



# Coordination meeting

## MINUTES

Date: 12.03.2024 (Tuesday)

Time: 11.00 a.m. – 1.00 p.m.

Place: Voivodeship Office in Lublin, column room

### The main points of the agenda

#### Introduction and welcoming participants

##### **Andrzej Maj – Lubelskie Voivodeship Office in Lublin**

- The Deputy Governor noted that information and reception points at the train station in Lublin and Chelm are still in operation. Recently, the activity of four reception points was not extended, and 6 points have been put on stand-by. An audit has been carried out in places which are still open. The audit shows that the places of collective accommodation are currently mainly occupied by socially disadvantaged people with the lowest adaptive abilities, i.e. the elderly, people with disabilities, people in need of care and mothers with children. The Deputy Governor noted that it is necessary to provide access to education for Ukrainian children and access to childcare for single mothers to help refugees with the integration.

##### **Marco Procaccini – Head of UNHCR Field Office in Lublin**

- Extension of TPD only until June 2024, beside the statement of its extension to March 2025 in line with EU. Discussions about the changes of the social support and the housing system are noticeable by the refugee community and sometimes they feel that they have little space to flag their concerns and speak out.
- As UNHCR, and very much in line with what we hear in our engagement with refugees, we have shared recommendations to law makers on the amendments of the Special act, the overall direction is to continue to provide a sense of stability and the measures to protect refugees from Ukraine and avoid unnecessary stress, or complicated procedures to access benefits or to exercise their rights. But at the same time, we recognize that it is important to prioritize those with specific needs. This may imply the need of looking closely to accommodation opportunities, and it is very important the development of program to support rent with cash, or to help refugees to navigate in the changes we may expect in accessing social benefits.
- Regarding leaving places of collective accommodation, we encourage municipalities and authorized institutions to analyze the possibilities, costs and availability of places in specialized care facilities for people with disabilities and the elderly.
- Another change, we are hopefully going to witness, will be related to education, and we believe that this will be another area with the LCG can be critical to support enrollment if there will be developments on this front as I believe all of us wish, toward mandatory education in Polish schools at least for certain grades. The current enrollment rate of Ukrainian children and youth in Polish schools is about 44%. It is important to be aware that in the event of the introduction



of compulsory schooling, an additional 6,000-7,000 school places will have to be created in the Lublin Voivodeship.

- It has been observed that an increasing number of Ukrainian citizens have asked NGOs for material assistance such as: food, clothing and hygiene items. UNHCR will try to identify the reasons for this situation and convey them at the next LCG meeting.

#### **Maria Mazur – Voivodeship Plenipotentiary for Migration Processes and Integration**

- This was the first meeting attended by the recently appointed Plenipotentiary for Migration Processes and Integration, Ms. Maria Mazur. During her speech, she referred to the audit conducted by LUW in Lublin. She noted the need to support people with disabilities, the elderly and single mothers in the empowerment process. In the context of suspension or liquidation of the information-reception points, she noted that they can be reopened within 24 to 72 hours.
- Ms. Mazur informed about the recently established initiative called "Migration Data Platform for Lublin and Lublin Region". The composition of this platform is made up of four organizations: the Lublin Voivodeship Office, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, the University College of Enterprise and Administration in Lublin and the Homo Faber Association. She stressed that since Poland has been currently experiencing dynamic migration processes, it is important to collect data on the subject. Ms. Plenipotentiary also referred to several aspects that should be improved. In particular, she noted that care should be provided for children who are outside of the education system, as they neither benefit from education in Ukraine (online) nor attend Polish schools. It is also important that minor and children, who have experienced domestic violence, should be given a proper care.

#### **Wellbeing of children and adolescents living in Poland in the face of the war in Ukraine**

##### **Agnieszka Sochoń – UNICEF**

- UNICEF presented the results of a study on the well-being of children and young people living in Poland in the face of the war in Ukraine. The research was conducted in cooperation with Plan International and Save the Children. 104 children aged 8-18 in Poland were surveyed, 90 of whom were of Ukrainian nationality. The report is based on the voices and opinions of the children, presented from the photos they took and expressed during the consultation. The children were asked to take pictures that showed their life in Poland. They could also take pictures of what helps them in their new daily life and where they get support from. The survey was mainly qualitative rather than quantitative. Through the photos the children were able to express themselves, and based on the photos it was possible to conduct short interviews with the children. From the interviews it emerged that the children have considerable knowledge of adult problems, worrying about issues related to lack of work or housing. The children feel lonely and isolated and miss their former life in Ukraine. It is difficult for them to make new friends without fluency in Polish.
- Children who go to a Polish school still experience a language barrier. In this regard, intercultural assistants play a very important role. They help break down cultural and language barriers. They often provide the children with initial psychological support. On the other hand,



children who are enrolled in the Ukrainian system, online, often do not leave home for a whole week. Remote learning is based on sending children study materials, which has a diminishing effect on their interest in learning. There are also children who are in two education systems. These children are heavily overloaded with learning and overworked. Detailed results of the study are presented in the attached presentation.

