

Consequences of the Russian War in Ukraine:

What Policies for Temporary
Displaced Ukrainian
Women in Austria, Czechia,
Hungary, and Slovakia?



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CEE ♀ HER

The CEE Her Initiative, powered by GLOBSEC, aims to amplify expert female voices in influential policy-making debates. The goal is also to create a public resource for conference organisers, think tanks, non-profits and public institutions to find women experts from and interested in the Central and Eastern Europe+ region for their panels, articles and discussions and to bolster a creation of a vivid network of female experts who seek more diverse debates and can provide a valuable perspective on contemporary societal issues. Through this initiative, GLOBSEC strives to contribute towards a more comprehensive goal of changing narratives and policies in CEE+ where gender equality can lead to more stable, secure, and prosperous region.

Executive Summary

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has forced more than 12 million people to flee their homes, with Ukrainians applying for a temporary protection in the European Union primarily consisting of women, children, and the elderly.

This report seeks to map out policies targeted towards assisting Ukrainian women refugees and explore the different actors and processes involved in organising and coordinating such programmes. This report also scrutinises some of the **challenges and best practices** from these activities based on the experiences of both assistance providers and Ukrainian women. It asks: what **recommendations** can be advanced at the EU, state, and non-state levels?

The focus here is placed on smaller countries in **Central Europe (Austria, Czechia, Hungary and Slovakia)** that either border or are in the near vicinity of Ukraine – they have notably all been affected by the arrival of Ukrainians fleeing Russia's aggression. Among Ukrainians granted temporary protection in the four countries, women make up 70% of arrivals in Austria, 63% in Czechia, 57% in Hungary, and 68% in Slovakia. They are, notably, **vulnerable to numerous risks**, including gender-based violence (GBV), labour exploitation, and human trafficking (often for sexual exploitation). They also **have specific needs**, including finding suitable childcare (many women come alone with their children) and suitable jobs as well as accessing healthcare services. While all four selected countries have applied the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), yet each has adjusted and adapted it via national legislation.

Though state-provided **accommodation** has been provided in each country, for instance, the suitability of the locations and conditions of these arrangements has come under question in some locales. In Czechia and Slovakia, private hosts that accommodate Ukrainian refugees receive a state allowance (in Czechia this will change from July 2023 onwards), whereas in Austria subsidies are disbursed to refugees directly. An allowance is provided in Hungary to accommodation providers in a very specific manner.

The **labour markets** of the four countries are generally accessible to refugees (though some barriers still exist in Austria and in Hungary related to work permits). Ukrainian refugees in Czechia have also gained access to unemployment benefits. And in Slovakia, a change to the Commercial Code has indirectly eased the rules for Ukrainians wishing to open their own businesses, while other labour barriers have been removed.

While basic **healthcare** is broadly available to refugees, the specific services on offer depend on the legal particularities of each country. Czechia ensures refugee access to public health insurance for the first five months of their stay, with vulnerable groups such as pregnant women, the elderly, persons with disability, and children eligible to receive public health insurance during their entire stay.

Education is also accessible - state education institutions receive additional government funds to support the integration of Ukrainian students. Overall, language courses and other 'catching up' assistance seem to be broadly provided by the different governments. Hungary has further adjusted the dates for relevant exams, Austria has waived

grading requirements for certain groups of students lacking sufficient language skills, and Czechia and Slovakia have simplified the admissions procedures for entry into universities. Still, not all Ukrainian children are enrolled in the school systems, with language barrier and enrolment procedure hindering the process.

Humanitarian allowances, which vary widely from country to country, finally are available in Austria, Czechia, Hungary, and Slovakia – the subsidies are usually targeted towards ensuring displaced persons can purchase basic necessities such as clothing, school supplies, and food.

The initial response to the arrival of Ukrainians and the implementation of support programmes were largely organised by **non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs), in cooperation with international organizations (IOs) (e.g. UNHCR and UNICEF). Municipalities and Ukrainian-led organizations** have also been integral to supporting and implementing different measures and interventions. Non-state actors, including NGOs, charitable organizations and IOs, have played a particularly important role in Hungary in supplementing and addressing gaps in services and support functions.

Stable coordination mechanisms, meanwhile, were established in Czechia and Slovakia throughout the past year by all actors involved in the policymaking and implementation processes, including public agencies, NGOs, CSOs, and Ukrainian-led organisations. That said, in Hungary, there has been a disconnect, to some extent, between the government and non-state providers.

Austria

School supplies

200 EUR

Clothing

150 EUR

Pocket money

40 EUR

Food

145–260 EUR

Czechia

Humanitarian allowance

212 EUR

*(first 5 months, longer
for vulnerable groups)*

Hungary

Humanitarian allowance

60 EUR

*(adult, if not employed)
and **36 EUR** for children*

Slovakia

Humanitarian
assistance between

60–160 EUR

(for persons in material need)

One-time winter months
support up to

400 EUR

per family

School supplies

32 EUR

and a contribution
for school meals

All told, European and national governments, IOs, NGOs, CSOs, and publics have displayed tremendous solidarity towards ensuring that swift initial assistance is provided to those in need. Governments acted without delay in adopting Lex Ukraine once the TPD was triggered. Considering the previous response by Central European governments to inflows of refugees and migrants during prior

crises, the process this time saw a sea change in perceptions among different societies, government officials, and politicians. This shift can be attributed, in part, to the composition of refugees from Ukraine: primarily women, children and most vulnerable groups.

This refugee crisis, in this vein, has taken on a starkly women's

image that has **focused attention on gender issues and inequities**. Several challenges related to women and children have been scrutinised as part of the existing policies and support programmes implemented by Austria, Czechia, Hungary, and Slovakia. These include:



Finding childcare
services



Obtaining flexible
and suitable jobs



Ensuring living
arrangements in
safe and affordable
accommodation



Preventing
gender-based
violence (GBV)



Locating psychological
support options



Combatting labour
exploitation and
human trafficking



Dealing with language
barriers and inclusion
on a day-to-day basis

The past year can serve as an important learning experience for the EU institutions, governments IOs, and non-governmental actors. Some possible adjustments should be considered by applying gender- sensitive and cross-cutting diversity methods. These include:

EU level

- ▶ Consider strengthening the Temporary Protection Directive, based on lessons learned from its first use, to assure more equitable guarantees and safeguards within all member states.
- ▶ Coordinate a monitoring system focused on achieving the TPD goals and collect detailed data to this end (data-driven policymaking).
- ▶ Ensure better coordination, cooperation and sharing of information on challenges and best practices among EU member states. Create a common platform.
- ▶ Intensify strategic communication in support of Ukrainian temporary displaced persons (from a gender-sensitive angle).

National governments

- ▶ Open access to the labour market and encourage job providers to hire temporarily displaced persons through appropriate incentives.
- ▶ Secure better access to childcare services.
- ▶ Provide full access to healthcare services for all groups of Ukrainian temporary displaced persons.
- ▶ Put in place mechanisms to prevent labour and sexual exploitation.

State and not-state actors

- ▶ Employ more Ukrainian-speaking staff for helplines and train them to provide psychological support – coordinate this among various actors.
- ▶ Ensure that all service providers are trained on war trauma and provide trauma-sensitive services.
- ▶ Strive towards social inclusion for Ukrainian children and more systemic efforts for broader societal inclusion of Ukrainian temporary displaced persons.
- ▶ Focus on removing language barriers to increase social inclusion, levels of employment and school enrolment among Ukrainian temporary displaced persons.
- ▶ To address GBV and human trafficking, develop a comprehensive counter-violence and counter-trafficking response in partnership with all actors (governments, international organisations, and specialist NGOs).



Introduction

More than 12 million Ukrainians have been forced to flee their homes since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine began 24 February 2022,^{1,2} with an additional 7 million people internally displaced.^{3,4} The response of European Union (EU) member states and institutions was swift – the bloc activated the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) on 3 March 2022, only a few days after the start of hostilities. These developments mark a historic moment for the EU. Though TPD has existed for 20 years, this represents the first time it has been used to support incoming refugees.⁵ In accordance with TPD, people displaced from Ukraine can access employment opportunities, accommodation assistance, and schools, with minimal wait times for these services.⁶ As more than 3.4 million people (often with just a bag to their name and/or lacking biometric documents) sought temporary protection in the first three months following the Russian invasion alone (the numbers now stand at 4.1 million),⁷ TPD needed to be rapidly activated to ensure that those fleeing maintain access to education, healthcare, the job market, and other essential services. However, as explored in this report, EU member states enjoy flexibility in applying the Directive, with considerable implications on

the settlement (even if temporary) and integration of refugees.

