UKRAINE SITUATION

2024 REGIONAL REFUGEE RESPONSE PLAN

PLANNING PARAMETERS

States have the primary responsibility to protect refugees. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is mandated to provide international protection to refugees and to support the efforts of host governments by seeking funding for and coordinating assistance provided by the many stakeholders outlined in the Global Compact on Refugees. This is captured in the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM).

A Refugee Response Plan (RRP) is an inter-agency planning, coordination, and fundraising tool that contributes to operationalizing the RCM. It is designed to support host government responses to refugee situations through international solidarity. Efforts are made to link RRPs to ongoing national efforts, plans, and policies to ensure protection and solutions for refugees and to build on host government responsibilities, approaches, and capacities.

For the purposes of brevity, the term “refugees from Ukraine” will be used henceforth, and is understood to include refugees from Ukraine, as well as third-country nationals in need of international protection and people who are stateless or at risk of statelessness as appropriate. Third-country nationals are persons who have fled Ukraine but for whom Ukraine is not their country of origin, and who may be in need of international protection.

The purpose of this note is to guide partners responding to refugees fleeing the full-scale war in Ukraine through the 2024 RRP planning process.

1. Background

The war in Ukraine, which escalated following Russia’s large-scale invasion in February 2022, has resulted in a displacement and humanitarian crisis of epic proportions. The response by the refugee-hosting countries, led by national and municipal authorities across the region, has been remarkable: non-governmental organizations, civil society actors and local volunteers – many of whom had not previously worked in refugee (emergency) contexts – as well as Ukrainian diaspora communities, and refugees themselves all mobilized to provide protection, essential services, and assistance to those fleeing violence.

At the same time, humanitarian partners, under the overall leadership of host governments, have supported and complemented the national response, through coordinated and inclusive interventions. Many of these activities were captured in the original RRP for the Ukraine Situation, launched in early March 2022, revised in April 2022, and recalibrated in October 2022 to capture evolutions in the situation and better prepare for the response during the winter months. A subsequent RRP, launched in February 2023, covered the plans for that year, focusing increasingly on the socio-economic inclusion of refugees in their host communities.

Looking forward to 2024, it is forecasted that – barring unexpected developments - newly displaced refugee movements into neighboring countries and beyond will significantly decrease as compared to the first years of the response. Based on data provided by governments and available on the

UNHCR Operational Data Portal, close to 6 million refugees from Ukraine are currently hosted across Europe of which about 84 per cent are women and children and 16 per cent are men,[1] including some 5 million who have applied for asylum, temporary protection, or a similar national protection scheme. Amongst refugees, 23 per cent of households indicated having at least one member with specific needs such as a disability or a serious medical condition. The top 5 oblasts of origin are Kyivska, Odeska, Kharkivska, Dnipropetrovska and Khersonska.

Short visits by refugees to check on family and property in their home countries will continue to occur, leading to significant movements between Ukraine and refugee-hosting countries. Return intentions among the displaced population have remained relatively stable over time. Based on UNHCR's latest Regional Intentions Report from July 2023,[2] most refugees hope to return to Ukraine one day (62 per cent) but only 14 per cent in the next three months.

2. Strategic Objectives

The 2024 RRP is organized around 4 broad objectives and 6 cross-cutting considerations supporting and complementing refugee hosting countries' national response:

a. **Refugees have effective access to legal status, protection, and rights in host countries.** On 4 March 2022, the Council of the European Union triggered the application of the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) for an initial period of one year, which has since been extended for another year, until 4 March 2024. The activation of the Directive was a crucial milestone, providing refugees from Ukraine access to safety, legal status, rights, and services in the EU. Many other countries have implemented similar legal regimes for refugees displaced by the international armed conflict in Ukraine.

While the TPD has been shown to be an effective tool to respond to the mass arrival of refugees from Ukraine, inconsistent implementation of the Directive across Member States can lead to more restrictive approaches being adopted. This can prevent refugees from effectively accessing legal status, rights, and protection in host countries, especially those in vulnerable situations, as well as some groups, such as minorities and TCNs, being denied access to rights under TPD.

