



Research on Long-term Housing of Ukrainian Refugees in Europe
commissioned by Habitat for Humanity International

Housing of Ukrainian Refugees in Europe Options for Long-Term Solutions

Country case study

Slovakia

commissioned by Habitat for Humanity International

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January, 2023

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Introduction

After a short post-COVID recovery year, on February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, devastating cities, destroying critical infrastructure and forcing millions of people to leave their homes. According to data provided by host governments to UNHCR, between February 24 and December 6, 2022, more than 7.8 million individuals who had fled Ukraine were registered across Europe. Due to the imposition of martial law, men between 18 and 60 are not allowed to leave Ukraine. Thus, 90% of those in need of international protection are women and children. By the beginning of December, more than 4.8 million people had registered for Temporary Protection or other legal status provided by the host countries' protection regimes in Europe. The war is still ongoing at the beginning of January 2023, and refugees' prospects of returning and starting reconstruction are increasingly delayed, and the aspirations of refugees are becoming more precarious.

This country case study is one output of a more extensive research effort commissioned by Habitat for Humanity International that was designed to examine immediate and longer-term accommodation/housing policy responses in five countries and, based on the findings, to define longer-term housing solutions that may lead to the better integration of refugees. The five countries include four neighbouring Ukraine (Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia) and Germany, which was used as a benchmark for the other four countries in terms of general housing policy and refugee-related policy responses. Nevertheless, the German system was also analysed through a critical lens by comparing it to a well-functioning (ideal-type) affordable and human-rights-based housing system. The five country case studies are based on secondary data analysis, numerous interviews, document analyses, and fact collection. Their principal findings, on the one hand, are summarized in Country Fiches (one for each); on the other hand, a Comparative Report has been produced to help draw conclusions about the responses to the diverse housing needs of people fleeing the conflict of civil society, the private sector, local authorities, and humanitarian actors in the five EU countries. The Comparative Report also provides more general recommendations for Habitat for Humanity International advocacy activities regarding national and EU-level policy interventions.

The Slovakian case study is structured as follows. Chapter 1 analyses the main features of the Slovakian housing system and housing policy, comparing these with the situation in the other four countries. Chapter 2 summarises the results of the interviews and the fact-collection process. In doing so, it first shows the main regulatory background to the country's refugee policy and, secondly, the size and profile of refugee groups arriving from Ukraine. Then, it enumerates the forms of accommodation and housing provided for refugees, followed by a shorter description of other services. Chapter 3 concludes by specifying the main gaps (by comparing existing models for refugee housing solutions to an ideal approach). Finally, in Chapter 4, recommendations are made for developing more inclusive and longer-term housing solutions that take into account the specificities of the country's housing system and housing policy.

1 General description of the country's affordable and social housing solutions

1.1 Common features of housing systems in the examined new Member States

Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia, countries with post-socialist housing regimes, have gone through very similar processes, which can be summarized in the following way:

1. After the regime change, public rental housing was taken over by municipalities. The privatisation of housing at a fraction of the market price radically reduced the stock of social rental housing. In addition, rents typically do not cover costs, so municipalities must cover the shortfall from their own revenue. As a result, they are left with smaller, poorer-quality housing, which, coupled with a lack of funds for renovation, has led to a decline in the sector.
2. A significant proportion of low-income (urban) families have been pushed out of the social rented sector and can find solutions only in the private rented sector or settlements further from urban centres. Much of the private rental market is informal. Liberal legal regulation has created significant risks for owners and tenants in the system. The supply side is dominated by casual landlords, as property is increasingly becoming a desirable form of investment among upper-income families.
3. As a consequence of utility and energy price liberalization, housing costs have risen rapidly in all countries. To reduce the burden, housing subsidies have been introduced. However, subsidies have not successfully compensated for the increase in burdens due to issues with income measurement and scarce budgetary resources.
4. Condominiums and multi-story buildings (including prefabricated housing estates from the socialist era) in all countries are faced with serious problems, partly because of the quality of the housing stock (energy efficiency) and partly because of the weak financial capacity of the new owners of privatised housing.
5. The main eras of housing policy in the former socialist countries are very similar. The first was dominated by housing privatisation in the 1990s, the dismantling of socialist-era institutions (including the settlement of 'old loans' and the completion of stalled construction projects), and the building of new state and market institutions. The second main period started around the 2000s, with increasing housing construction and the expansion of mortgage lending, for which countries provided varying degrees of public support. The main priority of housing policy was to subsidize the owner-occupied sector (VAT tax credit, credit subsidies, personal income tax credit), but there were also attempts to support public housing programmes (social housing, youth rental housing, etc.). Schemes have often been short-term, based on political incentives, and shut down due to budgetary constraints. After the 2008 GFC, there was a downturn, followed by an upturn after 3-7 years, again with the priority being to support the owner-occupied sector.

These processes have taken place in specific circumstances in different countries at different times due to macroeconomic, political, and institutional factors.

1.2 Economic growth and population trends

Slovakia had a population of 5.46 million people at the beginning of 2021.¹ In terms of GDP (at current market values), Germany's was bigger than those of the individual former socialist countries by a significant 4-5 times in 2011, which has since narrowed to 3-4 times. By 2021, Slovakia's GDP was the largest among the four countries, nearly doubling between the latter two periods and overtaking that of Hungary (see Figure 1). Slovakia is the only one of the four former socialist countries where the population is not falling (Figure 2). Slovakia is also the best performing of the New Member States participating in the project in terms of the size of the shadow economy. The latter is slightly larger than in Germany (11.2% compared to 7.8%) but much smaller than in the other three countries under comparison (see Table 1).

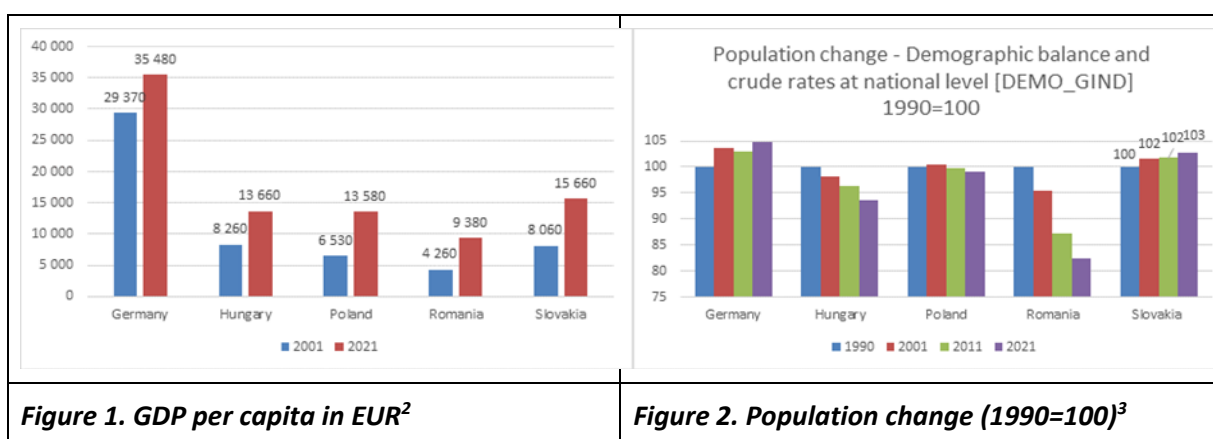


Table 1. Share of shadow economy 1991, 2000, 2010 and 2020⁴

	1991	2000	2010	2015
Germany	13.3	12.9	10.9	7.8
Hungary	31.9	25.1	22.8	20.5
Poland	33.1	26.2	20.9	16.7
Romania	36.0	34.4	26.8	22.9
Slovakia	17.2	17.6	12.8	11.2

1.3 Migration, inequalities

Slovakia's migration indicators are stable, showing no significant migration and the lowest rates among the four examined New Member States. Slovaks are the least likely of the four countries to take up employment elsewhere following migration (see Table 2).

¹ Source: EUROSTAT <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00001/default/table?lang=en>

² Source: Hypostat 2021 https://hypo.org/app/uploads/sites/3/2021/11/HYPOSTAT-2021_vdef.pdf

³ Source: EUROSTAT (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/DEMO_GIND)

⁴ Source: Medina, Leandro, and Mr Friedrich Schneider. Shadow economies around the world: what did we learn over the last 20 years? International Monetary Fund, 2018. IMF Working Papers 2018

Table 2. Migration data⁵

	Annual net migration per 1,000 inhabitants 2010-2015	Annual net migration per 1,000 inhabitants 2015-2020 (forecast)	Net migration per 1,000 inhabitants five-year period (2007-2012)	Net migration between 2000 and 2021	The net emigration rate of the population aged 15-64 in 2019 ⁶
Germany	4.8	6.6	15.14	5 984 941	n.a.
Hungary	n.a.	n.a.	3.02	330 273	4.2%
Poland	-1.7	-0.8	-1.94	-175 046	7.8%
Romania	-3	-3.8	-21.8	-2 205 003	18%
Slovakia	0.4	0.3	2.1	4 524	4.1%

According to the Gini index, which measures social inequalities, the greatest inequality is found in Romania – higher than in Germany. On the other hand, Slovakia and Poland's inequality indicators improved between 2012 and 2020, while Hungary's remained essentially unchanged.

Table 3. Gini coefficient between 2012 and 2020 (scale from 0 to 100)⁷

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Germany	28.3	29.7	30.7	30.1	29.5	29.1	31.1	29.7	30.5
Hungary	27.2	28.3	28.6	28.2	28.2	28.1	28.7	28	28
Poland	30.9	30.7	30.8	30.6	29.8	29.2	27.8	28.5	27.2
Romania	34	34.6	35	37.4	34.7	33.1	35.1	34.8	33.8
Slovakia	25.3	24.2	26.1	23.7	24.3	23.2	20.9	22.8	20.9

1.4 Housing privatization, tenure structure

In contrast to the New Member States, Germany (in terms of rental and homeownership) has a balanced tenure structure with a significant rental sector, although the share of owner-occupied housing is also increasing.

Table 4. Tenure structure of the five examined countries in 2012 and 2020 (%)⁸

	Owner with mortgage	Own outright	Rent (private)	Rent (subsidized)	Total	Owner with mortgage	Own outright	Rent (private)	Rent (subsidized)	Total
	2012					2020				
Germany	28.0	25.2	38.7	8.1	100	31.4	19	43.3	6.3	100
Hungary	20.9	68.9	3.1	7.1	100	15.5	75.8	4.3	4.4	100
Poland	9.6	72.8	4	13.6	100	13.1	72.5	3.3	11.1	100
Romania	0.9	95.4	0.8	2.9	100	1.1	95	1.3	2.6	100
Slovakia	9.6	80.8	7.8	1.8	100	23.3	69	6.1	1.6	100

⁵ Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_net_migration_rate; Eurostat Population change - Demographic balance and crude rates at national level [DEMO_GIND]

⁶ Source: : Hárs Ágnes (2020) Elvándorlás, visszavándorlás, bevándorlás: jelenségek és munkaerő-piaci hatások (Emigration, return migration, immigration: phenomena and labour market effects) (In.: Társadalmi Riport 2020, szerk.: Kolosi Tamás, Szelényi Iván, Tóth István György, Budapest) p 115-145)

⁷ Eurostat Gini coefficient of equivalized disposable income - EU-SILC survey [ILC_DI12\$DEFAULTVIEW]

⁸ Source: Distribution of population by tenure status, EU-SILC survey [ILC_LVHO02__custom_3360359]

In the New Member States, homeownership is the dominant tenure form. Poland is the only outlier in terms of social housing (the share of the subsidized rental sector is 11 %); the other three countries have a very small amount of social housing (2-5%). The share of owners with a mortgage is an indication of the state of the housing finance sector. While in 2012, Hungary had the highest proportion of owners with mortgages (20.9%), it was overtaken by Slovakia in 2020.

The cooperative sector plays a specific role in the New Member States. Originally, housing cooperatives were a specific form of public housing organisation, but in fact, there was no practical difference between owner-occupied cooperatives (very similar to condominiums) and tenancy cooperatives. During privatisation, the vast majority of cooperatives were transformed into condominiums, but even if the legal form remained unchanged, they functioned in virtually the same way as condominiums. This is illustrated by the example of Slovakia.

There is a long tradition of cooperative housing in Slovakia. The construction of housing cooperatives was constantly significant from 1946 to 1981. A new legal framework was introduced in 1992 for co-ops. There are two forms of occupancy in co-ops: owner-occupied and tenant with no ownership rights. In 2007 there were 97 housing cooperatives registered in the Slovak Union of Housing Cooperatives, with 270,000 dwellings. (Uplift, 2022 Urban report, Bratislava).

However, members of cooperatives may “sell” their rights. Thus, this tenure form does not differentiate from that of owner-occupation.

Privatization in Slovakia took the form of a “give-away” scheme. Consequently, the share of municipal housing is one of the lowest in the region.

Residents of rental units that previously belonged to the state or local municipalities could apply for private ownership of them under preferential conditions. (Applications had to be submitted by 31 December 2016, covering flats owned by the cities and municipalities that had been completed before 1998.⁹ As a result, more than 90% of tenants applied for private ownership). This step drastically decreased the number of public sector dwellings.

Restitution in Slovakia also caused problems. The renting of flats taken over by former owners was regulated by the state, which did not cover the related costs; consequently, as in other countries, this led to conflict between tenants and owners. However, after 2011 (until 2017) a gradual increase in renting was allowed, and the law obliged municipalities to offer tenancies to households under restitution. Based on the 2011 census, the number of these flats was estimated at 5-7 thousand¹⁰.

The study does not cover the Czech Republic, which is an outlier, because restitution mainly affected apartments and the protection of private tenants could only be solved by strong rent regulation, which reduced landlords’ interest representation. However, strict rent control was only lifted in 2012, and the issue of free rent negotiation was addressed. Thus, according to 2011 data, the homeownership

⁹ Housing Policy of the Slovak Republic until 2030, Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic, p 11.

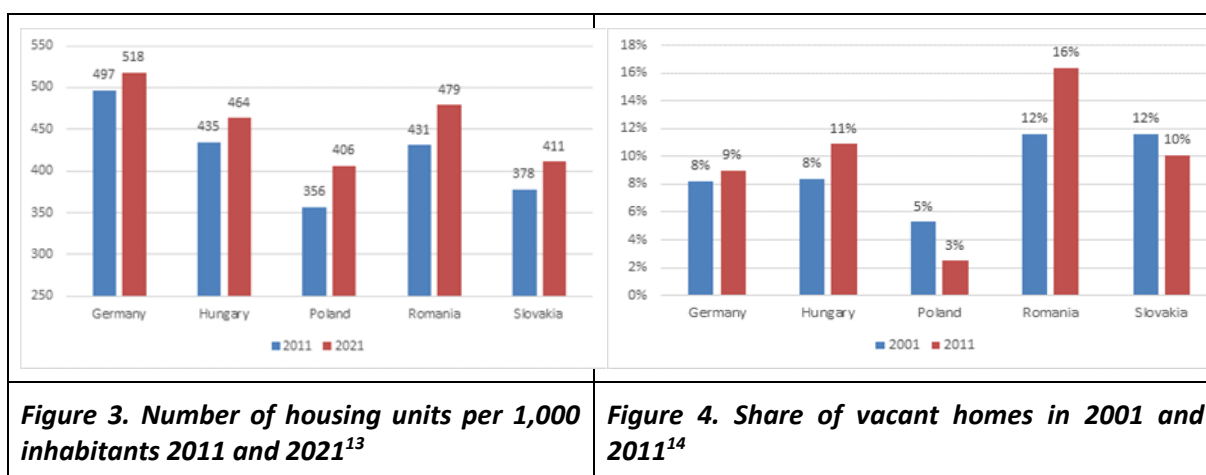
¹⁰ Hojsík, M.: Slovakia: On the way to the stable housing concept in: In: Hegedüs; Lux; Teller (eds.): Social Housing in Transition Countries. New York: Routledge. 2013 p. 262-277

rate increased to 56%, cooperative housing¹¹ accounted for 9%, public rental 8%, and private rental housing 14% of all housing stock, the highest among the New Member States¹².