Due to the unique implementation of the TPD in every member state, this report focuses on four Central European countries (Austria, Czechia, Hungary, and Slovakia) and analyses their policies and activities in welcoming Ukrainian refugees, with a particular focus on the immediate needs and safety of arrivals. The four countries were selected based on their proximity to Ukraine and the relatively large number of refugees each is hosting. While Poland might seemingly present a more straightforward case to examine, there is already an abundance of reporting on that context compared to the four selected cases.^{8,9,10} This report, consequently, contributes added value by paying heed to smaller countries from Central Europe that have, nevertheless, also been highly affected by the displacement of people from Ukraine.

The report aims to map out some of the central policies and programmes enacted in the four Central European member states. It takes as an important starting point the fact that most Ukrainians compelled to flee abroad include women, adolescent girls, children, persons with disabilities, and elderly people. The refugee population also encompasses LGBTIQ+ individuals, people from the Roma community,

1 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-60555472>

2 Third country nationals fleeing Ukraine have been estimated to number several hundred thousand (EUAA, IOM, OECD Report, 2022).

3 https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2022-11/2022_11_09_Forcible_Displacement_Ukraine_Joint_Report_EUAA_IOM_OECD_0.pdf

4 There have been a recorded 5.6 million border crossings into Ukraine from neighbouring countries between February–September 2022 (EUAA, IOM, OECD Report, 2022).

5 Even though the official status for people fleeing Ukraine is “temporary protected” (in most cases), for simplicity this paper uses the word “refugees”. It is crucial though to note the difference, as in the case of “temporary protection” the key word is ‘temporary’ assuming that those who fled are ‘protected’ temporarily until it becomes safe enough at home to return – there are no long-term integration processes to stay in a host country.

6 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_1469

7 https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2022-11/2022_11_09_Forcible_Displacement_Ukraine_Joint_Report_EUAA_IOM_OECD_0.pdf

8 <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/not-single-safe-place-ukrainian-refugees-risk-violence-trafficking-and-exploitation-findings-poland-and-ukraine>

9 <https://www.socialeurope.eu/ukrainian-women-in-poland-an-insecure-sanctuary>

10 <https://www.medam-migration.eu/publications/assessment-reports/refugee-protection-in-the-eu-building-resilience-to-geopolitical-conflict-1770/>

and third-country nationals.¹¹ These groups, all vulnerable to different risks, have specific needs that demand relevant and timely responses. Some potential risks include gender-based violence (GBV), labour exploitation and human trafficking (especially for sexual exploitation). Simultaneously needs range from distinct healthcare access to childcare, safe housing and transportation pathways, access to flexible labour market, school enrolment and support (studies ‘catching up’, language learning, psychological help).^{12,13,14,15} While all Ukrainian refugees can benefit from most policies and programmes, such as those pertaining to accommodation, health insurance, financial support, and access to education and the labour market, our research places a particular

emphasis on the impact of these policies on women (with children).

This report also explores and analyses the diversity of actors involved in the creation and implementation of various policies and programmes and as participants within the existing response ecosystem. A key finding concerns the fact that the Ukrainian diaspora, Ukrainian-led organisations, and Ukrainian refugees themselves are all vividly present, alongside state actors, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations (CSOs), and international organisations (IOs), in supporting the response ecosystem and ensuring that the diverse needs of arrivals are accounted for, and specific risks mitigated. This report, therefore, spotlights best practices from Austria, Czechia, Hungary, and Slovakia that can provide a template

for responding to future refugee inflows into the EU. Additionally, the report scrutinises persistent vulnerabilities and challenges that need to be addressed.

Finally, we propose distinct policy recommendations for European institutions and for national governments - to be coordinated with IOs and NGOs/CSOs - to improve programme drafting (preparedness) and implementation (reaction), heeding the complexity of particular needs and risk exposure.

The report draws on a mix of research methods, ranging from desk research based on primary and secondary data sources to semi-structured interviews with representatives from the government, NGOs, IOs, and the Ukrainian community (total of 15 interviews).



11 <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/Rapid-Gender-Analysis-of-Ukraine-en.pdf>

12 [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_ATA\(2022\)729328](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_ATA(2022)729328)

13 <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/not-single-safe-place-ukrainian-refugees-risk-violence-trafficking-and-exploitation-findings-poland-and-ukraine>

14 https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/Conflict_Ukraine_TIP_2022.pdf

15 <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/97958>

Overview of countries

Countries directly bordering Ukraine immediately experienced a substantial inflow of refugees in the days and weeks following Russia's invasion (this includes Hungary and Slovakia among the four countries examined here). But countries in the near vicinity, like Austria and Czechia, also began to welcome larger numbers of Ukrainian refugees soon after too. It was immediately apparent that the majority of seeking refugee are women, children, and the elderly.

Austria

Between February 2022 and March 2023, around 94,984 Ukrainian refugees registered for temporary protection in Austria, with the largest number residing in Vienna.¹⁶ These arrivals are predominantly women

(70%), children, and older people (above 60 years old).¹⁷ Women between 20 and 39 years old make 36% and 10% are 60 years and older.¹⁸ Surveys indicate that more than 90% of respondents feel safe, welcomed, and well cared for in Austria.¹⁹ Representatives of NGOs interviewed for this report agreed with this sentiment, underlining that both Austrian society and political leaders have fostered a welcoming atmosphere.²⁰ A study conducted by the University of Vienna based on interviews conducted between May and June 2022 with Ukrainian women staying in Vienna, nevertheless, found that most expressed a desire to return home and a high degree of uncertainty about their lives given the continued war.²¹

Czechia

The Czech Republic has granted temporary protection to nearly half a million refugees fleeing Russia's invasion (497,712 - cumulative number as of 31 March 2023²²). Women and girls comprise 63%.²³ Both government and society have displayed tremendous generosity and solidarity from the outset towards refugees. According to GLOBSEC's "Perception of Ukrainian refugees in the V4" report, 73% of respondents in Czechia view refugees from Ukraine positively.²⁴ Czechia is both a transit and destination country and hosts the third highest number of registered Ukrainian refugees in the region, after Poland and Germany, and the highest number of refugees from Ukraine per capita globally.²⁵

Austria: Czechia: Hungary: Slovakia:

Total number of Ukrainian refugees:

94,984

497,712

34,248

112,715

Percentage of Ukrainian women and girls refugees:

70%

63%

57%

68%

Source: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

¹⁶ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

¹⁷ <https://www.integrationsfonds.at/newsbeitrag/seit-kriegsbeginn-haben-sich-rund-72000-ukraainerinnen-und-ukraainer-in-oesterreich-registriert-knapp-70-prozent-davon-sind-frauen-13556/>

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ <https://phaidra.univie.ac.at/o:1588454>

²⁰ Interview with Claudia Lui, Head of the Diakonie Ukraine Advisory Center and with Valeriya Kaiser, Verein Matusya, Austria, March 2023.

²¹ https://inex.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/p_inex/Rosenberger-Lazareva-Bericht_Ukraine_Vertriebene_.pdf

²² <https://data.unhcr.org/en/dataviz/277?sv=54&geo=10819>

²³ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/97958>

²⁴ https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/GLTrends_Ukraine_refugees_summary_v13_spreads.pdf

²⁵ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2022/10/14/ukrainian-refugees-challenges-in-a-welcoming-europe/>

Due to the substantial Ukrainian diaspora already present in the country prior to the war (30% of refugees had a relative in Czechia before the invasion²⁶), the lowest unemployment rate in the EU,²⁷ cultural similarities, and the impeccable display of solidarity towards refugees, many Ukrainians have opted to seek refuge in the country. Among all Ukrainian refugees in Czechia, 44% are adult women, 35% are children, 17% are men, and 4% are elderly. Meanwhile, 43% of female refugees are under the age of 35, 36% are between 35-50 years old, 15% between 50-65, and 6% above 65. The most common type of household is a mother with one child followed by women living alone and women with two children.²⁸

Ukrainian refugees are increasingly finding employment at higher rates, with the number of arrivals receiving humanitarian aid steadily declining.²⁹ Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine began, around 190,000 refugees have found work in Czechia.³⁰ Despite the apparent positive employment trend, 50% of Ukrainian refugees state that they are struggling to make ends meet.³¹

Hungary

By January 2023, over 2.2 million Ukrainian refugees had crossed the Ukrainian-Hungarian borders³² and among this group, 34,248 Ukrainian refugees had registered for temporary protection status or similar protection schemes in Hungary.³³ Women and girls comprise 57%.³⁴ A tracking

survey conducted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and started in October 2022 suggests that 84% of households are comprised of women with children.³⁵ Moreover, country specific data suggests that 78% of respondents had completed higher education or hold university degrees. A total of 91% were in dire need of assistance with at least one urgent need (food, material assistance, employment, etc.). And 31% faced difficulty accessing healthcare in Hungary and 27% problems accessing childcare services (for infants aged 0-4). Meanwhile, 39% of households with school-aged children reported that at least one child was not registered for education in the host country.³⁶

Meanwhile, according to GLOBSEC's "Perception of Ukrainian refugees in the V4" report, 82% of respondents in Hungary view refugees from Ukraine favourably, with 86% reporting they had no negative experiences involving Ukrainian refugees and 88% observing no changes in their lives since Ukrainian refugees began arriving.³⁷

"The warm welcome of Ukrainian refugees at the beginning of the war along with the outpouring of solidarity both by civilians and authorities has been exceptional and deserves recognition and gratitude."

