Regional Refugee Response for the Ukraine Situation

SLOVAKIA
DECEMBER 2024

SITE MAPPING AND MONITORING

#2 Round | Analysis on collective accommodation

Bratislava, Slovakia. Accommodation center in Petrzalka hosting refugees coming from Ukraine. © Samo Šóth

Introduction

Site Mapping and Monitoring (SMM) is a joint initiative of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and International Organization for Migration (IOM), initiated in 2022, which aims to ensure an adequate and timely understanding of the situation and needs of the accommodation sites in Slovakia. The results-oriented nature of SMM allows UNHCR and IOM, as well as their partners, to better inform their response programmes in particular by adapting prevention, advocacy, assistance and policy interventions tailored to the needs of accommodation sites hosting refugees. This assessment covers accommodation sites in all regions in the country, and provides information on the type, capacity and services at these sites.

Methodology and limitations

As a first stage, accommodation sites for refugees coming from Ukraine who entered Slovakia were identified across the country. This mapping process was a continuous coordinated effort through the Refugee Coordination Forum[1] and the Information Management Working Group,[2] including government entities, humanitarian actors and other relevant stakeholders, to collaborate on this initiative, increasing the list of accommodation sites since 2022. However, it does not contain all accommodation facilities in the country, and results presented in this document represent an analysis of those sites mapped and contacted during the data collection exercise.

Data collection is the second round of 2024 under this exercise,[3] conducted between October and November 2024 through a structured survey questionnaire developed for key informants and conducted with site managers or responsible personnel at each site, by UNHCR, IOM and Slovak Humanitarian Council (SHC) trained enumerators, by phone and through in-person interviews. The analysis presents the situation of 86 accommodation sites in all regions across the country.

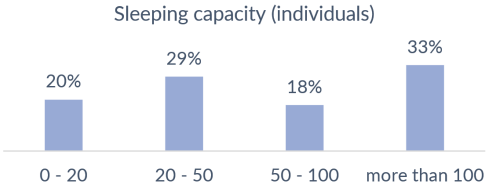
Results are based on the responses of the site manager or responsible person at the site; there was no on-site verification of the information shared. On many occasions, the site managers were not available or willing to participate. Therefore, from the total 200 accommodation sites mapped, 138 were contacted and 86 participated in the interview. Out of those, 45 remained open and hosting refugees, 30 were open but no longer hosting refugees, two were about to close and eight had already closed. The results presented in this document reflect the responses provided by the staff of the 45 sites that remain open and hosting refugees, hosting in total around 1,800 refugees at the time of the interview.

UNHCR, IOM and SHC have put in place a follow up mechanism to take necessary action for any protection incidents cases identified during this process.

1 RCF – Refugee Coordination Forum - online
2 IMWG – Information Management Working Group - online
3 Site Mapping and Monitoring - Round 1 - 2024 - online

Overview

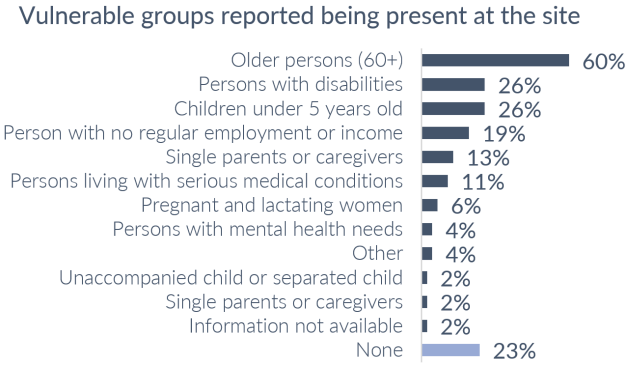
Out of the total 45 accommodation sites surveyed and open at the time of the interview, 78% of the sites reported being owned by private companies or individuals, 11% by government or municipality, and the remaining by religious or faith-based organizations. Most sites (74%) reported being managed by a private entity or individual,[4] 13% by the government and the rest by religious or faith-based organizations. Regarding the sleeping capacity, 35% of these sites were large centers with capacity to host over 100 individuals.



Some 76% of the sites reported an average stay of more than 6 months. Prolonged stays in collective sites may increase protection risks as it is generally recommended that collective sites are used in short term, followed by transition to more adequate, medium-term to long-term housing solutions.

Vulnerable groups

Site managers were asked about vulnerable groups hosted at the site at the time of the interview. Almost one-quarter of sites reported not hosting persons with specific vulnerabilities. However, more than half (60%) of accommodation sites hosted older persons (over 65 years old), 26% hosted persons with disabilities and 26% hosted children under 5 years old.[5] This raises concerns as the majority of centers are not properly equipped and prepared to host persons with disabilities or older persons. The data suggests a concerning trend of high number of older persons residing at collective sites. This situation warrants a more detailed examination, as it could be associated with the insufficient availability of care facilities for older persons from Ukraine throughout Slovakia.



