

SLOVAKIA

1 October – 31 December

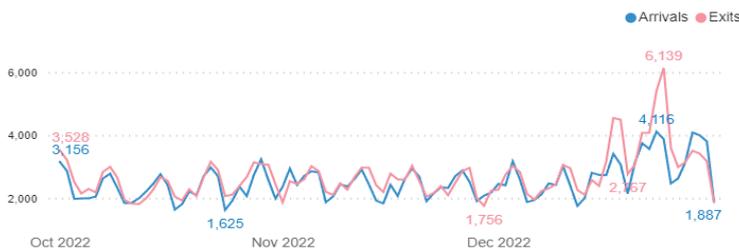
Since the start of the war in Ukraine, over one million people have crossed the border into Slovakia, **with more than 95,000 receiving Temporary Protection**. Around 80 per cent are women and children, but there are also older people and those who need **urgent medical care or who have disabilities**.

UNHCR's response to the refugee crisis is multisectoral and focuses on **protection, reception conditions, accommodation, socio-economic inclusion, and financial assistance** for the most vulnerable groups.

UNHCR and partners are present at border crossing points and other locations where refugees are assisted, to **provide information on rights and available services, and to identify vulnerable refugees and refer them to relevant services**.

BORDER CROSSINGS FROM UKRAINE & TEMPORARY PROTECTION

Border Crossings To / From Ukraine



Temporary Protection since 24 February 2022
104,764 applications for temporary protection status &
95,489 who received temporary protection status
 (as of 31 December 2022)



A mother registering for UNHCR's cash assistance at UNHCR's protection desk at the Bottova Registration Centre, in Bratislava.
 © UNHCR / Zsolt Balla

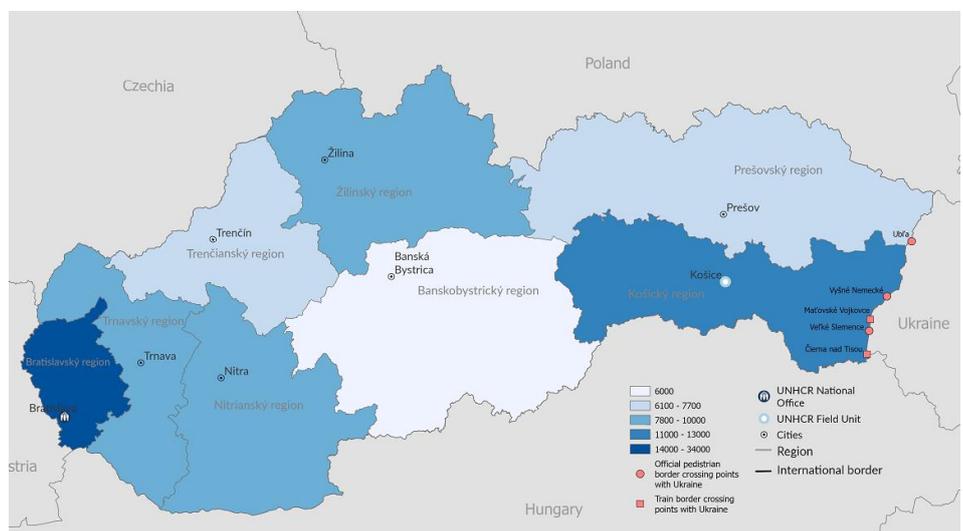
UNHCR PRESENCE IN SLOVAKIA

STAFF:

- **44** Total staff
 - **19** International Staff
 - **25** National/Local Staff

OFFICES:

- **1** National Office in Bratislava
- **1** Field Office in Košice
- **1** UNHCR Representation for Central Europe in Budapest



Operational Context



The Head of Košice Field Office greeting the border police at the Vyšné Nemecké BCP. © UNHCR / Lucia Kolpakova

