

# SLOVAKIA

1 June – 30 September

Since the start of the war in Ukraine, over **820,000 people have crossed the border into Slovakia**. Almost 90 per cent are women and children, but there are also older people and those who need **urgent medical care or who have disabilities**.

UNHCR’s response to the refugee crisis is multisectoral and focuses on **protection, reception conditions, accommodation, and financial assistance** for the most vulnerable groups.

UNHCR and partners are present at border crossing points and other locations where refugees are assisted, to **provide information on rights and available services, and identify vulnerable refugees to refer them to relevant services**.

## BORDER CROSSINGS FROM UKRAINE & TEMPORARY PROTECTION

Since 24 February 2022



**95,437** applications for temporary protection status &  
**89,674** under temporary protection status  
(as of 30 September 2022)



UNHCR and partners are present at border crossing points and other locations, including in urban areas, where refugees from Ukraine are arriving in Slovakia.  
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## UNHCR PRESENCE IN SLOVAKIA

### STAFF:

- **48** Total staff
  - **31** International Staff
  - **17** National Staff

### OFFICES:

- **1** National Office in Bratislava
- **1** Field Office in Košice
- **1** UNHCR Representation for Central Europe in Budapest



For more information, see the [Operational Data Portal](#) for the Ukraine Refugee Situation.

## Operational Context

Slovakia has seen a **rapid influx of refugees fleeing hostilities at its four border crossing points with Ukraine**. The majority are women and children and include older people, people with disabilities, and those with urgent medical care needs. While the initial influx has stabilized, the volatile security situation in Ukraine leaves open the possibility of another wave of people crossing the border to Slovakia in the future. Many of those arriving have experienced trauma and distress associated with the conflict and require **Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS)**. Border authorities continue to process new arrivals, providing information on temporary protection and asylum, with onward transport available for those seeking to reach urban centres. Information is provided by UNHCR and partner staff at all border crossing points alerting refugees to available services including accommodation, food, work opportunities, and health care. As of 30 September, there have been 823,138 border crossings from Ukraine into Slovakia, and 95,437 individuals have applied for temporary protection, with many moving on to other European countries. To respond to the scale, pace and complexity of the situation, UNHCR maintains a **Level 3 Emergency** in Slovakia, the highest possible designation.

National, district and local authorities rapidly responded to the influx. The Border and Foreigners Police and Fire Rescue Service have prepared **reception centres and temporary hosting sites** to accommodate those staying in Slovakia for short periods. Local communities have taken a welcoming stance, with humanitarian actors, civil society, and community volunteers providing significant support at border reception points, including advice and referral to temporary housing, transportation, and legal counselling services. Continuous efforts are needed to ensure all arrivals are informed about the possibility of applying for temporary protection or asylum and the rights associated with different legal statuses in Slovakia.

As the war in Ukraine becomes more drawn out, it is increasingly important to **shift to a more sustainable response model** over the medium- to longer-term. UNHCR is actively engaged with the Government on coordinating humanitarian actors via the **Refugee Coordination Forum (RCF)** for the humanitarian response, as well as issues related to integration. The RCF brings together a still broader group of stakeholders now operating in the country – including the Government, civil society, refugee-led initiatives, donor countries, the private sector, the UN, and other international organizations to ensure a harmonized and effective response.

In this coordination role, UNHCR has established and enhanced coordination structures in the framework of the Refugee Response Plan (RRP) for Slovakia, to better support refugees from Ukraine and the host country. UNHCR has expanded its presence to 48 staff after establishing a National Office in Bratislava and a Field Office in Košice – this from one staff member covering the country at the beginning of 2022. With UNICEF, UNHCR has established three Blue Dots, one in each of Bratislava, Michalovce, and Košice. ‘Blue Dots’ are safe spaces along border crossings in countries neighbouring Ukraine that provide women and children, and families, with critical information and services. For four months, from June to September, UNHCR stepped up to provide multi-purpose cash assistance that had previously been provided by the Government. UNHCR has established partnerships with four partners and continues to expand its partnerships, with another agreement (with a fifth partner) in process.

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UNHCR staff with refugees, sister agencies' staff, and supporters celebrating World Refugee Day in Košice.

© UNHCR / Samantha Bernasovska

## Working with Partners

UNHCR has been present in Slovakia since 1994, and has rapidly expanded its presence since the conflict in Ukraine began.

