

UNHCR SLOVAKIA
PROTECTION STRATEGY
RESPONSE UKRAINE EMERGENCY

This strategy pertains to the initial Ukraine emergency response and the first 9 months in Slovakia (until the end of 2022) and is in line with the approach of the Government of Slovakia which is organized around two phases:

- Phase one - "Last Mile Project", led by the MOI/CCMB, covering the first 10 days
- Phase two focusing on integration, with Integration Task Force led by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family

1. Background

It is expected that by the end of the year (December 2022), 750,000 Ukrainian refugees and third country nationals fleeing Ukraine will have entered Slovakia of which 200,000 are expected to remain in Slovakia. Based on current trends (May 2022) of temporary protection status holders, 49% are women, 10% men, 21% girls and 20% boys. Initial analysis of data on persons with specific needs, identified through enrolment for cash-based assistance, indicates that one third of Temporary Protection status holders are persons with specific needs such as persons with disabilities, older persons and women headed households. Like other countries neighbouring Ukraine, Slovakia has seen an initial rapid flow across its borders of people fleeing hostilities followed by a continuous flow as of April of around 2,000-4,500 persons per day.

As of 3rd May 2022, the daily arrival figure was 3,328 persons bringing the total number of persons fleeing Ukraine and entering into Slovakia to over 390,000 persons (390,875). High frequency of pendular movements have been observed and confirmed through exit figures provided by border authorities standing at slightly over 134,000 persons (134,297) since the onset of the war in Ukraine. Main motivations for these pendular movements are yet to be confirmed through border and protection monitoring but it is expected that many refugees are going back to pay a temporary visit to family, get supplies, check on their property or access services.

So far, the Slovak Government received over 73,000 (73,507) applications for temporary protection status and 184 asylum applications (figures as of 3/05/22).

The Government of Slovakia applied provisional temporary refuge as of 1st March to persons arriving from Ukraine who are Ukrainian nationals and their family relatives or third-country nationals (TCN) with Ukrainian family links. While other third country nationals can apply for asylum.

Transposition of the EU Protection Directive was facilitated via the Government's decision adopted on 16 March 2022, entitling Temporary Protection to:

- citizens of Ukraine and their family members, if the family was present and resident in Ukraine before 24 February 2022;
- foreigners who are not nationals of Ukraine and having international protection or equivalent national protection granted in the territory of Ukraine before 24 February 2022 and their family members who were present on 24 February; and
- foreigners who are not nationals of Ukraine and have a permanent residence in the territory of Ukraine granted before 24 February 2022 and who cannot return to their country or region of origin under safe and stable conditions.

2. Phase one - "Last Mile Project", led by MOI/CCMB, covering the first 10 days after arrival

Phase one includes activities in 3 different locations: at the border, in reception centres and in temporary hosting sites (accommodation centres).

Government and civil society interventions at the border mainly focus on:

- processing of new arrivals;

- providing information (temporary residence, asylum and temporary protection, and available services including accommodation, food, work opportunities, legal counselling, and healthcare); and
- providing onward transport for those seeking to reach urban centres.

The government is also involved in identification, assessment and provision of support for unaccompanied and separated children, through cooperation between the border police and the national child protection services.

Government interventions in reception centres mainly focus on registration for temporary protection status and identifying temporary hosting sites to accommodate those staying in Slovakia. Government interventions in accommodation centres mainly focus on conducting social counselling, providing basic humanitarian assistance and coordination among the different service providers.

In addition, at the border and registration centres, government interventions are complemented by services by local authorities, NGOs and other civil society actors. These services range from provision of legal information, psychological support, mother and children's spaces, non-food items, free wi-fi and SIM cards. Information is provided in a wide variety of formats (leaflets, posters, QR codes and directing to available hotlines) and one-on-one counselling on support and services available for new arrivals.

UNHCR and partner presence is required in all three locations and focuses on:

- supporting and reinforcing government protection structures;
- protection monitoring;
- communicating with communities through the establishment of two-way communication systems;
- identification, referral and follow-up of children at risk, survivors of GBV, LGBTIQ persons, minority groups and other persons with specific needs; and
- prevention and risk mitigation for vulnerable groups, including risk of human trafficking.

This will allow us to provide an **evidence-based protection narrative** and enable us to guide actions on the ground.

At the border UNHCR protection staff and partner protection staff (SHC, Mareena, REACH) will be trained on and use of the protection profiling tool for border monitoring and for interactions with refugees and asylum seekers visiting the Blue Dots (protection help desks).

