

Discussing Refugee Response Priorities for Hungary (2025/26).

INTRODUCTION.

On 16 September 2024, international and national NGOs, refugee- and community-led organizations and UN agencies gathered in Budapest in a planning workshop for the next Refugee Response Plan (RRP) in Hungary, organized in the Refugee Coordination Forum (RCF) framework.¹

The consultation was based on up-to-date information about the current operational context and challenges faced by refugees in Hungary, through the presentation and validation of Socio-Economic Inclusion Survey (SEIS) results, the feedback on the response by refugee-led organizations (RLOs), and the lessons learned shared by the Municipality of Budapest.

Participants reflected on the priorities for the 2025-2026 refugee response in Hungary and developed a set of actionable recommendations in the sectors of protection, socio-economic inclusion, and basic needs. Additionally, participants provided inputs on an individual basis through a survey.

This note summarizes the outcomes of the workshop. It focuses on 3 aspects: the priority areas for the 2025-2026 response, strategies to enhance sustainability and localization, and ways to improve coordination.



2025/26 RESPONSE PRIORITIES.

Most participants believe the current refugee strategy in Hungary aligns with refugee needs, with 24% finding it well-aligned, 68% adequate, and 8% poorly aligned. For the 2025-2026 timeframe, participants prioritized socio-economic inclusion and protection programs in alignment with RRP Objectives 1 and 2. Key intervention areas rated were employment (68%), accommodation (52%), education (52%), protection (40%), healthcare (32%), mental health (20%), cash and vouchers (12%), child protection (12%), food (8%), and gender-based violence (4%). These priorities guide where efforts and resources should focus. Group discussions further explored these areas, with outcomes summarized in the following.

Employment. For 2025-2026, expanding vocational training and language support for Ukrainian refugees is crucial for enhancing their access to employment. This includes linking refugees with national job centers, offering interpreters, and providing Hungarian language courses with specialized technical vocabulary. Engaging employers and the private sector is essential by simplifying hiring processes and highlighting successful case studies to encourage participation. Promoting job opportunities that match refugees' qualifications without requiring Hungarian proficiency and streamlining the recognition of qualifications and certifications is important to tackle underemployment. Addressing transportation challenges through travel cost subsidies or shuttle services can improve job and training access. Creating safe channels for reporting workplace exploitation is important to protect refugees' rights and promote ethical recruitment and safe employment practices. Supporting refugee entrepreneurs with information, financial aid, and mentorship will help them achieve self-reliance and integrate into the economy.

¹ 25 organizations participated with 60 persons: Bona Fide, Budapest Municipality, Cordelia, House of Ukrainian Traditions, Hungarian Baptist Aid, Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Hungarian Interchurch Aid, Hungarian Red Cross, IOM, Jesuit Refugee Service, Mene dek, Migration Aid, Minority Ombudsman, Next Step, Terre Des Hommes, Ukrán Remény Egyesület, ULE, UNHCR, UNICEF, United Way Hungary, Unity, UREC, Vamos Foundation, WHO, XXI Century Roma Women Association.

Accommodation. Over the next two years, expanding secure, sustainable, and independent housing options for refugees in Hungary is a key priority. This involves developing social housing programs in collaboration with municipalities and providing information to raise awareness of housing options and rights. Counseling activities will also be offered to help refugees navigate these options effectively. Cooperation between municipalities and the government is key to expanding housing options and extending long-term housing solutions in Budapest and other key areas. Working with host communities to raise awareness of refugee rights and address discrimination is also crucial. For refugees unable to afford private rentals, ensuring alternative housing solutions (private or collective), rent subsidies, and rental assistance is essential. Coordinated efforts between the government, local municipalities, and the humanitarian community are necessary to mitigate the risk of homelessness, particularly in assessing changes to the subsidized accommodation regime. Advocacy with authorities to sustain rental subsidies and support should continue. Linking employment with accommodation support is another option, encouraging employers to become informed about accommodation options and available financial assistance/fiscal incentives.