1.5 Housing stock, quality

Quantitative housing indicators, which compare the number of housing units with the size of the population, show a more balanced picture. The difference in the number of dwellings per 1000 inhabitants between countries seems to have decreased, but this is not necessarily due to housing investment but to demographic processes. In 1990, there were 425 dwellings per 1000 inhabitants in Germany compared to 317 in the other four countries (weighted average), a difference of 108 dwellings per 1000, but by 2021 this difference had decreased to 84 dwellings (518-434) (see Figure 3).

Slovakia was essentially on par with Poland in terms of the number of dwellings per 1000 inhabitants in 2021, with slightly more improvement in Slovakia than in Poland (See Figure 3). However, it should be noted that the indicator is sensitive to population size, and the populations of these two countries have been relatively stable. Slovakia is in a similar position to Hungary in terms of the number of vacant dwellings, which suggests some unused capacity, but as we do not know much about the composition of unoccupied dwellings, we cannot make further conclusions.



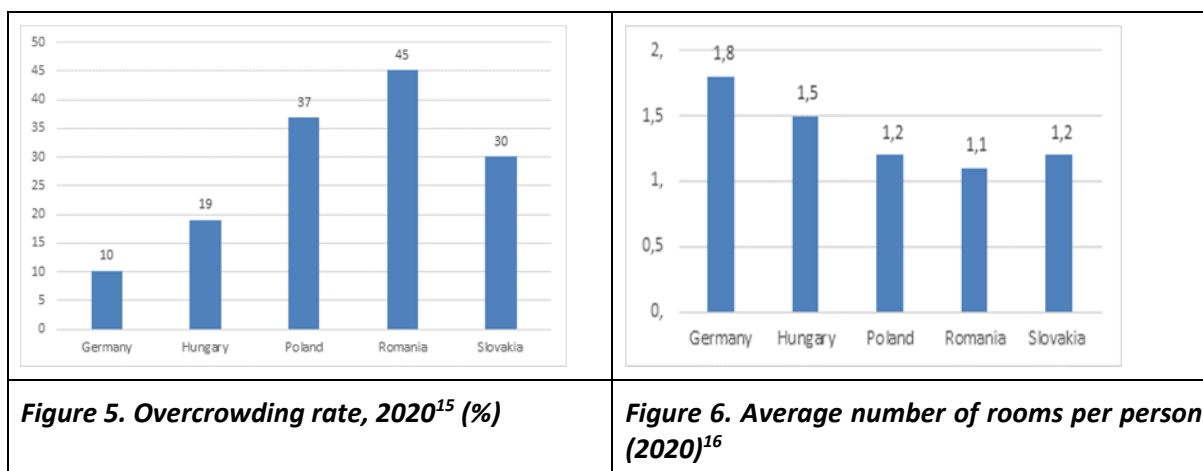
Thirty percent of Slovaks live in overcrowded housing conditions, less than in Romania (45%) and Poland (37%) but more than in Hungary (19%). Similarly, the situation in Poland, Romania and Slovakia is similar in terms of the number of persons per room. Here again, Hungary has the best value for the indicator among the four countries included in the analysis (See Figure 5 and Figure 6).

¹¹ Cooperative housing in the Czech Republic is more similar to owner occupation than exists under housing (rental) coop schemes.

¹² Lux, M. and Sunega, P.: Czech Republic: Growth and Professionalisation in: Hegedüs, J., M. Lux and V. Horváth (eds), Private Rental Housing in Transition Countries – an alternative to owner occupation? Palgrave 197-188

¹³ Source: Housing Statistics of Europe 2014, Eurostat Population change - Demographic balance and crude rates at national level [DEMO_GIND]

¹⁴ Source: Eurostat Census Hub, Census 2011. T, Housing Statistics of Europe 2014,



Data according to a Eurofound study (2016), the most detailed analysis of housing quality in Europe.

Table 5. Indicators of inadequate housing, 2015¹⁷

	Dwelling stock	Space problem	Rot problem	Damp problem	Toilet problem	Bath problem	Garden problem	Rent problem	Utility problem	Heating problem
Germany	40 545 300	12%	4%	6%	1%	2%	17%	10%	12%	6%
Hungary	2 762 444	10%	14%	12%	4%	5%	11%	11%	21%	14%
Poland	13 853 000	18%	12%	14%	6%	7%	15%	18%	23%	24%
Romania	6 384 000	10%	9%	12%	22%	22%	12%	6%	18%	17%
Slovakia	1 994 900	8%	5%	7%	3%	2%	10%	9%	11%	10%

Space-related problem. Problems with overcrowded housing, i.e., space problems, are most significant in Poland (18%), while figures for the other three New Member States, including Slovakia, are very similar in this regard (8-10%). (The result somewhat contradicts the latest data we have analyzed in Figure 5 and Figure 6).

Rot-related problem. The biggest problem with this second qualitative characteristic that is connected with housing is found in Hungary (14%), but less in Germany (4%) and Slovakia (5%).

Damp-related problem. These are identified at a high level in Poland (14%) and less again in Germany (6%) and Slovakia (7%).

Toilet-related problem (i.e., lack of). The most significant deficiencies in this regard are in Romania (22.2%). Slovakia is in the best position among the four New Member States in the analyses.

¹⁵ Source: Overcrowding rate by age, sex and poverty status - total population - EU-SILC survey [ILC_LVHO05A_custom_3397213]

¹⁶ Source: EU-SILC survey [ILC_LVHO03_custom_1513490]

¹⁷ Source: Eurofond (2016), Inadequate housing in Europe: Costs and consequences, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. The study analyses the European Quality of Life Survey carried out in 2011.

Bath-related problem (i.e., lack of). This problem is most marked in Romania and less in Germany and Slovakia (2%).

Garden-related problem. This covers the existence of a balcony, a terrace, or a small garden connected with a dwelling. Scoring lowest on this indicator are Germany (17%) and Poland (15%). From a qualitative point of view, the best position is held by Slovakia (10%) and Hungary (11%).

Rent-related problem.¹⁸ The biggest problems with paying rent are found in Poland (18%), and less in Romania (6%).

Utility-related problem.¹⁹ This is marked in Poland (23%), and again less in Germany (12%) and Slovakia (11%).

Heating-related problem.²⁰ The most significant issues with heating can be observed in Poland (24.4%), with almost one-fourth of households facing this problem. Again, Germany (6%) and Slovakia (10%) are in the best positions in terms of this indicator.

1.6 Housing investment, housing finance, and affordability

The effectiveness of a country's housing policy is determined by the cost of housing/investment and affordability. Examining a longer period, housing construction in Slovakia followed the trend identified with the New Member States more generally: a slump between 1990 and 2000, followed by a boom, and then a crisis, which meant a sharp decline, and rapid recovery from 2015 onwards. The latter period (i.e., the period after 2015) seems to have involved faster catch-up in Slovakia than in the other countries.

On a per capita basis, there is almost complete convergence between Slovakia and the New Member States.²¹ However, it is worth noting that Germany did not follow the trend of the New Member States: housing construction increased in the 1990s and started to decline earlier (around 2000) but recovered sooner after the GFC.

¹⁸ Rent problem: the proportion of respondents whose household was unable to pay a scheduled rent in the 12 months preceding the European Quality of Life Survey in 2011 (Eurofound, 2012).

¹⁹ Utility problem: the proportion of respondents whose household was unable to pay a scheduled utility bill in the 12 months preceding the European Quality of Life Survey in 2011 (Eurofound, 2012).

²⁰ Proportion of respondents whose household could not keep their home sufficiently warm when needed (Eurofound, 2012).

²¹ Data for New Member States is based on the weighted average of the 11 New Member States.

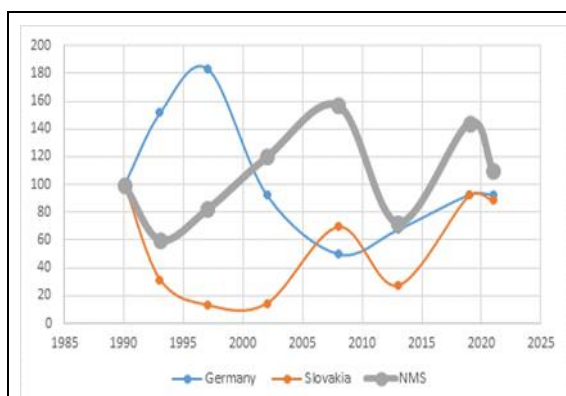


Figure 7. New housing completion (1990=100) 1990, 2021²²

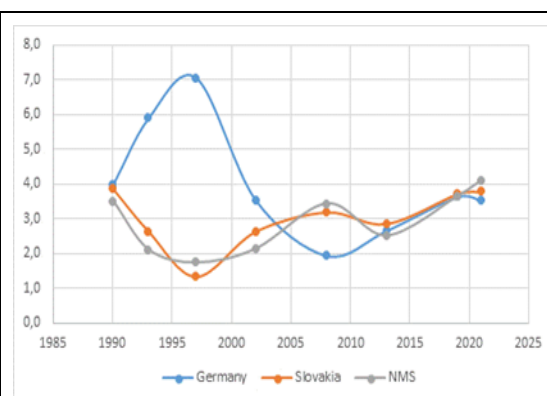


Figure 8. New housing completions per 1000 people 1990, 2021²³

It is clear that housing loans in the New Member States rapidly increased between 2000 and 2008. The most significant increase occurred in Hungary, which between 2000 and 2004 provided significant support for credit management (subsidies on loan interest, PIT tax relief, and cash subsidies for construction). However, Poland and Slovakia followed closely behind (without subsidies), with Romania lagging in this respect. However, after 2008 the post-crisis developments are noteworthy: Hungary's loan-to-GDP ratio decreased to 10% (catching up with slowly growing Romania), Poland maintained a level of 20%, while Slovakia reached 40%.

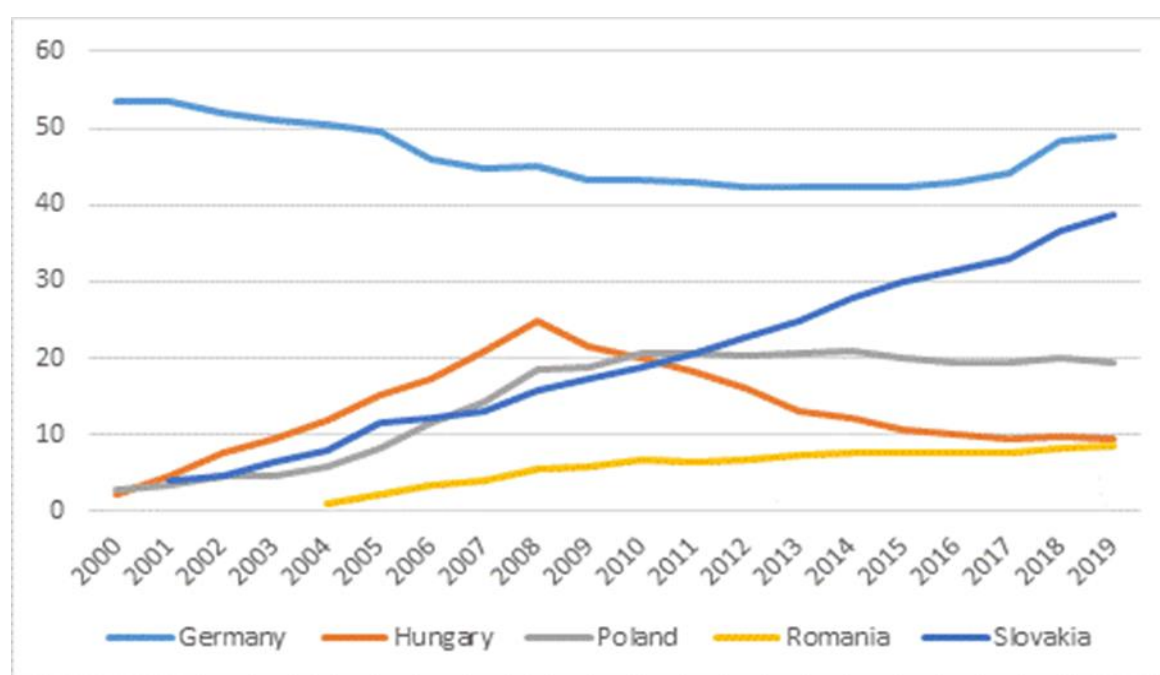


Figure 9. Total Outstanding Residential-Loans-to-GDP Ratio²⁴

²² Source: Source: EU Housing Statistics, UNECE, National Statistical Institutes, RICS European Housing Review 2005 (for Germany before 2005), Hypostat 2021

²³ Source: Source: EU Housing Statistics, UNECE, National Statistical Institutes, RICS European Housing Review 2005 (for Germany before 2005), Hypostat 2021

²⁴ Source: Hypostat 2021 https://hypo.org/app/uploads/sites/3/2021/11/HYPOSTAT-2021_vdef.pdf

Another vital housing indicator is the level of house prices and rents relative to family income. These indicators are revealing, but they should be treated with caution because average prices and average incomes do not reflect the situation of marginalised groups, even when measured in terms of income, education, location of housing, etc. Statistics about house prices and rents should also be treated with caution, as they often refer to the asking price rather than the transaction price. Several sources have been used to illuminate the problem of affordability.

According to data from Deloitte, house prices in Germany are, on average, more than double those in the New Member States, with much smaller differences in rents. The rent-to-price ratio is highest in Poland and most favourable in Germany, most likely due to Germany's soft rent controls. The data show that the highest pressure on the rental housing market is in Poland. Slovakia and Hungary are in a significantly more favourable position in this respect, at almost the same level.

Table 6. Average prices and rents (in capital cities) 2020

	Average transaction price of new dwelling (EUR/sqm)	Average monthly rent (EUR/sqm)	Rent-to-price ratio ²⁵
Germany	4100	10.1	3.0%
Hungary	1657	9.8	7.1%
Poland	1581	15.1	11.5%
Romania	1332	n.a.	n.a.
Slovakia	1941	10.7	6.6%

Hungary recorded the highest increase in nominal house prices, with other countries (among them Slovakia) following a broadly similar trend.