Corina Iovescu, Reporting officer, UNHCR Representation Central Europe

Slovakia

There have been 1,129,733 total border crossings of non-Slovaks from Ukraine between 24 February 2022 and 31 January 2023³⁸ and there are 112,715 people with temporary protection status currently living in Slovakia.³⁹ Women and girls comprise 68% of Ukrainians residing in Slovakia based on data from December 2022.⁴⁰ And according to UNHCR, 12% of household members were aged 60 or above, 36% were children, and 9% were persons with disabilities.⁴¹

While Slovaks resoundingly rushed to support Ukrainians fleeing the conflict in the first days and weeks following Russia's invasion, Slovak society has become more polarised over perceptions towards Ukrainian refugees compared to, for example, other Visegrad Four countries. GLOBSEC's "Perception of Ukrainian refugees in the V4" report revealed that only 42% of Slovaks view refugees positively. Though 62% indicated that they had not experienced any changes in their lives since Ukrainian refugees began arriving, 68% expressed support for reducing assistance (in some cases even discontinuing this aid altogether).⁴²

26 https://www.mpsv.cz/documents/20142/2786931/Analiza_situace_uprchliku_CENSUS_14072022.pdf/1650e3f6-8c1f-a2af-5f3a-b1acdb0bd0ee
 27 https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/UNE_RT_M_custom_3761903/bookmark/table?lang=en&bookmarkId=e8fdad7-74a2-4074-99f1-d92cb0583cf5
 28 https://www.mpsv.cz/documents/20142/2786931/Analiza_situace_uprchliku_CENSUS_14072022.pdf/1650e3f6-8c1f-a2af-5f3a-b1acdb0bd0ee
 29 <https://www.mpsv.cz/-/pocet-davek-vyplaceny-ch-uprchlikum-z-ukrajiny-klesa-stale-asteji-nachazeji-uplatneni-na-trhu-prace>
 30 <https://www.mpsv.cz/-/snemovna-schvalila-novelu-zakona-lex-ukrajina-prinese-lepsi-zacileni-podpory-a-jednodussi-administrativu>
 31 https://www.mpsv.cz/documents/20142/2786931/Analiza_situace_uprchliku_CENSUS_14072022.pdf/1650e3f6-8c1f-a2af-5f3a-b1acdb0bd0ee
 32 <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/99138>
 33 <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>
 34 <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/97958>
 35 <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrJmJlZGZlYmMzMDZlZS00NzU1LTkzYzgtNTNhN2FiNiU3Y2RlIiwidCI6ImU1YzYwM3OTQxLTkzYzgtNTNhN2FiNiU3Y2RlIiwidmFmODBiZSIsImMiOiJh9>
 36 Ibid.
 37 https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/GLTrends_Ukraine_refugees_summary%20v13%20spreads.pdf
 38 <https://reliefweb.int/report/slovakia/unhcr-slovakia-fact-sheet-ukraine-emergency-february-2023>
 39 <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>
 40 <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/97958>
 41 <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/96557>
 42 https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/GLTrends_Ukraine_refugees_summary%20v13%20spreads.pdf

Policies and programmes

The TPD assures that basic support for those fleeing the Russian war in Ukraine will be provided. In this context Austria, Czechia, Hungary and Slovakia have sought to

adopt policies and programmes towards Ukrainian refugees. These mainly relate to accommodation, education, healthcare, labour market, some social services and

other additional support. Table 1 summarises the different policies and programmes by country.

Table 1: Main policies and programmes towards Ukrainian refugees in Austria, Czechia, Hungary and Slovakia

		Private accommodation	Labour market	Healthcare	Education	Other financial assistance
Austria	Provided and free of charge	Possible, allowance for rent and food directly to refugees	Open access but need of work permit	Basic provided and free of charge	Open access	School supplies, clothing, pocket money if in state-provided accommodation
Czechia	Provided and free of charge	Possible, accommodation contribution to hosts (change in July 2023)	Open access	Basic provided and free of charge in first five months (exception for vulnerable groups)	Open access	Humanitarian assistance in first five months (exception for vulnerable groups)
Hungary	Provided and free of charge	Possible, accommodation contribution to those hosting over 20 refugees	Partially open access, need of work permit, employment only where shortages	Basic provided and free of charge	Open access and mandatory (3-16years old)	Humanitarian assistance if unemployed
Slovakia	Provided and free of charge	Possible, accommodation contribution to hosts	Open access	Basic provided and free of charge	Open access	Humanitarian assistance in in need, school supplies, school meals, one-time winter aid

Austria

The Austrian government has ensured that basic facilities are provided and the needs of Ukrainian refugees in the country met. The housing needs of refugees, for instance, are secured through either organised (supervised) accommodation (as part of essential government assistance) or private accommodation. The organised accommodation providers, notably, cover all relevant costs including housing and food. Support for school supplies (up to 200 EUR per child/per year) and clothing (150 EUR per person/per year) is also provided. And pocket money up to 40 EUR (per person/per month) is disbursed to individuals that opt for organised accommodation.⁴³

Austrian households have also supported Ukrainian refugees with private accommodation options, either by offering vacant homes or sharing living arrangements with Ukrainian refugees. Additionally, some refugees have decided to live with family members already residing in Austria prior to the start of Russia's invasion. If Ukrainian refugees opt for the private accommodation option and lack sufficient financial resources, allowances can be obtained including a 165 EUR rent subsidy for single people (per person/per month) and 330 EUR (per family/per month for a family). Food allowances, meanwhile, amount up to 260 EUR for adults (per person/per month) and 145 EUR for minors (per person/per month).⁴⁴

All refugees from Ukraine are formally added to the country's health insurance scheme, with arrivals entitled to medical care, like Austrian citizens, through the Austrian Health Fund (ÖGK). They are eligible to receive medical assistance, medicine, and/or medical aid. Once registered,

refugees are assigned an insurance number and subsequently an e-card. Even before refugees are assigned an insurance number, though, arrivals can receive free medical treatment by presenting their Ukrainian passport.

Upon receiving a "blue card" (an identity card for refugees in Austria), refugees also gain access to the labour market. To take a specific job, however, refugees need a work permit issued by the Austrian Public Employment Service (AMS). Dedicated websites have been developed to promote open positions to Ukrainian refugees (e.g. Jobs for Ukraine and Austrian Jobs for Ukrainian refugees). Once a refugee starts earning a salary, the state-provided basic services and allowances are no longer available (It is possible to earn 110 EUR + 80 EUR per family member per month and continue to receive basic support).⁴⁵

Diakonie—a charitable organization in Austria—have taken the lead by organising "single mom groups" for Ukrainian mothers and their children. While volunteers supervise their children, mothers gain an opportunity to share their situation and challenges in the presence of a psychologist. Consultations with psychologists, notably, are provided both for adults and children, with psychological support for children also organised in cooperation with schools.

Children can be enrolled in early childhood education and primary schools by submitting a request to local authorities. Children in elementary school who lack sufficient knowledge of German

are not graded until they reach certain language benchmarks. For young refugees who have completed compulsory schooling in another country (from the 10th grade onwards) but cannot complete secondary or high school classes due to a lack of German language skills, a training course (or transitional course) has been offered since September 2022.⁴⁶ Additionally, a 'buddy program' has been introduced that aims to connect young Ukrainians with their peers in Austria who can help them learn German, make decisions about enrolment at particular schools or universities, and facilitate their adaptation to life in the country.