- The UNICEF representative suggested, the voice of children should be taken into account more often. Only by listening to children will we know how to effectively help them. The representative also stressed the important role of intercultural assistants in schools and the roles of peers in the classroom. We should also work with Polish children and help them build relationships with Ukrainian peers. Local governments also have an important role to play in raising awareness among parents about the children's school attendance.

#### **Challenges regarding the procedure for reactivation of social benefits due to loss of UKR status from the perspective of the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS), Border Guards and Municipalities**

- During the meeting, a discussion was held on the challenges of the procedure for reactivating social security benefits. To this purpose, the representatives of the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) and the Border Guard were invited to join the discussion. Other participants including representatives of local governments were able to present their experiences and suggest ways to improve the process of reactivating social benefits for people with UKR status.
- Mr. Piotr Waszak, Director of ZUS in Lublin, said that granting family benefits including 800 + is coordinating by the ZUS branch in Białystok. The director is aware that the problem of receiving benefits after returning to Poland arises among refugees from Ukraine. In order to solve it, it is crucial to improve communication on the ZUS-Border Guard line. The director therefore recommended creating a single application to the Border Guard, which would streamline the renewal of benefits paid by Social Security. He added that it would be useful to prepare template responses to streamline and standardize the communication process. He noted that a single email address to which return inquiries would be directed would be a good solution.
- Ms Magdalena Romańska-Ścisiel, Head of the Customer Service Department in Lublin and in 9 other branches in the Lubelskie Voivodeship, said that the return of a Ukrainian citizen to Poland due to military action is not always recorded in the system. She suggested that the Border Guard should precisely ask persons crossing the border the reason for the crossing. The SG should also ask if the person has a document in the Diia application. In the course of the conversation, Ms. Romańska-Ścisiel said, according to current legislation, the legality of the stay of Ukrainian nationals in Poland, who came to Poland in connection with the hostilities, is determined by an entry in the Register kept by the Commander-in-Chief of the Border Guard. And that as long as there is no record of entry into Poland in connection with hostilities, ZUS will not be able to resume payment of benefits, resulting in a prolonged procedure for reactivation of benefits. She added that only the Białystok branch has access to the register kept by the Border Guard and can check that the data in the ZUS and Border Guard systems overlap. Regional branches do not have such access, so they rely on the information contained in the ZUS register.
- Border Guard Officers assured that border clearance is thorough and reliable. One of the Border Guard officers informed that sometimes people crossing the border between Poland and Ukraine use a new passport or another document such as a visa. There also are cases when refugees cross internal borders such as with Slovakia, for example, which is not recorded in the



system. These listed issues can cause inconsistencies in the register (e.g., crossing the border on the basis of a different (new) document, or coincidences regarding last name or first name). The SG noted that the system updates once a day and no inconsistencies should arise between the SG data and the ZUS databases.

- The SG also suggested that refugees applying for renewing benefits from Polish social system, may not inform the ZUS administration about the benefits from the social assistance in another country. The SG therefore recommends that ZUS employees check whether a person benefits from social assistance in another country, e.g., on the European Solidarity Platform, where data on benefits in other countries can be found.

**During the discussion, there were several suggestions from LGC participants about how the process of reactivating social benefits could be streamlined.**

- LGC members suggested that people crossing border should be informed about the consequences of changing the travel document and also that they should inform SG about a changed travel document or if possible, travel with the previous document. The registry should make it possible to enter a new travel document. The SG should also have template information prepared so that it can be understood by the recipient. It is also advisable for the SG to inquire about documents in the Diia.pl application.
- Communication in Ukrainian should be provided in branches of the ZUS, and it is especially important that refugees were informed in Ukrainian about the possibility of appealing an administrative decision. It would be necessary to create favorable conditions for appeals. In addition, communication in the PUE ZUS system (text messages, emails exchange) should also be in Ukrainian. It is advisable to increase the number of attachments in the electronic application on the ZUS website. Currently, there is not enough space to add often extensive documentation with the SG. Since all correspondence with ZUS is electronic, the paper request to the Border Guard requesting a change in the Border Guard's record of the reason for entry to Poland could be abandoned.
- ZUS should treat each case individually, responding to the situation of the individual applicant. One of the frequently recurring recommendations was to integrate the SG and ZUS registers to streamline them. It was noted that it would be beneficial to decentralize ZUS so that applications for the resumption of benefits are processed at the regional level and not just in Bialystok. Another recommendation was for direct communication between ZUS and the Border Guard. In order to facilitate the procedure, it would be valuable for ZUS to be the one to request information from the Border Guard. Direct contact between the bodies could improve the flow of information and the entire process of reactivating benefits.