Infrastructure

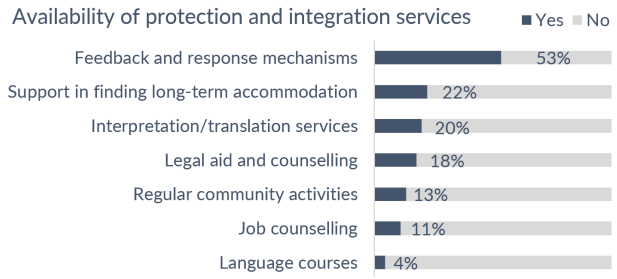
The analysis also examined the infrastructure situation of the centers. The majority of the site managers (98%) reported providing family rooms, and 62% of all sites have rooms separated by gender. Out of all sites surveyed, 36% reported having toilets accessible for persons with disabilities, and similar percentage (33%) reported having accessible showers.

No major structural issues were reported by site managers; 61% of managers did not report any major structural damage. However, cases of minor structural issues, and need for better accessibility for persons with disabilities were mentioned.

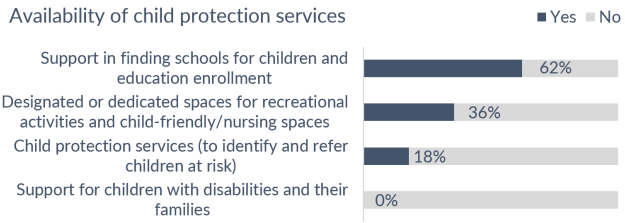
Services and Assistance

Site managers or responsible personnel were interviewed about on-site services and information provided to individuals accommodated at the sites, and/or in the proximities to the centers.

The most cited service available in the surveyed sites are feedback and response mechanisms, reported by 53% of site managers. Comparing with the previous round of the exercise,[6] the percentage of sites reporting having legal aid and counselling services decreased from 37% at the beginning of the year, to 18%. Similarly, support with finding long-term accommodation was reported by 22% of surveyed sites, resulting in a decrease from the first half of the year (54%). With regards to other integration services, only 13% of site managers reported having regular community activities, and only 11% mentioned providing job counselling at the site.



Regarding services to identify and refer children at risk, majority of sites (82%) reported these services as unavailable at the sites or in the proximity. Additional sources of information[7] revealed higher perception of risks for children residing in collective centers, such as risks to their mental health and wellbeing, and vulnerability to neglect.



4 List of collective sites includes those previously supported by Ministry of Transport scheme; most of them privately managed.
5 Multiple responses were possible, so percentages can go over 100% when added.
6 Site Mapping and Monitoring - Round 1 - 2024 - online
7 Multi-sector Needs Assessment 2023 – Slovakia - online

Site managers were also asked about the availability of specific support and assistance for children with disabilities and their families. No site manager reported having this specific support at the site.[8] Majority of site managers (81%) reported schools available in the proximities, and in 62% of cases, the centers provided support to find schools for refugee children hosted at the site. However, more than half of the accommodation centers (65%) reported not having dedicated spaces for recreational activities for children.

All site managers mentioned availability of basic primary medical care at the site or in the proximities. However, only 7% reported specifically having mental health and psychosocial support.

An important gap was identified from the analysis on gender-based violence (GBV) and prevention from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA). The majority of site managers (84%) reported their staff not being trained on these topics, and only 18% had a written protocol for handling GBV and PSEA cases in place. Further analysis from other sources of information[9] revealed higher concerns regarding security faced by women and men when hosted in collective sites.

Results obtained on accountability to affected population show that 53% of site managers reported having feedback and complaint mechanism at the center, with more than two-thirds of them (70%) being confidential and accessible to anyone.

Accommodation subsidy program

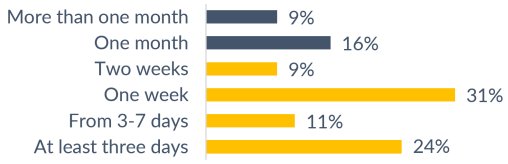
Due to the accommodation and housing situation in the country,[10] the survey also analyzed the situation of those sites supported by the government subsidy program, and the impact on refugees hosted at those centers with regards to possible changes to this scheme.

Out of the total sites surveyed, 76% of site managers expressed their centers would continue hosting refugees in the coming months.[11] Meanwhile, 55% of the site managers reported not being eligible to receive government subsidies, 17% were not sure, and 28% confirmed receiving these subsidies. This represents an important decrease compared to previous results,[12] when 88% reported receiving government subsidies. In addition, out of the 28% (13 sites) receiving government subsidies, 10 site managers mentioned also hosting refugees that do not fall under the critera of the government subsidy program. In majority of these sites (9 sites), managers said refugees contribute financially to accommodation costs.

Sites reported receiving government subsidies

This situation has a direct impact on the protection and wellbeing of refugees. Almost three-quarters of the sites (76%) mentioned a notice period of two weeks or less, increasing the uncertainty on refugees' housing situation and difficulty to plan ahead.

Notice period to leave the site



In light of the anticipated amendments to the accommodation subsidy scheme,[13] the data on the intentions of the collective site owners or managers indicate potential protection risks. This is particularly significant when considering the number of vulnerable persons living in these collective sites, including older persons and persons with disabilities. The likelihood that these groups may not be able to access adequate housing shall be thoughtfully taken into account.