Czechia

In Czechia, the implemented Lex Ukraine measures can be summarized in seven main categories: 1. the granting of temporary protection itself, 2. access to the labour market, including eligibility for unemployment benefits, 3. free healthcare, 4. humanitarian allowance, 5. solidarity household allowance - de facto free housing, 6. free transport of various forms and under varying conditions (expired August 2022),⁴⁷ and 7. free education and other social services.

As far as employment opportunities and social security benefits are concerned, refugees from Ukraine with temporary protection status are considered permanent residents and granted unrestricted access to the labour market. Furthermore, they can file claims for unemployment benefits and do not need to navigate any extra hoops. Refugees are also added to the public health insurance rolls from their date of entry into Czechia and are eligible to use the scheme for free throughout their first five months in the country. A recent amendment to the Lex Ukraine will ensure that vulnerable

⁴³ <https://www.integrationsfonds.at/ukraine/>

⁴⁴ <https://www.integrationsfonds.at/ukraine/>

⁴⁵ <https://www.integrationsfonds.at/ukraine/>

⁴⁶ <https://start.wien.gv.at/bildung-de>

⁴⁷ <https://www.mdcr.cz/Media/Media-a-tiskove-zpravy/Bezplatna-preprava-pro-uprchlicky-z-Ukrajiny-ma-sta>

groups, including pregnant women, children, elderly individuals, and persons with disabilities can further maintain health insurance coverage past this period.

Additionally, Ukrainian refugees are eligible for humanitarian allowances 212 EUR (per person/per month).⁴⁸ This subsidy was initially available for six months but has since been reduced to the first five months after arrival in the country.⁴⁹ The humanitarian allowance currently varies between 150 EUR and 310 EUR depending on age and disability.⁵⁰

A solidarity household allowance - or de facto free housing scheme - is disbursed to Czechs that provide accommodation to Ukrainian refugees. The amounts vary dependent on whether the arrangements are co-housing (128 EUR per person, maximum three persons) or separate apartments are provided (from 212 EUR per person up to 637 EUR for five persons).⁵¹ According to a report from the Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs from July 2022, more than 44% of Ukrainian refugees were benefitting from such accommodation arrangements.⁵² Over 70% of accommodation providers, meanwhile, are Czech and 28% are Ukrainian.⁵³ With recent changes to the Lex Ukraine, the existing solidarity household allowance will be replaced in July 2023. Ukrainian refugees will instead now directly receive subsidies that can be used to cover eligible housing costs.⁵⁴

“Thanks to Lex Ukraine, war refugees have the same rights and conditions as people with permanent residence.”

Michal Zuna,
TOP 09, Czechia

When it comes to women and children, the largest group of refugees, the Lex Ukraine scheme opened the door for foreigners with temporary protection to send their children to childcare/playgroup facilities. The conditions to work as a social worker or in playgroups were also eased for newcomers from Ukraine. In terms of education, a special enrolment period for refugees from Ukraine was opened for kindergartens and primary schools. Teaching staff from Ukraine, moreover, are permitted to work without Czech language skills in specific classes, groups, or departments where only refugees from Ukraine are to be educated. The law also simplified the rules for admitting refugees to universities.

In February 2023, the Czech Chamber of Deputies approved the latest amendment to Lex Ukraine⁵⁵ aimed at improving the targeting of aid and simplifying the administration of humanitarian aid for refugees from Ukraine. The changes were designed to better target aid to the most vulnerable refugees. According to the legislation, stricter rules would not apply to vulnerable groups, which include persons with disabilities, children under 18, caregivers of children under 6, pregnant women, students, and seniors over 65. The humanitarian allowance would be accommodative to vulnerable groups, with these refugees eligible to continue receiving the humanitarian allowance past their first five months in Czechia.

Hungary

In 2022, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) established cooperation with the municipalities of Debrecen, Gyor, Zahony, and Budapest “to provide multisectoral services and delivery of supplies to refugees from Ukraine and host communities, including Roma children and their families... (aiming to) reach more than 50,000 refugees and vulnerable host community children and families... (with) services including early childhood education, child protection, social protection/ humanitarian cash, health and nutrition”.⁵⁶ **Specific cooperation between Zahony—a municipality bordering Ukraine—and UNICEF aims to secure adequate funds to support vulnerable groups of refugees and children.**

Ukrainian refugees in Hungary are covered by the core tenets of temporary protection status. They are eligible for financial aid at 60 EUR per adult/per month and 36 EUR per child/per month, if not employed, and able to request free state accommodation.⁵⁷ The National Directorate General for Disaster Management (NDGDM) is responsible for accommodating Ukrainian refugees at state-provided sites for the entire duration of their stay as long as refugees indicate they plan a longer stay

48 For the purposes of comparing different allowance amounts case by case, we have converted non-euro currencies into euro amounts (exchange rate as of 1 April 2023).

49 https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/czech-republic-lex-ukraine-law-package-enters-force_en

50 <https://www.mpsv.cz/-/snemovna-schvalila-novelu-zakona-lex-ukrajina-prinese-lepsi-zacileni-podpory-a-jednodussi-administrativu>

51 <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2022-205>

52 https://www.mpsv.cz/documents/20142/2786931/Analiza_situace_uprchliku_CENSUS_14072022.pdf/1650e3f6-8c1f-a2af-5f3a-b1acdb0bd0ee

53 Ibid.

54 <https://www.mpsv.cz/-/snemovna-schvalila-novelu-zakona-lex-ukrajina-prinese-lepsi-zacileni-podpory-a-jednodussi-administrativu>

55 <https://www.mpsv.cz/-/snemovna-schvalila-novelu-zakona-lex-ukrajina-prinese-lepsi-zacileni-podpory-a-jednodussi-administrativu>

56 <https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/27026/file/Hungary.pdf>

57 <https://vsquare.org.ukrainian-refugees-in-hungary-volunteers-are-doing-the-governments-work/>

in Hungary. If refugees are only seeking short-term protection in the country, they are assigned to NGO-led locations.⁵⁸ Temporary accommodation in Budapest, for example, is only accessible because of NGO donations. A housing allowance is available at 10 EUR per night but only to providers who host more than 20 refugees and have a contract with the government.⁵⁹

The labour market is accessible to Ukrainian refugees, although refugees still need to obtain work permit (free of charge) and in practice they can apply for openings where labour shortages exist.⁶⁰ Meanwhile, basic healthcare is also available, free of charge, through the national healthcare system and for services aligned with the national legislature. And the city of Budapest offered free public transportation until 31 March 2023.

Education is accessible and free for all applicants and beneficiaries with temporary protection status.⁶¹ The government provides 'catching up support' for children in schools through language and other classes and has adjusted the timetables for higher education exams.⁶² Schools and universities receive state financial contributions based on the number of Ukrainian students enrolled.⁶³ Pre-primary-age children, for their part, are legally required to enrol in early childhood education through the ordinary admissions procedure.

While the government has adopted several regulations to ensure the applicability of the temporary protection directive, especially in relation to education, the labour

market, and social security and health insurance access, NGOs, CSOs, IOs, and the private sector have all contributed to implementing programmes and/or supplementing services and addressing gaps.

Slovakia

Similar to other countries, the Slovak government introduced Lex Ukrajina, a package of laws that covered the most pressing areas for protection and support of Ukrainian refugees. Under the Lex Ukrajina framework, protection was guaranteed for one year (until March 2023), with the option to extend the duration of the programme by an additional year.⁶⁴ This option has been exercised in light of the continuing hostilities in Ukraine.

Social benefits are available to refugees who are legally granted the status of permanent residents or hold temporary refugee status.⁶⁵ These include meal benefits for children attending school – 1.30 EUR per day and financial contributions up to 33.2 EUR per month to support children in fulfilment of their duties.⁶⁶ The financial contributions disbursed by the Slovak government are calculated based on parental income.