Many refugees have engaged in short-term visits to Ukraine since their arrival in host countries, primarily to visit relatives who remained behind, obtain documents, make health care appointments, check on property, and access social services (such as medical care, medical prescriptions, etc.).

Most refugees report that they do not intend to permanently return to Ukraine in the immediate future, primarily due to continuing war and security concerns. It would not be appropriate at the current time to promote returns to Ukraine. Therefore, it is crucial that should individual refugees decide to return to Ukraine these decisions must be truly voluntary, well-informed, and arrived upon without push factors and inducements for premature return, including the provision of return cash grants or restrictions on refugees' ability to access protection, rights, and assistance in host countries. In June 2023 UNHCR issued a Position on Voluntary Returns to Ukraine. UNHCR also reiterated that the Office's March 2022 non-return advisory, which called for the suspension of forcible returns to Ukraine, remains valid.

Some refugees who temporarily visited Ukraine reported experiencing difficulties upon their return to their host countries, mainly due to deactivation of temporary protection status,

[1] Regional Protection Profiling and Monitoring
[2] Lives on Hold: Intentions and Perspectives of Refugees and IDPs from Ukraine, July 2023.

difficulty crossing back into the host country, and suspension of benefits previously enjoyed in the country of asylum. UNHCR recommends that an individual's legal status and associated rights in a host country are not affected by a visit to Ukraine lasting less than three months. In the event of longer-term travel, UNHCR recommends that host States temporarily de-activate legal status rather than withdrawing it or de-registering individuals in order to avoid administrative burdens and facilitate renewed access to protection if required.

Within the EU, discussions regarding the future of temporary protection arrangements are currently underway. It will be crucial to ensure that all individuals who are unable to return to Ukraine and who remain in need of international protection at the point when temporary protection comes to an end, continue to receive protection and access to rights in host countries in line with international law. A coordinated and harmonized approach among hosting states towards the post-temporary protection period will be important to avoid undermining the effective cooperation and responsibility-sharing which has characterized the international response to the Ukraine refugee situation.

In light of these challenges, key activities in 2024 in support of refugees from Ukraine in host countries will remain monitoring intentions, ensuring access to protection and rights, strengthening advocacy vis-à-vis governments and regional institutions, including on issues such as support to coordination of legislative and policy mechanisms of TPD across the region, supporting effective communication with refugee and host communities, including providing access to information on available legal statuses, legal support (including access to documentation), and avenues for assistance.

b. **Refugees with specific needs and vulnerabilities have access to targeted support and assistance.** According to UNHCR's latest Regional Protection Analysis, some 84 per cent of refugees from Ukraine are women and children and 22 per cent of households interviewed contain at least one member with a specific need, such as persons with disabilities, serious medical conditions, and older people. Based on the results of UNHCR protection monitoring, the rate of family separation among the refugees from Ukraine is 70 per cent, and 4 per cent of households include separated children, exposing children to additional risks, including increased exposure to sexual violence, trafficking, exploitation and abuse, and gender-based violence (GBV). This also requires access to services from relevant protection actors. Households with specific vulnerabilities may encounter difficulties meeting their socio-economic needs in host countries, leading to increased protection risks and potential pressure on return decisions, even with suboptimal conditions in Ukraine. Indeed, analysis shows that the most important drivers or predictors of refugees planning to return in the short term are related to heightened vulnerability and challenges to sustain themselves in their host countries. As aid is scaled down the potential for premature returns or returns in adverse conditions increases, as does the risk of resorting to harmful coping mechanisms.

In light of these challenges, efforts will be required to systematically identify persons with specific needs and provide targeted assistance, including through case management, cash programming, holistic inclusion initiatives, and effective inclusion in social protection programmes for those unable to work due to age, health concerns, or lack of employment opportunities. Targeted support will complement or enhance government services to persons with specific needs, including in the prevention and response to GBV, provision of mental health and psychosocial support, disability inclusion and in the protection of women and children.

Disruption of key services can be extremely detrimental to young children who face compounded risks to their development. Reflective of these challenges, an integrated set of early childhood development services across health, nutrition, education, and child protection is needed, with particular attention to supporting parents of young children in providing nurturing

care. Continued efforts should be made to ensure the inclusion of refugee children at risk, in particular those without parental care, in the national child protection systems of refugee-hosting countries, inter-alia, making sure that their alternative care arrangements are in line with their best interests. This may include vetting, registration and support to families hosting refugee children. Households headed by older persons with children may also require targeted interventions and support.