EXPLANATORY NOTE:

Since February 2024, the Government of Slovakia decreased the accommodation subsidies by 50% compared to the previous levels. Additionally, in March 2024, the subsidy schemes were valid only until the end of March. At the time when some interviews were conducted, there was uncertainty if the Government of Slovakia intended to extend the subsidy scheme or not. On 20 March 2024, the government announced extension of its subsidy scheme for providing accommodation to Temporary Protection holders in Slovakia. The subsidy schemes have been extended until 30 June 2024. Official information is available here. Briefly, the subsidy schemes are:

1. The subsidy paid to the private owners of apartments and houses continue to be 5€ per night per Temporary Protection holder.
2. The subsidy paid to the commercial owners of accommodation (hotels, hostels, etc.) continues to be max. €6 per night per Temporary Protection holder.

Entering into force on 1 July 2024, the Slovak Parliament adopted amendments presenting a major shift from providing subsidies for providing accommodation to all temporary protection holders towards provision of support for accommodation of selected target groups and fully discontinuing financial support to commercial accommodation providers, which was previously under the Ministry of Transport. As of 1 July 2024, the subsidy is provided for the accommodation of a temporary protection holder:

1. For 120 days from the date of the first provision of temporary protection (TPD) in the territory of the Slovak Republic, for all new arrivals regardless of their additional vulnerabilities (as of 1 March 2025 for 60 days, see below)

2. Who is a vulnerable person, meaning:
a. a member of a household who is a recipient of assistance in material need,
b. a person with a severe disability receiving disability allowance for refugees,
c. a person over 65 years of age,
d. a parent/caregiver who is caring for a child under the age of five years, (including the child under the age of five years).

The adopted amendments narrowed the eligibility criteria for receiving the financial support for providing accommodation to refugees. As of 1 July 2024, the eligible recipients are the following:

- *a person who owns a property serving for housing in its territorial district, which provides free of charge accommodation to the refugee,*
- *the accommodation allowance is provided in the amount 5 euros for one night accommodation of the refugee (from 390 to 900 euros depending on the number of habitable rooms).*
- *a legal person who provides free accommodation to the refugee in a non-residential building serving for provision of short-term accommodation - provided that they do not run business in the field of accommodation services.*
- *From 1 July 2024, legal entities operating in the field of accommodation services are no longer entitled to the allowance for accommodation of visitors.*
- *a municipality or a higher territorial unit if they provide free of charge accommodation to refugee.*
- *accommodation allowance is provided in the amount 6 euros for one night accommodation of the refugee.*

Official information is available here.

28 November 2024, the Slovak Parliament adopted an amendment to Act No. 480/2002 Coll. on Asylum concerning accommodation support for the newly arriving temporary protection (TP) holders. The accommodation subsidies for newly arriving will be shortened from the current 120 days to 60 days from the date of the first provision of TP. This change takes effect on 1 March 2025. If people are granted the TP for the first time in Slovakia before this date (i.e. by 28 February 2025), the current 120-day period still applies. The accommodation subsidies for the defined vulnerable people remains unchanged.

8 No information was obtained on the number of children with disabilities hosted at the sites at the moment of the interview.
9 Multi-sector Needs Assessment 2023 – Slovakia - online
10 Please see the explanatory note on page 4.
11 Please see the explanatory note on page 4.
12 Site Mapping and Monitoring - Round 1 - 2024 - online
13 Please see the explanatory note on page 4.

Conclusions

After four months since the changes of the accommodation subsidy program in the country, results of the Site Mapping and Monitoring reveals that the accommodation situation remains challenging, and refugees identified accommodation as their first priority in 2024.[14]

Half of the surveyed collective sites reported accommodating persons with different specific needs, including older persons (60%), persons with disabilities (26%), or children under 5 years old (26%). In addition, majority of the sites (58%) reported having no equipment to address the needs of older persons and persons with disabilities, 42% of the surveyed sites reported not being accessible for persons with disabilities, 62% did not have disability-accessible showers, and 56% did not have disability-accessible toilets.

Despite the challenges outlined, the Site Mapping and Monitoring showed important positive results. First and foremost, the accommodation subsidy scheme provided by the government facilitated access to accommodation for a significant number of refugees in Slovakia. The survey findings indicate that a majority of the sites surveyed are committed to continuing their support for refugees, with a proportion of them prepared to host refugees. Accommodation in collective sites represents a vital element of the complex housing support and an important aspect of humanitarian efforts linked to sustainable housing solutions. Moreover, the implementation of feedback and complaint mechanisms in 53% of the sites reflects a growing emphasis on accountability and continuous improvement in service delivery. These efforts signal a constructive path forward for enhancing the overall wellbeing of refugees in Slovakia.

14 Slovakia Socio-Economic Insights Survey 2024: online

Joint initiative of:

UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency

IOM UN MIGRATION

Supported by:

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Access more information on:

Site Mapping & Monitoring interactive Dashboard