As it pertains to financial assistance more generally, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, in collaboration with the Red Cross and UNHCR, has implemented a scheme for refugees that find themselves in material need.⁶⁷ The assistance varies by age: 80 EUR/ per month for an adult, 60 EUR/ per month for a child under 3 years of age and 160 EUR for a child between 3-18 years of age.⁶⁸

During the winter period, a programme for emergency financial assistance became available for Ukrainian refugees in need. The initiative targeted vulnerable Ukrainian families and individuals to ensure their access to essential goods and services, including winter clothes, shoes, food, and shelter. In this context, eligible refugees received one-time assistance of 150 EUR per person and up to 400 EUR per family.⁶⁹

In education, under the auspices of the Slovak Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport (MoESRS), implementation of a project aimed at supporting and enhancing the integration of children and students from Ukraine began in September 2022. This includes the following educational facilities: kindergartens, primary schools, high schools, secondary grammar schools, vocational schools, and conservatories. Financial assistance will be provided to schools based on the number of children/students from Ukraine. The amount varies by type of educational institution, and it ranges from 177 EUR to 232 EUR.⁷⁰ According to data from the MoESRS, there are currently 10,550 Ukrainian children enrolled in some form of education in Slovakia.⁷¹

Structural policies were introduced by the Slovak government and placed under the authority of different ministries, primarily the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, and Ministry of Finance. Slovak citizens who provide accommodation to Ukrainian refugees, most commonly women

58 Ibid.

59 <https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Ukrainian%20refugees%20in%20Visegrad%20countries%20-%20Societal%20Attitudes%20and%20Challenges%20of%20Accommodating%20People%20Fleeing%20the%20War%20v5%20web.pdf>

60 <https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Ukrainian%20refugees%20in%20Visegrad%20countries%20-%20Societal%20Attitudes%20and%20Challenges%20of%20Accommodating%20People%20Fleeing%20the%20War%20v5%20web.pdf>

61 <https://help.unhcr.org/hungary/temporary-protection/>

62 <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/hungarys-education-responses-influx-ukrainian-students>

63 Ibid.

64 https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/slovakia-adopts-package-legislative-changes-facilitate-integration-those-fleeing-ukraine_en

65 <https://www.mfsr.sk/sk/media/tlacove-spravy/velka-pomoc-ludom-z-ukrajiny.html>

66 https://www.upsvr.gov.sk/socialne-veci-a-rodina/socialne-veci/pomoc-v-hmotnej-nudzi-a-statne-socialne-davky/dotacie-pre-deti-na-stravu-a-skolske-potreby.html?page_id=964373

67 https://www.employment.gov.sk/files/sk/uvodna-stranka/pomoc-odidencov-z-ukrajiny/inter-agency-poster-cash-assistance_a1_slovak.pdf

68 Ibid.

69 <https://help.unhcr.org/slovakia/sk/cash-assistance/>

70 <https://www.minedu.sk/dohodovacie-konanie-ukrajina-aktualizovane-1982022/>

71 <https://ukrajina.minedu.sk/vseobecne-informacie/>

and children, are eligible for a housing allowance to cover some of the expenses. The owners of the flats/homes are eligible to receive 10 EUR per night/per person aged 15 and over and 5 EUR per night/per person under the age of 15. This amendment to the law came into force in June 2022 and will remain valid until May 2023. Since January 2023, free transportation is no longer available for Ukrainian refugees.⁷² And access to healthcare in Slovakia depends on refugee status, with people with temporary protection status entitled to full healthcare coverage.⁷³

The labour market in Slovakia is open to Ukrainian refugees – the country has recorded a 15% rise in the number of Ukrainian refugees in the labour force between September 2021 and September 2022.⁷⁴ The Slovak government recently passed an amendment to the Commercial Code that eases and accelerates the establishment of companies in Slovakia, which will also facilitate the creation of Ukrainian-led businesses.⁷⁵ Moreover, from 1 January 2023 the government lowered some restrictions for labour market entry, including cancelling requirement for third country nationals (this applies for Ukrainian refugees and other nationals) to be employed only in districts with unemployment rate below 5%, removing requirement for test taking when renewing residence permit and allowing continuation of work during the process of renewal.⁷⁶

72 <https://www.idsbk.sk/preprava-obcanov-ukrajiny/>

73 <https://ua.gov.sk/en.html?cs-rt=3762438762097158730>

74 <https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Ukrainian%20refugees%20in%20Visegrad%20countries%20-%20Societal%20Attitudes%20and%20Challenges%20of%20Accommodating%20People%20Fleeing%20the%20War%20v5%20web.pdf>

75 <https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=f644d7f1-d155-4c67-9f98-551da66adafb>

76 <https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Ukrainian%20refugees%20in%20Visegrad%20countries%20-%20Societal%20Attitudes%20and%20Challenges%20of%20Accommodating%20People%20Fleeing%20the%20War%20v5%20web.pdf>



The ecosystem of participating actors

In all studied countries the ecosystem consists of several main categories. These include the national governments, through their various ministries and offices, municipalities and local governments, international organizations, a vast array of NGOs, CSOs and charities as well as Ukrainian-led organizations. The national governments in Austria, Czechia and Slovakia have taken a very visible role in the ecosystem, while the work of IOs, particularly UNHCR and UNICEF, in Czechia, Hungary and Slovakia has also been very noticeable. Municipalities and local governments have also stepped-up in assisting, noting those bordering Ukraine being especially pro-active but also capitals and bigger cities, in general. In all countries NGOs, CSOs, charities (especially in Austria, Hungary) and Ukrainian-led organizations are most active in providing specific assistance and aiding in implementation of different programmes either initiated by the state or their own.

Austria

The Austrian ecosystem consists of various actors across different levels. The national level departments of various ministries from the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Education, Science and Research, Public Employment Service are included as coordinators of the programme for Ukrainian refugees. UNHCR has been present and very active throughout Austria (especially Vienna) in supporting refugees. At the state level, the Austrian Integration Fund (Österreichischer

Integrationsfonds - ÖIF) serves as the primary organisation coordinating the refugee registration process and providing arrivals with initial assistance. The Vienna Social Fund (Fonds Soziales Wien), notably, has performed an important role in the capital, which hosts the largest number of Ukrainian refugees in the country, in managing the accommodation process and coordinating other activities with additional actors. Apart from state authorities, the ecosystem also encompasses various NGOs taking part in rendering assistance to refugees. Some of the most significant and active organisations include Diakonie (which developed a special department especially for helping Ukrainians), Caritas, the Red Cross, Samariterbund Wien, Asylkoordination Österreich, Volkshilfe Wien, Interface Wien, Brave, and Train of Hope.

“Step by step we are helping to put the puzzle together to make a difference in living, especially for the women, for children and also for older people.”

Claudia Lui,
Head of the Diakonie Ukraine
Advisory Centre, Austria

Ukrainian organisations, in the initial response period, mobilised relatively swiftly to assist Ukrainian refugees crossing into Austria. From the Ukrainian Embassy in Vienna to the Ukrainian school and Church Sant Barbara, these actors remain important and are all involved in helping refugees in an array of different ways. Smaller organisations led by Ukrainians (“Матуся”, “Domivka”) further provide substantial support to the ecosystem – these actors play an integral role in introducing new perspectives and recommendations that are often later acknowledged and accepted by Austrian officials. Regular monthly meetings between participating actors are held and have proven especially productive, enabling improvements to different policies.⁷⁷

Women have also assumed a major role in the decision-making and implementation structures of programmes targeted towards Ukrainian refugees. This is most apparent within different NGOs and Ukrainian-led organisations and among volunteers, especially those working with children.

“Матуся” (“Mommy”) and “Domivka” (“Home”) focus specifically on helping Ukrainian women refugees including new single moms with children. “Матуся” is particularly active in distributing hygiene products, children’s clothes, food, toys, and books. The organisation, moreover, provides housing and job search consultations and facilitates access to physical and mental health support.

Women have also assumed a major role in the decision-making and implementation structures of programmes targeted towards Ukrainian refugees. This is most apparent within different NGOs and Ukrainian-led organisations and among volunteers, especially those working with children.

Czechia

The Ministry of Interior assumed the paramount task of coordinating the inflows of refugees and overseeing the temporary protection legislation.

The government department has also ensured the staffing and necessary financial resources for the Regional Centres for Help and Assistance to Ukraine (KACPU). A robust network of 16 KACPUs across all regions of Czechia have facilitated the registration of arrivals for temporary protection and humanitarian assistance. The centres have also coordinated health and security screenings, accommodation, and social benefits, including health insurance and financial assistance for up to five months for arrivals from Ukraine. KACPUs have, furthermore, organised rest areas and play spaces for children. Trained psychologists and translators provided assistance where needed. The government additionally set up the National Centre for Help and Assistance to Ukraine (NACPU) to oversee all activities and coordinate the relevant work of officials. The Ministry of Interior, finally, has coordinated different activities with NGOs that engage directly with refugees. These collective efforts have ensured that the necessary capacities for implementing temporary protection were mobilised in record time.

“We set up Regional Assistance Centres for Support of Ukrainian Refugees in each region where representatives of all relevant stakeholders were present in one place. They could therefore provide complex support to incoming persons.”