Communication with Communities (CwC) and identification, referral and follow-up of children at risk, survivors of GBV and other vulnerable persons will be provided through the Blue Dots, but also through mobile monitoring and support by UNHCR partners and staff. Community-based outreach work will provide key information, engage in conversations to address misunderstandings or changing circumstances, identify different information needs, and respond to rumours, misinformation and/ or disinformation. Feedback Response Mechanisms will be established, and feedback data analysed to further inform activities and needed course corrections in addition to responding to specific issues raised such as those related to cash assistance.

The Blue Dots also serve to ensure field presence, act as an entry point for protection monitoring or protection profiling and provision of legal advice including to refugees who would not opt to apply for the Temporary Protection Status and would rather pursue an alternative legal status or seek asylum. Legal advice, identification and referral of protection cases will also be provided during cash enrolment to both temporary protection (TP) status holders, non-TP holders and third country nationals seeking international protection.

Seven locations for Blue Dots have been identified, one of which already operational at Bottova station. Two Blue Dots will be/are located at the strategic points of Košice and Bratislava for communication with communities, legal counselling, identification, assessment and referral of vulnerable persons while four additional light Blue Dots for information sharing and identification of vulnerable persons will be located in Humenné Registration Centre (partner SHC); Michalovce Registration Centre (partner SHC); Nitra Registration Centre (partner SHC); and Košice train station hot spot (SHC).

To respond to or mitigate protection risks, UNHCR and partner staff will also facilitate referral of families in need of cash assistance to cash enrolment sites (often same locations as where the Blue Dots are located) and facilitate recording of their specific needs in the proGres database.

As of first of May, UNHCR supports the government with setting up cash enrolment systems, providing three-month transitional cash assistance to Temporary Protection status holders who applied for

financial support to allow government systems to become fully operational. UNHCR will also ensure coordination with other agencies (such as IOM, UNICEF and IFRC), who are providing cash assistance to both TP and non-TP holders, in order to avoid duplication and collect up-to-date information on groups at heightened risk such as persons with disabilities, older persons, minorities, women and children at risk, etc.

On child protection, UNHCR will strengthen collaboration with the national child protection authority under MoLSAF to strengthen the monitoring of children at risk, particularly UA/SC staying in Slovakia, and improving documentation for the purpose of family tracing and reunification when possible and ensuring feedback and response mechanisms are child-friendly and timely.

UNHCR GBV interventions will be based on a comprehensive and coordinated approach guided by the common guiding principles of GBV programming (survivor-centred, do-no harm, confidentiality, respect, consent and safety). The main activities for Phase one will focus on increasing knowledge and awareness among all GBV stakeholders on PSEA, GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response, conducting assessments, including safety audits and identification and capacity building of humanitarian actors within the various referral processes.

UNHCR will also reinforce the capacity of authorities and local service providers through coordination and organisation of workshops on contingency planning, protection monitoring, GBV, Child Protection, AAP, PSEA and Persons with Specific Needs.

Of particular importance is UNHCR's role in management of protection information and analysis of data provided through different sources such as sector assessments, feedback by refugees, protection profiling and monitoring, etc.

3. Phase two focusing on integration, with Integration Task Force led by Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family

In this second phase, UNHCR will continue to focus on a) supporting and reinforcing government protection structures; b) protection monitoring; c) communication with communities; d) identification and referral of children at risk, survivors of GBV and persons with specific needs; and e) prevention and risk mitigation for vulnerable groups.

Additional investment will be made to:

- build up community structures, and
- reinforce social cohesion to support the inclusion of refugees.

Protection monitoring activities will include GBV safety audits, mapping and monitoring of accommodation sites based on the EU Reception Conditions Directive.

At five registration centres (Bratislava, Zilina, Nitra, Michalovce, and Humenné) and in one of the Blue dots (Košice train station hot spot), UNHCR will support the provision of humanitarian cash assistance aligned with the government's social protection system through technical support to cash enrolment. UNHCR will also facilitate the provision of the first 3 months of cash as a means of improving access to basic goods and essential services and reducing the risk of resorting to harmful coping mechanisms or the risk of GBV and exploitation and abuse of children.

An additional number of 27 locations at the municipality level will be visited on a rotational basis to facilitate further enrolment at the decentralized level.

It is expected that mainly refugees in a precarious situation will apply for cash assistance. Protection and partner staff present during UNHCR-supported enrolment will actively identify persons with specific needs, and scout for potential volunteers among the refugee and host community. Additional volunteers and other opportunities to collaborate with refugees and civil society will also be identified through networks of grassroots Slovak and Ukrainian organizations. Protection partner Mareena, a partner with extensive experience working on social cohesion in Slovakia, will play a crucial role in the identification and management of the network of refugee and Slovak volunteers. This volunteer network will be a key partner in extending protection monitoring, facilitating feedback, communicating with the refugee community, creating communication and information content. Partnerships with refugee-led and

community-led organizations, volunteers and other organizations will be strengthened to facilitate identification of less visible vulnerable refugees and their effective referral to protection services.