Education. In 2025-2026, education efforts should focus on promoting consistent enrollment and attendance in national schools: strengthening awareness campaigns on enrollment procedures for families with children in kindergarten, primary, and higher education is essential; addressing bullying and dropout rates among adolescents, especially Romani refugees, is critical due to significant barriers like discrimination and marginalization; providing Hungarian language courses for Ukrainian refugees at all education levels, especially secondary and higher education, is vital. Special attention should be given to translating and adapting Ukrainian certificates for children with special needs and training educators to support them. Capacity-building for teachers in teaching Hungarian as a second language is necessary, along with advocating for textbook accessibility in Ukrainian. Additionally, support for the recognition of qualifications and certifications for trained Ukrainian educators is important to help them integrate into the workforce and support refugee children. Workshops sharing best practices from other Refugee Response Plan (RRP) countries should be held.

Health. For 2025-2026, addressing the significant gap in healthcare information for refugees and professionals is crucial. Efforts should focus on clarifying healthcare rights and entitlements and providing clear guidance on applicable rules and regulations. Workshops with healthcare providers, including pharmacists, are necessary to identify and address systemic barriers to refugee care and gather their perspectives on serving refugees. Overcoming language barriers during medical consultations is essential, as phone translation services are often insufficient or unavailable. Additional support for communication challenges is needed, with cultural mediators playing a key role in bridging information and communication gaps between refugees and healthcare providers. Leveraging the government's role over the two-year response period is critical; collaboration with public authorities and coordination between Ukrainian and Hungarian governments is essential, especially for refugees with chronic conditions or disabilities requiring consistent care and certificate recognition. Strengthening referral pathways between organizations and the healthcare system is also important to ensure that patients with acute needs receive adequate care.

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS). To address psychosocial needs effectively, it is crucial to implement a range of supportive measures across the sectors. Schools should integrate both individual and group counseling to support students' mental health. It is important to provide tailored care for non-Hungarian speakers and other underserved groups. Given the funding constraints often affecting MHPSS first, fostering community building and creative solutions is essential. Mental health services should include sessions for both children and adults, as well as comprehensive therapy programs for trauma healing. Increasing the visibility of NGOs offering mental health care is vital, and organizing more Ukrainian-Hungarian social activities can help combat stigma and promote mutual acceptance.

Protection. Information sharing is vital for empowering refugees to advocate for their rights and navigate post-Temporary Protection (TP) statuses. However, there is a significant gap in information access for refugees, with 25% lacking necessary details to access services due to poor communication and language barriers. Platforms with trusted information for refugees already exists but need to be further promoted across the community. RLOs are a key actors in the promotion of

such tools and in sharing information, however a shift to state actors is expected in 2025-2026. Protection case management, including for cash assistance, must prioritize persons with specific needs, and RLOs may be engaged as intermediaries. Community-based protection is largely handled by civil society and RLOs, with more state involvement anticipated in the two-year plan.

For 2025-2026, the strategy should emphasize comprehensive training on Child Protection (CP) and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) for key stakeholders like schools, caregivers, authorities, and medical personnel, delivered by RRP partners. Training is crucial to ensure these service providers can protect children and address GBV effectively. Robust case management systems must be prioritized, focusing on unaccompanied and separated minors, survivors of GBV, and vulnerable families. This should be coordinated through key service providers. The strategy must also integrate child protection principles and GBV risk-mitigation measures across sectors, mainstreaming CP and GBV principles into the work of both NGOs and government bodies. These activities collectively aim to strengthen the protection framework for vulnerable populations, ensuring that children and GBV survivors receive the support and resources they need and that the exposure to CP and GBV risks of refugees in Hungary is reduced.

Basic Needs (BN). BN will remain a priority sector in the upcoming RRP, despite fewer funds and partners. Key activities should focus on food, cash assistance, and possibly clothing, sanitation and hygiene supplies when non-food items (NFIs) are required. Short-term accommodation should continue to support new arrivals, refugees in transit, vulnerable individuals, and those evicted from housing, as part of emergency response efforts. It is also important to maintain a certain capacity for contingency purposes in case of a mass influx of refugees, with a focus on the border areas and the main urban centers.

Integrated service delivery, such as multi-service centers, is preferred over street distribution of food and NFIs. These centers serve as community hubs and help identify vulnerable cases with basic needs. Identification of vulnerable refugees for targeted assistance will be increasingly important, through mechanisms that allow a monitoring of changing vulnerabilities of refugees in Hungary.

SUSTAINABILITY and LOCALIZATION.

