



Key recommendations on Accommodation and Housing

Protection and Inclusion Working Group's sub-Working Group on Inclusion under Slovakia's Refugee Coordination Forum held two sessions on accommodation and housing inclusion in 2022, and decided to make the following observations and recommendations in its session dated 3 March 2023. Slovakia has a generous programme to provide property owners subsidies to encourage and compensate hosting refugees under temporary protection. In January-March 2023, the Inclusion sub-Working Group members observed uncertainties and concerns among the beneficiaries and hosts with regards to belated extension of the accommodation subsidies, leading in some cases to eviction of refugees from their accommodation or forcing them to move back to displacement within Ukraine.

It is essential that decisions relating to the essential sector of accommodation and housing, including subsidies and other potential solutions, rely on existing evidence obtained through inter-agency and other participatory assessments based on the views and needs of refugees, engaging refugees themselves and stakeholders working with them. The Inclusion s-WG refers to findings of the inter-agency assessments,¹ and focus group discussions conducted by UNHCR at refugee accommodation sites. Accordingly, while some refugees are able to find housing solutions as they have access to decent work conditions and self-reliance, employment does not always lead to self-reliance in view of labour exploitation and lower salaries. Refugees with relatively decent incomes need guidance and support to find housing solutions within Slovakia's housing market; for instance, they lack accurate information on housing or are denied rental contracts because of uncertainties of their stay and residence status in Slovakia. They prefer to stay closer to their new communities within the accommodation centres to help each other in childcare or care of family members with disabilities, serious medical conditions or other vulnerabilities. Up to 20% of the population may need social housing or other housing assistance in the longer term in view of their vulnerabilities, including separated families with children who lack day care options, persons with disabilities, and older persons without family support. Persons with disabilities, older persons and persons with underlying serious medical conditions face additional challenges of accessibility in their accommodations. Several accommodation sites are in remote locations and isolated, raising additional challenges of inclusion and access to essential services, including education and health.

There is need for more data on refugee housing in Slovakia. PIN Slovakia's fieldwork shows that many refugees want to avoid discussing their housing situation. Sometimes they are ashamed of their condition (for example, in private housing sponsored by state subsidies). Hence, the assessment of refugees' needs should be done sensitively.

The Inclusion sub-Working Group thanks the members of the task force who helped draft this set of recommendations:

Migration Office of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic
www.minv.sk/?migracny-urad-mv-sr

Slovak National Centre for Human Rights
www.snslp.sk

Habitat for Humanity International
www.habitat.org

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies/Slovak Red Cross
www.ifrc.org
www.redcross.sk

Human Rights League
www.hrl.sk

People in Need Slovakia
www.clovekvohrozeni.sk

International Organization for Migration
www.iom.sk

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
www.unhcr.org

¹ UNHCR, IOM, Reach: [Slovakia : Site Monitoring and On-Site Needs Assessment - October 2022](#); and UNHCR, Reach: [Slovakia: Refugee Accommodation Sites - Mapping & Monitoring | Update #2](#) (December 2022).



Sustainable Development Goals

These recommendations are informed by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Adequate and inclusive housing at affordable costs in line with SDGs means adequate privacy; adequate space; physical accessibility, including for persons with disabilities; adequate security and safety, including against gender-based violence; adequate heating and ventilation; adequate basic infrastructure; suitable environmental quality and health-related factors; and adequate and accessible location with regard to employment opportunities and essential services. Safe, secure, and affordable housing is key to socio-economic resilience of refugees and contributes to sustainable development.

Housing policies should be adjusted to the profiles of refugees. Since refugees under temporary protection are primarily women and children, housing policies should include safeguarding to ensure protection and compliance with their human rights.

