Regional Refugee Response for the Ukraine Situation

POLAND PROTECTION SECTOR MEETING

Meeting Minutes – 24 April 2025

Meeting subject:	Monthly Protection Sector Meeting
Time & location:	2pm (hybrid meeting)
Chaired by:	UNHCR, HNLAC
Minutes prepared by:	UNHCR
Participants:	HNLAC, UNHCR, IOM, Save the Children, SIP, HFHR, YWAM Poland, Plan International, PAH, UNICEF, JRS, Towards Dialogue Foundation, Caritas, IRC, ELIL, HumanDoc Foundation, Inicjatywa Dom Otwarty, AEH, Central Information Point if European Funds (37 participants)
Agenda:	**Agenda** 1. Opening remarks 2. Information session on PIFE Network services and general information on potential sources of EU funding for NGOs - by Magdalena Adamczyk, Central Information Point of European Funds (session in Polish) 3. Update on legal developments 4. Law on military conscription (Discussion/Information Sharing) 5. Presentation of 2024 Participatory Assessment Country Report 6. RRP Protection training (May/June) 7. Updates from Gender-based Violence (GBV), Child Protection (CP), Counter-Trafficking (CT) 8. AOB
AGENDA POINT	**DISCUSSION**

Agenda point 1	UNHCR welcomed participants to the third Protection Sector (PS) meeting in 2025 and invited members to join PS meeting in person at the UNHCR office in Warsaw. The following was further shared with participants: • In the upcoming weeks members will receive emails with requests to update and confirm 2025 members to the protection sector and email contacts of their respective organization. • The minutes and presentations are regularly uploaded on ODP and can be accessed here. • Members were asked to participate in the protection sector survey which aims to improve the protection sector coordination in 2025 that will be shared. • The agenda of the meeting was then introduced.
Agenda point 2	Information session on PIFE (Information Point of European Funding) Network services and general information on potential sources of EU funding for NGOs was delivered by Magdalena Adamczyk from Central Information Point of European Funds. The session and presentation were in Polish language. The presentation on the European Funding for NGOs was divided into the following sections: I. explanation on what PIFE network stands for; II. introduction to Financial Perspective for 2021-2027; III. general information about national, regional and Interreg programs; IV. sources of information about European Funding; V. Q&A session. I. **PIFE network** is located across Poland, there are 52 information points within the country where free of charge consultations on available EU funding are done in person, via email or phone. There are also webinars, information sessions and trainings organized to ensure access to information and provide assistance to various stakeholders eligible for funding. In order to find the nearest PIFE office, one can check the following link: List of Information Points. As part of the assistance provide by PIFE the following may be done (including on individual basis): assessing if a project has a chance to receive funding or preferential loan; connecting a project to concrete priority or objective in any financial program of EU funds; informing about conditions, criteria and procedures on receiving EU funding; presenting a step-by-step process of applying for funding; assisting in implementing and finalizing the project

	settlement as per PIFE knowledge regarding documents, procedures and deadlines; organizing free training and information webinars on various types of projects application. PIFE operates as part of the Center of European Projects: https://www.cpe.gov.pl/ Detailed information about funding opportunities as well as information and access to trainings and information sessions can be found on the official PIFE website - Portal Funduszy Europejskich. The most recent information session on EU funding for NGO will be held on 21 May in various locations. II. **Financial Perspective for 2021-2027** – is a partnership agreement with the EU Commission which considers challenges identified by Poland with Commission's expectations; implemented as national, regional and/or Interreg programs; total funding - 350bln PLN; final closure and financial settlement of a project can be done within 2 years after 2027; six various European Funding programs were presented; flagged program for NGO – European Funding for Social Development. III. **Interreg programs** were presented briefly as their aim is to improve life of local communities across the national borders; there are 11 programs available with a wide thematic scope. Based on programs that had been concluded in the past, PIFE possess a good practice database. **National and regional programs** – thematic scope of national and regional programs is similar; links to various programs including those available in specific voivodeships are available in the presentation; each program is described in detail and the application submission schedule is available on the PIFE website. IV. PIFE website is a comprehensive **source of information on European Funding** where the following can be found: information in the form of instructions and guides; search engine for training and conferences on the funds; list of announcements on calls for applications; information documents and publications on European funds; contact details of the European Funds Information Points; information on the effects of the European Funds and data on projects that received funding from the European Funds; possibility of assessing the usefulness of specific information contained on the websites V. N/A The presentation can be accessed here
Agenda point 3	Legal updates focused on the following:

	- **Amendments** to the Act on granting protection to foreigners (effective as of 27 March 2025 for 60 days - until 26 May 2025 – the government flagged that it will be extended) – included: introduction of a definition of 'instrumentalization of migration' as grounds for **suspending the right to apply** for international protection (IP); expansion of grounds for revoking refugee status; possibility to temporarily restrict the right to apply for IP; list of certain vulnerable groups that are exempted from these restrictions. - Situation on the **Polish-Belarusian (PL-BY) border** – in Q1 2025, at the Terespol border crossing (BC) based on information from Border Guard (BG) in Terespol, a total of 673 people were refused entry and 277 asylum applications were accepted; no clear criteria observed distinguishing those returned from those allowed to lodge applications for IP; notable trend – overrepresentation of individuals from Tajikistan; NGOs report that BG fails to respect interim measures issued by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and interprets the exceptions in the Act too restrictively ; limited access to BC outside Brest-Terespol route; continued reports of fatalities near the border area. - New **act on the conditions for employing foreigners** – signed by President on 10 April 2025; overall assessed as a positive change; the law aims to provide a comprehensive framework regulating the legality of foreigner employment in Poland; streamline administrative procedures; reduce bureaucratic backlogs; digitalize employment processes. - **Upcoming legislative changes** – The act on foreigners is to be amended soon (mainly on visa system to eliminate abuse). - European **trends in Migration Policy** are tightening as new initiatives at national (DE, AT and IT) level were observed in Q1 2025 and at the EU level where EC proposed a new Return directive. - **Key ECtHR rulings** – a case concerning the use of firearms against migrants (ALMUKHLAS ET AL-MALIKI c. GRÈCE - 22776/18) and cases concerning pushbacks A.R.E. v. Greece - 15783/21; G.R.J. v. Greece (dec.) - 15067/21) were presented. - The presentation can be accessed here
Agenda point 4	Law on military conscription (Discussion/Information Sharing): On 9 January 2025, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed a law amending the Law of Ukraine "On Military Duty and Military Service" regulating the issue of registration of Ukrainian citizens for military service; while on 16 April 2025 Ukrainian Parliament extended the martial law until August 2025 – these developments attracted significant media attention in Ukraine. Key changes included:

	• Starting from 2025, **male citizens of Ukraine who turn 17 years old in a given calendar year must register for military service in the period from January 1 to July 31**. This lowered the age of the registration obligation from 18 to 17 years. In addition, all citizens of Ukraine under the age of 25 must now also be registered by July 31, 2025. • The law **moved the responsibility for registration from institutions** (schools and employers who previously notified military units) **to the individual**. Now, every person needs to register individually in the respective territorial military recruitment unit. Failure to do so may result in a fine (UAH 17,000 to 25,000). • **Two ways to register for military service**: an electronic conscript's office using electronic identification Rezerv+ (very important for those who are currently abroad) or a personal visit to the military unit. **The mobilisation age has not changed** and remains currently at **25**, but there is an ongoing discussion about lowering it. As of September 1, 2025, an obligatory basic general military training will be introduced for students of higher education institutions and for citizens who plan to enter the civil service, local government or prosecution for the first time, as well as for all interested persons. Therefore, PS participants were asked whether **any impact of these amendments is already observed in Poland**. How these amendments could change the profile of refugees coming to PL; Do younger males come to PL and register for PESEL UKR, apply for international protection? Based on protection monitoring data UNHCR does not see impact yet thus, question directed to the audience. **HNLAC** – last year saw an increase in number of asylum applications due to changes in the military law, thus impact seen already last year as this caused a backlog on the asylum application pending in the Office for Foreigner (OFF). Thus, it may have a further impact including on the vulnerable people who are left in the limbo, due to various difficulties related to access to documentation and procedures. It was further suggested to monitor and share any observations among PS members on the impact of these changes on refugee population in Poland.
Agenda point 5	Presentation of **2024 Participatory Assessment (PA) Country Report**: - Participatory approach is a process of engaging with communities of all age, gender and diverse backgrounds through a set of structured consultations to gain a better understanding of the protection risks faced by displaced people, their causes, existing community's capacities, and proposed solutions. The participatory nature of the assessment aims at empowering refugees by recognizing their agency and expertise. The participatory assessment should inform

	humanitarian programs. Refugees should be part of the decision-making process. Background and methodology: 76 sessions conducted in cooperation with local partners and authorities; data collection – Jan 2024 to Jan 2025; covered 10 voivodeship. - Profile of participants: 577 participants; 18 nationalities; with different legal status and age; groups with specific need included. - Main findings (challenges and solutions & recommendations) on access to services and information; social cohesion & inclusion; legal status and documentation; and economic inclusion & housing were presented. The full report can be accessed here and the presentation here
Agenda point 6	RRP Protection sector/sub-sector training (tentatively on 21 May) – presentation of the draft agenda and update on the refresher **session on Introduction to Protection** was provided. It focuses on Protection Induction, coordination and Protection principles, GBV, CP, CT and volunteer guidelines. Once finalized, the invitation with agenda will be disseminated among PS participants. The training is a refresher/induction training on protection for volunteers, protection and non-protection partners and for anyone working with refugees and interested in obtaining basic knowledge in protection.
Agenda point 7	Updates from Gender Based Violence (GBV), Child Protection (CP), Counter-Trafficking (CT) **GBV** sub sector working group update: • On 23 April 2025, UNHCR participated in a consultation to review and adapt a tool for monitoring healthcare quality in long-term humanitarian aid settings to the Polish context. Once finalized, a pilot will be launched in various healthcare facilities to test the tool and assess readiness to respond to intimate partner and sexual violence. The initiative is led by WHO and the Polish Society for Sexual and Reproductive Health, in collaboration with GBV Sub-Sector Working Group members. • Following changes in the composition of the coordination structures (GBV Sub-Sector and Clinical Management of Rape/Intimate Partner Violence Task Force), the co-chairs from UNHCR, Feminoteka, and CARE convened on 23 April 2025 to discuss priorities and review the current ToRs and work plans. • On 23 April 2025, UNHCR discussed GBV training for Police and Judiciary with Feminoteka, tackling challenges posed by budget cuts and amendments to the Partnership Agreement.
Agenda point 8	AOB:

	Next Protection Sector meeting planned for 29 May 2025, 2pm. An agenda and meeting link will be shared.