²⁵ Source: Property Index Overview of European Residential Markets 10th edition, July 2021

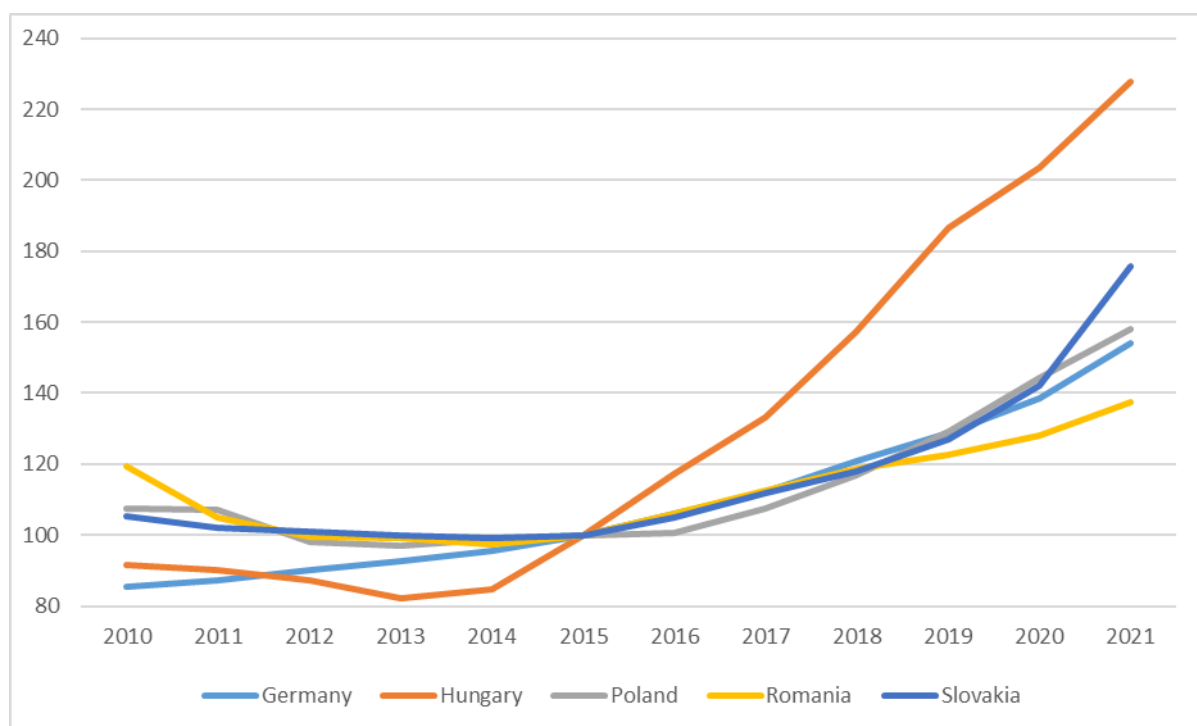


Figure 10. Nominal House Price Indices (2015=100)²⁶

The ratio of rent to income shows the affordability of short-term housing. The data for the capital cities of the five examined countries are consistent with the table above (Table 6): Berlin has the most affordable rents, and Warsaw has the highest demand-related pressure in the housing market for both one- and three-bedroom apartments. Bucharest is in the most favourable position in this respect, but the differences are not so striking. Similar conclusions can be drawn about the relationship between house prices and incomes. Berlin and Bucharest are the most affordable cities when comparing price and income.

Table 7. Rent-to-income ratio and price-to-income ratios in capital cities²⁷

	Rent-to-income (3 rooms)	Rent-to-income (1 room)	Price-to-income
Berlin	59.4	32.9	11.5
Budapest	83.3	47.1	16.2
Warsaw	122.5	63.4	19.4
Bucharest	78.2	47.5	13.0
Bratislava	92.4	54.5	23.1

Deloitte's analysis points out another interesting fact, essentially confirming what was written earlier. In Hungary and Slovakia, the difference in house prices between cities seems to be the greatest. The

²⁶ Source: Hypostat 2021 https://hypo.org/app/uploads/sites/3/2021/11/HYPOSTAT-2021_vdef.pdf

²⁷ The rent-to-income ratio is the quotient of the rent for a typical rental flat in the capital and the national monthly net average income. The price-to-income ratio is the ratio of the average house price outside the city centre to the national yearly average wage. Calculations based on 75 square metre homes.

Source: Housing Market Report Hungarian National Bank 2022 Q3, 2022 Q1

table also highlights that Berlin does not have the highest house prices, despite being the country's capital.

Table 8. Price differences among cities, 2021²⁸

	Price of new dwelling (EUR/m ²)		Annual changes		Ratio of highest to lowest (Lowest=100)	Country	Price of new dwelling	
	Lowest	Highest	Lowest	Highest			Lowest	Highest
Germany	6 200	8 700	1.6 %	4.8%	140	Germany	Berlin	Munich
Hungary	1 281	2 207	1.2%	4.8%	172	Hungary	Debrecen	Budapest
Poland	1 426	2 233	4.9%	5.6%	157	Poland	Lodz	Warsaw
Romania	1 270	1 800	2.4%	6.5%	142	Romania	Timisoara	Cluj
Slovakia	1 720	2 805	2.2%	13.0%	163	Slovakia	Kosice	Bratislava

1.7 Housing policy and housing programs

In Slovakia, the state is primarily responsible for preparing state housing policy and developing legal and financial instruments for implementing the associated programmes. These tasks are carried out through the Ministry of Transport and Construction as the manager of state housing policy and through the State Housing Development Fund. National housing policy has been revised every five years since 1995. The latest National Housing Policy Concept is from 2020.

The State Housing Development Fund, the primary institution for financing the renovation of private buildings and expanding the social rental stock, was established in 1996. It has stepped up its activities since 2000, when the government approved a set of specific housing programs. It has become self-sustaining due to repayments of loans it previously issued. The Fund is an independent organization supervised by the Ministry of Transport and Construction and operates according to the priorities defined in the State Housing Policy concept of the government. The Fund provides long-term loans with favourable conditions for several purposes. Since 2013, it has become the primary implementation body for the "Joint European Support for Sustainable Investment in City Areas" (JESSICA) programme and, since late 2017, for the "Integrated Regional Operational Programme" (IROP). Through these programmes, the State Housing Development Fund uses EU funds to provide preferential loans for energy-efficiency renovations and construction²⁹.

State interventions involve four primary target areas:

- Homeownership program: supporting the purchase and construction of owner-occupied homes through subsidized loans and building savings schemes;
- Renovation and renewal of pre-existing private housing: grants and subsidized loans;
- Social housing sector support: renovation and construction of social rental flats;
- Housing allowances

²⁸ Source: Property Index Overview of European Residential Markets 10th edition, July 2021. <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/at/Documents/real-estate/at-property-index-2021.pdf>

²⁹ Slovakia - ECSO country fact sheet EU Commission, 2019 https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sectors/construction/observatory/country-fact-sheets/slovakia_en

Social housing sector programs

Slovakia has been the most active country in terms of the construction of new social (municipal) housing, and since 2000 the national housing programme has included support for municipal social housing, which is considered a significant element.³⁰ There are basically two schemes: one for “lower-standard” housing (mainly for Roma beneficiaries) and one for “normal” quality (typical standard) municipal housing for average lower-middle-class families.

- The construction of new social rental flats with complete infrastructure has been supported since 2000 by grants and preferential loans. However, for these dwellings, the social rent level must be sustained for 30 years, and only households with a household income less than triple the minimum required for subsistence are eligible. Additionally, the beneficiaries cannot own any other real estate.
- The Ministry of Transport and Construction guidelines define the rules for granting subsidies for the construction of rental dwellings. A municipality or a non-profit organisation may be granted funds according to these guidelines if specific requirements are met. For instance, a flat may only be rented to individuals if their income does not exceed a specified ceiling, if the floor space of the rental unit does not exceed a set limit, if purchase costs will not exceed a specified value, etc. At present, a specific floor-space criterion is in force: for example, a three-room flat must not exceed a maximum of 80 m². Municipalities can obtain the **70% balance in the form of a loan from the State Housing Development Fund** and do not need to use “own” financial resources for construction. The law stipulates the conditions for obtaining this sort of state support. **Loans are granted for a period of 30 years at a yearly interest rate of 1.2% and may amount to 70% of the purchase cost of the building.** In addition, the income of the selected tenants cannot exceed the income ceiling (defined as triple the subsistence minimum) over the duration of the tenancy agreement. Municipalities are responsible for the construction of public rental housing units.
- A lease contract must always be concluded with tenants for a fixed term (up to three years) but may be prolonged repeatedly. Rents have already attained cost level within the public sector. Annual rents amount to up to 5% of the dwelling purchase cost, covering the costs incurred for the management, operation and maintenance of the residential buildings.
- This programme resulted in the construction of 40,858 social rental flats between 1998 and 2016, mainly in rural areas³¹. However, as the share of social rental flats in the total housing stock is marginal, this programme may be considered less relevant. Nevertheless, the share of new social rental flats in all new constructions ranged from 10-20% during the 2000s, although it eventually dropped below 3% by 2015.³²
- Beblavy and Beblava (2014)³³ take a critical view of the program: they claim “that there are no constraints pushing for targeted allocation to lower-income families. Instead, with proper

³⁰ Social service facilities: Socially vulnerable or excluded population groups are provided with very narrowly defined types of housing in the form of social services/institutional facilities. Such facilities include homes for the elderly, social care homes, shelters for the homeless, shelters for battered women, shelters for women in need, etc. This is the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family

³¹ Spirkova, Daniela: "Housing Policy in the Slovak Republic." Housing. Edited by Amjad Almusaed. IntechOpen, 2018. <https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/62071>

³² Ibid.

³³ Beblavy, Miroslav, and Emilia Beblava. "Public Rental Housing as Middle-Class Entitlement? Economic Analysis of the Slovak Public Rental Housing Policy." Economic Analysis of the Slovak Public Rental Housing Policy (July 7, 2014) (2014).

calculation of costs, municipalities allocate housing but share only a small percentage of the costs and bear the risk of rent non-payment. The current framework thus incentivises local governments to prefer indefinite leases to middle-class tenants. Therefore, it is simply owner-occupied housing in disguise, but there is a substantial subsidy compared to the market cost of housing – approximately 50%”.³⁴

Thus, although governments have implemented social housing programs across the region, the sector has only experienced limited expansion. Furthermore, the social and financial sustainability of the new social housing system could not be guaranteed. The operation of the sector requires huge subsidies to bridge the gap between cost rents and social rents; tenants retain extensive tenancy rights; allocation principles remain non-transparent; the requirement of a down-payment as a pre-condition of entering the sector has led to indirect regressive selection among potential tenants; and a number of other negative issues have occurred (e.g. non-payment, deterioration of stock, etc.). These problems and uncertainties explain why tenants and municipal landlords continue to press for further privatization.

Lower-standard programs

According to Slovakia's Progress Report 2013 for the Decade of Roma Inclusion, the OPGRC received funding of 252,469 EUR [C\$366,702] in the area of "project documentation for the construction of housing, infrastructure, community centres and school facilities" and for "self-supporting construction of housing" (Slovakia [2013], Sec. 1).

According to the civil society assessment for the Decade of Roma Inclusion, due to decentralization, the issue of housing for Roma is primarily the responsibility of local governments, many of which lack the funding and capacity to handle the issue (Roma Institute et al., 2013, 77). The Roma Institute Policy Advisor explained that the construction of social housing is funded by the central government through grants to municipalities that local governments must apply for (Roma Institute et al., 24 July 2014).

As part of Slovakia's Housing Development Programme, in 2012, the state spent approximately 3.8 million euros [C\$5.5 million] on "lower standard" housing resulting in 251 apartments in 23 buildings (ibid. [2013], Sec. 4). In 2013, the state provided approximately 2.8 million euros in funding for the procurement of lower standard housing in 2013, resulting in 202 new apartments in 12 buildings (ibid.). Slovakia's Progress Report, 2013 for the Decade of Roma Inclusion, explains that "lower standard" housing targets "socially excluded communities", which includes Roma (ibid.). The state also spent 12-13 million euros each year in 2012 and 2013 to fund over 1,000 apartments of "common standard", from which some Roma also benefited (ibid.). According to Slovakia's Progress Report 2013, the Slovak government allocated 7 million euros for the construction of 180 housing units in 15 residential buildings for "marginalized groups" (ibid.). [...] 30 percent of the cost is expected to come from the recipient [...] or through the State Housing Development Fund loan (ibid.).

In its 2013 national report submitted to the UN Human Rights Council, Slovak authorities indicated that subsidies associated with rental housing, infrastructure, and the elimination of systematic failures associated with residential homes are allocated from the state budget on an annual basis. In 2010, 2,344 rental apartments for socially disadvantaged groups were supported through these subsidies; in 2011, 1,589 rental apartments, and in 2012, 1,288 rental apartments. In addition, funds to the amount of EUR 162,098,748.94 [C\$235,448,447.03] were provided through the State Housing Development

³⁴ https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=hu&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=Public+Rental+Housing+as+Middle-Class+Entitlement%3F+Economic+Analysis+of+the+Slovak+Public+Rental+Housing+Policy&btnG=

Fund (under the responsibility of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development) and in the form of subsidies for housing development in 2012 (Slovakia 8 Nov. 2013, 14).³⁵

Non-profit sector

In Slovakia, a Dutch grant program, Matra, helped create a non-profit housing organization in the city of Martin in 2005³⁶. Unfortunately, the project failed after three years because the municipally owned cooperative that initially managed 678 municipal dwellings was privatized — the local government wanted to eliminate the cost of operating the program. This case demonstrates the extent to which social landlords in transition countries depend on local government financing structures. Pressure to reconcile social and market functions arises at the local government level, the latter which are under constant fiscal pressure from the central government, as funding is being reduced and mandates are underfunded. Thus, local governments must sacrifice some social programs, like housing, which are not based on central funding, to maintain their financial stability.

The ETP Savings and Micro-Loan Programme helped the Roma community of Rankovce with the legal aspects associated with either building new houses or finishing incomplete houses by themselves due to the subsequent legalization of the houses, making them their personal property. The focus of this form of cooperation is not only promoting the legal construction of homes but also individual personal development. These experiences are associated explicitly with construction in segregated Roma localities³⁷). A similar pilot scheme by the European Parliament has been launched in Slovakia and two other countries in cooperation with the Council of Europe Development Bank and local stakeholders (in Slovakia, the latter are Slovenská Sporiteľňa a.s. and the NGO Projekt DOM.ov).³⁸ However, there is currently no initiative for scaling up these programmes.

Homeownership program

Slovakia joined the euro area on 1 January 2009. For Slovak commercial banks, the changeover to the single currency and competition between banks led to lower interest rates. As a result, even amid the economic crisis (2009), the volume of loans increased, albeit slightly.

As noted previously, the stock of housing loans grew fastest in Slovakia, approaching 40% of GDP by 2022, and 23.3% of households have a housing loan. Moreover, the interest rates on housing loans

³⁵ Slovak Republic: Housing situation of Roma in Bratislava, Smizany, Levoca and Spisska Nova Ves; state programs related to housing for Roma (2011-July 2014)

³⁶ Kandlbauerova, Alena. 2004. "Responsibilities for Housing Development on Different Institutional levels in Slovak Republic." *UNECE Conference on social housing* 28-30 November 2004 Vienna. Ministry of Construction and Regional Development of the Slovak Republic. Červeňová. 2005. *The Development Of The Non - Profit Housing Sector In Slovakia*. Faculty of Civil Engineering, Slovak University of Technology. Bratislava http://www.fgw.at/publikationen/pdf/05/2005-3_4-cervenova.pdf

³⁷ Svidroňová, Mária Murray, et al. "Social housing provided by the third sector: The Slovak experience." *Critical Housing Analysis* 4.2 (2017); Sika, P., & Vidová, J. (2017). Interrelationship of migration and housing in Slovakia. *Journal of International Studies*, 10(3), 91-104. doi:10.14254/2071- 8330.2017/10-3/7

³⁸ <https://coebank.org/en/news-and-publications/news/european-parliament-european-commission-and-ceb-launch-pilot-project-support-affordable-housing-roma-slovak-republic/>

have fallen the most in Slovakia (partly as a result of competition between banks). As a result, loans have become available to a much wider range of people.

Besides building savings schemes (*bausparkasse*), home ownership has been supported through subsidized mortgages primarily for young people (aged 18 to 35). The Housing Development Fund offers a 'newlywed' loan. Clients (spouses) can apply if they are under 35 years old and have been married for at least one year. Valued at up to € 15,000, the amount is subject to interest at 1% p. a., and its maturity term is 15 years. However, limited resources are available to support this scheme. Both subsidy schemes are financed by the State Housing Development Fund, and the government regularly allocates funding for different purposes. In recent years, the focus has been on the energy-efficiency renovations of pre-existing stock³⁹.

³⁹ Tesarova, Eva Nahalkova. "Comparison of housing financing products in SR." SHS Web of Conferences. Vol. 92. EDP Sciences, 2021.

