



RECOMMENDATION NOTE - Strengthening Socio-Economic Inclusion of Refugee Youth in Hungary

Introduction.

Refugee youth are an important segment of Hungary's refugee population, yet their unique needs are often overlooked. Youth frequently fall between programs meant for children and those for adults, and when included, they are rarely the focus, resulting in limited impact.

This note refers to "youth" as individuals aged 15 to 24, as [defined by the United Nations](#), though this interpretation may vary across different societies.

Young People		
Child	Youth	Adolescent
0-17 y/o	15-24 y/o	10-19 y/o

Young individuals are navigating a critical phase of their lives, transitioning from the later stages of childhood through adolescence into adulthood. This period is marked by significant milestones such as pursuing higher education and embarking on career and family paths. For refugee youth, this journey is even more challenging due to the upheaval of forced displacement and the uncertainty of the future.¹

Service providers share the responsibility of prioritizing refugee youth in the response not just as aid recipients but as catalysts for change. Youth programming has to be integrated into humanitarian planning, especially as the emergency response phase stabilizes. The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus also emphasizes higher education and employment of refugees as multipliers for inclusion and development.² Innovative partnerships among the government, humanitarian organizations, civil society, and donors are essential to address the needs of young refugees and leverage their potential.

This note is a joint effort of the Budapest Municipality, Menedek, Kek Vonal, CalmSchool, Dorcas, UNICEF, and UNHCR. The document was discussed and finalized at the June 7 [Refugee Coordination Forum](#) meeting in Budapest. Challenges, recommendations, and youth voices were collected through five Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) held in Hungary between March and May 2024, targeting 43 youth refugees (22 15-18 y/o, 6 18-20 y/o; 17 male, 26 female; 16 Roma).

Needs and Vulnerabilities of Refugee Youth

Continuous education. Access to higher education plays a crucial role in the socio-economic inclusion and empowerment of refugee youth. It enhances employment opportunities and addresses psychosocial challenges by fostering hope and prospects in the host country or upon return to Ukraine.

The Hungarian higher education system, which encompasses both public and private institutions,

offers various programs, including bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees, as well as vocational training and professional courses.³

The legislative framework in Hungary clearly details the process of recognizing primary and secondary education certificates obtained abroad and considers the specific circumstances of Temporary Protection (TP) holders and refugees from Ukraine.⁴

¹ UNHCR, [Helping Hands - Housing Support and Employment Facilitation for Refugees from Ukraine, April 2024](#). Also, the rate of youth not employed in education or training (NEET) in Hungary is higher among refugees than the host community (17% vs. 14%), hinting at challenges and disconnection from the education system (see [2023 MultiSector Needs Assessment \(Hungary\)](#)).

² [IASC – HDPN Guidance Note](#), 2023.

³ For more details, see the [EU Eurydice portal/Hungary](#).

⁴ The [Lisbon Recognition Convention](#), signed and ratified by Hungary, sets standards for recognizing the qualifications of refugees and urges the development of fair and swift procedures for assessing the eligibility of refugees (and refugee-like situations) for higher education/employment, even with partial or missing documents. Official qualification recognition processes set by governments are listed



However, based on the findings of the FGDs and partner consultations, in Hungary, refugee youth face certain obstacles in accessing higher education in particular:⁵

- **Language barriers:** Higher education is usually taught in Hungarian or English, languages that youth refugees may not be proficient in with consequences on their class participation, understanding of assignments, and exam performance.
- **Administrative barriers.** Procedures for applying for higher education are complex. They require mandatory registration through the client gateway (*kormanyablak*) first and are mainly in Hungarian at felvi.hu for universities. For vocational training they are not streamlined or centralized and differ by institute. It also remains to clarify how students can enroll in the next academic year, if the TP validity is as of now extended until March 2025 and does not cover the whole academic year (2024/25).
- **Lack of sufficient and accessible information** about application requirements, scholarship opportunities, and available support services.
- **Financial Barriers.** Refugees often struggle to cover tuition fees and related expenses; also, for refugees, higher education is often de-prioritized among household needs. Education disruption due to conflict and displacement can lead to gaps in learning pathways and limited access to educational resources (textbooks, technology, and internet connectivity) to efficiently engage with course materials, conduct research and complete assignments. Existing scholarships for international students may not sufficiently cover the living expenses of refugee students and/or are not cumulable with other forms of financial assistance; scholarships are extended to TP holders but not to beneficiaries of international protection. From FGD, dormitories for TP students are also offered but only for the first year of studies.
- **Academic Barriers.** Besides differences in the academic curricula, entry to college requires [11 years of primary and secondary studies in Ukraine](#) but 12 in Hungary. Furthermore, the unfamiliarity with the