Representative from the Office of the Czech Government Commissioner for Human Rights

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs was tasked with managing the humanitarian allowance and solidarity subsidies for households. It also conducted labour market research and proposed legislative regulations to protect individuals from potentially vulnerable forms of employment. It was further tasked with ensuring the availability of Czech language courses for job seekers, including online courses. The Ministry of Industry and Trade, meanwhile, prepared a database of job opportunities for prospective job seekers from Ukraine. The Ministry of Education, for its part, was tasked with integrating Ukrainian students into the Czech education system. The Health Ministry, finally, oversaw the provision of free healthcare.

These measures were all overseen by a national coordinator who managed the different processes with pertinent ministries, regions, and cities. The national coordinator reported directly to the government and was backed by a strategic team that included a strategic communications coordinator and a point person for securing financial support from the EU budget.⁷⁸

The government also recognized the added value of the UN humanitarian partners in various coordination capacities. The Ministry of the Interior accepted to co-chair the Inter-Agency Refugee Coordination Forum set up by UNHCR, comprising other UN agencies and humanitarian partners working on the response. The Forum meets twice a month with the participation of the Ministry of the Interior, the NGO Consortium of Migrants Assisting Organizations (representing more than 15 Czech NGOs), and UN agency representatives. Its main objective is to systematize cooperation.

Actors in the Ukrainian refugees' support ecosystem



⁷⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/czech-republic-determination-strategic-priorities-government-czech-republic-deal_en

Women take a prominent role at all stages of the crisis response in Czechia. This includes through the policy drafting process at the Chamber of Deputies and the top government coordination role, held by Klára Šimáčková Laurenčíková, and the head of the NGO Consortium of Migrants Assisting Organizations. Furthermore, according to the Office of the Czech Government Commissioner of Human Rights, Ukrainian women already residing in the Czech Republic before the invasion began and refugee women themselves contributed substantially to the cause.

“It took the Hungarian government two to three months to create a transit centre; before that, if not for volunteers, nothing would have been there to support Ukrainian refugees”

Lesya Jakab, Ukrainian diaspora, Hungary

Zsuzsa Hetényi, one of the volunteers, described her three-week-long volunteering experience at railway stations in Budapest as a “derailed train”.⁸⁰ The response during the first several weeks of inflows of Ukrainian refugees was almost completely organically organized and managed by NGOs established in 2015 during the European migrant crisis and other NGOs such as Migration Aid, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee or Budapest, and Bike Mafia.^{81,82} Groups of volunteers primarily handled the generous donations of food, clothing, utensils, accommodations, and toiletries. Subsequent aid was provided by three church relief organizations recognised by the Hungarian government (the Hungarian Red Cross, the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta, and the Hungarian Reformed Church Aid) and several civil associations.⁸³

This organic system was, however, interrupted at the end of March 2022 by the opening of a state-led and state-organized refugee reception facility at the BOK Sports and Conference Centre in Budapest. This strategy was announced just two days prior to its rollout, underscoring the ineffective coordination and flow of information amid the crisis.⁸⁴ Once the government began coordination the National Directorate General for Disaster Management

(NDGDM) was appointed as the main coordinator. Besides the Ministry of Interior, under which the NDGDM falls, departments from other ministries have been involved depending on the policy and program (e.g., education, labour and social services).

UNHCR’s presence in Hungary has been noticeable. In cooperation with 37 international and national partners it developed a Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) and began implementation. The various activities are, importantly, coordinated at both the national and regional levels and/or directly with Ukrainian refugees. UNHCR, namely, facilitates “the Refugee Coordination Forum (RCF) at country-level to ensure harmonized response within existing government structures”.⁸⁵ This framework encompasses NGOs, faith-based charities, civil society, Ukrainian diaspora, and other organisations totalling 70 active actors. Moreover, monitoring constitutes part of UNHCR’s agenda.

Hungary

The first arrivals of Ukrainian refugees were met with significant humanitarian support, primarily from charities, host communities, local NGOs, Ukrainian Diaspora, humanitarian actors, and local municipalities relying on volunteers. The government response appeared to be somewhat sluggish at the time, with Human Rights Watch reporting that some of the chaos stemmed from a lack of information from the government, combined with the fact that the asylum system had been dismantled over the years.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/08/hungarians-helping-ukraines-refugees-no-excuse-limited-government-action>

⁸⁰ <https://cz.boell.org/en/2022/07/12/ukrainian-refugees-hungary>

⁸¹ <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2022/9/6322e4b44/mayor-hungarian-border-town-gears-welcome-ukrainian-refugees.html>

⁸² <https://www.asileproject.eu/about-face-or-camouflage-hungary-and-the-refugees-from-ukraine/>

⁸³ Interview with Lesya Jakab, Ukrainian diaspora, Hungary, March 2023.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Interview with Corina Iovescu, Reporting Officer, UNHCR Representation for Central Europe, March 2023

UNHCR has a strong presence in Central Europe. With the initial support in the first days of the refugee influx being provided by volunteers, NGOs and CSOs, the UN Agency came on board as a coordinator among the state and non-state actors. It quickly drafted a Regional Refugee Response Plan, commissioned Needs Assessment Reports and began to implement assistance programmes with various partners (government structures, NGOs, CSOs and other international organizations).

“UNHCR conducted a number of surveys, focus group discussions, and a multi-sector needs assessment⁸⁶ exploring and evaluating the needs and intentions of refugees from Ukraine to ensure our operations are in line with real-life challenges and targeting areas where they have the most impact”.

Corina Iovescu, Reporting Officer, UNHCR Representation for Central Europe

In Hungary, women from volunteering communities, NGOs and IOs have been very involved in helping other women and the arriving refugees, in general, working to ensure equitable access to basic assistance and necessary protection.

Slovakia

The situation regarding Ukrainian refugee arrivals in Slovakia today is coordinated at multiple levels and involves many actors, though the initially overwhelming (albeit somewhat chaotic) response was managed by CSOs. NGOs and CSOs, such as Human Rights League, Mareena, Sme spolu, and People in need, have actively communicated information and assisted refugees in finding suitable accommodation and accessing other types of necessary assistance.

UNHCR stepped into a supporting role, beginning its activities in Slovakia in April 2022 in response to the large number of people fleeing Russia's aggression in Ukraine. The introduction of UNHCR's more systematic RRP in March 2022 helped to “establish coordination systems where none had previously existed, and work together to ensure a holistic, government-led response”.⁸⁷ Coordination between UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), UNICEF, and Slovak NGOs, which previously had operated at considerably smaller scale and with only a few staff members, has consequently grown rapidly since the beginning of the conflict. Additional volunteers and staff members have been recruited and the groups have become better organised and more responsive to emerging situations. Weekly coordination meetings with various government and non-government organisations and structures, moreover, were established to gather information from the field and discuss and coordinate implementation strategies and deliveries.⁸⁸

“The response was overwhelming but slightly chaotic, with many actors involved...however, Slovakia managed the initial response surprisingly well, with strong support from the general public.”

Olga Pietruchova, Gender Equality Expert, Slovakia

Ukrainian women-led organizations and communities were quick to mobilise and respond to the immediate and specific needs of new arrivals (especially through language facilitation). Ukraine-Slovakia SOS/Sme spolu, an NGO based in Bratislava, was among the first responders to the refugee inflows coming into Slovakia. Apart from distributing humanitarian aid, the organisation assisted with disseminating relevant information through, for instance, the use of social media. Simple and widely accessible tools, such as Facebook groups, became key to providing timely and relevant information, ranging from border crossing rules and legal registration to the housing search process.⁸⁹ Numerous groups, including Sme spolu, Mareena, and other organisations, subsequently initiated offline information meetings attended by experts from relevant fields, partnering organisations, and even local government.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/97062>

⁸⁷ Interview with Olga Pietruchova, Gender Equality Expert, Slovakia, March 2023

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ <https://smespolu.org/en/informational-support/>

⁹⁰ <https://mareena.sk/ukrajina>

The Slovak-Ukrainian House in Bratislava continues to organise regular activities and psychological support for temporary displaced Ukrainian women, children, and the elderly. For example, the “women’s power group” provides a safe space where women can support each other, connect, and learn more about themselves through art activities.⁹¹

In time, Ukrainian women refugees became essential to different helplines, for example, by providing relevant available information in the Ukrainian language.

“State and local organs (Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Education, and others) employ Ukrainian specialists so that they can communicate directly with refugees, having the same language, cultural, and social background.”