2 Fieldwork – fact collection

2.1 Main legal regulations on migrants and refugees

Act. No. 55/2022 (Lex Ukraine) is one of the most relevant pieces of legislation related to the Slovak government's response to the needs of those fleeing Russia's war on Ukraine.⁴⁰ It was adopted on 25 February 2022 by the National Council of the Slovak Republic and came into effect on 30 March 2022.⁴¹ It articulates that the State shall provide "temporary refuge" to people fleeing Ukraine, and defines the conditions and content of the temporary protection in line with the 2022/382 Council Implementing Decision establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine.⁴²

The temporary refuge is "granted for the purpose of protecting foreigners from war, endemic violence, the consequences of a humanitarian disaster or persistent or massive human rights violations in their country of origin".⁴³ The temporary protection granted by the Slovakian State is valid until 4 March 2023.

The following group of people displaced by the Russia's war on Ukraine could be granted temporary protection in the Slovak Republic.⁴⁴

1. **Ukrainian citizens and their family members**
2. **Third-country nationals who were granted international** protection or equivalent protection status in Ukraine prior to 24 February 2022 and **their family members** who resided in Ukraine before 24 February 2022
3. **Third-country nationals legally residing in Ukraine** prior to 24 February 2022 and who are unable to return to their country of origin in a safe and durable manner⁴⁵

People granted temporary protection by the Slovakian authorities have the following rights and social entitlements.⁴⁶

- Residence on the territory of the Slovak Republic
- Information related to temporary protection

⁴⁰ ZÁKON z 25. februára 2022 o niektorých opatreniach v súvislosti so situáciou na Ukrajine. Zbierka Zákonov, Slovenskej Republiky, 26 February 2022. https://www.slov-lex.sk/static/pdf/2022/55/ZZ_2022_55_20220226.pdf

⁴¹ ZÁKON z 25. februára 2022 o niektorých opatreniach v súvislosti so situáciou na Ukrajine. Zbierka Zákonov, Slovenskej Republiky, 26 February 2022.

⁴² ZÁKON z 25. februára 2022 o niektorých opatreniach v súvislosti so situáciou na Ukrajine. Zbierka Zákonov, Slovenskej Republiky, 26 February 2022.; COUNCIL IMPLEMENTING DECISION (EU) 2022/382 of 4 March 2022 establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine within the meaning of Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC, and having the effect of introducing temporary protection. Official Journal of the European Union, 4 March 2022 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022D0382&from=EN>

⁴³ Temporary refuge (protection). Information and assistance in connection with the war in Ukraine. IOM Migration Information Center, last updated: 30 September 2022. <https://www.mic.iom.sk/en/news/758-info-ukraine.html#refuge>

⁴⁴ Information on temporary protection in Slovakia. European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), June 2022. https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-06/Booklet_Slovakia_EN.pdf

⁴⁵ Information on temporary protection in Slovakia. European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), June 2022.

⁴⁶ Information on temporary protection in Slovakia. European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), June 2022.

- Means of subsistence in the reception facilities
- Accommodation
- Access to health care services
- Access to the labour market and work permit
- Access to education
- Family reunification

Lex Ukraine aims to provide beneficiaries of temporary protection with access to the labour market and social welfare system in a simplified manner. Beneficiaries of temporary protection are exempt from the duty to pay local taxes related to accommodation, waste management, pet ownership and highway use.⁴⁷ Lex Ukraine also designates specific funding for covering expenses incurred in connection with the response to the needs of displaced people.⁴⁸ Furthermore, it sets out that the government may provide an allowance for supporting the accommodation of “an emigrant” via the municipality in which the person resides (§ 36a (1)).⁴⁹

One of the key amendments to **Act No. 404/2011 Coll. on the Residence of Foreigners** that came into effect on 30 March 2022 is that refugees shall notify the municipality if they move to other accommodation. Prior to the war, refugees were obliged to inform the Foreign Police in such cases.⁵⁰ This might indicate a shift away from a law enforcement approach towards a more inclusive attitude towards refugees which should apply to people of all ethnic and national backgrounds.

As a result of the modifications of **Act No. 480/2022 Coll. on Asylum** executed by Lex Ukraine, landlords may receive a maximum monthly financial contribution of EUR 500 – EUR 1,250 for providing free accommodation for beneficiaries of temporary protection.⁵¹ The financial contribution for providing free accommodation to beneficiaries of temporary protection was raised on 1 October 2022 to between EUR 710 and EUR 1,790 monthly and was extended to 28 February 2023.⁵² The amount of the financial contribution is calculated according to the size of the flat and is being provided on a per-night basis.⁵³ The provision of financial assistance is subject to the mandatory monthly visit of the beneficiaries of temporary protection to the municipality or the city district where they are being

⁴⁷ Legislative changes under Lex Ukraine. Deloitte, 11 April 2022. <https://www2.deloitte.com/sk/en/pages/legal/articles/legislative-changes-under-lex-ukraine.html>

⁴⁸ ZÁKON z 25. februára 2022 o niektorých opatreniach v súvislosti so situáciou na Ukrajine. Zbierka Zákonov, Slovenskej Republiky, 26 February 2022.; COUNCIL IMPLEMENTING DECISION (EU) 2022/382 of 4 March 2022 establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine within the meaning of Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC, and having the effect of introducing temporary protection. Official Journal of the European Union, 4 March 2022

⁴⁹ ZÁKON z 25. februára 2022 o niektorých opatreniach v súvislosti so situáciou na Ukrajine. Zbierka Zákonov, Slovenskej Republiky, 26.02.2022.

⁵⁰ ZÁKON z 21. októbra 2011, o pobyte cudzincov a o zmene a doplnení niektorých zákonov. Zbierka Zákonov, Slovenskej Republiky, Vyhlásené: 22 November 2011, Časová verzia predpisu účinná od: 30 March 2022 do: 31 December 2022. https://www.slov-lex.sk/static/pdf/2011/404/ZZ_2011_404_20220330.pdf

⁵¹ Legislative changes under Lex Ukraine. Deloitte, 11 April 2022

⁵² Source: <https://www.minv.sk/?prispevok-za-ubytovanie> Accessed: 04/11/2022

⁵³ Legislative changes under Lex Ukraine. Deloitte, 11 April 2022; ZÁKON z 20. júna 2002 o azyle a o zmene a doplnení niektorých zákonov. Zbierka Zákonov, Slovenskej Republiky, Vyhlásené: 22 August 2002, Časová verzia predpisu účinná od: 30 March 2022 do 31 March 2022 https://www.slov-lex.sk/static/pdf/2002/480/ZZ_2002_480_20220330.pdf

accommodated.⁵⁴ Landlords are obliged to present a contract to the municipality together with an affidavit.⁵⁵

According to recent changes to **Act No. 461/2003 Coll. on Social Insurance**, Ukrainian citizens previously employed in Slovakia who are now serving in the Ukrainian military are not obligated to pay mandatory social insurance while they are conscripted.⁵⁶ However, the time they spend in Ukraine undertaking their military services will still be counted towards their pension insurance.⁵⁷

According to **Act No. 580/2004 Coll. on Health Insurance**, beneficiaries of temporary protection are eligible to access to emergency medical care services.⁵⁸

Act. No. 552/2003 Coll. on Undertaking Work of Public Interest stipulates that those aiming to work in the public interest are obliged to present an integrity certificate issued by the criminal register.⁵⁹ People fleeing Russia's war on Ukraine can submit an affidavit if it is not possible for them to get an integrity document from the criminal register during the declared emergency situation which was announced on 26 February 2022 by the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic.⁶⁰ Ukrainian teachers need to submit an affidavit in order to be employed in Slovakia while the emergency lasts.⁶¹ They are also required to submit the integrity certificate after the emergency situation ends if they are employed for more than two months, otherwise their work contract can be abolished.⁶²

2.2 Needs Assessment

2.2.1 *Size of groups from Ukraine and groups who have previously arrived*

Culturally quite homogenous and not affected by the dramatic increase in migration during the twentieth century, until recently the Slovak Republic was almost exclusively a country of origin of migrants; i.e., a country from which citizens migrated abroad for various reasons. Within the European Union, Slovakia has the third smallest share of foreigners. The only countries with a smaller share of foreigners in the total population are Poland with 0.94% and Romania with 0.72%. Neighbouring countries the Czech Republic (5.49%) and Austria (16.55%) have a larger proportion of migrants.⁶³ As seen in the table below, the number of asylum applications and first-instance decisions have been minimal in past years.

⁵⁴ Legislative changes under Lex Ukraine. Deloitte, 11 April 2022

⁵⁵ Legislative changes under Lex Ukraine. Deloitte, 11 April 2022

⁵⁶ Legislative changes under Lex Ukraine. Deloitte, 11 April 2022

⁵⁷ Legislative changes under Lex Ukraine. Deloitte, 11 April 2022

⁵⁸ Legislative changes under Lex Ukraine. Deloitte, 11 April 2022

⁵⁹ Legislative changes under Lex Ukraine. Deloitte, 11 April 2022

⁶⁰ Ministry announcement of emergency <https://www.minv.sk/?tlacove-spravy&sprava=pre-vojnu-na-ukrajine-je-vyhlasena-mimoriadna-situacia-ak-chcete-ukrajincom-pomoc-kontaktujte-ministerstvo-vnutra> Accessed 18.10.2022

⁶¹ ZÁKON zo 6. novembra 2003 o výkone práce vo verejnom záujme. Zbierka Zákonov Slovenskej Republiky, Časová verzia predpisu účinná od: 30. 03. 2022. [THE LAW of November 6, 2003 on the performance of work in the public interest. Collection of Laws of the Slovak Republic, Temporary version of the regulation effective from: 30 March 2022]

https://www.slov-lex.sk/static/pdf/2003/552/ZZ_2003_552_20220330.pdf

⁶² Legislative changes under Lex Ukraine. Deloitte, 11 April 2022

⁶³ <https://www.iom.sk/sk/migracia/migracia-na-slovensku.html> - Accessed 14.10.2022

Table 9. Number of asylum applications and first-instance decisions in the years 2010-2022⁶⁴

rok	žiadosti o udele nie azylu	udelený azyl	poskytnutá doplnková ochrana	negatívne rozhodnutia	zastavené konanie
year	applications total	asylum granted	subsidiary protection granted	negative decisions	Cessation of Procedure
2010	541	15	57	243	284
2011	491	12	91	120	232
2012	732	32	104	264	340
2013	441	15	34	137	292
2014	331	14	99	99	137
2015	330	8	41	72	128
2016	146	167	12	56	35
2017	166	29	25	34	73
2018	178	5	37	46	69
2019	232	9	19	51	179
2020	282	11	27	40	177
2021	370	29	13	90	212
31.08.2022	357	21	41	45	243
SPOLU	4597	367	600	1297	2401

Slovakia - before Russia's war on Ukraine

Previous to Russia's war on Ukraine, Slovakia was not considered a major transit route for asylum seekers, nor a destination country. As can be seen in the following table, in the past five years the number of asylum seekers has been relatively small but steadily increasing. Consequently, since 2016 the number of individuals granted asylum has been a fraction of the total number of applications, at between 100 and 300 yearly. A slight increase was seen in 2020, with 282 asylum-seekers registered of whom 267 were first applications: the majority of these seekers were from Afghanistan, Syria and Morocco. The number also included 18 unaccompanied children.⁶⁵

Table 10. Asylum applications and international protection in the SR in 2016-2020⁶⁶ (sourced from the Interior Ministry, 2020)

Indicator	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Asylum seekers (of which first applications)	146 (99)	166 (153)	178 (155)	232 (214)	282 (267)
Asylum granted	167	29	5	9	11
Subsidiary protection granted	12	25	37	19	27
Citizenship granted	3	6	18	9	14

⁶⁴ Ministry of SK Statistics Document August 2022 <https://www.minv.sk/?statistiky-20> Accessed 01.12.2022

⁶⁵ UNHCR - Slovakia <https://www.unhcr.org/slovakia.html?query=slovakia> Accessed: 01.10.2022

⁶⁶ Statistical Report of the Migration Office of the Ministry of Interior in 2020 (Štatistická správa Migračného úradu Ministerstva vnútra Slovenskej republiky – rok 2020). Available at: <http://www.minv.sk/?statistiky-20> Accessed:16/10/2022

In 2019, Slovakia hosted around 900 refugees, predominantly from Armenia, Romania, the former Yugoslavia, Cuba, Iraq and Afghanistan⁶⁷. Although legally accessible and open to asylum-seekers, the declining number of applicants in past years (previous to February 2022) indicates that Slovakia does not have ample experience with refugees and was not as affected or involved in the so-called European refugee crisis of 2015.⁶⁸

The Role of Individuals who had previously migrated & Ukrainians in offering support

There is limited information about the roles the Ukrainian diaspora community play in receiving currently arriving refugees. The predominant Ukrainian Diaspora NGO identified as part of this research is one that was founded in 2014 – *Ukraine-Slovakia SOS* (SME Spolu'; <https://smespolu.org/>). Their work has expanded since February 2022 and focuses on the development and implementation of humanitarian projects to assist Ukraine, acquire information about the needs of migrants who have come to Slovakia, promote cooperation in both public and private sectors (creation of dialogue), and the development and popularisation of the Ukrainian culture in Slovakia and the EU overall. Their expanded work in the past months has also resulted in them securing a base in Bratislava from which they can conduct their work.

Furthermore, based on the knowledge obtained from the interviews that were conducted, a growing number of people are contributing towards the support that is being provided. Examples include Ukrainian students who previously migrated helping with clothing collections to be sent to border regions as part of humanitarian aid, Ukrainian psychologists working within NGOs in Slovakia offering psychological support, and others working as social workers and translators.

Ukrainian Situation - Statistics

Slovakia can be described as being predominantly a transit country for Ukrainian refugees with approximately 953,910⁶⁹ border crossings documented between February 24 and November 22 2022. As cross-border movement is pendular, this figure represents cross-border movements, not individuals. Despite the large number of refugees who continue on after passing through Slovakia or return to Ukraine, within these months, according to the UNHCR, 101,236 people residing in Ukraine entered Slovakia and registered for temporary protection or a similar national protection scheme.⁷⁰

There are a number of options available for those who decide to stay longer in Slovakia (dependent on citizenship and circumstance). These include⁷¹:

- Applying for temporary protection or “temporary refuge” / dočasného útočiska (the easiest form of protection for those fleeing the war in Ukraine)
- Applying for international protection (asylum/refugee, subsidiary protection status)

⁶⁷ Report from 2019 - Universal Periodic Review: 3rd Cycle, 32nd Session
<https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5c52c5e97.pdf> Accessed: 18.09.2022

⁶⁸ Report from 2019 - Universal Periodic Review: 3rd Cycle, 32nd Session
<https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5c52c5e97.pdf> Accessed: 18.09.2022

⁶⁹ UNHCR Data <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine> Accessed: 29.11.2022

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ UNHCR Data <https://www.mic.iom.sk/en/news/758-info-ukraine.html#refuge> Accessed: 10.10.2022

- Applying for a temporary or permanent residence

In the table above and below, the numbers indicate the second case associated with this classification (international protection). This explains why the figures do not include the large number of incoming Ukrainian refugees since February 2022, as from the 1st of March 2022, ‘temporary refuge’ (which is equivalent to temporary protection), has been the easiest form of protection available to the Ukrainian population. This form of international protection status is currently being offered with validity until 4 March 2023.

The majority of Ukrainians entering Slovakia opted for temporary protection, which gave them the following entitlements:

Table 11. Entitlements of and services provided to Ukrainian refugees according to the legal status of their stay:

	Short Stay	Temporary Protection	Refugee (through ordinary asylum application)
Documents needed/issued	Valid Biometric Passport ⁷²	Proof of identity (passport, ID card) ⁷³	Application can take up to 6 months ⁷⁴
Possible length of stay	90 days (within the Slovak Republic and the Schengen area) ⁷⁵	"Having Temporary Protection does not mean you have to stay in that country. You are able to move around freely to other EU countries for up to 90 days within a 180-day period, or you can choose to travel to any other countries if you have the necessary documents (passport, visa etc)". ⁷⁶	Indefinite ⁷⁷
Social Services	Different services at transit centres (food; clothes; emergency healthcare) ⁷⁸	Different services at transit centres (food; clothes; emergency healthcare). ⁷⁹	"The Slovak Humanitarian Council will help you to find affordable accommodation and will help you search for employment (access to education, requalification), provide you with a financial contribution for the first 6 months, as well as social, cultural, legal and psychological counselling". ⁸⁰
Labour market	Right to work in Slovakia ⁸¹		
Education	Right to be enrolled for free in Slovak educational system (after short-term residence has been granted).	Right to be enrolled for free in the Slovak educational system (the school will receive an allowance for your child as with Slovak children). ⁸²	Right to be enrolled for free in the Slovak educational system. ⁸³
Medical assistance	Entitled to medical care identical to Slovak citizens/insured residents		
Accommodation	No direct subsidy but persons and legal entities hosting them receive an "allowance". Free accommodation is not a legal obligation; accommodation providers receive a contribution from the state.		

⁷² UA Gov.Sk <https://ua.gov.sk/en.html> Accessed: 15.10.2022

⁷³ UNHCR Slovakia temporary protection <https://help.unhcr.org/slovakia/temporary-protection/#:~:text=What%20is%20Temporary%20Protection%3F,2023%20and%20might%20be%20extended.> Accessed: 15.10.2022

⁷⁴ UA Gov.Sk <https://ua.gov.sk/en.html> Accessed: 15.10.2022

⁷⁵ Slovak Government Landing Page for Ukrainians <https://ua.gov.sk/en.html> Accessed 16.10.2022

⁷⁶ <https://help.unhcr.org/slovakia/temporary-protection/#:~:text=What%20is%20Temporary%20Protection%3F,2023%20and%20might%20be%20extended.>

⁷⁷ UNHCR Slovakia Asylum <https://help.unhcr.org/slovakia/asylum/> Accessed: 23.10.2022

⁷⁹ UA Gov.Sk <https://ua.gov.sk/en.html> Accessed: 15.10.2022

There was difficulty identifying the various entitlements provided to Ukrainian refugees according to the legal status of their stay in one location. The lack of a unified source for accessing this information hinders incoming refugees from making an informed decision about the type of application they would like to make and is indicative of the lack of data and easy access to information.

Based on an interview with a member of the Legal Aid Centre of Slovakia, a state budget organisation established by the Ministry of Justice of Slovakia that provides legal assistance, acquiring temporary protection status is easy and accessible, as described in the following statement.

“Registration for temporary protection and the granting of temporary protection usually takes a few minutes. So this means that you'll pre-register online and within a few minutes you receive temporary protection registration... [This] is a piece of paper where it is written that residence is tolerated for temporary protection [...] with the picture and some data and [...] is the proof of their residence and their temporary protection status. So this is a very quick procedure, and based on the registration and having the temporary protection, they can go straight to the Labour Office and register for the financial subsidy”. (Legal Aid Centre - Interview)

Estimated Long-Term Plans of Ukrainians

It is difficult to estimate the longer-term plans of individuals regarding either staying in Slovakia, moving on to another country, or returning to Ukraine. The majority of Ukrainian refugees have settled in larger cities due to the infrastructure and availability of employment (interview with People in Need). Due to the vast numbers of refugees and lack of systematic support and accommodation on such a scale, many of them are still based in reception centres.

Furthermore, as elaborated by UNHCR, the impact of the coming winter months will further add to the instability of long-term plans.

“It is expected that the onset of winter may also trigger further displacement. Millions of Ukrainians are currently living in damaged homes or buildings ill-suited to provide sufficient protection from harsh winter conditions. Inadequate shelter particularly impacts vulnerable groups, including the elderly, people with disabilities, people with chronic illnesses, and children. The Government of Ukraine, with support from humanitarian partners, is leading the preparation and implementation of winterization activities. These may fall short of the full extent of needs on the ground, however, triggering further internal and cross-border displacement”.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ UA Gov.Sk <https://ua.gov.sk/en.html> Accessed: 15.10.2022

⁸⁰ UNHCR Slovakia Asylum <https://help.unhcr.org/slovakia/asylum/> Accessed: 23.10.2022

⁸¹ UA Gov.Sk <https://ua.gov.sk/en.html> Accessed: 15.10.2022

⁸² Slovak Government Landing Page for Ukrainians <https://ua.gov.sk/sk.html?csrt=8918819930045023225> Accessed: 16.10.2022

⁸³ UNHCR Slovakia Asylum - Education <https://help.unhcr.org/slovakia/education/> Accessed: 25.10.2022

⁸⁴ 2022 Inter-agency RRP -Recalibrated Version <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/3472> Accessed 05.12.2022

Perceptions & Attitudes

Although there is limited research and evaluation of the topic, ASILE (Global Asylum Governance and European Union's Role) explored attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees and governmental responses in eight European countries, including Slovakia, in September 2022. The findings were that perceptions were a lot warmer than in the past, particularly than during the so-called refugee crisis of 2015 in Europe. The following statements are conclusions drawn by ASILE on the matter:

- “The media coverage [about] Ukrainian refugees has tended to be very positive and to focus on the ‘human’ side of displacement, whereas the coverage of Syrian displacement was dominated by scenes of chaos and disorder at sea and land borders in the face of large-scale arrivals, albeit nowhere near the scale of Ukrainian arrivals”.⁸⁵
- “the fact that Ukrainians were represented as fellow Europeans played a key role too and there can be little doubt that media coverage, compared to [that of the] Syrians, has at times been racialized”.⁸⁶

In comparison to past experiences with refugees, there is a strong narrative of the reaction of Slovaks as warm and unprecedented, as in many other countries, as indicated below.

“[S]upport was offered almost immediately once the war broke out, at all levels of society. This included from the government and its institutions, from municipalities, from civil society actors and charities, from the business sector and the general public. It includes legislation updates and information, the simplification of access to the country, the provision of basic supplies to ensure stability and meet basic needs, facilitated access to health and safety services as well as to the labour market, and immediate integration into the education system”.⁸⁷

2.2.2 Profiles of the different types of refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine

UNHCR data indicates that 84% of Ukrainians arriving in Slovakia are women and children.⁸⁸ Furthermore, based on border-crossing data⁸⁹ of the 96,140 Ukrainians or third-country nationals previously residing in Ukraine who had crossed the border into Slovakia by the end of September, approximately 52,700 refugees have requested financial assistance.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ ASILE Project - Attitudes towards Refugees <https://www.asileproject.eu/attitudes-towards-ukrainian-refugees-and-governmental-responses-in-8-european-countries/> Accessed: 15.10.2022

⁸⁶ ASILE Project - Attitudes towards Refugees <https://www.asileproject.eu/attitudes-towards-ukrainian-refugees-and-governmental-responses-in-8-european-countries/> Accessed: 15.10.2022

⁸⁷ ASILE Project - Attitudes towards Refugees <https://www.asileproject.eu/attitudes-towards-ukrainian-refugees-and-governmental-responses-in-8-european-countries/> Accessed: 15.10.2022

⁸⁸ UNHCR Factsheet September 2022 (Slovakia) <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/95968> Accessed: 19.10.2022

⁸⁹ Border crossings to Ukraine - By Date UNHCR <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine/location/10785> Accessed: 15.10.2022

⁹⁰ UNHCR Factsheet September 2022 (Slovakia) <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/95968> Accessed: 19.10.2022

In a research project that involved the UNHCR and partners conducting 4,900 interviews in the border countries of Ukraine between mid-May and mid-June 2022,⁹¹ the demographic data and intentions of Ukrainian refugees were explored. It is important to note that 48% of the population participating in this data collection process were individuals staying at collective sites which might have impacted the overall perceptions and plans of particular groups.

In terms of demographic details, it was concluded that 90% of all family members were women and children.⁹² Furthermore, “70% of respondents left Ukraine accompanied by other persons (mainly immediate family),”⁹³ and “82% had to separate from at least one or more immediate family members who stayed behind in Ukraine”.⁹⁴ Regarding their education and vocation, it was found that “77% of respondents have completed technical, vocational or university studies; most have a professional/occupational background in services-related sectors”.

In Slovakia, 21% of respondents planned to return to Ukraine, 60% planned to stay in the host country Slovakia, 4% planned on moving to another host country, and the reminder were unsure of their plans.

Another piece of research conducted in Slovakia was a Displacement Survey of Ukrainian Refugees and Third-Country Nationals conducted by the IOM UN Migration office from 9 March to 3 June; the study also explored displacement patterns, needs and intentions. Of the 1,027 individuals at the two border crossing points in Slovakia (Vyšné Nemecké and Ubl'a) and registration centres at Michalovce, Humenné and Červená Hviezda, 99% were Ukrainian refugees, with the remainder being third-country nationals.⁹⁵ The research found that the main five regions refugees who arrived in Slovakia were originating from were “Kharkiv (21%), Kyiv (19%), Donetsk (14%), Dnipropetrovsk (10%) and Odessa (5%)”.⁹⁶ Furthermore, it concluded that women and girls accounted for the majority of refugees (85% women of an average age of 41).⁹⁷ The following table summarises the age distribution by sex of refugees surveyed in Slovakia.

⁹¹ Lives on Hold: Profiles and Intentions of Refugees from Ukraine

<https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/94176> Accessed: 18.10.2022

⁹² Lives on Hold: Profiles and Intentions of Refugees from Ukraine

<https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/94176> Accessed: 18.10.2022

⁹³ Lives on Hold: Profiles and Intentions of Refugees from Ukraine

<https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/94176> Accessed: 18.10.2022

⁹⁴ Lives on Hold: Profiles and Intentions of Refugees from Ukraine

<https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/94176> Accessed: 18.10.2022

⁹⁵ Ukraine Response 2022 - Slovakia Displacement Surveys Ukrainian Refugees and Third-Country Nationals: Displacement patterns, needs and intentions surveys, 9 March - 30 June 2022

<https://reliefweb.int/report/slovakia/ukraine-response-2022-slovakia-displacement-surveys-ukrainian-refugees-and-third-country-nationals-displacement-patterns-needs-and-intentions-surveys-9-march-30-june-2022>

⁹⁶ Ukraine Response 2022 - Slovakia Displacement Surveys Ukrainian Refugees and Third-Country Nationals: Displacement patterns, needs and intentions surveys, 9 March - 30 June 2022

<https://reliefweb.int/report/slovakia/ukraine-response-2022-slovakia-displacement-surveys-ukrainian-refugees-and-third-country-nationals-displacement-patterns-needs-and-intentions-surveys-9-march-30-june-2022>

⁹⁷ Ukraine Response 2022 - Slovakia Displacement Surveys Ukrainian Refugees and Third-Country Nationals: Displacement patterns, needs and intentions surveys, 9 March - 30 June 2022

<https://reliefweb.int/report/slovakia/ukraine-response-2022-slovakia-displacement-surveys-ukrainian-refugees-and-third-country-nationals-displacement-patterns-needs-and-intentions-surveys-9-march-30-june-2022>

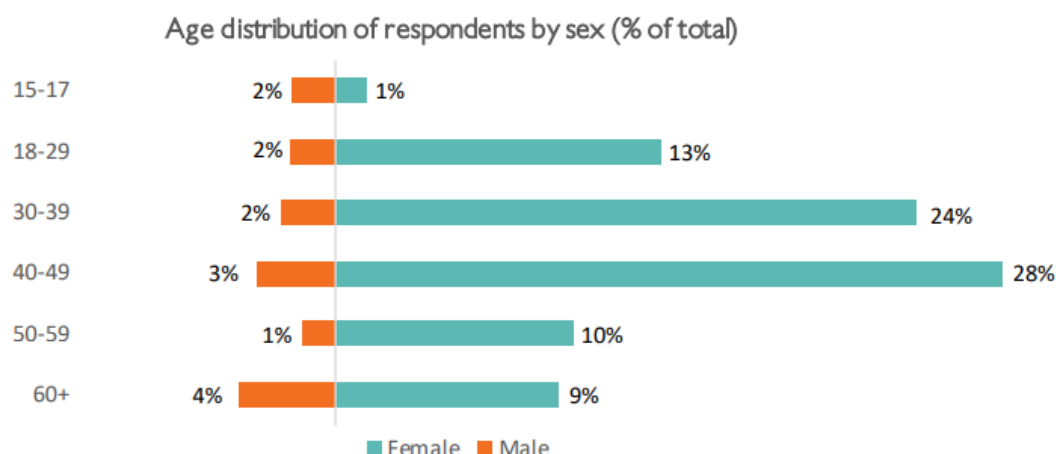


Figure 11. Age Distribution of respondents by sex⁹⁸

When exploring the intentions and reasons behind these plans, the UNHCR data (which compiled data from the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Republic of Moldova, Poland, Romania and Slovakia) concluded the following:

“The question of whether to stay in the host country or leave (either to go back to Ukraine, or continue on to another host country) was one [to which the answer] greatly varied. Overall, “65% of respondents reported planning to stay in their current host country and 9% were planning to move to another host country within the next month”.⁹⁹

Among the individuals expressing an interest in staying in the host country, “a [larger] proportion than average were: (i) individuals travelling with dependents (infants, children and older persons; (ii) those that left the country at the beginning of the military offensive against Ukraine; and (iii) [those] currently staying in hosted or rented accommodation”.¹⁰⁰

Of the individuals expressing the interest and intention to leave their host country (both for the purpose of returning to Ukraine or continuing on to another host country), the majority were either individuals who had more recently left Ukraine and/or those staying in collective sites. Furthermore, many of these were “refugees with at least one family member with special needs”.¹⁰¹

“For approximately a quarter of refugees who reported an intention to return to Ukraine, their plans were motivated by a need to access basic services and livelihoods. A slightly [larger] proportion than average among [the] refugees with at least one person with specific needs

⁹⁸ Ukraine Response 2022 - Slovakia Displacement Surveys Ukrainian Refugees and Third-Country Nationals: Displacement patterns, needs and intentions surveys, 9 March - 30 June 2022
<https://reliefweb.int/report/slovakia/ukraine-response-2022-slovakia-displacement-surveys-ukrainian-refugees-and-third-country-nationals-displacement-patterns-needs-and-intentions-surveys-9-march-30-june-2022>

⁹⁹ Lives on Hold: Profiles and Intentions of Refugees from Ukraine
<https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/94176> Accessed: 18.10.2022

¹⁰⁰ Lives on Hold: Profiles and Intentions of Refugees from Ukraine
<https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/94176> Accessed: 18.10.2022

¹⁰¹ Lives on Hold: Profiles and Intentions of Refugees from Ukraine
<https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/94176> Accessed: 18.10.2022

were planning to return, which could indicate that their return is driven by the need to access specialised services or related to difficulties sustaining themselves in host countries”.¹⁰²

In addition to the above, there was an emphasis on the intention to return to Ukraine due to having run out of savings and a lack of financial security.¹⁰³

Overall, the ability to make plans and the instability of the current situation appear to significantly affect decision making, with the UNHCR making the following conclusion “while most refugees hope to return to Ukraine one day, for the time being, the majority plan to stay in their current host country”.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, although many shared worries about the individuals who stayed behind in Ukraine, “most want to wait until hostilities have subsided”.¹⁰⁵ According to the UNHCR, “the lack of spots in preschool, primary and secondary school and opportunities for informal learning opportunities for teenagers and youth, as well as limited pathways for recognition of qualifications, constitute barriers to the education and employment of refugees”¹⁰⁶ – these factors cause further difficulty envisioning long-term plans.

The Legal Aid Centre elaborated on some reasons why the decision to stay or leave is difficult to assess at the moment, mainly due to the instability of the situation.