UNHCR works closely with Slovak Government counterparts to ensure refugees and asylum-seekers can enjoy their **essential rights** and have **access to basic services**. UNHCR maintains positive collaboration with state entities including local and municipal authorities, UN agencies, NGOs, humanitarian partners, civil society organizations and other relevant stakeholders to provide support and assistance to those seeking protection.

As part of the Ukraine Situation response, UNHCR leads and coordinates the implementation of the **Refugee Response Plan (RRP)** in line with the **Refugee Coordination Model (RCM)** and in close collaboration and consultation with relevant government counterparts, and with the support of inter-agency partners and other stakeholders. UNHCR co-leads, along with the Government, a response-wide **Refugee Coordination Forum<sup>1</sup> (RCF)** at country-level to ensure a harmonized response within existing government structures and among inter-agency partners, NGOs, volunteers and other stakeholders. Within the RCF, seven working groups and sub-working groups<sup>2</sup> are operating (**Anti-Trafficking, Cash, Child Protection, Health, Information Management, MHPSS, Protection and Inclusion**) as well as a **Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Task Force**, while **Accountability to Affected Persons (AAP)** is mainstreamed across all groups and has been made a RCF standing agenda item. A **Humanitarian and Development Donor Group** also meets regularly. RCF partners are furthermore supporting the ongoing engagement of the Slovak Republic with the **Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)** as a means of systematizing and sharing good practices with other countries facing similar challenges, and in view of cultivating pledges related to its national response for the **Global Refugee Forum** in 2023.

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<sup>1</sup> This forum includes sector-specific working groups aligned with the national response. UNHCR leads the Protection and Inclusion working group (with Human Rights League), the Cash working group (with the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family - MoLSAF), the Inclusion sub-working group (with People in Need) and Child Protection sub-working group (with MoLSAF and UNICEF), and participates in the Health working group and the MH / PSS sub-working group as well.

UNHCR has formally expanded its **partnerships** in Slovakia to ensure availability of comprehensive support and services to people seeking protection, including those with specific needs. UNHCR has four partners. These are:

- **Slovak Humanitarian Council (SHC):** SHC is carrying out legal counselling and representation of asylum-seekers in detention, supporting the Blue Dots, and providing general protection services.
- **Human Rights League (HRL):** Active at the Bottova registration/reception centre in Bratislava, HRL is providing legal counselling and assistance, as well as interpretation services for Ukrainian refugees – related to their registration for Temporary Protection and access to rights, services, and information.
- **People in Need (PIN):** PIN provides assistance and services to vulnerable persons through needs assessments, psychosocial counselling, case management, and referrals.
- **Mareena:** Mareena is performing host community outreach, advocacy and refugee community mapping, capacity building in protection and inclusion, and implementing the UNHCR Helpline.



UNHCR Partner staff helping a Ukrainian family register for emergency cash assistance in the Bottova Reception/Registration Centre in Bratislava. © UNHCR / Esraf Cinco

## UNHCR Response

### Protection

UNHCR and partners are present at **border crossing points, transit and reception centres, collective sites, help desks** and other areas where refugees arrive or seek help. In addition to providing information on available rights and services, UNHCR is working to reinforce reception conditions by strengthening local capacities and monitoring arrivals to ensure non-discriminatory treatment, including for third-country nationals. UNHCR and partners are helping identify those with vulnerabilities—including people with specific needs, those with disabilities, and unaccompanied and separated children—for referral to **specialized services**. In coordination with local authorities, **referral pathways** have been developed to ensure refugees can access necessary services, in accordance with their needs and preferences. UNHCR and partners are also supporting authorities in assessing accommodation sites to help identify priority areas for improvement including for **Gender-Based Violence (GBV)** risks.

UNHCR has developed a **protection strategy** for the response that covers the rest of 2022. The strategy sets out a holistic approach, with evidence-based interventions designed to strengthen safeguards in areas such as child protection, particularly regarding unaccompanied and separated children; risks of exploitation in the context of accommodation and labour market; prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse; accountability to affected people; as well as ensuring the requisite capacity for specialized services, such as services to prevent and address gender-based violence. From June, UNHCR and its partners continued to roll out the **Regional Protection Profiling and Monitoring Tool** in Slovakia, which is helping to build an evidence base for interventions, programming, as well as a refugee protection narrative. As of 30 September, 4,294 Protection Profiling interviews with refugees have been conducted. The majority of respondents were staying in hosted (33%) or rented accommodation (21%), while 16% were still staying in collective sites and reception or transit centres at the time of the interview. Nine percent of respondents have relatives in Slovakia. The top three urgent needs reported by respondents were employment, accommodation and cash assistance. Respondents reported preferring to receive information on financial aid services and work opportunities, followed by medical care, and accommodation.