Hungarian education system can make it challenging for refugees to transition, adapt, and succeed.

- **Preference for Online Ukrainian School Enrollment.** As per 2023 Hungary MSNA, 43% of refugees aged 16 to 18 are not enrolled in Hungarian high schools; many prefer online education (in Ukrainian schools) as school enrollment is mandatory until the age of 16 in Hungary.
- **Non-completion of high school.** From field experience and consultations with refugee families, refugee teenagers aged 16 and above exhibit higher rates of school dropout and non-completion of school years, particularly as education is no longer compulsory at this age in Hungary and struggle with the language and the Hungarian academic system. From FGD, it emerged that **social norms and traditions** present another barrier for refugee youth, particularly from Roma background, to stop education at age of 16. Also, youth have identified peer **bullying** by Hungarian speaking peers and school administration's lack of response to this issue as a factor for leaving the formal education system.
- **Access to Vocational Training:** Access to vocational training or apprenticeships can be crucial for employment, but young refugees face barriers in accessing these opportunities in Hungary due to the limited offer that includes refugees among its targets and accessibility issues (financial barriers, language).
- **Data Gap.** Higher education statistics are based on citizenship rather than status and, therefore, lack disaggregation for TP holders or individuals with international protection. Data disaggregation is an essential component of good programming and monitoring.

Employment. Although the TP status allows legal access to employment for Ukrainians in Hungary⁶ and so do resident permits issued to Ukrainians for work purposes; in fact, barriers to employment remain for refugees and, in particular, for young refugees at their first work experiences.

in the [ENIC-NARIC Gateway](#) and the Council of Europe [Qualifications Passport for Refugees](#). In Hungary, the Department of Education specifically offers information about recognizing primary and secondary school certificates. Though there is a fee for the recognition procedure, exceptions are foreseen for TP holders. More information about document requirements for refugees from different countries and how their academic achievements are recalculated in the Hungarian system at [Felvi.hu](http://felvi.hu). See also [FAQ by UNHCR](#).

⁵ For more detailed readings on challenges, see [Europe Region Quarterly Update: Education \(Q1 Jan-Mar 2024\) | UNHCR Europe](#), page 1 and for a general report on barriers to higher education for refugees in Europe (prior to the Ukraine crisis), see [Accessing Higher Education in Europe: Challenges for Refugee Students & Strategies to Overcome Them](#), 2018 by SUCRE. It is important to consider that the education system in Ukraine has been heavily affected by the war, see [Overview of the current state of education and science in Ukraine under Russian aggression](#) (as of February 2023), published by the Ukrainian Government.

⁶ The right to work for TP holders is ensured by Section 6(4) of Government Decree No. 86/2022 (III. 7.). Employers must report the employment of TP holders [as per Act II of 2007, Section 71]. In Hungary TP holders may also serve as public workers [as per Government Decree No. 86/2022 (III. 7.), Section 6(4)]. In order to incentivize the employment of health workers from Ukraine, special procedures have been foreseen for the recognition/homologation of Ukrainian certification [as per the Government Decree No. 121/2022 (III. 28.)]. Source: [Safe in Hungary](#) (the official web portal providing information to "persons fleeing the Russian-Ukrainian war to Hungary" by the Hungarian government).



In addition to the challenges faced by Ukrainian refugees in general in accessing the labor market in Hungary,⁷ there are several other specific and age-related challenges that this group faces.