In 2022, Slovakia saw a rapid influx of refugees fleeing hostilities at its four border crossing points with Ukraine. The majority were women and children and included older people, people with disabilities, and those with urgent medical care needs. While the initial influx has stabilized, the volatile security situation in Ukraine leaves open the possibility of another wave of people crossing the border to Slovakia in the future. Many of those arriving have experienced trauma and distress associated with the conflict and require Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS). Border authorities continue to process new arrivals, providing information on temporary protection and asylum, with onward transport available for those seeking to reach urban centres. Information is provided by UNHCR and partner staff at all border crossing points alerting refugees to available

services including accommodation, food, work opportunities, and health care. As of 31 December, there were over a million border crossings from Ukraine into Slovakia, and 104,764 individuals had applied for temporary protection, with many moving on to other European countries.

National, district and local authorities rapidly responded to the influx. The Border and Foreigners Police and Fire Rescue Service have prepared reception centres and temporary hosting sites to accommodate those staying in Slovakia for short periods. Local communities have taken a welcoming stance, with humanitarian actors, civil society, and community volunteers providing significant support at border reception points, including advice and referral to temporary housing, transportation, and legal counselling services. Continuous efforts are needed to ensure all arrivals are informed about the possibility of applying for temporary protection or asylum and the rights associated with different legal statuses in Slovakia.

As the war in Ukraine becomes more drawn out, it is increasingly important to shift to a more sustainable response model over the medium- to longer-term, increasingly focusing on inclusion and self reliance, as well as targeted assistance to the most vulnerable. UNHCR is actively engaged with the Government on coordinating humanitarian actors via the [Refugee Coordination Forum \(RCF\)](#) for the humanitarian response, as well as issues related to integration (see 'Coordination' section below). UNHCR has expanded its presence to 44 staff after establishing a National Office in Bratislava and a Field Office in Košice

Working with Partners

. UNHCR works closely with Slovak Government counterparts to ensure refugees and asylum-seekers can enjoy their essential rights and have access to basic services. UNHCR maintains positive collaboration with state entities including local and municipal authorities, UN agencies, NGOs, humanitarian partners, civil society organizations and other relevant stakeholders to provide support and assistance to those seeking protection. With UNICEF, UNHCR has established three Blue Dots in Bratislava, Michalovce, and Košice. 'Blue Dots' are safe spaces along border crossings in countries neighbouring Ukraine that provide women and children, and families, with critical information and services.

UNHCR has formally expanded its partnerships in Slovakia to ensure availability of comprehensive support and services to people seeking protection, including those with specific needs. UNHCR has five partners:

- **Slovak Humanitarian Council (SHC):** SHC is present at the Border Crossing Points (BCPs) in Velke Slemence and Ubla, providing information on access to services and acts as UNHCR partner for the Blue Dots in Michalovce and Kosice. SHC is also present in Zilina, Gabcikovo, and Humenne at the Help Desks. SHC is carrying out legal counselling and representation of asylum-seekers in detention centres in Secovce and Medvedov.
- **Mareena:** Mareena is present at the Border Crossing Point (BCP) in Vysne Nemecke, providing information on access to services. The partner is also performing host community outreach, advocacy, and refugee community mapping in Bratislava, Nitra, Kosice, Trencin, and Banska Bystrica, capacity building in protection and inclusion, and implements the UNHCR Helpline. Mareena is engaged in social inclusion activities related to access to the labour market.
- **People in Need Slovakia (PIN):** PIN provides assistance and services to vulnerable persons through needs assessments, psychosocial counselling, case work, and referrals in Kosice, Zilina, Presov and Banska Bystrica.
- **Human Rights League (HRL):** Present at the Bottova registration/reception centre in Bratislava and at the Integration Center in Kosice, HRL is providing legal counselling and assistance, as well as interpretation services for Ukrainian refugees, related to their registration for Temporary Protection and access to rights, services, and information.
- **SME SPOLU:** SME SPOLU, a refugee led organization, runs a successful community centre for Ukrainian and host communities in Bratislava, and supports Ukrainian refugees with social inclusion and provision of key information.



