Regional Refugee Response for the Ukraine Situation

POLAND PROTECTION SECTOR MEETING

Meeting Minutes – 30 October 2025

Meeting subject:	Protection Sector Meeting
Time/ location:	30.10.2025, 2pm (Hybrid: online/conference room)
Chaired by:	UNHCR, Halina Nieć Legal Aid Centre (HNLAC)
Minutes prepared by:	UNHCR
Participants:	(27) Foundation Towards Dialogue, Save the Children, Marshal's Office of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Region, Regional Centre for Social Policy in Torun, Project HOPE Poland, UNICEF, WHO, US Embassy/PRM, Vela Foundation, Autonomia foundation, Plan International Poland, Eleon Foundation, YWAM Poland, Kalejdoskop Kultur, UMWKP, Patchwork, JRS, IOM and others.
Agenda:	Agenda 1. Introduction – Katarzyna Przybysławska (HLNAC) and Miriam Aertker (UNHCR) 2. Legal Update (Persons with disabilities) – Katarzyna Przybyslawska 3. Presentation from the Marshal's Office of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Region (Magdalena Burdziej, Director of Department of International Cooperation) on the situation of children and young adults with disabilities evacuated from institutional care facilities in Ukraine – Kujawsko-Pomorskie Region case 4. Presentation from Towards Dialogue Foundation (Olena Vaidalovych) on the situation and activities for Roma refugees, including persons with disabilities 5. Presentation from Eleon Foundation (Rafał Kołodziej) on the situation and activities for refugee children with disabilities (10 min) 6. Discussion (in Polish) 7. Updates from sub sectors (GBV, Child Protection, Trafficking in Persons) (15 min) // AOB
AGENDA POINT	

Agenda point 1	**Opening remarks:** Presentations and minutes of our last protection sector meeting are updated on the operational data portal: Working Group: Poland Protection Sector
Agenda point 2	**Legal Update (Persons with disabilities) – Katarzyna Przybyslawska** **Recognition of Disability Certificates** • Ukrainian disability certificates are not automatically recognized in Poland. • To access Polish social benefits and services, individuals must obtain a Polish disability certificate. • Disability groups/categories under the Polish law differ from the ones in Ukraine. **Education Access** • If a child with a disability is unable to attend school, an additional certificate is required to confirm this status and secure appropriate educational arrangements or support. **Residence and Social Support** • Children with disabilities (and their caregivers, if they do not receive care allowance) may continue to stay in collective sites. • Guardians of children with Polish disability certificates are entitled to receive the 800+ benefit without the obligation to work. The presentation is found here: Document - Poland: Protection Sector - Legal Update (30 October 2025)

Agenda point 3	**Presentation from the Marshal's Office of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Region (Magdalena Burdziej, Director of Department of International Cooperation) on the situation of children and young adults with disabilities evacuated from institutional care facilities in Ukraine – Kujawsko-Pomorskie Region case** **Background** • Marshal's Regional Social Policy Centre in Torun runs a facility for 54 beneficiaries (43 men, 11 women, including 5 minors), aged 11–37 who arrived from the Municipal Socio-Medical Facility 'Children's Social Care Home' in Miedzyborz, Ukraine in 2022 as part of organized evacuation. **Legal and Administrative Issues** • Unclear legal status of the facility under Polish law (no formal status of a care and educational facility under Article 27 of the Special Act), ongoing discussions with the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy. • Ukrainian disability certificates are no longer valid once beneficiaries reach the age of 18.

	○ Renewal is impossible from Poland, as the process requires in-person application in Ukraine. ○ The Ukrainian Consulate cannot process renewals online or on behalf of the care centre. **Guardianship Issues:** • Minors have guardians appointed by Ukrainian authorities. • Adults (18+) often lack guardians, despite having intellectual or mobility disabilities that make independent decision-making impossible. • Their issue of legal guardianship is unclear: in Ukraine, it is held by state institutions; in Poland, courts have decided inconsistently in cases concerning guardianship. **Challenges** • Diverse needs among residents create staffing and care difficulties. Conditions: autism, Down/Williams/Smith syndromes, cerebral palsy, FAS, epilepsy, sensory & motor impairments. • All need 24-hour medical and therapeutic care. • No institutional support in Poland for such a heterogeneous group of people with disabilities. • Limited access to psychiatric care and private medical visits due to financial constraints. • Access to personal documentation is difficult — obtaining Ukrainian IDs requires travel to Gdańsk, which most beneficiaries cannot undertake. • Medication costs are no longer reimbursed following amendments to the Special Act. • Funding shortages threaten the center's sustainability — currently supported only through regional funding. PFRON & UNICEF funding ending, Care center on risk of financial gap. • Differences in nutrition, education, and parenting standards between Poland and Ukraine affect adaptation and care quality. • Lack of engagement from Ukrainian caregivers or authorities — evacuees receive no contact or assistance from Ukrainian institutions. The presentation is found here: Document - Poland: Protection Sector - Challenges in providing care for evacuated residents from Ukraine (30 October 2025)
Agenda point 4	**Presentation from Towards Dialogue Foundation (Olena Vaidalovych) on the situation and activities for Roma refugees, including persons with disabilities** **Population Overview** • The Roma refugee population in Poland is estimated at 15,000–20,000 people. • Approximately 5% of this population are persons with disabilities. **Access and Discrimination Issues**