These include:

- **Missing or Disrupted Education:** The conflict and the flight for safety have disrupted the education process of many young refugees. These educational gaps can be detrimental to their competitiveness in the job market.
- **Lack of previous Work Experience:** Young refugees are often at their first professional experience and, therefore, do not yet have the necessary experience requested, especially in comparison with more adult refugees and host communities. Youth are, therefore, less competitive in the employment market.
- **Discrimination based on Age:** There could be biases or stereotypes from employers about the employability and maturity of young refugees with scrutiny over their capabilities to handle work responsibilities.
- **Lack of familiarity with the Job Application Process:** Young refugees might not be familiar with the process of applying for jobs in the host country, including resume-building and interview techniques.
- **Limited Professional and Social Network:** Young refugees haven't had the time in Hungary to build professional networks that can enhance job opportunities and often rely on the ones of their family or friends. For TP holders, their families might also lack these networks in Hungary.

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS).

In addition to the trauma of conflict and forced displacement,⁸ refugee youth undergo a complex psychological and emotional process linked to their life-stage transition. The psychosocial stressors they face can significantly impact motivation, learning, and academic and professional performance, affecting their overall socio-economic inclusion in the host country.

- Specific MHPSS challenges faced by this age group are linked to the delicate period of personal **identity formation** they traverse. This age group is actively consolidating their personal, social, and cultural identities.
- **Balancing their culture of origin with the host country's culture and administration** can create tension and confusion in the integration process. For example, young refugees are unfamiliar with the Hungarian health system. In particular, young refugee women, despite being knowledgeable and competent about their own care within the Ukrainian system, may lack information about contraception, mandatory examinations during pregnancy in Hungary, or other basic support systems. Young adults coming of age often find it challenging to rely on peers or older family members for guidance, as the unfamiliarity with the healthcare system is widespread within the community. They lack accessible information about their rights, obligations, and pathways to care, leading to temporary returns to Ukraine for healthcare access, as observed by RCF partners.
- Also, service providers often face a **dichotomy between services for children and adults**, leaving this transitional age group underserved.
- In addition, refugee youth may **lack adequate peer support**. Peer connections are crucial during this developmental phase. Establishing friendships in a new environment, particularly with language and cultural barriers, is challenging.
- Refugee youth might be exposed to and engage **in risky behaviors**. Faced with challenges and frustrations, some individuals may be drawn to risky behaviors and coping mechanisms, such as heavy drinking. Refugee youth are at a heightened risk of substance abuse, often using it as a form of self-medication to cope with past traumas and current stressors.
- Also, the **preference for online education** among secondary students further isolates refugees from their peers and hinders the social inclusion process.

⁷ From the [2023 MultiSector Needs Assessment \(Hungary\)](#): language barriers, lack of recognition of qualifications, discrimination, lack of local work experience, cultural differences, access to information, inadequate skills training.

⁸ These include trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), loss and grief, adjustment difficulties, isolation and loneliness, cultural and linguistic barriers preventing them from seeking help or service providers from properly diagnosing or treating conditions, stigma and discrimination, lack of continuity in care, inadequate training of service providers, structural challenges.



Recommendations.

CONTINUOUS / HIGHER EDUCATION → Enhance access to quality higher education and skills development opportunities for refugee youth in Hungary through targeted and combined interventions that support preparation,⁹ admission,¹⁰ and retention/integration¹¹ into local higher education institutions.

Here is a non-exhaustive list of suggested interventions:

- **Scholarships combined with cash-based interventions.** Financial assistance initiatives such as grants or scholarships should be expanded to improve the participation of refugee youth in higher education.¹² These initiatives can help overcome the financial barriers that prevent these young individuals from pursuing higher education. Further exemptions from tuition fees should be explored for vulnerable refugee students, as practiced in the state funded “Stipendium Hungaricum” Scholarship including its sub-program currently open to Ukrainian refugees or in other EU countries like Estonia, Ireland, Austria, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, and Sweden.¹³ Scholarships can assist with tuition, books, and living expenses, making higher education more accessible for this group.¹⁴

Simultaneously, synergies should be established with cash-based interventions from humanitarian partners to ensure that higher education is not overshadowed by other unmet household needs. Collaborative partnerships between universities, donors, government, and NGOs are essential to design tailored scholarship programs for refugee students.

