

PROTECTION BRIEF SLOVAKIA

Issue 01/2022 | 17 May - 11 October 2022

Operational Context

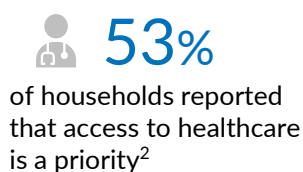
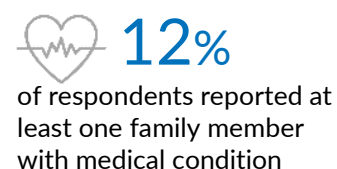
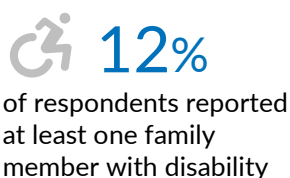
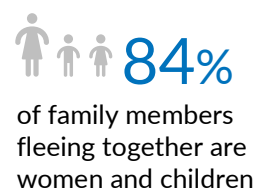
As of 11 October 2022, 851,810 persons from Ukraine and third-country nationals have crossed into Slovakia seeking protection.

Confronted with the largest refugee emergency in its history, Slovakia has responded with generosity and solidarity, mobilizing authorities at all levels to respond to the needs of refugees fleeing the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Slovakia is a State Party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. As of 1 March 2022, temporary protection status has been accessible to Ukrainian refugees and their families, as well as third country nationals who were legally residing or benefitting from protection in Ukraine. As of 13 of October, 90,790 persons were granted temporary protection status in Slovakia. Supplementary legislation was adopted to regulate subsidies for temporary protection holders in private

accommodation, facilitate access to urgent and necessary healthcare and other specific social benefits. In this sense, the Government of Slovakia has assumed strong leadership in the refugee response, with important support from civil society, the private sector, volunteers, and UN agencies. UNHCR has been monitoring, documenting, and analysing the profiles, needs and intentions of refugees with the aim of strengthening and promoting evidence-based protection interventions. To this end, UNHCR has conducted **protection profiling**¹ regularly since mid-May 2022 across Slovakia at crossing-border points, transit locations, accommodation sites, humanitarian assistance distribution hubs, and information points among others. This report reflects the findings from **4,227 interviews** carried out between **17 May** and **11 October 2022**, complemented by other assessments conducted in this period.

Key Trends & Figures

Protection profiling¹ respondents by gender



¹ Protection Profiling Factsheet – UNHCR May-September 2022
² Inter-Agency Participatory Assessment – October 2022

Protection concerns

Inadequate support for persons with specific needs

According to UNHCR protection profiling¹, women and children make up 84% of refugees from Ukraine while persons aged 60 and above constitute 11%. The early and systematic identification of **persons with specific needs** (such as persons with disabilities, older persons, persons with serious and/or chronic medical conditions, as well as unaccompanied and separated children) remains essential to promote their effective protection and access to rights. UNHCR protection profiling¹ indicates that 12% of households have at least one household member with a disability, with the same percentage of households expressing that at least one member has a medical condition that require access to adequate healthcare, information, and support.

Participatory needs assessments conducted by UNHCR during 2022 found that **persons with disabilities** or functional diversity account for up to 12% of the refugee population and face additional challenges accessing services and securing employment. Parents of children with disabilities reported difficulties in securing school places and learning support in mainstream primary and secondary schools. Moreover, the Inter-Agency Site Monitoring Assessment carried out during the Summer of 2022 at 38 accommodation sites in Trnava, Prešov, Košice, Bratislava, Žilina, and Banská Bystrica revealed that only 21% of the sites offered services to people with disabilities. Among the assessed accommodation sites only 34% are accessible for people with physical disabilities, with 29% of bathrooms and showers adapted to their needs. The assessment further found that access to disability assistance devices is limited.

Older persons (over 60 years old) are a distinct, and heterogeneous group that requires attention and tailored programmatic responses. Participatory assessments show that older persons play a vital role in supporting families by, for instance, seeking informal employment opportunities to financially contribute to the household (17% persons), and caring for children or other dependents. Older persons may also have a disability, chronic health issues or specific nutrition needs, and may face additional barriers

to access services. On a sample of 237 households, 14% of households reported at least one family member over 65 years of age with a serious medical condition.

Children encompass approximately 40 per cent of the refugees in Slovakia. All children have been affected by the experiences of displacement, separation from families and peers and losing the sense of normalcy. Some children have been exposed to traumatic events. The most vulnerable are unaccompanied and separated children, as well as other **children** who are **at risk** of, or have experienced violence, exploitation, abuse, or neglect at any stage, including at crossing and transit points, in private or collective accommodation or during temporary protection procedures. Due to specific vulnerabilities and the sensitivity of the cases, these children require early and effective identification and assessment to ensure children best interest is considered in all action taken affecting their lives. At present unaccompanied children can be identified through the temporary protection application procedure. The identification of unaccompanied and separated children, as well as other children at risk, allows targeted supports.

Persons with specific needs have been identified as part of the UNHCR-led Inter-Agency Multi-Purpose Cash Enrolment Programme. This, to some extent, has led to referrals to other services and the provision of counselling, as well as the identification where there was need to set up referral pathways and strengthen services at Blue Dot Safe Spaces and Protection Hubs. There is a need to identify such needs early on and establish harmonised individual needs assessment and case management procedures. The early and systematic identification of persons with specific needs is essential to promoting their effective protection and **access to rights**. The inability of refugees to exercise one right often negatively impacts the enjoyment of others. For example, lack of capacity in local schools significantly impedes adults' access to the labour market, whilst a lack of sustainable, longer-term housing has had a multifaceted impact on refugees' ability to exercise other rights including education, employment, and social protection.