Despite great efforts from the host countries and entitlement to equal access to health services for refugees, Ukrainian refugees continue facing barriers to accessing health care. Thus, sustained efforts should be made in ensuring equitable and equal access to quality health services. This includes supporting countries in strengthening their health system, including the prevention and treatment of priority health concerns such as non-communicable diseases, maternal, newborn and child health, communicable diseases such as vaccine preventable diseases, TB, HIV, etc. Sustained efforts are required to support health workforce capacity, addressing policy and legal frameworks, mitigating protection-related health risks, strengthening provision of information on health service availability, and supporting health care financing to allow equal access to health services. This will include improved health and well-being of refugees with heightened vulnerability, such as children and women as well as ethnic minorities, LGBTQI+ persons, older persons, and persons with disabilities and/or specific needs. Continued support to countries is needed in gathering and disseminating information on the prevailing access gaps and good practices regarding access to health services, including sexual and reproductive health (SRH) information and services.

Integrated delivery of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) across the response, in areas such as health, protection, child protection, GBV, anti-trafficking and victims' assistance, education, and livelihoods remains essential. This requires a multi-layered approach that includes strengthening supportive systems for families and communities. Steps include assuring the delivery of community based psychosocial activities and interventions that build on existing individual and community resources, resilience, and capacities. Providing psychosocial support through case management and scalable psychological interventions that can be implemented by both trained and supervised specialists and non-specialists, as well as access to clinical mental health care for those in need of specialized services.

Access to affordable housing remains a challenge in some areas, and collective accommodation sites continue to be used to house refugees for extended periods of time. Concerted efforts are required to ensure access to social housing or targeted support to cover the costs of longer-term independent housing, particularly for vulnerable refugees. Collective sites should be incrementally closed as longer-term accommodation arrangements are made available to refugees, in collaboration with municipalities, on a no-harm basis, and with the best interest of residents in mind.

Strengthening safe access to holistic, quality GBV multi-sectoral response services, including case management, safety options, health, including SRH, psychosocial support, and legal assistance, will continue to be critical in preventing, mitigating, and responding to GBV. Language and cultural sensitivities play an important role. Collaboration with government agencies and international, national, and local organizations and service providers to strengthen the delivery of GBV services and coordination across specialized responses will be key. Similarly, activities to minimize GBV risks within communities and across the humanitarian landscape will continue to be essential. Partner capacity enhancement, awareness campaigns and community engagement initiatives challenge harmful norms and promote gender equality and the participation of women and girls.

Addressing the specific vulnerabilities and needs of older refugees is important to ensure their dignity, safety, and effective inclusion within the humanitarian response. Many of them have

experienced trauma and loss during war and displacement, increasing risks for MHPSS issues and other health risks, including the deterioration of chronic conditions or emergence of new ones that demand adequate support. Physical challenges, financial difficulties, language barriers, and limited access to resources can hinder their ability to meet basic needs and access essential services. Additionally, older refugees may encounter social isolation and lack of family support, which can adversely impact their overall well-being.

Further efforts should be made for the identification and inclusion of refugees with disabilities in national services, including through the recognition of disability certificates issued in Ukraine, accessible accommodation, identifying and mitigating the barriers to services, availability of accessible information and communication, and further engagement and working with organizations of persons with disabilities.

c. **Refugees' socio-economic inclusion in their host communities is strengthened and their self-reliance increased.** Through the application of the TPD across the region, refugees from Ukraine have the right to work, receive government support in terms of social welfare, specialized social services and medical assistance, and have access to the education system and accommodation. These provisions are critical to increasing refugees' self-reliance and independence and enabling them to contribute to the local economy.