Maryna Milashchuk,
Communication Manager,
Sme Spolu, Slovakia

The government, under the Lex Ukrajina framework, addressed the most pressing areas and, in coordination with the relevant ministries (such as the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, and Ministry of Education Science, Research and Sport), provided comprehensive information on the different ministerial websites and social media channels. Meanwhile, mainstream media outlets, such as Dennik N, SME, and Aktuality.sk, assumed a very active role from the beginning of the war in sharing pertinent information, including via Ukrainian language articles, to help Ukrainians address their needs.^{92,93,94,95}

This swift coordination at the regional level and among local governments in Slovakia was especially important in cities sharing a border-crossing point with Ukraine. Local governments managed to coordinate with volunteers, NGOs, and CSOs to ensure a smooth border-crossing process.^{96,97}

“The League for Mental Help, which has provided phone counselling services for Slovaks in need of mental health and psychological support, opened a dedicated Ukrainian helpline soon after Russia’s invasion. They have managed to incorporate Ukrainian refugee psychologists who now offer counselling to other people with similar experiences and serve as a helpline for survivors of gender-based violence survivors from Ukraine.”

Olga Pietruchova, Gender
Equality Expert, Slovakia

91 <https://smespolu.org/en/ukrainian-and-slovak-house-in-bratislava/>

92 <https://uzitocna.pravda.sk/ako-vybavit/clanok/620855-pobyt-praca-skola-lekar-davky-ake-prava-a-moznosti-maju-ukrajinski-odidenci-na-slovensku/>

93 <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/5KdV9VW/rady-pre-ukrajincov-ako-vybavit-doklady-ubytovanie-zdravotnu-pomoc-ci-skolu-pre-deti/>

94 <https://dennikn.sk/2761860/ako-pomoc-ludom-z-ukrajiny-a-ich-aktualnym-potrebam-prehľad-organizácii/>

95 <https://dennikn.sk/tema/po-ukrajinsky/>

96 <https://www.topky.sk/cl/10/2269179/Slovensko-ukazalo-solidaritu-Ukrajine--Obrovska-pomoc--Kroky-avizuju-mesta--aj-rozne-organizacie>

97 <https://kosicepreukrajinu.sk/>

Best practices and challenges

All told, governments and civil society have generally responded in a commendable way to the arrival of Ukrainian refugees in the countries explored in this report.

- ▶ The strong solidarity displayed by European and national governments, IOs, NGOs/CSOs, and different societies has ensured that initial assistance has swiftly reached those in need.
- ▶ The process has spurred a shift in regional perceptions among government officials, politicians, and the broader public about refugees. While the large inflows of persons from third countries into the EU in 2015 (the migration crisis) was characterized by predominantly young men, the composition of refugees from Ukraine, primarily women and children, tilted attitudes more favourably towards persons seeking protection and served as a learning experience in the region.
- ▶ In most country cases, efforts by government bodies, IOs, and NGOs/CSOs, including the involvement of Ukrainian-led organizations, gradually became more coordinated, ensuring complementarity in action, the comprehensive assessment of particular needs, and the professionalisation of smaller local actors.
- ▶ This refugee crisis has a female face at its core and has focused attention on gender issues and inequalities. The

UNHCR RRP has placed a particular emphasis on GBV elements in providing support to Ukrainian women refugees.

“The Ukrainian refugee crisis has a powerful female face, as most women are refugees but also at the frontline of helpdesks and present in providing services. Women have been intensely involved in the response to the refugee influx from the very beginning.”

Olga Pietruchova, Gender Equality Expert, Slovakia

Nevertheless, some **challenges and vulnerabilities** need to still be addressed, undergirded by the complexity of refugee flows and the diverse range of actors involved in implementing the aid response.

- ▶ Ukrainian women comprise the majority of people fleeing their country and they often come with children and without any support mechanisms. Two primary challenges faced by these refugees, consequently, involve securing suitable childcare services and job opportunities upon arrival in their new countries. The region generally lacks adequate space in pre-primary education facilities, presenting a problem both for Ukrainian women refugees and local women more generally. And infant care is especially difficult to find. Women, therefore, are forced to balance caring

for their children and finding employment. Part-time jobs often prove unsustainable and fail to contribute enough resources to cover monthly costs. And where temporary protection status is not sufficient to ensure full access to the labour market (Austria and Hungary), it can be exceedingly difficult to find a job.⁹⁸ While large companies are willing to cut through red tape and employ refugees, small businesses tend to struggle to navigate these processes. Furthermore, special childcare services for refugees are very limited, thereby constraining the ability of mothers with young children to attend language courses or start a full-time job. The need to ensure care for children, in fact, accounts for 71% of economically inactive refugees who have yet to seek employment in Czechia⁹⁹ and 35% in Hungary (where language is an additional impactful barrier to employment-21%).¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Interview with Claudia Lui, Head of the Diakonie Ukraine Advisory Center, Austria, March 2023.

⁹⁹ https://www.mpsv.cz/documents/20142/2786931/Analyza_situace_uprchliku_CENSUS_14072022.pdf/1650e3f6-8c1f-a2af-5f3a-b1acdb0bd0ee

¹⁰⁰ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/97062>

“We need to focus on their language education so that they can adapt better in Czech society. And we also need to make sure that childcare is available for mothers with young children so that they can attend language courses or start working. We also need to put in place mechanisms to prevent labour and sexual exploitation.”

Representative from the Office of the Czech Government Commissioner for Human Rights

- **Accommodation** has posed one of the greatest challenges from the outset. Ukrainian refugees in Hungary are entitled to state-provided accommodation for the entire duration of their stay under temporary protection status. Nevertheless, non-state actors have noted that accommodation arrangements provided by the National Directorate General for Disaster Management in Hungary, for example, are nearly always located in remote areas that are far from job opportunities. And temporary accommodation in Budapest is only accessible via NGO assistance.¹⁰¹ The openness of local populations in Austria, Czechia, and Slovakia to hosting Ukrainian refugees in their homes has provided a very short-term remedy to this challenge. But the overall movements of Ukrainian refugees into a region where real estate capacities were already limited before the invasion could later create issues. This is especially pertinent once state housing

subsidies are slashed and landlords potentially revert to seeking more long-term oriented housing contracts. Another concern is that public attitudes may shift more negative as the limited accommodation capacities in cities like Bratislava, Budapest, Prague, and Vienna spur real estate prices to rise further.¹⁰²

- Cases of **gender-based violence (GBV)** among Ukrainian refugees, often committed by housing providers, are starting to be reported.¹⁰³ An estimated one in five refugee women and girls have experienced **sexual violence** during their journeys from home and in accommodation facilities such as refugee camps and shelters.¹⁰⁴ “Women have been harassed, threatened, or illegally forced to pay for humanitarian housing and cases of violence, including sexual violence.”¹⁰⁵ One anonymous woman with a son, interviewed for a recent study conducted by the University of Vienna, shared that after a few weeks living with an Austrian family, the male host made a sexual advance that put her in an extremely stressful situation. Since she rejected his advances, she is now unsure where she and her son can go to be safe.¹⁰⁶ One of the main challenges pertains to the **lack of a vetting mechanism** to carry out background checks on accommodation providers.

“We have also monitored cases of violence against women from Ukraine, often committed by housing providers. We have encountered cases of women that have been harassed, threatened, or illegally forced to pay for humanitarian housing as well as cases of violence including sexual violence. We have also encountered cases of labour exploitation and even human trafficking. At a systemic level, the situation of women in these cases has been made even more challenging by limited re-housing options. This has led to many of these women facing homelessness or outright being forced to leave the Czech Republic and return to Ukraine.”

Representative from NGO Iniciativa Hlavák, Czechia

- Services dealing with **survivors of GBV** have not yet been sufficiently developed. There is, for example, currently only one operational referral pathway covering all eight regions in Slovakia.¹⁰⁷ The same is true for other vulnerable groups, such as LGBTIQ+ individuals and Roma women. In Hungary referral pathways are still to be developed and clearly disseminated.¹⁰⁸ More Ukrainian speaking operators are needed in centres with help lines – some cases have surfaced where only national-language-speaking staff who lacked knowledge of other languages were present.

¹⁰¹ <https://vsquare.org/ukrainian-refugees-in-hungary-volunteers-are-doing-the-governments-work/>

¹⁰² The real estate markets were still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic effects in 2022. And the energy crisis and the inflow of Ukrainian refugees now make it difficult to discern which factors are exerting the greatest impact on prices.

¹⁰³ <https://www.unhcr.org/ceu/48777-ukrainian-refugee-women-answering-the-call-for-their-compatriots-in-crisis.html>

¹⁰⁴ <https://theconversation.com/ukrainian-female-refugees-are-fleeing-a-war-but-in-some-cases-more-violence-awaits-them-where-they-find-shelter-179754>

¹⁰⁵ Interview with representative from NGO Iniciativa Hlavák, Czechia, March 2023.

