Regional Refugee Response for the Ukraine Situation

**POLAND PROTECTION SECTOR MEETING**

Meeting Minutes – 10 July 2025

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| **Meeting subject:** | Monthly Protection Sector Meeting |
| **Time/ location:** | 2pm (Hybrid: online/conference room) |
| **Chaired by:** | UNHCR, HNLAC |
| **Minutes prepared by:** | UNHCR |
| **Participants:** | HNLAC, UNHCR, SIP, IOM, IRC, Plan International Poland, ICRC, Caritas Polska, Save the Children, Nomada Association, Pastoral Family Foundation – Przemyśl, HFHR, Zustricz Foundation, PMF, WHO, UNICEF, Jobs First (31 participants) |
| **Agenda:** | Agenda<br>1. Opening remarks<br>2. Presentation of the report 'So I told myself that I can't stay here... Unaccompanied children on the border with Belarus and in Polish foster care in 2024' – Save the Children<br>3. Update on legal developments – HNLAC<br>4. Presentation of the report 'Professional Activation of Refugees from Ukraine Residing in Collective Accommodation Centres' – Jobs First<br>5. Presentation and discussion on the draft Protection Sector Advocacy messages<br>6. Updates from GBV, Child Protection, Counter-Trafficking<br>7. AOB – 'hate speech' as a topic for the next PS meeting |
| **AGENDA POINT** | **DISCUSSION** |

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| **Agenda point 1** | UNHCR and HNLAC welcomed participants to the fifth Protection Sector (PS) meeting in 2025.<br><br>The following was shared with participants:<br>• The agenda of the meeting was introduced.<br>• The Protection Sector dedicated webpage on the Operational Data Portal (ODP) was presented to the group. The group was reminded that the minutes and presentations are regularly uploaded on ODP and can be accessed here. |
| **Agenda point 2** | Presentation of the report 'So I told myself that I can't stay here... Unaccompanied children on the border with Belarus and in Polish foster care in 2024' by Save the Children (StC):<br><br>• The report is available in Polish and English.<br>• The report **examines** whether the **best interest of unaccompanied children crossing the Polish-Belarusian** (PL-BY) border was being upheld in Poland in 2024. It focuses on the journey of the children at three stages: access to territory and situation at the PL-BY border, initial securing of the unaccompanied child's situation and systemic issues, and reception in alternative care facilities (institutional care).<br>• The report is a **result of a StC collaboration with the three NGOs** – SIP, PMF and We Are Monitoring; the methodology and research limitations were further explained.<br>• The following **issues** were **presented** together with concrete **recommendations** regarding: access to territory and protection, violence at the border, age assessment, "a system that pushes people out" and guardian and legal representative.<br>Furthermore, the general activities conducted by StC in Poland was presented at the end. The presentation can be accessed here.<br><br>**Plan International** asked whether any **progress or changes in the context of age assessment have been observed** since the launch of the report. StC explained that there has been no progress on that front for the time being. However, StC plans further advocacy efforts together with MSF and some medical professionals vis-a-vis the authorities in autumn. Border Guards approached StC to explore possible future cooperation regarding unaccompanied children in care facilities. |
| **Agenda point 3** | Update on legal developments – HNLAC<br><br>• **Potential plans to extend the suspension of asylum**: Information about a draft regulation proposing the suspension of the right to apply for international protection at the Polish-Lithuanian has been included in the government's legislative agenda. While the current suspension at the PL-BY border is in effect until 25 July 2025, and probably will be extended for another 60 days by the Sejm. |