Despite the favorable legal environment of TPD commitments from host governments, there are specific groups and profiles who face challenges in effectively accessing rights in their current locations, limiting their prospects for socio-economic inclusion in host countries. Employment remains a pressing concern for refugees – with 34% counting it among their top three priority needs and 52% working at a lower level than in Ukraine. Refugees, particularly women, remain susceptible to labor rights abuses and other forms of exploitation, including trafficking for forced labor, as a result of precarious working conditions, work in the informal sector, lack of knowledge of legal provisions and workers' rights in host countries, and lack of knowledge of where to turn in case of labor right violations.

Those experiencing difficulties accessing decent work report higher reliance on social protection benefits, and a corresponding lower ability to meet their basic needs and access stable accommodation. Further investments are needed to offer relevant language courses, address skills mismatches through job-matching, re- and upskilling, such as skills and qualifications recognition, provide information and counseling to refugees and the private sector, strengthen access to business development and financial services, expand access to childcare, and facilitate coordination among stakeholders. Increasing long-term independent housing opportunities, including for vulnerable groups, will remain vital to enhance socio-economic inclusion prospects.

Access to government social protection benefits is one of the main income sources for refugees and is fundamental to reduce protection risks, while enabling refugees to progressively become self-reliant. Further progress on ensuring that governments meet TP social protection commitments, that refugees can access adequate levels of benefits, and that longer-term access to benefits and services is maintained through other legal pathways beyond TP can all be supported in three ways: (i) increase support for refugees to access social assistance benefits, working closely with local civil society and refugee-led organizations, and specific targeting of assistance to fill gaps in government coverage; (ii) ramping up partnerships with municipalities and continued technical assistance to line ministries to ensure benefits and service delivery, promote referrals and ensure space to absorb refugees; and (iii) reinforcement of links to and capacity of national Integration Programmes of the Asylum System as an alternative route to TP to access social protection.

Continued advocacy for the increased enrolment and inclusion of refugee children and youth in national education systems of host countries is critical to mitigate long-term detrimental effects of forced displacement on child development and learning. Available data show that current enrolment rates of Ukrainian children in national school systems in EU countries average around 40-50%. This low enrolment rate is due in part to a persistent hesitancy by parents to enroll children and youth in host country education systems, lack of physical space and learning infrastructure in schools, teacher shortages, and insufficiencies in preparatory classes and language support programmes in some major refugee hosting countries. Compounding this is the choice of many parents and displaced learners to rely exclusively on distance learning, on-line education, and other forms of non-formal education while being displaced (including following on-line curriculum made available by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine). The result is that hundreds of thousands of children and youth are at risk of remaining out of school in 2023-2024, which marks the 3rd interrupted school year due to the war in Ukraine.[3]

Education support for refugee children and youth from Ukraine has moved from immediate assistance (e.g., provision of safe spaces for children, psychosocial first-aid, non-formal education) to longer-term inclusion and enrolment in national education systems of host countries. A key priority is to bringing refugee children and youth back into formal face-to-face education settings where they can benefit from long-term stability in education, social interaction with host communities, and in-school support. Efforts in education should therefore focus on systems strengthening in host country education systems and support to parents and displaced learners to access education in host countries. This needs to go hand-in-hand with a phase-out of lower-quality and unsustainable forms of non-formal education.

Activities in 2024 should therefore focus on supporting States to strengthen the inclusion of refugees within national education systems, for example by providing language education and preparatory programmes in schools, building capacity in schools, mobilizing staff and resources, and extending mental health and psychosocial support services. This should include initiatives aimed at reducing bullying and violence in schools, as well as promoting social cohesion. Particular attention should be paid to adolescents who are over the age limit of compulsory education and who are at greater risk of dropping out or never entering education in a host country. Close cooperation will be needed with States, including the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (MoES), to coordinate approaches and to better inform parents on educational options available to their children and the benefits of inclusion in national education systems.

d. **The social cohesion between refugee and host communities is reinforced.** The generosity shown towards refugees from Ukraine has been outstanding but as the war enters its third year and as host communities face increasing costs of living, additional burdens on services, and other socioeconomic challenges, including limited housing, means there are locations displaying increasing examples of this welcome turning into fatigue. Countering disinformation and shaping the narrative and language used in a way that is positive, honest, and promotes peaceful coexistence activities will be key.