¹⁰⁶ https://inex.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/p_inex/Rosenberger-Lazareva-Bericht_Ukraine_Vertriebene_.pdf

¹⁰⁷ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/97958>

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

These offices, therefore, were unable to provide necessary information to the individuals in need of assistance. This matter should be prioritised as an issue of high importance since any victims are already suffering from an endangered physical and mental state. The inability to receive assistance due to **language barriers** could lead to further traumatization.¹⁰⁹ Additionally, Ukrainian Roma women refugees have experienced even more complex challenges as an expert from Iniciativa Hlavák in Czechia shares:

“The main challenge has undoubtedly been the systemic discrimination that Ukrainian refugees of Roma descent have faced. This discrimination has resulted both in drastically reduced humanitarian housing options for Ukrainian Roma refugees as well as systemic administrative challenges that were specific to Roma refugees and affected their access to both the temporary protection status and any humanitarian care outside of Iniciativa Hlavák.”

► Cases of **labour exploitation** and even **human trafficking** have also been encountered. Ukrainian women refugees have faced expectations by some hosts that they should support the household (cooking and cleaning) with domestic work. And in some cases, they have been subjected to “companionship” requests.¹¹⁰ Concrete rigorous data on the pervasiveness of these types of exploitative arrangements, however, is currently lacking. Similarly, no data exists on the trafficking of Ukrainian women refugees and minors, including for sexual exploitation. Bordering countries (such as Slovakia and Hungary) have not been immune from such harmful and unlawful activities (though no cases have been officially recorded). This knowledge gap is hampering a more systematic response to prevent such incidences.

“Ensuring psychological help reach children and victims of atrocities such as sexual violence remains a challenge not just for war survivors. Unfortunately, there are not many specialized workers.”

Michal Zuna,
TOP 09, Czechia

► While Ukrainian refugees directly needed basic necessities, transportation access, and safe accommodation at the outset of the conflict, there is now a growing need on the part of women and child arrivals for **psychological help** in dealing with horrors that they have either witnessed or experienced. Though voluntary services have been provided by NGOs and Ukrainian-led organizations, a more comprehensive strategy and systematic state assistance is lacking.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Maryna Milashchuk, Sme Spolu Ukraine, Slovakia, March 2023.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Vitalia Bella, Dennik N, Slovakia, March 2023

Recommendations

EU institutions

- ▶ Consider strengthening the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), based on lessons learned from its first use, to assure more equitable guarantees and safeguards within all member states. While national flexibility of adopting is integral part of the Directive, studies like our reveals that refugees are provided support and basic services in very diverse manner.
- ▶ Coordinate a monitoring system focused on achieving TPD goals and collect detailed data to this end. Data, especially desegregated one based on women, children, and vulnerable groups, is still missing when it comes to Ukrainian refugees. Data-driven policymaking can lead to a more systematic ways in addressing particular risks and needs.
- ▶ Ensure better coordination, cooperation and sharing of information on challenges and best practices among the EU member states that are accepting Ukrainian refugees. Some challenges (as with access to accommodation, labour market, GBV, human trafficking, etc.) are common for almost all counties that host Ukrainian refugees. Yet, there are also best practices in addressing the challenges in systematic and creative ways. The EU institutions can serve as platform to exchange this vital information.
- ▶ Intensify strategic communication in support of Ukrainian refugees (from a gender-sensitive angle).

Focusing on the benefits that Ukrainian refugees bring to the host countries and the EU, could have a dual role in mitigating negative perceptions among local populations and in encouraging refugees, especially women and members of vulnerable groups, to seek more active social inclusion.

National governments

- ▶ Put in place mechanisms to prevent labour and sexual exploitation. These should include a registration, verification, and monitoring system for private assistance providers, including volunteer drivers and accommodation hosts (especially those sharing their household with refugees). Governments should require a more comprehensive initial registration process, conduct criminal background checks, and perform follow-up scrutiny.¹¹¹
- ▶ Ensure unrestricted access to the labour market (Austria and Hungary) and encourage job providers, through appropriate stimuli, to offer more flexible and suitable jobs that better fit the lives of women with younger children. Incentives might include one-time financial contributions, tax deductions, some sort of elevation of business status, and future benefits. While public institutions including schools and universities receive state financial support, private businesses should gain access to certain benefits too.
- ▶ In parallel to opening labour market opportunities, efforts need to also be made to ensure better access to childcare

services. As indicated by data from this report and elsewhere, Ukrainian women refugees with smaller children find themselves burdened by a lack of childcare support for their young children and a lack of steady and sustainable income. And where state-provided accommodation is located far from job opportunities (as in Hungary), women are particularly hindered by employment barriers. Prioritising the provision of childcare services for educated and skilled Ukrainian refugees, meanwhile, could help respond to the high demand for doctors, nurses, and teachers in the region. In Czechia, some creative solutions are being discussed, albeit only in the early stages, including “neighbourly childcare”.

- ▶ Provide full access to healthcare and social services for all groups of Ukrainian refugees. In some cases, Ukrainian refugees lack access to some social benefits that are only available to permanent residents. For example, parental leave assistance is not available for Ukrainian women under temporary protection. As a result, mothers with small children who cannot be enrolled in childcare in practice cannot look for a job. As a result, they live only on the minimal basic monthly state-provided allowance.¹¹²

¹¹¹ It should be acknowledged though that at the height of refugee inflows, the extensive vetting of housing providers would not have been possible without significantly delaying this assistance.

¹¹² Information based on an interview with Olga Pietruchova, Gender Equality Expert, Slovakia, March 2023.

State and non-state actors

- ▶ Employ Ukrainian-speaking staff (multiple languages) trained to support and provide psychological help to women and people seeking such help via call centre operators and coordinated helplines. This could also be organised in cooperation with local Ukrainian NGOs that have been performing similar work over the past year and can understand the context better and more comprehensively.
- ▶ Ensure that all service providers who work with Ukrainian refugees are trained about war trauma and provide trauma-sensitive services for refugees to reduce the risk of re-traumatising victims. War trauma relates differently to women, men, and children. It can be expressed in various forms, some leading to GBV against women, the inability to speak among children, etc. Constant training and information campaigns for service providers and the public are needed to minimize re-victimization.
- ▶ Strive towards social inclusion for Ukrainian children who face issues with access to education and enrolment in the school system in the host countries. These children are often still attending classes in Ukraine through online education and may stay home throughout the day, preventing their mothers from securing employment. After-school activities with peers in a supervised setting, including sharing experiences, teaming up for projects, or the 'buddy system' in Austria can serve as avenues for inclusion.
- ▶ Support towards social inclusion of all Ukrainian refugees should be further emphasised to ensure the day-to-day wellbeing of the refugees and to prevent possible negative shift of local population's perceptions. Language courses offered through state-provided or NGO-supported programmes should be organised and heavily promoted among refugees. With removing language barriers, the level of social inclusion but also employment for adults and school integration for children would more likely also increase.
- ▶ To address GBV and human trafficking, there is a need to develop comprehensive counter-violence and counter-trafficking responses in partnership with all actors (governments, IOs, and specialist NGOs). Measures should also be introduced to adapt existing policies and programmes to the needs of Ukrainian refugees given the gender and age composition and related vulnerabilities of arrivals. A strong focus should be placed on gender protections and prevention to help protect people from all forms of exploitation and abuse•

ANNEX 1

List of interviews

1. Representative from the Office of the Government Commissioner for Human Rights, Czechia
2. Andrea Krchova, Director, Consortium of Migrants Assisting Organizations, Czechia
3. Juliette Stevenson, UNHCR Representation Central Europe (Covering Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia)
4. Ukrainian woman in Czechia – anonymous
5. Representative from Department for Asylum and Migration Policy, Ministry of Interior, Czechia
6. Representative from Iniciativa Hlavák, NGO working with refugees, Czechia
7. Michal Zuna, Member of Parliament, TOP 09, Czechia
8. Claudia Lui, Head of the Diakonie Ukraine advisory centre (Diakonie Österreich Beratungszentrum Ukraine), Austria
9. Valeriya Kaiser, Verein Matusya, Austria
10. Maryna Milashchuk, Communication manager, Sme Spolu, Slovakia
11. Corina Iovescu, Reporting Officer, UNHCR Representation Central Europe
12. Lesya Jakab, Volunteer, Ukrainian diaspora, Hungary
13. Vitalia Bella, Deputy Editor-in-chief, Dennik N, Slovakia
14. Miroslava Mittlemannova, Programme Director, Human Rights League, Slovakia
15. Olga Pietruchova, Gender equality expert, Slovakia

Notes