UNHCR and partners are working to **monitor and reinforce reception conditions**, including through strengthening reception capacities in Slovakia and monitoring arrivals to ensure access to rights and services on a non-discriminatory basis, including for third-country nationals. UNHCR is **supporting authorities in scaling up of accommodation capacity**, including for collective and privately managed sites to accommodate those with both immediate and longer-term needs. Ten protection desks have been set up to share crucial information with refugees and to provide counselling.

UNHCR has also strengthened engagement of and support for refugee communities in the response, including setting up a **community outreach volunteer network**, and cooperation with **refugee-led and community-based organizations and community centres**, including through grants, to help strengthen their capacity. With the aim to enhance the community-based protection component of UNHCR's work, UNHCR hired refugee UN volunteers who already proved to play an invaluable role in UNHCR's response in Slovakia. UNHCR is also actively involved in supporting community centres for Ukrainian refugees and host communities throughout Slovakia, as well as in ongoing discussions regarding the establishment of integration centres in Slovakia.

UNHCR held 27 **Focus Group Discussions** from June to September with refugee communities, including with children, throughout Slovakia. **Many focus group discussions revealed the precarious situation of Ukrainian refugees, especially single mothers with small children, older persons, and persons with disabilities.** Participants highlighted concerns such as difficulties to accessing work especially due to the language barrier and shortage of childcare options, fear of losing financial assistance benefits covering basic needs, limited capacity of schools and kindergartens, general lack of information about basic rights, entitlements and available services, high rent prices and unavailability of private apartments, obstacles to accessing health care and medicine, lack of space in accommodation facilities, and lack of activities for children and youth. Focus group discussions also revealed that fewer and fewer people have plans to return to Ukraine in the near future compared to before. Participants also indicated their preference to stay in the country and noted that they received a warm welcome in Slovakia.

## Coordination

In support of Government-led efforts, UNHCR is leading the coordination of the **Refugee Response Plan (RRP)** for Slovakia to support refugees from Ukraine and the host country. In August, for the RRP, UNHCR announced to the RRP partners that a **recalibration exercise** would be conducted concerning the Slovakia inter-agency plan, and the exercise was completed in September. UNHCR and seven RRP partners worked on the recalibration, with regard to reprioritized activities and new winter-related priorities resulting in a revised 2022 RRP budget which stands at USD 87.5 m (initial budget was USD 91.9 M).

Inter-agency coordination activities are also led by UNHCR for the advancement of **Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)** in the refugee response. Under the umbrella of the Refugee Coordination Forum (RCF), UNHCR coordinates the **PSEA Task Force**. PSEA Task Force members, including representatives of local NGOs, refugee-led organizations, the Government and UN agencies, are working together to increase awareness around PSEA, and to strengthen the technical knowledge and capacity of all actors involved in the refugee response to prevent and respond to SEA through a victim-based approach. Between June and August, Human Rights League, International Federation of the Red Cross, IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF and WHO co-facilitated a four-session workshop to introduce PSEA-related topics and discuss their application in the Slovak context. The workshop culminated with the definition of the PSEA Task Force's role in the refugee response and the priority actions that its members are committed to undertaking until the end of 2022.

## Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

UNHCR advocates for the **inclusion of people in need of international protection in national systems** of health, legal/justice and protection, seeking to support in strengthening the capacity to prevent, mitigate and provide a comprehensive adequate and safe response to GBV, and reinforce existing capacities to guarantee quality services in line with international standards. From June to September, UNHCR continued its support in the mapping of GBV response services, and the development of referral pathways, in coordination with the relevant national authorities, other agencies and service providers.

## Accommodation

In August, UNHCR jointly with IOM and through REACH undertook an **Inter-Agency Site Mapping/Monitoring assessment** at 38 sites across Slovakia. Of the 38 sites assessed, 79% were collective sites (structures existing before the conflict in Ukraine), while 18% of the sites were created specifically for welcoming refugees. The majority of the sites assessed were dormitories (29%), educational facilities such as schools (16%), government buildings (13%), hotels or hostels (13%) and holiday resorts (13%). Partner organisations are also present in accommodation centres to provide information, non-food items like kitchen supplies, and psychological support.