Targeted outreach to minorities and more marginalised groups amongst the refugee community such as the Roma communities, will be facilitated through trusted channels and experienced interlocutors, primarily the partners PIN Slovakia, Human Rights League and Mareena.

Through the partnerships with PIN and Mareena, dialogue, mutual understanding, and social cohesion will be promoted among refugee and Slovak host communities, with a view of facilitating peaceful coexistence.

Local actors have assumed significant responsibilities as part of the initial emergency response. It is expected that – through the roll-out of the municipality toolkit (tool developed by local NGOs such as Mareena) – this capacity can be built on to further advance inclusion of refugees.

UNHCR will focus on supporting municipalities, to boost their accommodation capacity and holistic response to protection challenges and PSEA, as well as on local integration strategic planning and subsequent project design through Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) sensitive participatory approaches, and identification of funding resources.

Promising initiatives such as the establishment of integration centres in major cities and other key locations, will be supported and expanded to include additional Blue Dots and other services such as advice on the labour market and career counselling to facilitate access to dignified work, benefits and fair wages.

Support to grassroots organisations – often the first responders and the organizations that remain even in protracted refugee situations – will be reinforced through enabling small partnership agreements and capacity building activities for them including on PSEA. UNHCR will focus on using its new, simplified partnership tool to provide funding and other support to these crucial partners, including refugee and women-led start-ups. Investing in formalizing these small-scale partnerships, as well as in operational partnerships with larger national protection actors, will, in the medium term, significantly strengthen the protection environment. In the longer term, seizing the opportunities of the present will serve as a force multiplier in achieving UNHCR's goal of strengthening pro-refugee civil society actors.

It is also expected that qualified refugees might be identified and engaged as refugee outreach volunteers (ROV) to provide support to older persons, persons with disabilities or other groups at heightened risk.

Communication, community engagement, receipt and response to feedback and enabling community participation will be continued and reinforced through the network of Blue Dots and collaboration with trusted and community-based channels, including those online and on social media. This will include sharing messaging, signposting to UNHCR's Help Page, co-developing content and complementing already established communication networks. Different channels for receiving feedback will be established to adapt to community preferences and ensure closing of the feedback loop, including through Inter-Agency SOPs on response to feedback.

Regular positive messaging through publications in local media will help improve perceptions on the relevance of UNHCR and refugees in the Slovak public opinion.

UNHCR and partners, in close cooperation with national authorities, will strengthen existing efforts to increase availability and access to specialized child protection and GBV programming and services, including entry points for receiving services, support and GBV case management and awareness raising on key GBV issues that could emerge. This will include strengthening psychosocial support for children and their caregivers, improving access to education and integration into national programmes and support services, and in collaboration with the ICRC/IFRC, support family tracing and reunification. For GBV longer-term needs of improving coordination and quality of multi-sectoral and specialized response services, community mobilization, empowering women and girls through leadership and cash-based initiatives; will be addressed. GBV referral pathways and service linkages will be improved and main GBV risks – including human trafficking – documented and highlighted for better advocacy and putting counter measures such as safe-entry points and survivor-centred assistance in place.

During this second phase, access to education for all refugee children, with a particular focus on those who may have been out-of-school prior to fleeing, will be prioritized with specific attention to language classes during the July-August summer break.

UNHCR will further support authorities and local service providers to reinforce their capacity through workshops on cash enrolment, community-based protection, protection monitoring, Child Protection, responding to feedback, PSEA and GBV (for example on how to safely handle disclosures and make referrals in line with a survivor-centred approach).

For both phases, focus will be on putting communities at the centre of the response and creating safe environments while paying attention to the most vulnerable such as children, persons with disabilities, older persons, persons of diverse SOGIESC, minorities, and advocating for inclusion into existing national systems. UNHCR will also collaborate with the Office of the Slovak Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities and civil society actors to improve inclusion.

Main mechanisms for implementation will be through close collaboration with the Government of Slovakia, Slovak national asylum institutions and social protection systems, partnership agreements, coordination and capacity building (with due attention to vetting processes on PSEA).

UNHCR will leverage the protection environment to also advocate for inclusion of third country nationals and stateless persons.

Last updated by Machtelt De Vriese on 11th May 2022