¹ Protection Profiling Factsheet – UNHCR May-September 2022

Access to healthcare

According to the Multi-sectorial Needs Assessment² (MSNA) conducted in mid-2022, almost one quarter of household members were found in need of healthcare, with the most pressing needs cited being preventive consultation for acute and chronic communicable diseases, and consultations for trauma. UNHCR protection profiling¹ data shows that health needs are urgent for 22% of the households interviewed. Moreover, UNHCR participatory assessments indicate widespread mental health and psycho-social support needs, including for children and youth. The MSNA² pointed that 29% of households declared that at least one household member had mental health needs.

At present, persons with temporary protection in Slovakia are entitled to urgent and necessary health care. The Ministry of Health indicated that dialysis, oxygen therapy, chemotherapy, asthma treatment, and echocardiography in case of chronic autoimmune diseases are covered.



"Dentistry is not covered for us and are very expensive. Many Ukrainians go to Uzhhorod for dental treatment"

(FGD participant, Kosice)

Notwithstanding this, the Slovak national health system is currently experiencing significant capacity gaps, which have exacerbated access to healthcare. The most reported difficulties (MSNA 2022)² are associated with not knowing where and how to access mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), language barriers and limited access to interpreter services at essential services such as healthcare centres and hospitals, and long waiting periods to access certain services, particularly challenging for persons with serious medical conditions.



"Because of the language barrier we can't even call an ambulance"

(FGD participant, Bratislava)

Access to legal documentation

The data from the protection profiling¹ and monitoring¹ indicates that 90% travelled with their national passport (83% have a biometric passport), 54% with ID cards, 44% with temporary protection, 25% birth certificate, 8% asylum certificate, 3% refugee card, and 1% residency permit. Six persons travelled without documentation. Through protection profiling¹ UNHCR has identified the need to support issuance, renewal, and translation of documentation, including passports. Documentation and translation of legal documents are key to ensure access to housing or employment for instance. Human Rights League provides support for access to documentation, including translation at Bottova Blue Dot Safe Space and Protection Hub, however these support services are limited in many other parts of Slovakia.

Interviews with refugees at Blue Dots and Protection Desks, and focus group discussions, indicate that the lack of access to temporary protection documentation is a major barrier to access to services and assistance provided by the Slovak authorities. The Ministry of Interior has developed online solutions to ensure that refugees can monitor the validity and duration of their temporary protection status in Slovakia online. However, the fact that the temporary protection certificates are not signed and stamped when printed using the online system means that employers, landowners, and service providers do not always accept them as valid documents proving legal stay in Slovakia.

In some cases, refugees were not able to apply for temporary protection if they arrived in Slovakia before 24 February 2022, or if they had valid visa or a temporary residency in other EU Member State, or if they applied for temporary or permanent residency in Slovakia. When such issues are raised with the Border and Foreigners' Police, they are immediately resolved through an inclusive approach in line with the Temporary Protection Directive. Uncertainties regarding the length of temporary protection and the lack of more secure residence status, such as permanent or temporary residence in Slovakia, are equally important concerns for refugees, which cause anxiety and aggravate uncertainties regarding longer-term accommodation and employment.

1. Protection Profiling Factsheet – UNHCR May-September 2022

2. Slovakia Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA) – September 2022

Calls to action

This has been a challenging time for the Slovak Government and society, responding to an unprecedented crisis and showing a strong commitment to ensuring the rights and safety of those fleeing the armed conflict in Ukraine. Despite this commitment and the favourable protective environment some challenges remain.

The openness of the Slovak Government to proactive engagement with UN agencies and Slovak civil society has made possible to identify and address gaps in the national protection systems, which exist also in other EU countries receiving and hosting refugees from Ukraine.

Key recommendations



UNHCR welcomes the generosity of the Slovak Government and society in responding to the needs of refugees from Ukraine, and the example this sets internationally and within the European Union (EU) and recommends to the Government to take measures to support the capacity of the national authorities managing the refugee response under their respective competencies, including to mitigate staffing shortfalls.



UNHCR stresses the key role that Slovak volunteers, civil society and non-governmental organisations and the Ukrainian community initiatives have on supporting refugees navigating the national protection systems and essential services in Slovakia and supporting the public institutions responding to refugee needs, including accommodation, health, education, and social protection, and recommends to the European Commission to facilitate their access to available EU funding instruments.



UNHCR advocates that procedures to identify persons at heightened risk requiring specialized services such as children at risk are systematically part of registration procedures for Temporary Protection and other forms of protection, as well as procedures to renew legal stay and residency.



UNHCR recommends further strengthening the capacity of all humanitarian actors to standardise procedures to systematically and timely identify persons with specific needs, assess their protection and humanitarian needs through a rights-based approach, and strengthen specialized services and assistance where necessary, particularly in respect of older persons, persons with disabilities, women and girls at risk of or surviving various forms of gender-based violence, members of minority communities and people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics.



Furthermore, UNHCR urges the Government of Slovakia to continue to facilitate the integration of refugee professionals, particularly in health, education, and social protection sectors, and streamline the relevant administrative procedures, with a view of strengthening available services to persons with specific needs, in particular children, persons with disabilities and those with underlying medical conditions.



Acknowledging general staffing shortfalls that the public services are facing in responding to refugees' needs and appreciating recent digital solutions, UNHCR recommends that temporary protection documents are systematically validated through official marking to allow different stakeholders to recognize the authenticity of temporary protection documents issued online, as well as ensuring that the validity of the online documentation is communicated to refugees and service providers, employers, etc.

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