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## Child protection

Child protection preparedness and response is currently focused on **immediate assistance, referral and identification for children at risk including unaccompanied and separated children through Protection Desks at border crossing points as well as main registration/service centres** in Bottova, Košice, Michalovce, Nitra, Žilina and Gabčíkovo, as well as through the three **Blue Dots** (safe spaces for women and children) in Slovakia, while at the same time reinforcing and strengthening the existing national protection structures in the country. Relevant child protection services offered via Protection Desks include identification, rapid assessment and referral of children and women at risk for protection services, psycho-social support, legal aid, and counselling. Protection Desks are locations where individuals – regardless of their age, gender, race, ethnicity, belief, sexual orientation, or other characteristics – can get safety and protection. They are operated by UNHCR partners, to identify older persons, people in need of medical assistance or persons with disabilities and assist them to access essential services. Protection Help Desks provide information for self-referrals and, in the case of medical needs, manage referrals through UNHCR partners.

A UNHCR Slovakia **child-friendly page** was translated into Slovak, Russian, and Ukrainian for publication on UNHCR Slovakia's Help Page to provide children and their families/caregivers with all needed information about rights and services for children arriving to Slovakia.

## Communication and Provision of Information

As the arrival of refugees from Ukraine into Slovakia continues, **provision of information remains crucial** to ensuring refugees are able to access key services, make informed decisions, and actively participate in the response. UNHCR and partners are working to ensure those arriving from Ukraine have access to information through preferred channels, feedback mechanisms, community networks, and are able to participate in all stages of the response. UNHCR has established multiple channels for communication with refugee communities, including phone helpline, Telegram channel, email address, and Help website. UNHCR also routinely holds in-person individual and group consultations and counseling sessions with Ukrainian refugees. As of end-September, the Helpline had attended and registered 6,277 calls, and the UNHCR Slovakia Help Page had received 339,882 visits and views since 24 February.

Jointly with UNICEF, three **Blue Dot** locations have been launched in Slovakia – in Bratislava, Michalovce, and Košice – to **strengthen information provision and two-way communication**, while serving as a safe space for women and children recently arriving from Ukraine.

## Training and Capacity-Building

As of 30 September, 526 individuals have been reached through **capacity development trainings and initiatives** by UNHCR and partners on topics including **child protection, GBV, PSEA, the legal framework for temporary protection in Slovakia and access to associated rights and services**. Between June and September, through different online and offline modalities, UNHCR has provided trainings on PSEA core principles and standards of conduct to 161 staff members of UNHCR and partner organizations engaged in different activities, and district offices' volunteers, to enhance the capacities of all service-providers working with refugees.

## Cash-Based Interventions

UNHCR, with other operational agencies, provided temporary support, from June to September, to the Government's **Material Needs cash assistance programme** which includes refugees from Ukraine as well as third country nationals affected by the conflict in Ukraine. As part of this four-month interagency programme, UNHCR has been enrolling refugees from Ukraine across Slovakia into the programme and making payments to them according to values that have been aligned with the national programme. UNICEF, IOM and the Slovak Red Cross are also key actors in this transitional interagency effort that is designed to improve access to basic goods and services and reduce the risk of harmful coping mechanisms.



UNHCR partners enrolling a refugee from Ukraine into the cash assistance programme, in Košice © UNHCR / Yahya Baker

As of 30 September, **52,637 refugees have enrolled** in this programme out of an enrolment target of 57,500. UNHCR has been making 60% of the payments aligned with the inter-agency agreement<sup>3</sup>. The programme started a transition for inclusion into the Government social programme as of mid- September, and the payment in October will be made by the Government.

## Special Thanks to Donors

UNHCR is grateful to the donors of unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions to the 2022 global programmes.

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For more information, please visit UNHCR's [Global Focus page for the Ukraine Situation](#), available [here](#).

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<sup>3</sup> The four organizations that assumed the payment of multi-purpose cash assistance from the Government (i.e. the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family - MoLSAF) were UNHCR, UNICEF, the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC), and IOM. The agreement detailed the respective coverage of payments by each agency, with the first payment being made on 15 June, for three months (which was eventually extended to cover a fourth month).

<sup>4</sup> Contributed without restrictions on its use, unearmarked funding allows UNHCR critical flexibility in how best to reach refugees and other populations of concern who are in the greatest need and at the greatest risk. Where a donor has contributed \$10 million or more, the total amount of the contribution is shown.

<sup>5</sup> Due to their earmarking at the region or sub-region, or to a related situation or theme, the other softly earmarked contributions listed are those which can potentially be used for Hungary MCO. Where a donor has contributed \$2 million or more, the total amount of the contributions is shown.

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## More Information

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