“In general, not only with Ukrainians, it [deciding on a country to settle in] is a decision that is usually [formed over] many months or even years. Many people who are changing their country of residence [will not even be sure] after a few years whether Slovakia is their final destination or if they will be moving further. There are many perspectives and it is difficult for [anyone] to understand all these perspectives [including those] on the side of the state or NGOs or goals, assisting as they may be, [as they] do not understand how the refugees are thinking, or maybe because we [have never been] in their position”.

2.3 Solutions for providing immediate and long-term help for refugees – Country experts

2.3.1 *Immediate programs for providing accommodation and housing for refugees*

In Slovakia, the topic of accommodation is being discussed and accommodation offered by organisations, private companies, state organisations and private individuals. As the magnitude of demand has been so large, there has been a need to be flexible and take a pragmatic approach.

In the case study interviews, a topic that was repeatedly brought to light was the country’s limited experience with refugees which was impacting preparedness for the Ukrainian refugee crisis.

¹⁰² Lives on Hold: Profiles and Intentions of Refugees from Ukraine
<https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/94176> Accessed: 18.10.2022

¹⁰³ Lives on Hold: Profiles and Intentions of Refugees from Ukraine
<https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/94176> Accessed: 18.10.2022

¹⁰⁴ Lives on Hold: Profiles and Intentions of Refugees from Ukraine
<https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/94176> Accessed: 18.10.2022

¹⁰⁵ Lives on Hold: Profiles and Intentions of Refugees from Ukraine
<https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/94176> Accessed: 18.10.2022

¹⁰⁶ 2022 Inter-agency RRP -Recalibrated Version <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/3472> Accessed 05.12.2022

“[A] situation of this scale has never happened here. [...] there was maybe some small [amount of] housing offered during the war, or [to] Yugoslavia[ns] because in the nineties there was some other type of temporary protection [recipients] from former Yugoslavia who were actually taken [in] by Slovakia and housed. But it was not such a [great] number as right now”. (Legal Aid Centre - Interview)

Particularly due to the scale, this has meant that solutions have had to be created ad hoc and on the go. The Legal Aid Centre re-emphasized this by stating:

“Slovakia has never faced this challenge before. So we have a very small capacity [managed] by the Migration Office, which is responsible for refugees in Slovakia, but they have three facilities which cannot accommodate thousands of people. So those facilities have social workers, [and have] employed psychologists, and [a] system to take care of vulnerable asylum seekers. But unfortunately, all those ad hoc [forms of] accommodation don’t have this as [it was] never thought that they would be used for accommodating refugees”. (Legal Aid Centre - Interview)

It was also shared that the difficulties with offering support were not, from their perspective, legal ones, but more due to practical applications and opportunities.

“From the legal perspective, it's not a problem to find accommodation for people who have some kind of legal status in Slovakia, meaning like refugee status or currently Ukrainians' temporary protection status. So [at this time] I wouldn't say that is a challenge legally, [but] more practically”. (Legal Aid Centre – Interview)

An important point that was raised by UNHCR is that this situation is different to with refugee influxes in the past as Ukrainians have a right to move into the EU and are not camp based. This means that they are able to find their own accommodation, which makes tracking them quite difficult. This in itself is an interesting reason why there is limited data on the accommodation of Ukrainians in Slovakia.

Platforms created for coordination of immediate accommodation

As early as in the first few weeks of the war against Ukraine, the Ministry of Transport and Construction set up a system through which details of private accommodation, state facilities and hotels, and guesthouses could be uploaded. As the system had a few difficulties at the start, *#KtoPomozeUkrajine* (Who will Help Ukraine)¹⁰⁷ (a joint initiative that answered the call to action, made up of over 40 Slovak non-governmental and civic organisations and individuals) also set up their own collection system to help manage the large numbers of refugees. Accordingly, in the first 4-5 months following the arrival from Ukraine of the first Ukrainians and third-country nationals in late February, two main large systems appear to have been operating, in addition to many more small-scale accommodation systems.

The Department of Transport and Construction System: The Department of Transport created a state accommodation system which coordinated under one platform the accommodation capacities of state

¹⁰⁷ Websites that coordinate accommodation <https://ktopomozeukrajine.sk/en/> / <https://www.donio.sk/ktopomoze-ukrajine> Accessed: 19.10.2022

facilities, and hotels and guesthouses, as well as private housing. The site was called <https://pomocpreukrajinu.sk/>. It is unclear what financial resources were used for this provision.

The 'Who will Help Ukraine' System: The system that was created involved a data collection process in the form of a questionnaire aimed at supporting the provision of short and long-term housing. The data obtained through these systems was helpful as information could be collected in one location about private, company and government-owned accommodation – data which was previously unknown. One estimate is that 26,000 beds were available via this system.¹⁰⁸ Questions about pets, length of potential stays and type of accommodation were also collected. The UNHCR should have this data but as of now, we have been unable to obtain these statistics.

Practical use of Platforms: Although the above-described platforms were available to support people to find accommodation, NGOs such as Foundation DEDO (a network of service organisations based in Kosice that before February 2022 helped with ending long-term family and individual second-generation homelessness, which after late February 2022 offered humanitarian aid and helped with finding long-term housing solutions for Ukrainians) did not appear to find the platforms helpful. In an interview it was shared that they had used the Who will Help Ukraine platform (form on <https://ktopomozeukrajine.sk/>) and then the state-provided '*Pomoc pre Ukrajinu*' (<https://pomocpreukrajinu.sk/sk>), as well as another tool made by the Kosice regional government that was initially made for travelling and tourism, but the most potent tool was found to be the private housing market and personal networks of connections. Particularly in regard to the local platform from Kosice, it was shared that there was not much accommodation available through these platforms and the highest success rates came from the private housing market. Through the coordination of an integration centre in the Kosice region, Foundation Dedo (data from November 2022 apply to since June 2022 when the integration centre was founded) had managed to accommodate 25 families (of 2-5 people) with another handful waiting for help. They estimated the total number of people in need of housing to be 150 individuals. It was noted that the rest of the Ukrainians "were able to find apartments on their own, or went back to Ukraine" (Foundation DEDO - Interview). Financial support for the housing came from a combination of state funds and allocated project funding.

Airbnb Short-term accommodation system:¹⁰⁹ The International Office of Migration (IOM), in partnership with Airbnb.org, also offered their system for free to families who had fled Ukraine after 24 February 2022. This assistance is currently offered in Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary for a thirty-day period until 28 February 2023. Results for the period of 24 February to 1 November 2022 indicate that the IOM assisted 339 individuals (the majority of whom were vulnerable persons such as single mothers, the chronically ill, and the elderly) to find safe temporary accommodation in Slovak Airbnb facilities.¹¹⁰ Neither IOM nor Airbnb charged a fee for the accommodation, which allowed their platform to act as a gatekeeper between the landlord and tenant.

¹⁰⁸ Statistics offered by Who will Help Ukraine at interview

¹⁰⁹ IOM Airbnb support <https://www.iom.int/news/international-organization-migration-and-airbnborg-partner-support-those-fleeing-ukraine> Accessed 20.10.2022

¹¹⁰ IOM response to Ukraine <https://iom.sk/en/activities/iom-response-ukraine/results.html> Accessed 15.11.2022

The Financial Contribution of the State

As the situation is ever-changing, so is the guidance and types and amounts of financial support that are offered. Although only confirmed in March, the accommodation subsidy for individuals with temporary protection was retroactively applied to be available from February.¹¹¹

Based on the number of beds provided and the age of the individuals under temporary protection (above or below 15), a range of between 570 and 1,430 EUR was offered to accommodation providers on a monthly basis, whether private individuals, companies and or government-owned.¹¹²

“It happens that the money for the accommodation is requested [but] the individuals with temporary protection have already returned to Ukraine or moved on to other countries... it is quite difficult to tell, as there really isn’t a system or [the] capacity to track and check”. (People in Need - Interview)

The financial contribution is calculated on a per-night basis, but as described above, due to the constant flux and instability of the situation in Ukraine there are questions about the precision of the requested amounts. As a means of reducing this discrepancy, a system was created according to which it is the responsibility of the refugee under temporary protection staying at subsidised housing to declare on a monthly basis to the municipality in which they reside whether the accommodation is still being used. Whether this happens, in reality, is debated among experts in the field. Doing this may be particularly challenging due to the speed at which guidelines are changed and adjusted, the large numbers of refugees, and the lack of a system with which to review the situation, as discussed above by one of the grassroots NGOs – People in Need.

Similarly, an example of the shifting system is that the financial compensation offered to the hosts has been raised. From the months of February to June 2022, based on state guidance (No. 100/2022), accommodation could be subsidized at 8 EUR plus VAT (or 7 EUR without) per night per individual above the age of 15. For minors, this amount was reduced to 3.85 EUR plus VAT (3 EUR for non-VAT payers). From July to September 2022, this rate was increased to 22 EUR with VAT (20 for non-VAT payers) for individuals aged 15+ and 11 EUR with VAT (or 10 EUR for non-VAT payers) for minors.¹¹³ These numbers vary regarding the type of accommodation offered and the entity that offers this accommodation. This contribution is offered by the state (specifically, by the local government (*‘Samosprava’* in Slovak) from funds remitted by the Ministry of the Interior) and may be requested by individuals and organisations providing accommodation in an accommodation facility according to the regulation (§10 of Act No. 455/ 1991).¹¹⁴

To alleviate any barriers, according to the Lex Ukraine law, individuals under temporary protection are exempt from paying the local tax for accommodation.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, although it was previously indicated that this financial contribution would end in September, with demand rising again the accommodation subsidy has been increased by 25% and extended until February 2023. The minister summarised the goals of this increase in the following way.

¹¹¹ Temporary Protection page on UNHCR website <https://help.unhcr.org/slovakia/temporary-protection/> Accessed: 04.10.2022

¹¹² Ministry announcement on financial contributions <https://www.minv.sk/?tlacove-spravy&sprava=na-prispevkoch-za-ubytovanie-odidencov-z-ukrajiny-stat-dosial-vyplatil-13-2-miliona-eur> Accessed: 15.10.2022

¹¹³ Ministry Page – Lex Ukrajina <https://www.mindop.sk/lex-ukrajina> Accessed: 15.10.2022

¹¹⁴ Ministry Page – Lex Ukrajina <https://www.mindop.sk/lex-ukrajina> Accessed: 15.10.2022

¹¹⁵ Ministry Page – Lex Ukrajina <https://www.mindop.sk/lex-ukrajina> Accessed: 15.10.2022

“At this moment, [this] motivate[s] the accommodation providers to take into account the increasing costs of provision. This model of providing accommodation to emigrants is more advantageous in terms of state costs, it helps Slovak households, and at the same time it is also optimal for the integration of emigrants, which is our main goal”. (Interior Minister Roman Mikulec)¹¹⁶

According to the Ministry of Transport and Construction¹¹⁷, who provides state subsidy for SMEs accommodating Ukrainian refugees, within the months of July, August and September commercial entities accommodated a total of 7172 Ukrainians in July, 7788 in August and 7695 in September. The table below shows the number of refugees accommodated by SMEs (hotels, guesthouses etc.) in the 30 most populated cities¹¹⁸. Analysing the data we can conclude that 55% of these refugees stayed in the 30 largest cities, and more detailed analysis shows that cities in the western part of the country accommodated the largest number of refugees.

Table 12. State contribution in 30 most populated cities of Bratislava towards accommodated refugees

Most populated 30 Cities in Slovakia	Number of accommodated refugees		
	JUL	AUG	SEP
Bratislava	1169	1390	1209
Košice, Prešov, Nitra, Trenčín, Cadca, Sala (accommodating 200-500 refugees)	1702	1840	1960
Zilina, Trnava, Komárno, Bardejov, Liptovský Mikuláš, Piestany (accommodating 50-199 refugees)	704	741	765
Other cities (accommodating less than 50 refugees)	282	363	394
Total	3857	4334	4328

*There are an additional 361 accommodated expatriates in July, 370 in August and 357 in September with mention of being based in one of the above 30 cities. As their data is not complete they have not been included in the table above.

¹¹⁶ Ministry Page on raising the allowance for accommodation <https://www.minv.sk/?tlacove-spravy-8&sprava=vlada-schvalila-zvyssenie-prispevku-za-ubytovanie-odidencov-podla-zakona-o-azyle-poskytovat-sa-bude-do-februara-2023> Accessed: 13.10.2022

¹¹⁷ Data received from the State Aid in Tourism Department, Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic. The data do not include the individual flat owners and municipalities who receive the subsidy from the Migration Office, Ministry of Interior. We were not able to obtain data from the Migration Office.

¹¹⁸ Most populated cities of Slovakia: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/cities/slovakia> Accessed: 10.01.2023

Checks and precautions in place to support safety and equitable access

There is a unified rental agreement in place which the state provides for all people who are part of this scheme. Here, it is “directly specified that the owner of the apartment will get the state subsidy for the rental. So he or she should not take any more money from the refugee” (Legal Aid Centre - Interview). As discussed in the interview, this should speed up the process of accessing accommodation and require less effort by the landlord and tenant and ensure more equitable access to support the rights of both parties.

Further checks include the following at the municipal level:

“As the money to be paid comes from municipal offices, the individual owners have to report every month to the municipal offices that they still are providing the accommodation to a certain number of individuals [for] which they claim the subsidised money. So this is kind of a control [check], but it’s questionable whether municipal offices at large have the capacity to control everyone... ..It is quite questionable whether or to what extent this mechanism [may be called] a guarantee to protect human rights in general. You cannot have a mechanism [according to] which I think that everyone, every individual will be screened before offering the accommodation. And I can't imagine who would have the capacity to screen such numbers [of people]”. (Legal Aid Centre – Interview)

Likewise, in further discussion with the Legal Aid Centre, it was suggested that individuals are to a large extent responsible for finding assistance through their own channels or from the police if they have other difficulties with accommodation.

NGO Tenenet also raised the topic of safety in relation to accommodation:

“There doesn’t exist a system of controlling [checking] the accommodation. You give your accommodation to a refugee, but no one knows what it looks like, or what standard it is. The state gives money for each [night in] accommodation but no one checks it”.

When asked whether there is a plan to put a system in place, it was claimed that some charities do accommodation checks but this is not organised on a state level. The state system (set up by the Ministry of Transport and Construction) is another platform that manages accommodation.

“I think it is a good system, but if someone wants to be in that system, again no one will check. It was a hard time [for the claimants] and they needed something fast, but now there is time to improve it, but no money or individuals are focusing on it. We now need to create some structure and order”. (Tenenet – Interview)

Similarly, it was raised that due to the limited capacity to follow up on the tracking systems that are in place, many mistakes take place. This lack of a tracking system also affects the reality of accommodation. “We have cases when Ukrainians have returned to Ukraine or continued on to another country, but the Hotels or accommodation are still ‘offering’ accommodation in the system and receiving money. There is no system to track if the person is still there” (Tenenet - Interview).

Difficulties with the housing system

Overall, limited short and long-term accommodation appears to be available and the interest in offering housing is declining. As mentioned above, increasing the allowance and extending the current

deadline for the next five months (from October 2022) are designed partly to encourage renewed interest in renting to Ukrainian refugees. Some explanations for the reasons for the reduced interest were discussed by the Legal Aid Centre.

“Our accommodation is decreasing because at the beginning of the war there was a lot of sympathy and empathy. But naturally, as the war is longer and longer, the focus of people is [also] elsewhere”. (Legal Aid Centre – Interview)

They further discussed the potential that some more affluent cities with high demand are not as open to renting accommodation due to the level of the financial incentive offered by the state.