Assessments show that refugees primarily want to live in big cities where services, such as schools and infrastructure, are available. Nonetheless, in such sites, the housing stock is limited and expensive. Cheaper and available housing can be found more in areas that lack infrastructure and services. Hence, this issue is interlinked with the availability of such services at these locations. One of the possible solutions to this issue is strengthening public transport in remote areas so that it helps refugees commute to work and schools in the regions. Hence, service availability is interlined with the integration of refugees. Since without access to childcare and transport/infrastructure, refugees cannot find a job, thus paying for rent and living independently from states and NGOs aid.²

In UNHCR and IOM's experience in other countries where they support humanitarian response in the accommodation sector, dispersal strategies are also

important. Slovakia's housing strategy could involve developing a plan to distribute refugees around the country more evenly. If education and other services are sufficient in smaller towns, they can be an essential part of the solution, as housing is cheaper and more available in these localities.³

Recommendations for the Government, public entities, and main stakeholders committed to support Slovakia's response to the refugee crisis under Refugee Response Plan (RRP) and beyond

The Inclusion sub-Working Group recommends to:

1. The Government to extend of accommodation subsidies in tandem with the extension of Temporary Protection;
2. The Government to consider more targeted approaches to accommodation and housing assistance, going forward, based on the assessment of the needs of refugees and their vulnerabilities, in collaboration with the RRP stakeholders, municipalities and other local actors, given limited social housing or other solutions;
3. The Government, self-governing regions and municipalities to establish a data-based approach on housing opportunities and housing types on regional basis, and map existing and accessible owned housing options (apartments, dormitories, governmental buildings) owned by the state, municipalities or self-governing regions as well as privately-owned housing stock that could serve for an emergency, mid-term and long-term accommodation, and create a database in collaboration with the RRP partners, if required.
4. The Government to develop an area-based approach, coordinating between the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, Ministry of Transport and Ministry of Interior on dispersal strategies, informed by regional analyses of labour

² Habitat for Humanity International. [Housing of Ukrainian Refugees in Europe Options for Long-Term Solutions: Country case study Slovakia](#), 2023.

³ Ibid.



market and availability of essential services.

5. The Government and municipalities to consider risk sharing arrangements to facilitate the access of refugees to housing in the private sector;
6. The Government and municipalities to strengthen monitoring of and safeguarding against protection risks, including risks of labour exploitation, sexual exploitation or abuse, and

trafficking, as well as other potential risks for children, in the accommodation sector, including in hosted accommodation arrangements;

7. The Government and municipalities to make effective use of the European Social Fund plus, or ESF+, to finance rent-supplement measures and develop service provision.

Accommodation subsidies

The last extension of the accommodation subsidies was adopted on 15 February 2023. During this time, the assistance was applicable until the end of February. The decision was communicated to refugees and hosts shortly before the end of the subsidy. As a result, some of the refugees living in subsidized facilities were facing requests to pay for the housing themselves or leave it. With regards to the structure of the subsidies, it is observed that most hosts prefer to house adult persons to receive higher subsidies. It is challenging to find accommodation for a single person. Some refugees have experienced unsuitable living conditions, including the prohibition of using the kitchen in the facility and offensive behaviour from the hosts. Some hosts turned off the heating during winter. There are also cases when landlords ask for additional rent and pay for the usage of amenities. The s-WG also observes that the current value is higher than the market value, resulting in inflation in the rental market.

While some refugees strive to achieve resilience and others remain vulnerable, it is crucial to gradually decrease the reliance instead of suddenly terminating at once and assess the vulnerabilities of the beneficiaries, adapting an evidence- and vulnerability based approach.

Recommendations for the Government

The Inclusion sub-Working Group recommends the Government to:

8. Ensure predictability of the accommodation subsidies and establish clear communication with the hosting and hosted families about the subsidies so that beneficiaries can plan for an exit.
9. Reconsider the subsidy values, and increase the subsidy given to housing a person under 15 years to discourage hosts to prefer housing adults;
10. Develop, in collaboration with RRP partners, a gradual and layered approach to transition from emergency accommodation, using subsidies, to a longer-term, sustainable housing strategy;
11. Address cases where hosts are requested to pay for the usage of amenities, and introduce a feedback and complaint mechanism for people who need to report harmful practices;
12. Set up, in collaboration with the RRP partners, standards for protection in the context of hosted accommodation, including auditing to mitigate the risk of sexual abuse and exploitation and gender-based violence.