Objective 4 of the 2025-2026 RRP states: “Advance the localization of the response, by supporting national and local civil society, municipalities and local authorities, as well as coordination structures, sharing and building capacities and supporting sustainable programming.”

In the 2025 –2026 timeframe, genuine localization is essential to achieving lasting sustainability, with no solutions in sight to the Ukraine situation and declining fundings. Partners have stressed the importance of advancing the shift in planning, decision-making, and funding towards local actors—empowering community-based organizations, refugee-led groups, and civil society.

Sustainability also requires further reinforcing national systems supporting refugee socio-economic integration, accommodation, education, and employment. Partnering and coordinating with local government actors, including municipalities, is key.

Key aspects of localization explored through the survey during the workshop include:

Building Local Capacity. Strengthening the ability of local organizations and authorities to respond to refugees’ needs in Hungary is a key priority. Inter-agency coordination shall play a role in streamlining, coordinating and mobilizing training resources. While a more in-depth training needs assessment would need to be conducted within the RCF in 2025, according to a brief survey conducted during the workshop, the top 10 requested training areas include: Fundraising and grant writing (48%); Social media and communication about refugees (28%); Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) (24%); Safe and legal employment, fiscal and tax regime, banking (24%); Healthcare (20%); Legal framework (refugees’ rights in Hungary and internationally) (20%); Project management (20%); Youth engagement and NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) (16%); Monitoring and evaluation (16%); Child protection (16%). Partners have preferred in-person training and workshops to address these needs effectively. This approach will help ensure that staff are well-equipped to handle the challenges they face and provide better support to refugees in Hungary.

Partnerships. Developing equitable partnerships between international and local organizations will be a priority. Key stakeholders have been identified through the workshops in:

- **Refugee-led Organizations (RLOs):** Partners generally believe that refugees are effectively included in the planning process and the humanitarian response (61%), though 39% feel their engagement could be improved. Several mechanisms were proposed to enhance involvement of refugees and refugee-led organizations. Better outreach and mapping of RLOs/CSOs and consultations during project development and planning phases are essential. More field visits, focus group discussions, and beneficiary-organization forums can also play a significant role. Additionally, more frequent RLO workshops and increased transparency through periodic needs assessments and informal assessments during social events are recommended. Improved information mechanisms and training, as well as regular meetings, are crucial for better engagement. Conducting beneficiary satisfaction surveys and implementing mixed-methodology needs assessments, such as surveys and semi-structured interviews, can help ensure that refugee needs are better understood and addressed.
- **National Government:** Throughout the workshop, partners expressed an interest in closer coordination and dialogue with national government actors, line departments, and central and local government entities. They hoped for direct, regular, and constructive communication channels with the government to discuss response challenges, operational issues, and administrative barriers and propose advocacy points for consideration. It was emphasized during the workshop that the RRP is meant to complement the government response and provide support where needed without creating a parallel response system.
- **Municipalities** were frequently mentioned throughout the workshop as key service providers and intermediaries between the central government and civil society. Notably, Budapest Municipality was present and delivered a short presentation on their current interventions. Among the strengths and weaknesses of the partnership between humanitarian actors and municipalities, several points were highlighted. Strengths include available resources and infrastructure, administrative experience and compliance, and sustainability. However, weaknesses such as the volatility of the legislative environment and lack of funding were also noted. Good practices were identified, including the facilitation of comprehensive services for refugees. These points underscore the crucial role municipalities play in the humanitarian response and the importance of strengthening these partnerships.

COORDINATION.

Improving interagency mechanisms. Since 2022, the coordination of RRP partners has been exercised through the Refugee Coordination Forum (RCF) and its technical bodies. In 2024, these technical bodies were streamlined to include the Protection Working Group

(WG), Inclusion WG, Basic Needs WG, and the PSEA Resource Hub.

The survey showed that 94% of participants are satisfied with the coordination mechanisms between NGOs, the UN, and civil society set up with the RRP in Hungary. 6% are dissatisfied, citing issues like duplication and lack of information, while the remaining were unsure or prefer not to answer.

The survey revealed several significant challenges in coordination among various stakeholders involved in refugee support and protection. A major issue highlighted was the mismatch between staff time and organizational priorities, compounded by inadequate human resources and time constraints to accommodate the needs of different coordination groups. The importance of including Hungarian government entities and many municipalities in coordination efforts were also noted.

