Regional Refugee Response for the Ukraine Situation

POLAND: SHELTER, HOUSING & ACCOMODATION SECTOR STRATEGY FOR THE UKRAINE RESPONSE

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Introduction	This document aims to provide all members and relevant stakeholders in the Shelter, Housing & Accommodation Sector in Poland with a strategic framework in support of the Ukraine response.
Situation analysis	More than 1.9M refugees affected by the war in Ukraine entered Poland since February 2022. Poland has transformed from a country hosting relatively few refugees into one of the world's main refugee-hosting country, with safe and dignified accommodation remaining one of the most pressing needs. While the majority of refugee households live in private accommodation (over 60%), the most vulnerable refugees are still living in collective centers. Due to the high influx of refugees in a country such as Poland with limited pre-existing housing stock and a significant price rise in the rental market, it is extremely difficult for refugees to find medium/long term accommodation on their own.
Challenges	General data, especially on occupancy and location of collective centres, has been lacking from the beginning of the response. Situation was additionally complicated by the fact that some collective sites were run by government while others by private entities including NGOs. Due to the large number of entities involved, there was a visible lack of pairing between landlords and tenants, which generated a lot of problems and conflicts. There was also a lack of well-coordinated communication, including using instant messengers. In July 2024, amendment to the special act on support for Ukrainian Refugees, provided significant changes in the collective centers landscape. At the moment, most of the collective sites are run by the government, with very few privately owned. Despite this changes, access to data still remains challenging. The shelter response to the Ukrainian crisis is unique compared with other shelter responses, due to the urban nature and the European context. There is a need to implement non-conventional programs, such as "cash for rent", social rental programs, host matching/solidarity housing, etc., as well as programs addressing needs of most vulnerable population remaining in the collective sites. Provision of stable accommodation must be prepared for sudden waves of people fleeing the military conflict, both in the short and long term. Consequently, the challenge is to prepare and immunize the housing system for further, dynamic in its specificity, crises related to migration. Many grassroot Polish organisations implementing shelter/accommodation activities were not part of the Shelter Sector, since they might not be familiar with this coordination mechanism.
Opportunities	The fact that organisations need to engage and develop new programs, such as "cash for rent" or Solidarity Housing, provides a good opportunity to set up Standard Operation Procedures to use for future responses.

	Advocacy for establishing Social Rental Agencies and programs supporting economic and social inclusion and independence as part of the Partners' response can contribute to the development of Social Rental Agencies as a widespread modality in Poland as well as influence decrease of the number of residents remaining in the collective sites and stabilise households life situation. Humanitarian response in Poland was unique due to its urban nature. Shelter response included accommodation in private housing and collective centers, predominantly in towns and bigger cities. There was no camp like sites, as well as only few, really big temporary accommodation centers. Government decision was to ensure that such large facilities should be closed or reduced as soon as possible. Thanks to that unique situation, people staying at the collective centers had many opportunities to find employment, become independent and move out to their own accommodation. This was also supportive for the social inclusion and integration processes. Collective centers are now significantly reduced and only app. 6% of refugees are still living in them. They still provide enabling environment for the social and economic inclusion that can be used by NGOs and other social actors, to support integration of refugees.
Cross cutting issues	Medium-long term accommodation programs need to be accompanied by social and economic inclusion programs to be sustainable (otherwise refugees could not be independent at the end of the subsidized phase). The fact that many of the refugees are women with children makes it compulsory to support at the same time daily childcare, employment and accommodation. The three components need to be implemented simultaneously. Increasing share of elderly, people with disabilities and children in the collective sites' population puts pressure on social services and creates the need to ensure specialised services and facilities are available for this vulnerable population. There is a growing need to ensure strong collaboration with the government entities to ensure long-term support.
Strategic Objectives:	**1. Ensure refugees' access to protection, legal status and rights, focusing on vulnerable groups.** **2. Promote refugee inclusion in key national systems.** **3. Strengthen social cohesion between refugees and host communities.** **4. Advance localization by supporting Polish civil society, local authorities, and sustainable programming.**
Shelter Objectives	**Objective 1 – Promote independent living.** **Objective 2 – Support dignified accommodation for most vulnerable groups** **Objective 3 – Enhance coordination and policy**
Activities & estimated cost	**Activity 1: Provide shelter sector related capacity building and trainings** Shelter Sector trainings and capacity building activities are delivered based on the needs assessments and individual requests to all NGOs and CSOs who are engaged in any shelter related activities. They aim to support them with their activities and provide valuable technical knowledge.
	Activity 2: Provide repairs and upgrades in Collective Centers It is difficult to estimate an average renovation cost in collective sites since the types and sizes of the buildings differ a lot, as well as the scope of renovations. Also, prices of the work can vary depending on the Voivodeship. Based on the past years' experience, the following estimation can be considered: **1. Light Repair & Retrofit** cosmetic upgrades (paint), tiling, insulation upgrade, minor remodelling of bathroom/kitchen, etc. **Cost from 6.000 USD up to 15.000 USD.**