“It is also based on the city and town and the market. In larger cities, the subsidy might not be as interesting [for those with potential accommodation]”. (Legal Aid Centre – Interview)

Furthermore, the NGO People in Need added that “when the state doesn't clarify how long the support for accommodation will be, it is very stressful for both renter and tenant” (People in Need – Interview). Similarly, they shared their observation that “at the start, no one minded the flexibility, but now it is getting longer so it is more stressful. With energy prices rising, everybody is nervous” (People in Need – Interview).

Foundation DEDO further explored this topic and suggested that a reason for the reduced interest in renting to Ukrainians might be the limited promise of funding. The state has only promised the allowance in the past for a short period of time (with deadlines for the extension or termination of the subsidy always lingering). Therefore, as households are unsure how long they will receive the allowance, they are not enticed to rent to Ukrainians. In October it was announced that the allowance will be offered for the next five months, which will help with finding willing landlords. Additionally, it was noted that although the number of asylum-seekers was limited in the past (before Russia's war on Ukraine), there was also an ever-present reluctance to rent to ‘foreigners’ and “like before, when there was reluctance from [home]owners to rent apartments to people from distant countries like Afghanistan, Iraq and so on because of stereotypes and racism, currently this is the situation with Ukrainians”. (Legal Aid Centre - Interview)

Short-term Housing - Extended Emergency Housing

As discussed above, individuals currently offering accommodation receive an allowance from the state. Although the allowance has been extended, there is not enough accommodation so the hosting of refugees for ten days at large-capacity reception centres is often extended to two or three months. Therefore, the emergency housing or short-term housing that was initially planned for ten days, after which the individual should be moved on to a more stable housing situation, has become a longer-term reality for many.

“There are many situations when emergency housing is still being provided for people for many months, like in reception centres where suddenly too many people are living together for many months because sadly, we just don't have the capacity[y]”. (Legal Aid Centre - Interview)

Emergency housing is often very temporary in nature, such as low-quality housing or tents. As mentioned by the NGO Tenenet, large-capacity tents are available but, this solution is designed to be used for larger waves of immigrants and is not a long-term solution. As a result, the focus is on better accommodation, as many Ukrainians are still living in reception centres after months. “We need to

stabilise the situation as many are still [located in] big hotels, gyms, and other large-capacity buildings. We think we need to prepare a system to help them find houses and flats” (Tenenet - Interview).

According to the Slovak government website, after entering Slovakia the government and non-government organizations will help individuals find accommodation.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, for those interested in offering their accommodation, the Ministry of Interior shares all required information and documents on its website. Despite this, the lack of available housing and the sheer number of refugees result in a very different reality. Likewise, it is difficult to define whether the latter represent short- or long-term solutions to housing, as there does not appear to be a clear line between the two in Slovakia.

Challenges, limitations and groups that remain unserved

Based on the available data, other than the general lack of accommodation on offer there do not appear to be any particular groups that are unserved at the moment. There are a few discrepancies regarding the type of help that is offered that appear to be racially grounded, such as the variability in the approach to Ukrainian nationals and the Roma population from Ukraine. Prejudice against the Romani population is widespread in Slovakia.¹²⁰ With approximately 6.5% percent of the population of Slovakia being Roma (according to a recent study by Matlovičová, K., Matlovič, R., Mušíňka, A., and Židová, A. in 2012) and 9% according to the state,¹²¹ awareness of and focus on this topic has been rising in past years. Unfortunately, the same prejudice is reflected in the approach to Roma individuals who have crossed the border from Ukraine since February 2022. Although no statistical data has been collected yet, numerous articles and discussions have appeared about the blatant disparity between the aid and kindness offered to the two groups.¹²²

Despite the large capacity reception centres¹²³ being designated for short stays, time spent there is often extended in Slovakia for a number of reasons, including the lack of available accommodation, a lack of a feeling of security associated with moving out alone, and a lack of support for transitioning between these spaces and private accommodation (including language abilities, enrolling children in education facilities, finding employment, etc.) (People in Need Interview).

¹¹⁹ Ukrainian page on Slovak government <https://ua.gov.sk/en.html/> Accessed: 03.10.2022

¹²⁰ Research on Roma prejudice in Slovakia https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Barbara-Lasticova/publication/327981138_Predsudky_voci_Romom_na_Slovensku_Prehlad_vyskumov_s_pouzitim_pri_ameho_sprostredkovaneho_a_predstavovaneho_kontaktu/links/5bb1db19a6fdccd3cb80aac9/Predsudky-voci-Romom-na-Slovensku-Prehlad-vyskumov-s-pouzitim-priameho-sprostredkovaneho-a-predstavovaneho-kontaktu.pdf

¹²¹ Research on Roma population in Slovakia conducted by Matlovičová, K., Matlovič, R., Mušíňka, A., Židová, A., (2012) [https://www.unipo.sk/public/media/16282/R%C3%B3movia_na_Slovensku_\(2012\)_Z%C3%A1kladn%C3%A9_c_harakteristiky_R%C3%B3mskej_popul%C3%A1cie_na_Slovensku_s_d%C3%B4razom_na%20priestorov%C3%A9_aspekty_ich_diferenci%C3%A1cie.pdf](https://www.unipo.sk/public/media/16282/R%C3%B3movia_na_Slovensku_(2012)_Z%C3%A1kladn%C3%A9_c_harakteristiky_R%C3%B3mskej_popul%C3%A1cie_na_Slovensku_s_d%C3%B4razom_na%20priestorov%C3%A9_aspekty_ich_diferenci%C3%A1cie.pdf)

The Roma population in Slovakia. Basic characteristics of the Roma population with emphasis on the spatial aspects of its differentiation, in Penczes, J., Radics, Z. (Eds.): Roma population on the peripheries of the Visegrad countries. Spatial trends and social challenges. Debrecen 2012, ISBN 978-615-5212-07-9, pp. 77-104

¹²² Article on the Ukrainian Roma population (Denik CZ) <https://www.denik.cz/staty-mimo-eu/ukrajina-romove-ukrajinci-uprchlici-slovensko-20220301.html> Accessed: 15.10.2022

¹²³ Article on temporary refuge (UkraineSlovakia.sk) <https://www.ukrainslovakia.sk/en/i-am-already-in-slovakia/temporary-refuge/> Accessed: 15.10.2022

Varying Quality of Housing: It has been noted that the reception centres themselves vary in quality and are often not appropriate for long-term living (as this is not their goal). An example of unsuitable accommodation that was reported referred to a transformed prison in Presov. Mothers and their children are staying there, and prison guards are still working at the location. People in Need explained that such spaces are used because it is believed that there are no more suitable spaces available. This is only one example of the need to explore the quality of short-term housing as there is often great variation.

Hesitancy moving out of large-capacity short-term housing: The refugees are often hesitant to move out of these large-capacity accommodation units, as they feel unsafe moving out to more rural areas on their own. As the Ukrainians are mainly women and children, they worry about their safety if they move away from the communities that have developed within the large-capacity reception centres. Similarly, a lack of infrastructure, jobs, and support from NGOs and peers adds to the stress. “They think they will be alone again, just them and their children, so they sometimes prefer the worse conditions at the large capacity centres” (People in Need - Interview). In terms of the impact on the state, individuals who stay for long at the capacity centres will suffer from an ongoing lack of stability, as they may be relocated at any time. As reported by the NGO People in Need, this lack of stability is not conducive to integration.

Safety & Human Rights Violations: As discussed by NGO People in Need, what is missing from private-sector accommodation is any safeguards. The population is a vulnerable one, and we have heard cases of landlords saying to individuals that ‘you are not paying enough, so you should offer other services’ or ‘clean my office as well’. We need mechanisms for helping protect the refugees, as they are often afraid to speak up as they might lose their housing.

Similarly, the vulnerable body of women and children that make up the majority of refugees raises concerns about safety and human rights. An example of this is the safety of accommodation. The topic of women's safety at work and in housing has also come up for DEDO, as mentioned by other interviewees from other organisations. This applies particularly to employment when mothers try to find jobs as their lack of knowledge of labour laws often means that they are unable to get formal contracts, are not paid well, or not at all, and the employees feel that should do anything as their situation is vulnerable. “They are not as well protected as Slovak nationals so Ukrainians face discrimination in the job market” (Foundation DEDO). Later, the latter also shared that they have heard of “several cases concerning the accommodation of refugees [when] the owners demanded additional money, even though they received benefits from the state” and cases when landlords “forced some clients to work in the garden and build the houses they lived in” (Foundation DEDO – Interview). Likewise, they also faced the ‘non-payment of deposit money’, although there was no reason for this” (Foundation DEDO - Interview).

Vulnerable Individuals (People with Disabilities): In a recent report, the IOM shared that since June 2022 they had “provided cash assistance to people who are taking full-time care of adult Ukrainian citizens with disabilities and to adult Ukrainian citizens with specific needs”.¹²⁴ Furthermore, Tenenet, one of the largest NGOs in Slovakia whose main goal is providing psychological help and generally assisting refugees, reported that there is a need to support individuals with special needs and disabilities as the support offered to this group is currently limited.

¹²⁴ IOM response to Ukraine <https://iom.sk/en/activities/iom-response-ukraine/results.html> Accessed 15.11.2022

“We have many people with disabilities. We just finished a project for IOM (International Office of Migration Slovakia), where we visit[ed] over 700 refugees in Slovakia over two months with a carer – the cost is about 1,500 EUR for three months per individual. The project [lasts] until the end of November, but UNICEF said maybe they will extend it. UNHCR gave the money [to] UNICEF and IOM and they gave the money to us [Tenenet] as they have no capacity for this”.

Impact of Winter:

The impact of the incoming winter months is expected to be a challenge, as reported by UNHCR.

“Refugee accommodation centres, similarly, may require further investment to install or improve heating systems, provide thermal blankets and winter clothing, and ensure sufficient fuel or cash for heating expenses”.¹²⁵

As discussed above, these will be additional challenges and needs that will grow as the months progress.

2.3.2 Longer-term, more permanent solutions for providing accommodation and housing for refugees

When exploring longer-term and more permanent solutions that have emerged in relation to providing accommodation and housing for refugees, many of the topics raised are related to those discussed previously in this chapter. In Slovakia, there appear to be many suggestions and possibilities for creating a system but at the moment the systems that are in place are limited.

Foundation DEDO summarised the long-term housing situation in the following way: “We don't have a specific housing solution. We apply the same model in the case of homeless families”. With the help of rental experts (real estate agents and other specialists in the field), they try to find apartments in the private housing market, communicate with landlords, and negotiate opportunities to rent houses and apartments.

An example of current housing solutions:

The following is an example of a current housing solution that was reported in conversation with Foundation DEDO. The municipality of Kosice has social housing in around 500 apartments near the city, mainly offered to families. Unfortunately, the latter are mostly located in segregated areas, so “it is not a good solution for integration”. Some social housing also exists but is already being used by homeless families so this is at full capacity and there is a very long waiting list for it. Similarly, DEDO were unsure whether Ukrainians were able to apply for this at all. Overall, regarding long-term housing solutions it was claimed that housing would ideally be scattered across the city and not segregated on the fringes of society, as this is not supportive of integration.

¹²⁵ 2022 Inter-agency RRP -Recalibrated Version <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/3472> Accessed 05.12.2022

Unavailability of Social Housing

The Impact of Slovakia's History:

In Slovakia, according to Foundation DEDO, the majority of apartments are privately owned. The rental market is very small and what is available is very expensive. In the interview, it was reported that due to communism and privatisation in the 1990s and 2000s “the city sold everything they had, often in a corrupt way, so now the state owns very little” (Foundation DEDO). To summarise, DEDO representatives stated:

“We have lost two decades [of] our history whe[n] we tried to prevent any [focus] on social housing and rental housing, and so we don't have any policies for that. The only accommodation that [is] available [is] commercial, and [this is] only available for people who are not vulnerable at all, [and who] have a good education...” (Foundation DEDO – Interview)

An example of this concerns Kosice, where it is estimated by Foundation DEDO that of around 80,000 apartments, the city only owns around 1,500. In comparison, it is estimated that approximately 3,000 individuals live in shelters or on the streets. This itself indicates the lack of social or even city-owned housing available even prior to the influx of Ukrainian refugees, thus raising the question “what housing policy can you have when you don't own apartments?” (Foundation DEDO).

The Private Market as the ‘Only’ Option:

A challenge in Slovakia that the state is trying to solve through the creation of the accommodation support scheme for owners of the hostels and accommodation facilities and private individuals who are renting their apartments or houses to Ukrainians dates back to before the start of Russia's war on Ukraine.

“In Slovakia, social housing problems are not specific to refugees, but [have]been a problem in Slovakia for many years. Now, with the arrival of thousands of people, it is starting to be a pressing issue”. (Legal Aid Centre - Interview)

As highlighted by the Legal Aid Centre above, and re-emphasized by Foundation DEDO, even for individuals with a more complex background or in need of help in Slovakia (even before February 24, 2022), “only mortgages and commercial apartments [are available]. No other schemes for people with more difficult and complex situations. There is no other [solution], this [private housing market] is all we have... and the private rental housing market is extremely expensive and extremely limited” (Foundation DEDO).

The Choice of Location – Where to go

At the moment, as discussed above, the market is expensive and extremely limited. The lack of accommodation extends to such a degree that many refugees spend months at large-capacity reception centres. Therefore, although the choice of moving is theoretically theirs, the NGO People in Need discussed the difficulties arising from the focus and interest in large cities. “Everyone wants to be in the cities with infrastructure” (People in Need - Interview). However, it is cities where demand is greatest, and consequently also prices, as well as the competition to find accommodation and spaces in schools. Therefore, although there is no direct pressure on Ukrainian refugees to select a particular region, it appears to be a decision that is to a great extent dependent on available accommodation, and for parents on spaces in schools.

Main Challenges regarding providing more permanent housing for refugees:

The discussions about the lack of long-term housing solutions in Slovakia with individuals active in the discourse in relation to the situation in Slovakia brought to light a number of challenges:

Limited and Expensive Private Sector Housing: the limited availability of social housing schemes in Slovakia has been discussed, although it is important to add to that discussion the knowledge that there does not appear to be enough private rental sector accommodation either – particularly not in the main cities in Slovakia. Below is a solution suggested by Who will Help Ukraine. This is a topic they have raised with other NGOs and Ministries to stimulate more investigation.

“I think there should be a discussion with small towns and regions to motivate them to receive Ukrainian families, and provide them with some accommodation, and the state should financially motivate them. For example, the state motivating the municipalities financially, saying we will help you with internet or infrastructure” (Who will Help Ukraine - Interview).

Furthermore, the organisation representatives believe that municipalities have old buildings that are falling apart which could be renovated using money from the state and suggested this as a long-term solution.

Lack of Available Data: “We don’t know the numbers, we don’t know the characteristic households. We don’t know their needs, any plans, we don’t have data. It [the data] is very scattered and there is no single methodology so it is hard to merge the data” (Foundation DEDO).

Land ownership: The NGO People in Need shared that there have been discussions about building social flats in Presov but due to the upcoming local elections, plans have been paused. Land ownership is generally a large problem. The state does not own much land due to privatisation. It is also difficult to buy land, as many owners have inherited land and it is unclear whose it is, or they often cannot come to an agreement to sell (as an owner can decide not to sell one piece of land in the middle of others, and the whole sale falls through).

Pets: “Another big difficulty is the animals the [refugees] bring with them. [Finding a] long-term rental for a refugee with a pet is almost unrealistic” (Foundation DEDO - Interview).

Differences in Mentality: “In Slovakia, there is a mentality that you have to work to receive help. Examples of this include the system called ‘*Aktivacne Prace*’ (Activation work) – this is an additional small sum of money (around 60 EUR) payable on a weekly basis if one does some work such as helping clean up the city (People in Need - Interview). This work ethic was stressed by Foundation DEDO in another interview in which they stated: “in Slovakia, there is this belief that housing should be owned, deserved, and earned, so there is a strong need to focus on social and affordable housing” (Foundation DEDO). Although not obviously problematic, this indicates the general perspective of the population concerning concepts such as social housing schemes.