Another critical concern was the risk of violating protection principles, such as consent and confidentiality. Limited and incomplete information-sharing among CSOs was a recurrent theme, exacerbated by the absence of a uniform database of refugees, hindering case management. Referral mechanisms across service providers are in place but not always clear to stakeholders, leading to confusion over roles and responsibilities, duplication of services, and a lack of responsiveness. Additionally, the need for available contact channels between field, protection and inclusion staff of organizations was highlighted.

To address these challenges, several actionable recommendations were proposed. Simplifying the coordination structure and conducting meetings in Hungarian were suggested to enhance accessibility and participation. The frequency of WGs could be revised to every 2-3 months, with provisions for ad-hoc meetings, and combining the Inclusion WG and Protection PWG was recommended due to the overlap in topics they cover.

Improving coordination between WGs, fostering more active communication among actors, and encouraging greater participant engagement through written inputs were identified as potential solutions. It was also emphasized that coordination should be more practical and focused, with a stronger emphasis on translating common solutions into action. Increasing government involvement and buy-in was deemed crucial.

Additional recommendations included promoting the use of a common web repository internal for WG members (in addition to the more public data portal); promoting cooperation among organizations, particularly in rural areas; and organizing informal gatherings to strengthen relationships and communication. Streamlining services and eliminating duplications will be necessary to maintain efficiency with decreasing funding.

Information management. Participants were asked about their views on the effectiveness of indicators for reporting, the quality of the available data collection tools and information products for coordination as well as ways to improve information sharing between partners and barriers to accessing real-time data and information for planning.

In terms of capturing the impact of refugee response interventions, participants mostly found the indicators used for reporting to be effective (71%), whereas 29% felt that they could be improved by focusing more on qualitative impact indicators (e.g. through increased reliance on the MSNA/SEIS as a baseline, but with a larger and more representative sample size to cover the entire country better), increasing the involvement of affected populations (e.g. by getting direct feedback after every activity or conducting online beneficiary satisfaction surveys), avoiding overlap in indicators and duplication in reported beneficiary numbers (e.g. by improving guidance and having a more unified approach to reporting).

Participants indicated that they were satisfied (94%) with the tools and products used for coordination within the refugee response, such as the service mapping dashboard and form, the RRP progress dashboard and achievements reporting forms, RRP overview dashboard and project submission form, data portal as well as the MSNA/SEIS reports and datasets. Those who were not satisfied suggested simplifying the RRP application form, clarifying how partners can share information on the data portal and improving the implementation of the SEIS.

In terms of suggestions to improve information sharing between partners in the refugee response, the option of having an internal platform was mentioned to facilitate direct communication (especially on referrals coming from outside of Budapest), as well as newsletters and situational reports to understand better the activities

that are implemented and available services. Finally, it was suggested to create a dedicated space where recordings of previous webinars and other trainings can be collected and shared.

Few participants indicated facing barriers in accessing real-time data and information for planning, but those that did mention data policies, lack of internal capacity as well as lack of access to official data from the Hungarian government (e.g., on the number of Ukrainian refugees who remain in the country).

Advancing advocacy. In 2025-2026, interagency coordination shall also play a key role in promoting discussions with government counterparts to address the protection and socioeconomic needs of refugees for expanded guarantees and support. Participants have identified the following areas, in order of priority:

Access to Healthcare	Ensure healthcare is available and accessible for all and provide better information to healthcare providers and the community.
Social Services	Expand access to national social services, especially for the most vulnerable groups of refugees, including refugees with disabilities, older refugees, refugees with chronic medical conditions, single mothers.
Child Protection	Strengthen measures to safeguard refugee children and support their well-being and integrate them into national systems.
Inclusion	Advocate for safe and fair workplaces and make it easier to recognize foreign diplomas and certificates; offer subsidized language courses to help people integrate; provide rental support and access to affordable housing
Inclusive Legislation	Involve other organizations by considering their feedback when creating or changing laws.
National Awareness Campaign	Cooperate for a joint and coordinated campaign to provide refugees with reliable information and details about available services.

Coordination could also help in increasing donor support and funding for the RRP.