2. Standard Renovation

windows, doors, flooring, boiler replacement, roof repair/replacement, facade, insulation replacement, photovoltaic installation, plumbing, electrical upgrades, heating & cooling, etc. **Cost from 15.000 USD – 100.000 USD**

3. Large Renovation

similar to point 2. but broader scope of work, bigger size of the building, more technical complexity, etc., and therefore higher cost. **Cost: 100.000 USD and above** (i.e., renovation cost of a full office building space into dormitory accommodation can reach 1.500.000 USD)

Activity 3: Provide non-cash repairs and upgrade works within individual accommodation

Cost range of renovations within individual apartments:

1. **Light Repairs**

   Medium repairs such as windows replacement, new floors, kitchenette installation, electrical inspection, cosmetic upgrades (painting, lighting). **Average cost 1.000-20.000 USD**
2. **Standard-Large renovation**

   medium/full renovation of kitchen, bathroom, electrical and plumbery installation plus flooring, light fixture, painting, etc. **Average cost 20.000 – 60.000 USD**

Activity 4: Provide "cash for rent" support for accommodation in individual apartments (directly to refugees)

"Cash for rent" programs cover fully or partially the cost of rent payments up to 6 months (possible extension to 8). Full recommendations and guidelines for "cash for rent" programming have been established by dedicated group and are available in English here: https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/107747 and in Polish here: https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/107746

Activity 5: Provide information about housing including research, interpretation services & supporting assistance during rental process

Information about housing is provided by Shelter Partners through different ways: information lines, online platforms, face to face consultants, etc., and it is frequently provided together with information about other services (mental health, protection, etc). Information includes support in research of individual flats on the rental market, interpretation services for documents necessary in rental process as well as assistance during rental process.

Activity 6: Provide support to collective centres to ensure accommodation for individuals

Some site managers occasionally request humanitarian organizations to cover the bills of running the facility (e.g., one off payment of utility bills, fuel, etc). It could also include provision of financial support for short term emergency accommodation in hostels or other similar facilities, as well as additional services, such as food and hygiene items provision.

Activity 7: Provide support in access to mid- or long-term independent housing in apartments (2 to 12 months) through non-direct cash modalities (f. ex. host family support, social rental support, legal support with lease contracts etc.)

Accommodation provided through different modalities, as host family support (payment to the host family to cover their extra expenses), social rental program (which provides direct accommodation in apartments without transferring cash to refugees), support with lease contracts, tenant rights, etc.