UNHCR and partners conducting registration at Bottova Reception Centre, Bratislava.

© UNHCR / Zsolt Balla

UNHCR Response

Protection

UNHCR and partners are present at border crossing points, transit and reception centres, collective sites, Help Desks, three Blue Dot Protection Hubs and other areas where refugees arrive or seek help. In addition to providing information on available rights and services, UNHCR is working to reinforce reception conditions by strengthening local capacities and monitoring arrivals to ensure non-discriminatory treatment, including for third-country nationals. UNHCR and partners are helping identify those with vulnerabilities—including people with specific needs, those with disabilities, and unaccompanied and separated children—for referral to specialized services and supporting refugees to access accommodation, health care, and employment. In coordination with local authorities, referral pathways have been developed to ensure refugees can access necessary services, in accordance with their needs and preferences. By building partnerships with the Justice Ministry's Legal Aid Centre and the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights, UNHCR ensured that refugees have access to free legal aid and representation in Slovakia. UNHCR and partners are

also supporting authorities in assessing accommodation sites to help identify priority areas for improvement, including for risks of gender-based violence (GBV). UNHCR has developed a protection strategy for the response. The strategy sets out a holistic approach, with evidence-based interventions designed to strengthen safeguards in areas such as child protection, particularly regarding unaccompanied and separated children; risks of exploitation in the context of accommodation and labour market; prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse; accountability to affected people; as well as ensuring the requisite capacity for specialized services, such as services for persons with disabilities or to prevent and address GBV. From October, UNHCR and its partners continued to produce and publish the [Regional Protection Profiling and Monitoring Tool](#) in Slovakia, which is helping to build an evidence base for interventions, programming, as well as a refugee protection narrative. As of 31 December, 4,227 Protection Profiling interviews with refugees have been conducted. The majority of respondents were staying in hosted (37%) or rented accommodation (20%), while 17% were still staying in collective sites and reception or transit centres at the time of the interview. Nine percent of respondents have relatives in Slovakia. The top three urgent needs reported by respondents were employment, accommodation and cash assistance.

UNHCR and partners are working to monitor and reinforce reception conditions, including through strengthening reception capacities in Slovakia and monitoring arrivals to ensure access to rights and services on a non-discriminatory basis, including for third-country nationals. UNHCR is supporting authorities in scaling up of accommodation capacity, including for collective and privately managed sites to accommodate those with both immediate and longer-term needs. Ten protection desks have been set up to share crucial information with refugees and to provide counselling.

UNHCR also strengthened engagement of and support for refugee communities in the response, including setting up a community outreach volunteer network, and cooperation with refugee-led and community-based organizations and community centres, including through grants, to help strengthen their capacity. With the aim to enhance the community-based protection component of UNHCR's work, UNHCR hired refugee UN volunteers who already proved to play an invaluable role in UNHCR's response in Slovakia. UNHCR is also actively involved in supporting community centres for Ukrainian refugees and host communities throughout Slovakia, as well as in ongoing efforts regarding the establishment of integration centres in Slovakia.

UNHCR held eight [Focus Group Discussions \(FGDs\)](#) from October to December with refugee communities, including with children, throughout Slovakia. Many focus group discussions exhibited the precarious situation of Ukrainian refugees, especially single mothers with small children, older persons, and persons with disabilities. FGDs were part of the outreach and ensuring that children at risk including UAC/SC are served, and that their best interests are taken into consideration. Participants highlighted concerns such as difficulties to accessing work especially due to the language barrier and shortage of childcare options, fear of losing financial assistance benefits covering basic needs, limited capacity of schools and kindergartens, general lack of information about basic rights, entitlements and available services, high rent prices and unavailability of private apartments, obstacles to accessing health care and medicine, lack of space in accommodation facilities, and lack of activities for children and youth. FGDs also help UNHCR identify protection needs that can be resolved immediately, including through programmatic response by UNHCR or partners, or referred to authorities for their action.