Particularly in contexts of limited resources and overstretched systems, host communities will require continued support as they extend their services and assistance to refugees. This support to host communities should focus on institutions and facilities used both by refugees and members of host communities, with a view to alleviating pressures that could give rise to tensions and constrict asylum and protection space. Attention should be paid to how resources

[3] Back to school in times of war – education of refugee children and youth from Ukraine in Europe, publication forthcoming.

under strain can be expanded, meaning that partners should gather evidence and design interventions at the local rather than at the national level. Examples of such interventions include building or refurbishing additional classrooms, supporting renovations of municipal housing stock, expanding community centers, introducing scalable approaches to mental health services, or expanding and supporting national health facilities. Skills recognition and allowing refugees to employ their know-how to expand limited services – teachers, psychologists, doctors, nurses, etc. – creates a win-win, serving both the refugee and host communities.

Social cohesion will be affected by how successfully partners support governments to resolve the cost of living and housing crisis. While housing provision for refugees will need to be locally led and managed, partners will need to advocate for central government intervention on both demand-side housing assistance to individuals and households, and supply-side interventions that aim to stimulate affordable housing construction and free up unoccupied properties, along with improved regulation of the private rental sector.

Engaging local municipal structures, civil society, and refugee-led organizations (RLOs) in the response is important, as they play a vital role in addressing the diverse needs and vulnerabilities of refugees. Municipalities, local civil society and RLOs often have a deep understanding of the local context, culture, and community dynamics, enabling them to establish trust and rapport with refugees. Their proximity to the affected population allows for more effective and targeted service delivery, ensuring that assistance is tailored to meet the specific needs of refugees.

3. Cross-cutting considerations

a. **Government ownership at national and municipal level.** As was made clear from the outset of the response, humanitarian actors support governments and cannot substitute for state/EU action. As governments continue to own, lead, and have responsibility for the response at national and municipal levels there remains a need for continued solidarity from the international community and practical, specialized support from humanitarian and development organizations.

b. **Maintaining emergency capacities.** While the response is now focused on effective inclusion in national systems and services, sustaining protection space, and targeted support to the most vulnerable, capacities to ensure immediate assistance to new arrivals and to scale up in case of a surge in refugee movements will also be maintained.

c. **Participation by local NGOs, RLOs and other civil society organizations.** Collective and concerted efforts should continue to ensure that national NGOs and RLOs – who have played a critical role from the outset of the response – have visibility with donors, are able to access funding and capacity-building opportunities, and receive recognition for the central role they continue to play. This includes women-led organizations and local organizations working for LGBTIQ+ persons and persons with disabilities.

d. **Age, Gender, and Diversity.** Age, Gender, and Diversity (AGD) considerations should guide all the aspects of RRP partners' work. Collective effort is needed to ensure continuous and meaningful engagement with persons of concern, understanding their needs and protection risks through AGD responsive assessments and monitoring, building on their capacities and

pursuing protection, assistance and solutions that take into account their perspectives and priorities.

e. **Accountability to Affected Populations.** RRP partners will commit to the intentional and systematic inclusion of the expressed needs, concerns, capacities, and views of refugees and other affected persons in their diversity and being answerable for organizational decisions and staff actions, in all protection, assistance and solutions interventions and programmes. Feedback and response mechanisms and communication with community channels in all phases will remain crucial to ensuring that refugees are involved in decisions that directly impact their lives.

f. **Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.** All partners participating in the RRP should know and apply the IASC standards of conduct applicable to humanitarian workers and understand their responsibilities in terms of reporting SEA allegations and promoting a victim-centered approach. Refuges and other recipients of assistance must have access to safe, gender- and child-sensitive feedback and complaints mechanisms and information about PSEA, and victims should have access to timely assistance and services. Efforts should be made to ensure regional exchange, learning and documentation of good practices and supporting authorities to strengthen safeguarding and PSEA approaches.

4. Geographic scope

The 2024 RRP will have the same coverage as in 2023, with country chapters covering Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Republic of Moldova, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia.

5. Population planning figures

The planning figures in the RRP have been developed in consultation with inter-agency partners and government counterparts to reflect the projected population that will require assistance in 2024.