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| | • **Reintroduction of border control**: as of 7 July 2025, border controls have been reinstated at the (internal Schengen area) borders with Germany and Lithuania. This may be considered a result of a heated political and public debate on asylum and migration in Poland.<br>• **Extension of the buffer zone**: as of 8 June 2025, the buffer zone along the PL-BY border has been extended for 90 days – until 6 September 2025.<br>• **Facilitations for Belarusian Citizens**: facilitations regarding the issuance of Polish travel documents for foreigners have been extended for Belarusian citizens until 31 December 2025.<br>• **List of non-deportable countries**: according to the information from the BG, all countries except from Ukraine have been removed from the special (BG internal) list of countries to which returns have been suspended. Concerns have been raised as it is unclear what would be the approach of BG towards people who received obligation to return decisions and who originate from countries in which situation is unsafe such as Syria, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Afghanistan and where BG was unable to conduct returns thus far.<br>• **Draft amendments to the Special Act**: Draft amendments were published, proposing an extension of Temporary Protection status until 4 March 2026. Main changes relate to: access to TP, access to collective sites, changes in PESEL registration, deadline lifted in asylum procedure, extension of support and flexibility, child protection.<br>• The presentation can be accessed here.<br><br>**ICRC** shared their recent **observation** regarding the situation at the border with Ukraine stating that international passport is now required to cross the border to PL while it was not needed before to cross the border.<br>**Nomada** is also aware of such problems. However, they had recently supported a group of Ukrainians from the temporary occupied territories who were allowed to enter despite the lack of international biometric passport though the group has been facing issues with registration for PESEL UKR due to lack of a valid travel document.<br>It was decided to monitor the situation and exchange information between the partners to further analyze the situation and intervene if needed. |
| **Agenda point 4** | Presentation of the report 'Professional Activation of Refugees from Ukraine Residing in Collective Accommodation Centres' – Jobs First<br><br>• The programme was carried out by Jobs First in cooperation with UNHCR Poland.<br>• It targeted long-term unemployed Ukrainian refugees.<br>• Duration: 6 months, aimed at achieving sustainable and quality employment.<br>• Implemented in 3 voivodeships - Pomorskie, Śląskie, and Małopolskie.<br>• Target: 70 program slots, 96 participants in total (due to high drop out rate and need for additional recruitment).<br>• Average participant had been in a OZZ for 12 months, and in Poland for 18 months.<br>• 47% dropped out, mainly due to return to Ukraine or childcare responsibilities, suspected informal employment as another |

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| | factor.<br>• The most significant barrier to returning to work was the language barrier, which is why the programme placed strong emphasis on learning Polish. However, only 27% of participants attended classes.<br>• Outcome: 20 people secured employment: 85% via service contracts, 2 individuals under employment contracts, 1 person started a business.<br>• The project helped to test forms of support that could increase independence in the labor market and be most effective.<br>• The presentation can be accessed here.<br>• The report can be accessed here. |
| **Agenda point 5** | Presentation and discussion on the draft Protection Sector Advocacy messages<br><br>A draft of advocacy messages was presented to the group and thanks were extended to the members that worked on the draft. It was explained that the document is structured into 3 main areas related to: international protection, temporary protection and cross-cutting themes (prevention and response to gender-based violence, prevention and response to trafficking in human beings, prevention and reduction of statelessness, child protection and health). The document was shared with Protection Sector members for their review and further input until 18 July 2025. After that, the document will be finalized, translated into Polish and disseminated among the members for any further joint and/or individual advocacy efforts. |
| **Agenda point 6** | Updates from GBV, Child Protection, Counter-Trafficking<br><br>CP update on education – meeting of the Taskforce for education integration of children from Ukraine with the Minister for Education Barbara Nowacka was held on 9 July. The governmental program 'Friendly school' on integration of Ukrainian children that consist of three main components (hiring intercultural assistants in schools where UKR students study, welfare of the school society and capacity development of educational staff) will be implemented most likely as of the next week and last until end of 2027; with a budget of 500mln PLN. |
| **Agenda point 7** | AOB<br><br>Next Protection Sector meeting will focus on hate speech thus, any ideas and volunteers to present and discuss on that issue are welcomed. Moreover, the presentation of the report 'Crossing double borders, LGBTQI+. Displacement to Poland' by Migration Consortium will also take place during the next meeting as well as results of the survey on Protection Sector. Also, the final version of the advocacy messages will be presented.<br><br>The next Protection Sector meeting will most likely take place on 6 August, though the date will be confirmed at a later stage. |