Social Housing

Social housing is essential to refugee response and inclusion.⁴ However, there is a lack of social housing in Slovakia, with a long waiting list to access such options and political challenges at the local level to develop the social housing stock. Social housing is also segregated in some localities, which does not support inclusion.⁵ It is recognised that Slovakia urgently needs a social housing strategy for all vulnerable groups, including refugees. If done inclusively, it can be one of the tools to access long-term accommodation for refugees. These buildings can serve also low-income families in Slovakia.

As Habitat for Humanity International observes, Slovakia has a well-functioning State Housing Development Fund, and some main elements of the schemes required for a housing strategy already exist, such as grants and preferential loans for municipal housing construction and the renovation of private residential buildings. This can support development of social housing in Slovakia.

Recommendations for the Government

The Inclusion sub-Working Group recommends the Government to:

13. Initiate a housing strategy, including social housing that supports integration of the most vulnerable groups within local communities, and options for including Ukrainian refugees within broader social housing schemes;
14. Provide financial incentives to towns and cities to develop social housing, including for refugees, and renovate unused buildings, including former social housing facilities they own, including through targeted use of the State Housing Development Fund and available EU funding instruments, such as the European Regional Development Fund plus, or ERDF+, and the Cohesion Fund to support the renovation of the unused building stock in an energy-efficient way and the construction of municipal and non-profit housing for refugees.

Private housing market

Slovakia faces important challenges in the private housing market that are aggravated by the refugee arrivals, including expensive and limited housing stock, lack of relevant regulations in the private rental sector that would address non-payment, length of contracts, and conditions of rent increases that hurt both landlords and tenants.⁶

Habitat for Humanity International highlights the potential role of social rental agencies in addressing refugee housing needs and enhance their safety. NGOs could be effective in involving the private rental sector through social rental agency models. Such models would serve not only Ukrainian families but also break down barriers to access housing for the whole society. Such agencies have already been established in Bratislava and Kosice, run either by the municipality or housing NGOs.⁷

IFRC with Slovak Red Cross has introduced six-month rental assistance to support low-income refugee and host society families in several locations. Such assistance, if extended, could help refugees transition from collective site accommodation to private housing. In the context of transition from accommodation subsidies, extending rent subsidies to refugees would help them transition from fully subsidized housing and collective sites to smaller accommodations. The Slovak population would benefit from this change, contributing to social cohesion.

⁴ OECD: [Housing support for Ukrainian refugees in receiving countries](#), 27 July 2022.

⁵ Habitat for Humanity International. [Housing of Ukrainian Refugees in Europe Options for Long-Term Solutions: Country case study Slovakia](#), 2023.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.



Recommendations for the Government

The Inclusion sub-Working Group recommends the Government to:

15. Consider to extend private landlords subsidies for renovation if they are willing to accommodate Ukrainian refugees;
1. In collaboration with municipalities, the RRP partners and local civil society, support establishment of additional social rental agencies in refugee-hosting cities;
1. Consider to introduce rental subsidies to support low-income families, including refugees, based on their means and needs, to help transition from emergency accommodation to private rental housing market;
2. Introduce standardized contract forms that increase the security of tenants and landlords;
3. Establish a registration system for landlords who provide housing to refugees and a notification system for refugees (e.g. helplines).

For further information:

Bülent Peker, Co-chair of the Inclusion sub-Working Group

Senior Protection Officer, UNHCR, at peker@unhcr.org

Andrea Najvirtová, Co-chair of the Inclusion sub-Working Group

Director, People in Need Slovakia, at andrea.najvirtova@peopleinneed.sk

For further information on the Inclusion sub-Working Group, please go to:

