

**POLAND PROTECTION SECTOR MEETING**  
Meeting Minutes – 12 December 2024, 2 PM

<b>Meeting subject:</b>	Monthly Protection Sector Meeting
<b>Time &amp; location:</b>	2pm, hybrid meeting
<b>Chaired by:</b>	UNHCR, HNLAC
<b>Minutes prepared by:</b>	UNHCR
<b>Participants:</b>	Halina Niec Legal Aid Centre, IOM, WHO, PAH, IRC, HNLAC, Caritas, SIP, Feminoteka, UNHCR, UNICEF
<b>Agenda:</b>	<p><b>Agenda</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Opening remarks by the UNHCR Deputy Representative (5 minutes)</li> <li>2. Update on legal developments and what to expect on key protection fronts – HNLAC (15 minutes)</li> <li>3. Focus on Emergency Preparedness – Inter-Agency Coordinator (15 minutes)</li> <li>4. Discussion on coordination on Emergency Preparedness, Protection Concerns, Safeguards and Products - Plenary led by various sector and sub-sector/working group leads and including presentation by Caritas on their volunteer programme (30 minutes)</li> <li>5. Updates from GBV, MHPSS, Child Protection, Counter-Trafficking and PSEA/AAP – Highlighting key achievements and challenges (50 minutes)</li> <li>6. Wrap up for the year – HNLAC (5 minutes)</li> </ol>
<b>AGENDA POINT</b>	<b>DISCUSSION</b>
<b>Agenda point 1</b>	The Participants were welcomed by UNHCR and HNLAC for the last Protection Sector meeting this year. Miriam, the new Senior Protection Officer from UNHCR will co-lead Poland Protection Sector as of mid-December, was introduced.
<b>Agenda point 2</b>	As for the legal developments, there are no major changes in the situation on Ukrainian refugees (recognition rate is 95%, there are around 987,000 TP beneficiaries). Currently, the protection focus is on recent developments in Syria. The update on Syrian asylum seekers within the EU was provided. Deputy Minister of Interior, Maciej Duszczuk announced on <a href="#">his X (Twitter) account</a> that for now, the Office for Foreigners (OFF) would not process asylum application from Syria and that this topic will be discussed during a meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 12 <sup>th</sup> of December. After planned discussions at the EU level, Poland will decide on the next steps. In Poland, according to the stats from OFF, there are 458 asylum seekers from Syria (mainly those who entered via the Polish-Belarusian border). The situation at the Polish border remains stable, with no significant changes observed in migration patterns.

	<p>On 12 December 2024, the Government of Poland published a draft law amending the Act on Granting Protection to Foreigners in the territory of the Republic of Poland. The Draft Amendments are set to be presented at the Council of Ministers meeting on December 18th. If the Bill is adopted by the Parliament and the President, the Council of Ministers could issue a regulation to temporarily and territorially suspend the right to seek asylum for up to 60 days. Parliamentary approval would be needed only to extend the restriction beyond the initial 60 days. Key points from the migration strategy include prioritizing security, the suspension of asylum, and addressing instrumentalization, with certain exceptions from the suspension. Additionally, Article 33, Section 1a is proposed for removal. According to the explanatory memorandum, the aim of the new amendments is to establish legal mechanisms to prevent destabilization, addressing the situation as a collective threat rather than isolated incidents.</p> <p>During the discussion, it has been raised that the EU Regulation 2024/1359 addressing situations of crisis and force majeure in the field of migration and asylum does not allow the suspension of access to asylum procedures in situations of crisis, instrumentalization or force majeure. Additionally, the regulation also discusses instrumentalization, although its definition differs from that in the Polish draft law, which extends beyond the scope outlined in Regulation 2024/1359<sup>1</sup>.</p> <p>Finnish law was an inspiration of the changes in the Polish law and UNHCR has provided its observations.<sup>2</sup></p>
<p><b>Agenda point 3</b></p>	<p>Effective emergency preparedness requires close coordination across sectors, with a focus on a minimum package of information, clear deadlines, and coordination with Information Management (IM). While progress has been made at both central and local levels, further work is needed in key areas.</p> <p>A government-organized meeting on 6 December brought together Polish NGOs, border guards, local authorities, and other relevant actors to assess resources and preparedness. The situation at the border remains stable, with reserves in place, and no major concerns have emerged despite the ongoing situation in Ukraine. The government plans to distribute a preparedness survey and to hold another meeting early next year, prioritizing continued preparedness efforts.</p> <p>There will be a meeting on emergency preparedness led by Interagency team next week to discuss further steps and alignment with government support services.</p> <p>IOM workshop on 12 December aims to develop tools for rapid needs assessments in collaboration with IM actors. There is also a focus on linking up with actors across the Ukrainian border to minimize repetitive questioning of refugees.</p>

<sup>1</sup> <https://legislacja.rcl.gov.pl/projekt/12392451/katalog/13099787#13099787>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/neu/123431-unhcr-observations-on-the-finnish-proposal-to-enact-a-law-on-temporary-measures.html>

	Discussions are ongoing regarding the role of volunteers and addressing issues such as Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), human trafficking risks, and related concerns.
<b>Agenda point 4</b>	<p><b>Caritas presentation</b> - Caritas supports local communities through its Volunteer Centers (VC), which trains and coaches volunteers to implement social projects. The VCs operate under a code of conduct. Volunteer coordinators receive regular training on-site and online, covering legal updates and specific support. Caritas has 45 diocesan volunteer centers, ensuring alignment with legal requirements, including background checks for those working with children. Teams of coordinators, specialists, and managers work together to develop and manage social projects. Caritas collaborates with companies applying corporate social responsibility (CSR) and with educational, and governmental institutions to develop social projects. In emergencies, Caritas has effectively mobilized thousands of volunteers, including around 20,000 during recent crises like flood.</p> <p>A 1–2-page document outlining humanitarian principles, including child protection (CP), PSEA, and GBV, will be developed for actors, volunteers, and individuals crossing the border. Proposed by the IA Coordinator, Caritas has agreed to collaborate, and HNLAC will coordinate the draft. The document will be shared for feedback before the next meeting and include a QR code for easy access. Building on 2022 guidelines, it will ensure unified standards and address existing gaps. UNHCR’s CBP team will contribute, with focal points from various sectors involved.</p> <p>Additionally, UNHCR Lublin is co-leading emergency preparedness and contingency planning with the Voivodeship Office, provided updates from the government, NGO, local authorities and other actors. Some preparedness efforts in the Podkarpackie region were also covered. Overall, most of the voivodeships do not perceive a significant increase, with the flow of people remaining consistent across regions.</p>
<b>Agenda point 5</b>	<p>The <b>PSEA/AAP subsector working group (WG)</b> has presented its network ToRs and action plan in relation to roles and responsibilities, community engagement, prevention and capacity building, and collaboration and monitoring. The key points of the 2024-2025 Action Plan focus on prevention and awareness, establishing safe reporting mechanisms, victim assistance, accountability, investigation procedures, and coordination and structural alignment. Monthly network meetings are held, and training being conducted for partners and government bodies. These efforts aim to raise awareness not only among beneficiaries but also among all actors providing assistance to refugees. An animated video for PSEA awareness, targeting women and children, has been created in five languages. Additionally, a pool of PSEA investigators has been established, with eight organizations providing investigators, while six organizations are beneficiaries of the program. Further plans include expanding these efforts.</p> <p><b>GBV subsector WG’s</b> key accomplishments include the development of a work plan, training resources, service mapping, GBV referral pathways, and a successful 16 Days of Activism campaign. The group has also made strides in government and stakeholder engagement, operational planning, and knowledge exchange. However, challenges include organizational instability, data</p>

	<p>limitations, fragmented efforts, and resource constraints for systemic work. Since May 2024, four meetings have been held, addressing these key areas. In 2025, the focus will be on strengthening coordination and consolidation, enhancing emergency preparedness, conducting GBV safety assessments, allocating resources for systemic work, capacity building, expanding advocacy and cross-sector engagement and scaling GBV risk mitigation.</p> <p><b>MHPSS subsector WG’s</b> key activities include the distribution of newsletters that highlight important topics, training opportunities, and resources and tools available to stakeholders. The next edition of the newsletter is scheduled for late January 2025. The Ministry of Health (MoH) and WHO Poland co-organized a Mental Health Forum on June 6-7, 2024, in Warsaw, providing a platform for discussions and collaboration on mental health issues. Additionally, preparations are underway for the development of a comprehensive action plan, known as the roadmap, which will guide the implementation of the National Mental Health Protection Program for 2023-2030. Looking ahead, a follow-up meeting is planned for Jan 2025 to review progress and further refine strategies for mental health protection and support in Poland.</p> <p><b>Child Protection subsector WG’s</b> priorities for 2025 focus on supporting unaccompanied and evacuated children, Ukrainian foster families in Poland, and the establishment of Polish foster families. Key areas include assisting care leavers, temporary guardians and children under their care, children with disabilities, and those out of the education system, particularly vulnerable groups such as Roma children, children in collective shelters, and those facing stigma. UNICEF will also address violence against children, including GBV, bullying, and violence at the border.</p> <p>Additionally, UNICEF has launched an open call for CSO’s to work on care leavers support program.</p> <p><b>Counter-Trafficking subsector WG</b> provided update on the 2024 developments, including a revision of EU legislation on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (CTHB), which now includes forced marriage, illegal adoption, and surrogacy as forms of exploitation. The revised legislation mandates that member states criminalize the use of services provided by victims of trafficking, with aggravated circumstances for offenses by public officials or those using IT to disseminate sexual images or videos involving VoTs. In Poland, a new initiative is underway to adopt a single legal act on CTHB and adoption of the national referral mechanism. Also, a new study on vulnerability to trafficking in persons in the context of the war in Ukraine was published.</p>
<b>Agenda point 5</b>	<p>HNLAC provided the wrap-up for the year, summarizing key activities, achievements, and challenges faced throughout the year while reflecting on the progress made in various initiatives and outlining the next steps for continued collaboration and improvement in the coming year.</p>