The RRP target population figures include refugees, as well as TCNs in need of international protection and people who are stateless or at risk of statelessness (e.g. the Roma population). The planning figures assume that all refugees and asylum-seekers will benefit from legal support. For the host community, figures are calculated based on those who are affected by new arrivals, for example due to their location and who will benefit from initiatives that aid refugees as well as host communities.

Individual members of the host community are included in the target population figures only for Moldova where the pressures of hosting refugees have particularly strained local capacity and put strain on scarce resources. Within the EU, host community members are not included in the RRP as individuals targeted for assistance, rather activities under the plan will benefit impacted host populations at the community level, with an eye to expanding community resources and services that may be under strain due to the presence of the refugee population.

The 2024 population planning figures reflect a reduction from 2023 as some refugees and others in need of protection in RRP countries in 2024 have moved outside the geographic scope of the RRP and the remaining population is projected to be more stable in number, with fewer new arrivals and newly displaced persons in transit. The refugee population figures for most RRP countries were

revised downward in 2023 based on Temporary Protection re-registration exercises conducted by governments.

Should the circumstances change, partners will have the flexibility to review the planning figures and update the requirements in the RRP accordingly and will seek to be prepared to quickly scale up their operations alongside and in support of host States.

The figures below are still subject to discussion and agreement with governments and may change.

Countries	2024 RRP Population Planning Figures
Bulgaria	**70,000**
Czechia	**400,000**
Estonia	**50,000**
Hungary	**85,000**
Latvia	**40,000**
Lithuania	**50,000**
Moldova	**90,000**
Poland	**960,000**
Romania	**110,000**
Slovakia	**150,000**
TOTAL	**2,005,000**

6. RRP Membership

RRP partners shall include relevant UN agencies, international and national NGOs, IFRC and Red Cross/Red Crescent societies, faith-based organizations, academic institutions, regional organizations, community-based organizations, and refugee-led organizations.

Appeal submissions for the 2024 RRP will be done using an online form that is harmonized in all RRP countries. The RRP appeal submissions will include a short questionnaire for capacity assessment, collection of budgets by sector (Basic Needs, Protection, Child Protection, GBV, Education, Health & Nutrition, Livelihoods and Socio-economic inclusion), a description of key activities and their targets. Partners will be included in the RRP following a final vetting process conducted in each country.

Government entities and private sector actors shall not be included in the RRP as appealing partners.

7. Financial requirements

As the Ukraine Situation will enter year three in February 2024, the focus on emergency response has subsided in favor of a transition to increased self-reliance of affected populations. In this context, and as humanitarian aid becomes less relevant in many host countries, requirements by all partners are expected to decrease.

The budgets of all RRP partners providing protection and assistance to the refugee population should be included. Budgets for individual or household-level assistance to the host population should not be included for EU countries. Only in Moldova should activities specifically targeting host community members be included. Outside Moldova, a portion of host communities can be included in system-level activities targeting refugees.

The budget should be broken down by sector, and sub-sector if applicable. The budget should include operational staffing and administrative costs and should be provided in USD.

8. Timeframe

The 2024 RRP will cover the period of 1 January to 31 December 2024. This aligns with the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for inside Ukraine.

9. Key dates for 2024 RRP

Timeline	
August 2023	Kick off message with planning parameters, submission templates, and regional monitoring framework shared with all partners to start the 2024 RRP Planning Process
September 2023	Workshops at country level and continued consultation with partners on project submissions in line with strategic objectives and identified needs
Early October 2023	Partners submit project templates and budgets for strategic review and compilation by UNHCR Inter-Agency Coordinators at country level
20 October 2023	Submission of country-level budgets, population figures and targets against the regional monitoring framework to UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe (RBE) for regional compilation and inclusion in the Global Humanitarian Overview
1 November 2023	Submission by UNHCR Division of External Relations of the elements above to OCHA for the Global Humanitarian Overview
November 2023	UNHCR Inter-Agency Coordinators at country level, in consultation with partners, draft the country chapters of the 2024 RRP
December 2023	UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe compiles and reviews full RRP draft and circulates for review and clearance with partners at regional and country level
Late December 2023	Finalization of the 2024 RRP
January 2024	RRP/HRP Joint launch (TBC)