	• Discrimination is frequently experienced in access to medical services. • Recent amendment to the Special Act regarding the 800+ benefit disproportionately affects large Roma families, as meeting employment criteria is often impossible for them. **Key Challenges** • 48% of Roma refugees face employment barriers, due to various factors, including illness. • 10% experience healthcare barriers (high costs, queues, language issues). • 93% are covered by medical insurance, yet discrimination in hospitals remains a significant issue. • 40% are in need of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), but 51% avoid seeking psychological help due to stigma. **Main Needs** • Timely medical prescriptions and consistent access to family doctors. • Financial assistance, particularly for medication and rehabilitation costs. • Integration and retraining programs to support entry into the labor market. • Education and language support – many individuals struggle to read prescriptions and describe medical conditions in Polish. • Mental health services tailored to the Roma refugee community, addressing cultural stigma and accessibility. **Comments and Q&A** Q: Is there statelessness among the Roma population? A: Approximately 5% are presumed to be stateless. Q: How many refugees lack Polish disability certificates and is there a risk of eviction from collective centers? A: An estimated 20% of Roma with disabilities are awaiting Polish disability certificates and require assistance in obtaining them. No current reports of eviction, but the risk remains for those without recognized status. The presentation is found here: Document - Poland: Protection Sector - presentation by Fundacja w Stronę Dialogu (30 October 2025)
Agenda point 5	**Presentation from Eleon Foundation (Rafał Kołodziej) on the situation and activities for refugee children with disabilities** **Foundation Overview** • The Eleon Foundation operates as part of a Ukrainian foundation. • It was established in 2022 in Lublin by parents of children with disabilities. • To date, the foundation has supported approximately 2,200 beneficiaries, including: 136 adults and 68 children with disabilities. **Key Challenges**

	• Restricted access to rehabilitation services for children following amendments to the Special Act. • Difficult financial situation of families raising children with disabilities. • Lack of accessible infrastructure for people with disabilities in Lublin. **Foundation Activities** • Therapy and rehabilitation services for children and adults with disabilities. • Social support groups for mothers of children with disabilities (approx. 100 participants). • Humanitarian assistance, including food distribution in cooperation with a local food bank. • Christmas Integration Project – festive activities for around 150 children, including children from Ukraine. **Challenges Faced by Beneficiaries and Organizational Issues** • Limited access to rehabilitation due to financial and systemic barriers. Lack of stable funding – operations rely heavily on volunteers. • Difficult financial and psychological conditions, especially for single mothers caring for children with disabilities. **Comments/Q&A** Q: Are there often difficulties confirming disability status for children with mental health conditions (such as autism)? A: Confirming disability status for children with mental or behavioral disorders in general is a nationwide systemic problem. The presentation is found here: Document - Poland: Protection Sector - presentation by Fundacja ELEON (30 October 2025)

Agenda point 6	**Discussion/UNHCR:**
	
	1) Do you have additional recommendations on how the situation of refugees with disabilities could be improved?
	2) Do you note any particular challenges facing refugees with disabilities of nationalities other than Ukrainian?
	
	• Access to disability certificates is a major problem for refugees of all nationalities, and for local populations a like due to cumbersome procedures.
	• Many refugees, including Roma, require dedicated assistance to obtain Polish disability certificates.
	• Some services are becoming increasingly difficult to access, including:
	  ○ Refunds for medications; glasses and other medical equipment (changes in the Special Act).
	  ○ Psychiatric care.
	  ○ Diagnosis of mental disorders in children (lack of specialists and diagnostic tools).
	• Unemployed caregivers with poor health (but not a disability) often cannot work but are now they are required to in order to receive 800+ which may put these families under financial strain.

Agenda point 7	**Updates from sub sectors (GBV, Child Protection, Trafficking in Persons)** • Update from the Gender-Based Violence sub-sector working group: The "16 Days of Activism" campaign will be held from November 25 to December 10. In addition to several initiatives and activities around Poland, a joint information campaign will be conducted on social media. Those interested in joining the campaign can contact Karolina Fabirkiewicz (GBV Sub-Sector Coordinator) at fabirkie@unhcr.org • The last **Child Protection Working Group (CPSWG**) meeting is planned in November after which CPSWG will be merged with the Protection Sector. During that meeting, we will discuss current and future activities of organizations in the area of child protection as well as identified gaps and challenges with regard to support provided to refugee children in Poland. If you wish to join upcoming CPSWG meeting or would like to share any issues in the area of child protection for the sub-working group to discuss further, please reach out to Aleksandra Mosiolek (amosiolek@unicef.org) and Magdalena Szewczyk (szewczyk@unhcr.org).
Agenda point 8	**AOR** • Nationalization of the MHPSS WG: The first meeting of **MHPSS Technical Working Group**, organized by the Mental Health Council, will take place soon. To join, please contact glazewskaj@who.int • SIP developed an informational film for refugee children who came to Poland without their parents or guardians and are placed in a care facility, available in several languages. • **Next meeting of the Protection Sector: 27 November**. Topic: Social Inclusion/Elderly persons