- **Inclusive interpretation of eligibility criteria for post-secondary courses.** The “Students at Risk” sub-program should be extended to individuals with international protection statuses other than temporary protection, building on the good practice of including third nationals who fled Ukraine into the program in the academic year 2022/23.¹⁵
- **Tailored academic programs.** Skills development, bridging programs (from secondary to college), preparatory programs, and academic guidance are crucial in facilitating the integration of refugees into higher education in Hungary. In Hungary few civil initiatives are currently supporting refugees to access higher education with introductory courses, exam preparation, and other forms of academic guidance.¹⁶ These programs should be extended to students with international protection and adapted to meet the specific needs of refugees, considering factors like language, time commitment, and costs.¹⁷ The

⁹ Eg. academic guidance, introductory courses, Hungarian and English language training or support.

¹⁰ Eg. quotas and reserved study places, paralegal and administrative assistance.

¹¹ Eg. non-repayable grants, scholarships or tuition fee exemption, skill development, mentoring, exam preparation courses.

¹² Non exhaustive list of available scholarships for refugees in Hungary: Stipendium Hungaricum, Hungarian Diaspora Scholarship, Makovecz Programme, Hunyadi János Scholarship. For more information see [FAQ by UNHCR](#).

¹³ [Eurydice, Supporting refugee learners from Ukraine in higher education in Europe, July 2022](#).

¹⁴ Other tailored scholarships and bursaries can be explored to support students, including full-ride scholarships that cover all expenses, tuition waiver programs, book and equipment grants, living allowance bursaries, emergency funds, academic achievement scholarships, and language preparation scholarships. It's crucial that these funds are accessible to TP holders and refugees and well-publicized, so potential students are aware of the available assistance. Additionally, setting quotas for study positions specifically for Temporary Protection (TP) holders in Hungary could be beneficial. Although reserving places for refugees doesn't guarantee unconditional access and academic success, it ensures that refugees aren't competing under the same conditions as other student applicants and have a fair chance of acceptance if they meet the established criteria. Over time, such affirmative support systems, especially when supplemented by competence development bridging programs, can prove to be beneficial. For more information, see the Menedek [NIEM Policy Brief Hungary 08 - Higher education - Faludi-Lakatos.pdf \(menedek.hu\)](#).

¹⁵ Students at Risk scholarship program, sub-program of the state supported Stipendium Hungaricum Scholarship, available to Ukrainian citizens. The scholarship holders starting their studies in the Academic Year 2024/25 are entitled to a tuition-free education, a monthly stipend (HUF 43,700 at non-degree, bachelor's, master's and one-tier master's level and HUF 140,000/180,000 at doctoral level), accommodation contribution (HUF 40 000 ft) or free dormitory place, and medical insurance. <https://stipendiumhungaricum.hu/studentsatrisk/>.

¹⁶ Eg. the Stipendium Hungaricum provides bridging programs and language courses to foreign students and Ukrainian TP holders.

¹⁷ Eg: Germany introduced online courses for refugees after February 2022, aimed at the integration of refugee students in the German higher education system, while others aim at supporting students enrolled in a Ukrainian HEI to continue their studies online. [Eurydice, 2022](#).



transition from upper-secondary school to higher education often poses a challenge, and guidance is particularly important during this phase.¹⁸ Creating conditions for access to and completion of secondary education can pave the way for higher education in the same way as creating conditions for access to work post-graduation can incentivize the completion of higher education.¹⁹

- **Language training and support:** Implement language support programs tailored for refugees to overcome language barriers and enhance proficiency in Hungarian and English. Continuous language training offered from primary to secondary education is essential to ensure success. Other forms of language support include special entrance examinations for refugees and availability in English/Ukrainian of the information and registration portal (felvi.hu).
- **Mentorship, and Peer-Support Programs.** Initiatives should be undertaken to encourage current students to serve as buddies or mentors to refugee students. Mentorship programs can assist refugee students in navigating the education system and offer both academic and psychosocial support. Supporting existing student organizations and extending programs tailored around foreign students to refugees and TP holders, including cultural integration and exchange and sports programs. Mentors and peer supporters should also be equipped on how to handle dynamics that include students who have experienced trauma and students attending higher education online.
- **Skills and Vocational Training.** Strengthen access to existing vocational skill training centers where youth refugees can learn practical, job-oriented skills that can help them gain employment in the future. Ensure accessibility in terms of both finances and language proficiency. Providing flexible learning options such as online courses or part-time study can enable refugee youth to pursue education while balancing other responsibilities.²⁰

- **Online higher education from Ukraine.** Explore measures to assist refugee students engaged in online courses in Ukraine. While online education is discouraged for primary and secondary students, it is considered an option for higher education.²¹ Support measures can include dedicated spaces for online learning with internet and quiet areas, expanding tutoring and mentoring programs to online students enrolled in Ukrainian universities, or facilitating the organization of Ukrainian higher education entrance exams within its territory.²²

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT → Creating viable pathways to employment for youth refugees in Hungary is an essential part of their socioeconomic integration.

Here are some specific measures that could be undertaken to strengthen the access to employment for youth refugees, in addition to the expansion of vocation training opportunities, focusing on high-demand sectors in Hungary, already explored above:

- **Internship and Mentorship Opportunities.** Expand the offer of internships and apprenticeships for young refugees, in coordination with businesses and organizations, to provide practical work experience and learn about the work culture in Hungary. Establish mentorship programs pairing young refugees with professionals in relevant industries; mentors can provide guidance, share insights into job fields, and help build professional networks.
- **Job counselling, job placement and labor market integration programs.** Provide comprehensive career guidance and counseling services to assist young refugees in exploring various career paths and understanding the necessary steps to achieve their goals.

¹⁸ Other examples of activities are: eg. preparatory courses for admission and entry procedures, facilitated entrance examinations, and online information.

¹⁹ [UNHCR 15BY30 Roadmap: Expanding Higher Education, Skills and Self-reliance for Refugees](#). One such example of bridging programs is the [OLive program](#), which aims to prepare secondary students for higher education and provides educational and language courses for refugee adults.

²⁰ For a list of post-secondary vocational training centers in Hungary and their contacts details: [VET Centres | IKK Zrt](#). There are also alternative study programs available in Hungary for refugees: [Olive, Open Learning Initiative](#), [Invisible University for Ukraine Initiative](#); and opportunities for refugees to study abroad: [Erasmus+ program](#) (in Hungary managed through the [Tempus Public Foundation](#)), [CEEPUS Freemover Grant](#). For more information see [FAQ by UNHCR](#).

²¹ Adults often find it easier to study at a distance or online, and Ukrainian universities have already adopted online education system due to the conflict. Online education from Ukrainian institution will overcome language barriers and will also allow time for parallel working. While online education does not directly facilitate integration, it can ease the path to higher education in Hungary when in English, as students can have their certificate from Ukraine recognized instead of sustaining the Matura exams in Hungary.

²² [Eurydice, 2022](#).



Additionally, offer assistance in navigating the job market, in the recognition processes of foreign certificates and professional credentials, develop effective resumes, and prepare for interviews. Establish job placement initiatives that connect employers willing to hire refugees with trained and qualified individuals.

- **Partnerships with Businesses:** Form alliances with local businesses and corporations to actively hire refugees. Organize networking events, pitch competitions, and market access opportunities for refugee youth entrepreneurs to showcase their products and services and connect with potential customers and investors. Collaborate with local communities, employers, and educational institutions to create supportive environments that encourage the recruitment of refugee youth. Government incentives, such as tax breaks or subsidies, can further promote the recruitment of refugees.
- **Business Start-up Support:** Encourage self-employment by assisting refugees in small company or business enterprise start-up procedures for TP holders, refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, including guidance in business planning, securing financing, and navigating local regulatory requirements. Establish entrepreneurship training programs and incubators specifically tailored to the needs of refugee youth, providing hands-on support and mentorship throughout the startup process.
- **Data and evidence collection.** Conduct research and data collection to better understand the barriers and opportunities for refugee youth entrepreneurship in Hungary, informing evidence-based policy and programming.

MHPSS → Recognizing the unique experiences and developmental stages of refugee youth highlights the need for age-specific and accessible mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS). This requires collaborative efforts from the humanitarian community, government, and donors.

- **Tailored and accessible MHPSS programs.** Develop culturally sensitive, trauma-informed MHPSS programs tailored to refugee youth aged 16-18 and above 18. These programs should be accessible and staffed with trained professionals who understand the demographic's MHPSS needs²³ and should include partnerships with local NGOs and CSOs specializing in refugee support to leverage expertise and resources for outreach, service delivery, and capacity-building. Designate youth focal points within organizations to engage directly with youth networks and organizations, ensuring institutional accountability and establishing youth-specific referral mechanisms addressing emotional challenges from forced displacement, discrimination, and isolation.
- **Community focus.** Strengthen existing community centers and increase mental health service accessibility by decentralizing resources and expanding community-based mental health centers in areas with high refugee populations. Ensure linguistic and culturally appropriate services to accommodate diverse needs and train service providers to target refugee youth specifically.
- **Capacity Building.** Offer training to specialized and non-specialized service providers to recognize and address the distinct mental health needs of young refugees. This may include cultural sensitivity training, language classes, and professional development in trauma-informed care.
- **Data collection.** Conduct a comprehensive assessment of refugee youth's mental health needs, considering factors like trauma exposure, cultural backgrounds, language barriers, and existing support networks.

Good Practice: CalmSchool project (Sulinyugi). Materials regarding stress management for teachers, students and parents in Ukrainian and Hungarian (English is also available)

- [Ukrainian materials for teachers, parents and kids \(6- 14 ages\);](#)
- [Ukrainian materials for older adolescents \(14-19 years\).](#)

[Video](#) for parents and kids in Ukrainian with Hungarian subtitles + [Video](#) on what CalmSchool does with kids very briefly.

²³ These programs should encompass counseling services, support groups, and recreational activities aimed at promoting resilience and coping skills. MHPSS program for youth should focus on cross-sectoral issues: identity formation, peer support, transitional age services, sexual and reproductive health, substance abuse, risk-taking behavior.



Resources and Contacts.

International Policy and Guidance:

- [Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action](#), 2016
- [IASC Guidelines on Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises](#), 2021
- [Toolkit & Session Plans for Consulting with Youth](#), 2019
- Action 5 of the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action, 2016 [Data collection & age disaggregation for young people in humanitarian action](#)
- European Students Union (ESU), [Statement on Forcibly Displaced and Refugee Students](#), May 2024.

United Nations: [Security Council Resolutions 2250](#) (2015) and [2419](#) (2018) acknowledge that young people play an important and positive role in the realization of sustainable development, in the prevention of crises, and in the advancement of peace. Youth development and youth engagement are cross-cutting issues in the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), as well as in the [UN Youth Strategy](#) (2018).

UNHCR Policy and Guidance:

- [Age, Gender and Diversity \(AGD\) Policy](#), 2018
- [Tip sheet on applying the UNHCR age, gender and diversity policy to youth](#), 2021
- [Core Actions for Refugee Youth](#), 2016
- [Global Compact on Refugees](#), 2018 paragraph 77: “The empowerment of refugee and host community youth, building on their talent, potential and energy, supports resilience and eventual solutions. The active participation and engagement of refugee and host community youth will be supported by States and relevant stakeholders, including through projects that recognize, utilize and develop their capacities and skills, and foster their physical and emotional well-being.” And related resources under the section: [“We believe in Youth”](#)
- [Europe Region Quarterly Update: Education](#) (Q1 Jan-Mar 2024)
- [Education on Hold: Almost half of school-aged refugee children from Ukraine missing out on formal education](#), 2023.

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