**Protection sector updates**

**Felicia Byrne – UNHCR**

- Since October 2022 to March 2024, in total 4,266 persons interviewed in Lubelskie. In October 2023, a new data collection tool/questionnaire introduced: 365 household representatives interviewed in Lubelskie (41 new arrivals), representing 992 individuals.



- The presentation was followed by the question about the reason why there is a lack of opportunities for Ukrainian refugees to enter the job market. The answer given indicated that this is mainly due to the lack of access to childcare, the inability to nostrify diplomas, insufficiently developed language skills or the inability to find an offer tailored about a person's qualifications.

#### **AOB / Ending**

##### **Marco Procaccini – UNHCR**

- Deloitte and UNHCR released in March 2024 a study about refugees' contribution to Polish economy. It indicates that despite the traumas of war and the responsibilities of caring for children and relatives, refugees from Ukraine have made their way from consumers of humanitarian aid to the role of payers of public contributions and insurance in just months.
- The survey data indicate, among other things, that:
  - Between 225,000 and 350,000 refugees from Ukraine are currently working in Poland.
  - Their household incomes are already 80% derived from paid work. This includes full-time, temporary and self-employment in Poland, as well as remote work in Ukraine.
  - Refugees from Ukraine remaining in Poland as employees, entrepreneurs, consumers, and taxpayers, contributed 0.7-1.1% of GDP to the Polish economy in 2023.
  - Taxes paid by refugees reached PLN 10-14 billion in 2022 and another PLN 15-20 billion in 2023, more than the state's initial aid spending. These figures clearly show the economic benefits of the refugees' presence. Poland particularly stands out on the map of Europe in this regard, and the positive experience gained here can serve as a model for other situations. Another advantage is a positive effect on labor productivity. It is usually pointed out that an increase in the number of workers reduces the amount of capital per worker, unless companies invest to restore this ratio. However, what is often not mentioned is that refugees and migrants bring new skills to the workforce, expanding the range of specializations and thus likely increasing worker productivity. Importantly, this positive impact could be much larger, as most refugees work beneath their skills.
- It is worth to underline positive developments on different direction to support integration centers and integration projects by public institutions for the months and year to come. This is extremely important to ensure continuity and consolidation of great experiences in Lubelskie, including the Migrants and Refugees aid centers of Caritas in Lublin and Zamosc, or the Baobab Community center in Lublin to which as UNHCR we have since the early times ensured support, including financial one. UNHCR believes globally that enhancement of public services to make them fully accessible to refugees is the way to go in cooperation with NGOs when there is need to complement or to provide additional services where NGOs have an added value otherwise not available.
- Swiss-Polish Program for Development of Towns has been launched, which can be great opportunity to support refugees, but also host community under priority "supporting migration management and promoting integration activities". There are 11 towns designated to participate in the program from Lubelskie Voivodeship, including Chełm, Hrubieszów and Tomaszów Lubelski. Given UNHCR's cooperation with Swiss Embassy, we'd like to use this as an



opportunity to encourage municipalities to apply and to attend information meeting that will take place on 22 March in Town Hall of Lublin at Spokojna 2 street.

**Beata Chodorowska – Lubelskie Voivodeship Office in Lublin**

- Ms Chodorowska conveyed an expression of gratitude from the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky who she had occasion to meet with, for his support and assistance to refugees from Ukraine in the Lublin Voivodship.

**Cezary Szczurowski – Jan Zamoyski Foundation**

- Mr. Szczurowski of the Jan Zamoyski Foundation informed that it has fuel available for humanitarian transport. He asked that the information be passed on to interested parties.

**Andrzej Maj – Lubelskie Voivodeship Office in Lublin**

- The meeting was concluded by Deputy Governor who thanked LCG members for the participation and drafted an action point regarding recommendations for the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policy, ZUS and Border Guards. Next meeting is planned to take place mid April.

**Action point**

- To prepare Key Recommendations on streamlining the procedure for reactivating social benefits in connection with the loss of UKR status. Recommendations will be shared with the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policy, Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) and Border Guards

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