Key terminology	**Transit / Reception Centre** – A place where displaced people find temporary accommodation on a short term (typically 24-48h) pending to transfer to a suitable and safe solution. Transit and reception center are first front entry and registration points, access to information, catering – food services, etc. **Collective Centre** – An open space place where displaced people find accommodation on a mid-term basis (typically up to 3 months) in pre-existing buildings (which were not likely constructed as accommodation) for example school, factories, barracks, community centers, gymnasiums, hotels, warehouses, etc. Displaced people share sleeping and leaving areas and services such as MHPSS, Protection, Social Support, Healthcare are provided. The collective centers are managed by authorities (municipality, voivodships), as well as NGO and private entities. **Individual Flats / Housing units - i**ndividual housing units where displaced people find accommodation on a mid- long-term basis (typically longer than 3 months), assisted by NGOs or private programs such host family support, "cash for rent" programs, SRA, SRP, etc., aiming at self-reliance on the long-term recovery. **Social rental program (SRP):** The SRP acts as a mediating agency, leasing units directly with flat owners and then renting them at affordable or subsidized rates to people with housing needs **Social rental agency (SRA):** Statutory model established by local authority/municipality (gmina) and further operated by an NGO or municipal company. SRA leases flats or single-family homes and rents those to physical persons appointed by the local authorities. It is similar to SRP, but the participation of the municipality is mandatory.

Activities and indicators for 2025-2026	
	Activity 1: Provide shelter sector related capacity building and trainings *Indicator 1: # of individuals benefitting from sector related trainings and/or other capacity building activities*
	Activity 2: Activity 2: Provide repairs and upgrades in Collective Centers. *Indicator 2: # of Collective Accommodation repaired/upgraded*
	Activity 3: Provide **non-cash repairs and upgrade works** within individual accommodation. *Indicator 3: # of individual accommodation units repaired/upgraded (non-cash)*
	Activity 4: Provide "**cash for rent" support** for accommodation in individual apartments (directly to refugees) *Indicator 4: # of individuals provided with "cash for rent" in individual accommodation*
	Activity 5: Provide **information about housing** including research, interpretation services & supporting assistance during rental process *Indicator 5: # of individuals provided with information on housing including research, interpretation services & supporting assistance during rental process*
	Activity 6: Provide **support to collective centres** to ensure accommodation for individuals *Indicator 6: # of individuals supported with collective accommodation (incl. Running costs, maintenance, short-term hostel etc.)*
	Activity 7: Provide **support in access to mid- or long-term independent housing** in apartments (2 to 12 months) through non-direct cash modalities (f. ex. host family support, social rental support, legal support with lease contracts etc.) *Indicator 7: # of individuals who received support in access to mid- or long-term independent housing*

Two pronged approach strategy	To cover the full spectrum of people in need, we need to work on a two pronged approach considering the two main existing groups of beneficiaries: refugees who are able to enter the employment market if provided support, and refugees with limited capacity to find employment and find sustainable accommodation on a private rental market (elderly people, people with disabilities etc.), mainly living in collective centres for long-term.	
	Medium & long-term accommodation programs/activities **FOR REFUGEES ABLE TO SECURE SELF-SUSTAINABLE ACCOMMODATION** • **"Cash for rent"** programs complemented by comprehensive additional support services (economic inclusion, childcare etc.) so that the beneficiary is better prepared to find self-sustainable accommodation by the end of support period. • **Other non-direct cash modalities e.g. social rental support or other types of rental support** including additional social & economic inclusion services. • **Economic Inclusion and livelihood** programs including specialized professional courses, language courses, support in establishing own business, diploma nostrification, vocational training.	Support activities to **MOST VULNERABLE REFUGEES LIVING IN COLLECTIVE CENTERS** for long-term with limited capacity to find employment and secure self-sustainability (elderly, people with disabilities etc.). **Programs/Activities** allowing to guarantee the minimum standards recommended in the "Collective Centers Technical Guidelines" such as: • **Upgrading works & renovations** allowing to reach the minimum standards in terms of space, privacy, etc. • **Supporting site management capacity,** e.g., trainings for site managers • **Provision of basic needs services (**NFI, utilities, etc.) Strong and long-term **collaboration with government entities** such as local authorities, social services, health services to ensure specialized, long-term support. Collaboration in development of long-term response programs and services.