Coordination

In support of Government-led efforts, UNHCR is leading the coordination of the inter-agency [Refugee Response Plan \(RRP\)](#) for Slovakia to ensure a multi-partner and multi-sector assistance for refugees, including third-country nationals, from Ukraine. This is in line with the [Refugee Coordination Model \(RCM\)](#) and in close collaboration and consultation with relevant Government counterparts, and with the support of inter-agency partners and other stakeholders. UNHCR co-leads, along with the Government, a response-wide [Refugee Coordination Forum¹ \(RCF\)](#) at country-level to ensure a harmonized response within existing government structures and among inter-agency partners, NGOs, volunteers

¹ This forum includes sector-specific working groups aligned with the national response. UNHCR leads the Protection and Inclusion working group (with Human Rights League), the Cash working group (with the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family - MoLSAF), the Inclusion sub-working group (with People in Need) and Child Protection sub-working group (with MoLSAF and UNICEF), and participates in the Health working group and the MH / PSS sub-working group as well.

and other stakeholders. In December, the final version of the consolidated 2023 Regional RRP was completed, with the final budget of Slovakia's 2023 RRP standing at USD 80.1 million and including 28 partners.

Within the RCF, seven working groups and sub-working groups are operating (Anti-Trafficking, Cash, Child Protection, Health, Information Management, MHPSS, Protection and Inclusion) as well as a Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Task Force, while Accountability to Affected Persons (AAP) is mainstreamed across all groups and has been made a RCF standing agenda item. RCF partners are furthermore supporting the ongoing engagement of the Slovak Republic with the [Global Compact on Refugees \(GCR\)](#) as a means of systematizing and sharing good practices with other countries facing similar challenges, and in view of cultivating pledges related to its national response for the [Global Refugee Forum](#) in 2023.



UNHCR with WHO, UNICEF and IOM held a three-day Training of Trainers in Bratislava on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse for humanitarian partners supporting refugees in Slovakia, in November. © UNHCR / Anna Turus

The Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) continued its activities under the umbrella of the Refugee Coordination Forum, as per its [Terms of Reference](#) and [Action Plan](#). In October, a learning package on PSEA based on the IASC materials and adapted to the Slovak context was developed by IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF and WHO, and made available to all PSEA Task Force members for internal use as needed. In November, a three-day

inter-agency Training of Trainers on PSEA organized by UNHCR and co-facilitated with IOM, UNHCR and WHO, took place in Bratislava and was attended by 10 organizations. In December, the Gender Based Violence referral pathways were presented to the members of the PSEA Task Force and incorporated in the draft of the Inter-agency Standard Operating Procedures for processing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse complaints, which was circulated for technical review by PSEA Task Force members, and which is to be finalized for endorsement in the first part of 2023. The achievements of 2022 of the PSEA Task Force in Slovakia are available on the Operational Data Portal [here](#).

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

UNHCR advocates for the inclusion of people in need of international protection in national systems of health, legal/justice and protection, seeking to support in strengthening the capacity to prevent, mitigate and provide a comprehensive adequate and safe response to GBV, and reinforce existing capacities to guarantee quality services in line with international standards. From October to December, UNHCR continued its support in the mapping of GBV response services, and the development of referral pathways, in coordination with the relevant national authorities, other agencies and service providers. The UNHCR office contributed to activities and outreach during the 16 Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women by co-organizing an event on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women in Bratislava. The president of the Slovak Republic and several ambassadors attended the event. During December, a series of four training sessions focused on the response to GBV were conducted for psychologists working with the helpline 'Nezabudka', to ensure GBV survivors have access to counselling in their language based on gender-sensitive and survivor-centred approaches. The helpline is managed by the local NGO League for Mental Health.



On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, attendees including the Slovak President, UN agencies and embassies formed a living chain around the Globe fountain to show solidarity with women's NGOs in Slovakia.

© UNHCR / Olga Pietruchova

Accommodation

In October, UNHCR jointly with IOM and through REACH shared a [Site Monitoring and On-Site Needs Assessment](#), from assessments conducted in 38 accommodation sites across Slovakia between July and August. Of the 38 sites assessed, 79% were collective sites (structures existing before the conflict in Ukraine), while 18% of the sites were created specifically for welcoming refugees. The majority of the sites assessed were dormitories (29%), educational facilities such as schools (16%), government buildings (13%), hotels or hostels (13%) and holiday resorts (13%). Partner organisations are also present in accommodation centres to provide information, non-food items like kitchen supplies, and psychological support.

Child protection

Child protection preparedness and response is currently focused on immediate assistance, referral and identification for children at risk including unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) through Protection Desks at border crossing points and registration/service centres in Bottova, Košice, Michalovce, Nitra, Žilina and Gabčíkovo, as well as through the three Blue Dots in Slovakia, while at the same time reinforcing and strengthening the existing national protection structures in the country through capacity building and training on the best interest of children and the child-centered approach. Relevant child protection services offered via Protection Desks include identification and referral of children at risk for protection services, psycho-social support, legal aid, and counselling.

23 training sessions were provided to the enumerators for the Protection monitoring exercise enumerators, Area Based assessment enumerators, and partners covering foundational Child Protection concepts, on UNHCR's mandate for child protection and role in Slovakia, the defining key concepts for child protection, and the identification of Child Protection cases and referrals. Coordination efforts took place with Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and family to discuss the Child Protection response within Slovakia. Based on these meetings, mandatory reporting and referral mechanisms for Child Protection cases were drafted and shared with partners.

Communication and Provision of Information

As the arrival of refugees from Ukraine into Slovakia continues, provision of information remains crucial to ensuring refugees are able to access key services, make informed decisions, and actively participate in the response. UNHCR and partners are working to ensure those arriving from Ukraine have access to information through preferred channels, feedback mechanisms, community networks, and are able to participate in all stages of the response. UNHCR has established multiple channels for communication with refugee communities, including a phone helpline, Telegram channel, email address, and Help website. UNHCR also routinely holds in-person individual and group consultations

and counseling sessions with Ukrainian refugees. As of end-December, the Helpline had attended and registered 12,529 calls, and the UNHCR Slovakia Help Page has received 296,620 visits since 24 February.

Jointly with UNICEF, three [Blue Dot](#) locations have been launched in Slovakia – in Bratislava, Michalovce, and Košice – to strengthen information provision and two-way communication, while serving as a safe space for women and children recently arriving from Ukraine. Around 11,381 people were reached from October to December, with 33,227 people reached overall as of the end of 2022.

Training and Capacity-Building

As of 31 December, 596 individuals have been reached through capacity development trainings and initiatives by UNHCR and partners on topics including child protection, GBV, PSEA, the legal framework for temporary protection in Slovakia and access to associated rights and services. Between October to December, through different online and offline modalities, UNHCR has provided trainings on PSEA core principles and standards of conduct to 108 staff members of UNHCR, partner organizations engaged in different activities, as well district offices' volunteers, to enhance the capacities of all service-providers working with refugees.

Cash-Based Interventions

In December, UNHCR, aligned with the Cash Working Group operational agencies, launched its Winterization Cash Programme to support vulnerable families to access basic needs related to winterization needs such as increased energy bills and to purchase winter clothing. Around 20,000 vulnerable refugees benefited from this specific cash grant. The winterization assistance is a one-time payment of 150 EUR per person, with a maximum of 400 EUR per family.

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For more information, please visit UNHCR's Global Focus page for the Ukraine Situation, [available here](#).

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More Information

For further information, please visit the [UNHCR Ukraine Situation Operational Data Portal](#)

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² Contributed without restrictions on its use, unearmarked funding allows UNHCR critical flexibility in how best to reach refugees and other populations of concern who are in the greatest need and at the greatest risk. Where a donor has contributed \$10 million or more, the total amount of the contribution is shown.

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