Growing Anti-Ukrainian Sentiment: “The [anti-Ukrainian] narrative is [becoming stronger]” (People in Need – Interview). The latter organisation previously worked with helping Roma families find housing, and had the experience that landlords are somewhat resistant to selling and renting to Roma individuals, and although not identical, they stated that there was a resemblance in the attitudes to Ukrainians. “They are nicer to Ukrainians than the Roma, the prejudice is more [against] Roma people”. However, the sentiment is shifting in a more negative direction. It was reported that “[t]hey had a more helpful approach to Ukrainians but now it is shifting” and “[t]hey have expectations of what a

refugee should be like – that a proper refugee should have a job but should also cry” (People in Need - Interview).

One solution to avoiding such behaviour is considering social housing to have a dual purpose so as to avoid rising tension and hostility to Ukrainians within the host country (Slovakia). Similarly, if there is not a second wave or need from the Ukrainians, such renovated and prepared spaces would be ideal as a backup. People in Need shared that it appears that municipalities in the east of Slovakia better understand this, but in Bratislava, they believe that the rigid allocation of funds only to support Ukrainians is creating this divide.

Overall, it was indicated that it is very important to avoid segregation, and to do this we can learn from the case of the Roma population in Slovakia. “We need to make sure we don’t segregate them just like the Roma population” (People in Need – Interview). There needs to be discussion to ensure that they are welcomed into communities and not left on the fringes.

Lack of Long-term Planning: The lack of long-term plans (that include a direction and strategy) of the state and municipalities that individuals and NGOs could contribute to was a theme that was raised in all interviews. Possibly due to the lack of communication between ministries that was noted in the interviews with Who will Help Ukraine and People in Need, the lack of a plan means that NGOs “don’t know what will happen next” (Foundation DEDO). Deadlines and limits for funding and projects mean that it is difficult for the NGOs to plan (i.e., implement long-term plans). “Most organisations only give money for a short time, so it is hard to hire employees as no one wants to be hired for a short time” (Tenenet - Interview). For example, accommodation and buildings that are empty and could easily be restored are left untouched as “there is no initial moment when they say we want to come up with a long-term solution for X or Y households” (Foundation DEDO).

Similarly, there was also mention of some meetings between NGOs and the state, but Tenenet reported not having the time to spend talking. “It’s just talking, it doesn’t work, because there is no strategy. There is some money and the NGOs fight for the money to offer services, but NGOs have time to build the strategy” (Tenenet – Interview). It was also shared that although some NGOs had built some strategies, the state had not supported them and they no longer had time to both strategize and execute these plans. It was proposed that the state should make a strategy and let NGOs bring it to life at the grass-roots level (Tenenet – Interview).

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the current municipal elections (taking place in late Autumn 2022 in Slovakia) have meant that support for Ukrainians has declined as Ukrainians are not able to vote or contribute politically.

Suggestions from NGOs for future long-term housing solutions

As discussed above, no plan is currently in place. A strategy is being discussed but has not been finalized or shared. Throughout the interviews, a few mentions of general solutions and ideas already presented to ministries in the past months were shared. Among these suggestions were the following:

- People in Need highlighted the importance of working with the host community to achieve true integration: “Integration depends on the host community’s activities and mindset. So it is not just about supporting the individual but also the host community” (People in Peril - Interview).

- Within a few months of becoming operational, members of Who will Help Ukraine began to discuss the topic of long-term housing solutions. Most memorably, they had a meeting with the Ministry of Transport and Construction (who created the ten-day accommodation strategy after the first wave of Ukrainians arrived). Who will Help Ukraine came to them with a strategy related to accommodation. Specifically, the suggestion was that accommodation does not need to be of a high standard – even shared kitchens or bedrooms would be useful, as it is practical to have families located close to each other as there are no schools for kids to go to, so childcare could be shared, allowing parents to go to work. It was also suggested that this should operate according to a grant scheme and should be run by the municipality, state, and private operators, who can renovate accommodation to a basic standard and make it available to both refugees and low-income families to reduce the backlash of hate speech or negative feelings towards Ukrainians. The conclusion from Who will Help Ukraine at the interview was that this advice was not considered politically valuable and hence not acted upon.

Overall, these housing solutions need to be adjusted to the profiles of refugees. As many of them are women and children, as discussed above in this document, there needs to be a focus on vulnerable populations and safeguarding to ensure safety and human rights are upheld.

2.4 Other services for ensuring integration

Social Services

In Slovakia, all individuals with temporary protection status are eligible for social benefits. Of the 96,140 Ukrainians or third-country nationals crossing into Slovakia by the end of September, UNHCR data suggest that approximately 52,700 refugees have requested financial assistance.¹²⁶ One example of social benefits they are eligible for is material aid in the form of financial support. This support is offered to those unable to obtain basic living conditions and who cannot increase their income through their own efforts. These persons may include individuals fleeing the war in Ukraine. The amount of aid depends on the number of household members and their situation. Assistance for meeting material needs can also be provided to foreigners who show proof of residence on the territory of the Slovak Republic associated with a ‘foreigner’s card’ requesting temporary protection.¹²⁷

UNHCR and UNICEF have jointly established a ‘Blue Dots’ system across Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. Documented in early October 2022, Slovakia had three ‘blue dots’ for receiving refugees fleeing Ukraine. These ‘blue dots’ represent safe spaces in the form of Hubs where refugees can receive support and information, including psychological support, education, and health care, all in one location.¹²⁸ In a report by UNHCR that covered the months of May-December 2022, as a result of the Blue Dots, the UNHCR estimated it had provided, with their partners, “practical support and information to children and their families, including over 36,300

¹²⁶ UNHCR Factsheet September 2022 (Slovakia) <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/95968> Accessed: 19.10.2022

¹²⁷ Ministry page on Social Aid <https://www.employment.gov.sk/sk/rodina-socialna-pomoc/hmotna-nudza/> Accessed 22.10.2022

¹²⁸ Ministry page on Social Aid <https://www.employment.gov.sk/sk/rodina-socialna-pomoc/hmotna-nudza/> Accessed 22.10.2022

children and caregivers who have accessed mental health and psychosocial support”.¹²⁹ Similarly, “through partnerships with the Ministry of Education, the National Institute of Education and Youth, municipalities and local responders, partners have supported some 22,000 children to access formal or non-formal education, including early learning, while some 11,000 have benefited from the distribution of learning materials”.¹³⁰ Overall, the UNHCR is coordinating a response by humanitarian partners in order to harmonise and avoid duplication. The cooperation “complements the government’s efforts and at the same time UNHCR is coordinating the humanitarian response among other partners” (UNHCR - Interview).

Additionally, the above-mentioned NGO-organised hubs, including ones in Kosice (coordinated by Foundation DEDO) and Bratislava (Bottova), coordinate many social services and offer an accompaniment service for refugees seeking information and support. The respective services include but are not limited to legal support (offered by the Legal Aid Centre), psychological support (offered by Tenenet), language classes by Mareena, a day-care corner for taking care of children whilst individuals deal with paperwork, and a foreign office (police). Furthermore, in large-capacity centres, NGOs such as People in Need and Foundation DEDO offer direct support and accompaniment for organising health care, education for their children, and finding and negotiating accommodation and employment.

Likewise, hubs have been created to offer material aid. In Bratislava, one example of this is a grocery store available to Ukrainians coordinated by Who will Help Ukraine. Individuals and organisations can donate supplies here that can be picked up by Ukrainians after showing proof of identification.

Employment Services & Language Learning

In terms of the employment services available to refugees in Slovakia, according to Act. No. 552/2003 (discussed earlier), following the presentation of an integrity certificate issued by the criminal register or an affidavit in the case that the latter is not possible, individuals under temporary protection are able to take up work in Slovakia. During the interview with the NGO People in Need it was discussed how although there is more space in schools for children and accommodation in rural areas, due to the infrastructure and availability of work in larger cities, many gravitate there. With regard to supporting finding employment, some employment portals have created job fairs and work portals to support the sharing of information for individuals interested in finding employment (e.g., Profesia.sk). Additionally, organisations like People in Need and Foundation DEDO and many more local organisations, in order to foster integration, have accompanied Ukrainians throughout the process of offering holistic support and finding employment.

The topic of language is tied to employment. Regarding this, there are two lines of support: translation services during office visits, and the teaching of Slovak to Ukrainians.

With regard to translation services, although initially limited, as time passed translation services and individual NGOs and organisational capacity to hire Ukrainian translators became more available. People in Need shared that although they are hiring translators to accompany Ukrainians in temporary

¹²⁹ 2022 Inter-agency RRP -Recalibrated Version <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/3472> Accessed 05.12.2022

¹³⁰ 2022 Inter-agency RRP -Recalibrated Version <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/3472> Accessed 05.12.2022

protection to office visits and meetings, as the language of Ukrainian and Russian is quite similar to Slovakian “it is not that difficult to understand” (People in Need – Interview) so it is not as difficult as it might be to communicate in some other European countries.

Regarding learning languages, an exploration of the services available to refugees suggests that some language courses are being offered. In addition to private education services and individuals offering language lessons, NGOs such as Mareena at Bottova Hub offer language lessons. With regard to scale, NGO People in Need estimate that they have worked with approximately 1,000 people in their care and a further 5-600 people are receiving community activities such as children's programs or language lessons. These statistics do not include one-time consultations, as only after the fifth such event are they added to the system. Their outreach in the past three months (August-October) included approximately 11,500 people. They estimate that around 1,000 people have been beneficiaries of Slovak language courses so far.

In a recent report by the IOM for the period of 24 February 2022 to 1 November 2022, the IOM stated it had offered 54 Slovak language courses with an estimated 1,160 participating Ukrainian citizens.¹³¹ Funding for this involved a combination of projects, partners and volunteer teachers. As shared by People in Need, “the need was great, so it [funding] came every possible way we could think of”.

As of now, following a desk-based analysis, we are unable to identify any other state-offered language lessons.

Childcare Services

In large cities, most specifically in the capital city of Bratislava, there is a general understanding that there is a lack of spaces in schools and kindergarten for children. As this was a difficulty that existed prior to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the addition of thousands of people to the city's population has caused a challenge for schools (People in Need – Interview). As schools in rural areas have much more capacity, often even lacking the minimal number of children for opening classrooms, the NGO People in Need have indicated the potential benefit and accessibility to schools for Ukrainian children if parents move out of the large cities and into more rural areas. This view is further explained by the NGO People in Need below.

“If you push people into big cities [which is where many of the Ukrainians are], it will not be good as there are not enough schools, pre-schools, or accommodation. There are parts of Slovakia where they need [more] students to have enough [...] to open classrooms, so the directors are more than happy to accept students”.

Thus, as indicated above, the education system and accommodation are both key elements mothers must consider with regard to where their children will be educated. It was shared, however, that to move individuals to more rural areas, new infrastructure needs to be built as smaller towns are often filled with retirees and there is scarce transportation, while the infrastructure more generally is not designed to serve a working population.

¹³¹ IOM response Ukraine <https://iom.sk/en/activities/iom-response-ukraine/results.html> Accessed 15.11.2022

Legally, regulations stipulate that children up to the age of 16 years old must attend school. This condition is also applicable to children in temporary protection status. For a child to be enrolled into a Slovak school, the following process applies:¹³²

- Apply for temporary protection status, including for any children.
- Visit the education institution (school / pre-school) you wish your child to attend.
- Submit to the director of the school an enrolment document, and based on the level of Slovak and education, the “appropriate year and language courses will be provided for the child”.¹³³

In more recent months, a system was created to involve regional coordinators.¹³⁴ Together with UNICEF, this system was implemented to support schools in the regions.¹³⁵ The initiative is based on the cooperation of the National Institute of Education and UNICEF¹³⁶ with the aim of offering active help and methodical support for the integration of children from Ukraine into the Slovak education system whilst increasing the quality of education of already integrated children. Furthermore, the activities will also focus on language support for Ukrainian teaching staff, which will help them obtain employment in education.¹³⁷ The main areas of planned support for the project include but are not limited to advising and supporting schools in individual regions, the professional development of educational institutions/teachers /principals with a focus on the integration of Ukrainian children, Slovak language courses and certificates for Ukrainian teachers, and the printing and distribution of teaching materials for teaching Slovak as a second language for children and pupils in schools.¹³⁸ At the moment, there are still positions to be filled, indicating that the project is still in the process of being set up.¹³⁹

There are currently some difficulties with the program, as shared in the interview with People in Need. Not all the regional coordinators are at the schools yet, but the school year has started. This means that where there were no coordinators there are discrepancies between the directives and their practical application. An example shared by NGO People in Need obtained from first-hand experience concerns funds allocated per Ukrainian child attending school. The mandate suggested that the funds the school would get would cover school supplies for the children, thus People in Need did not buy these materials for parents. However, some heads of schools understood it differently and there was no coordinator to clarify this, so a number of children did not have school supplies. Furthermore, for a parent with multiple children, these costs add up, and if it is too expensive to come to school, they do not ‘integrate’ but prefer to continue online schooling in Ukraine, as this is a cheaper alternative.

¹³² Slovak Government Page <https://ua.gov.sk/sk.html?csrt=8918819930045023225> Accessed 19.10.2022

¹³³ Slovak Government Page <https://ua.gov.sk/sk.html?csrt=8918819930045023225> Accessed 19.10.2022

¹³⁴ Regional centers for teacher support <https://www.minedu.sk/regionalne-centra-podpory-ucitelov/> Accessed 20.11.2022

¹³⁵ NIVAM Regional Coordinators: <https://nivam.sk/> Accessed 20.11.2022

¹³⁶ Article on support for Ukrainians with temporary protection in Slovakia in relation to schooling <https://nivam.sk/aktivita-projektu-podpora-odidencov-z-ukrajiny-vo-vzdelavani-pomozu-adresne-reagovat-na-potreby-skol-priamo-v-regionoch/> Accessed 20.11.2022

¹³⁷ Article on support for Ukrainians with temporary protection in Slovakia in relation to schooling <https://nivam.sk/aktivita-projektu-podpora-odidencov-z-ukrajiny-vo-vzdelavani-pomozu-adresne-reagovat-na-potreby-skol-priamo-v-regionoch/> Accessed 20.11.2022

¹³⁸ Article on financing education coordinators: <https://www.minedu.sk/b-groehling-skoly-dostanu-na-ukrajinskych-ziakov-financie-z-eurofondov-s-ich-zaclenovanim-a-vzdelavanim-pomozu-koordinatori/> Accessed 22.11.2022

¹³⁹ Job description <https://www.profesia.sk/praca/narodny-institut-vzdelavania-a-mladeze/O4389138> Accessed 22.11.2022

Additionally, the previously mentioned Social Aid also makes it possible to apply for a subsidy for food for a child. In order to provide a subsidy for meals, it is necessary to inquire when enrolling a child in a kindergarten or elementary school about the local procedure for doing this.¹⁴⁰

Healthcare Services

As discussed earlier in this document, according to Act No. 580/2004,¹⁴¹ refugees with temporary protection are eligible for and can therefore gain access to emergency medical care services.

Particularly in light of the reasons for Ukrainians entering Slovakia, psychological help has been a major area of focus. In addition to being offered help through standard healthcare channels, psychological help is offered separately by NGOs. The key organisations that do this, according to the interviews, are IPCKO,¹⁴² which is offering support at registration centres and on the ground primarily in the east of Slovakia, and Tenenet, which is based in and around Bratislava. Furthermore, a recent IOM report from February 24 - November 1, 2022, stated that they had provided 1,692 people with psychological support, of which psychological first aid was offered to 356 adults and 55 children, and individual psychological counselling to 436 adults and 87 children.¹⁴³

The equivalence of diplomas and certificates is a topic of debate.¹⁴⁴ In addition to language difficulties that may result in a lack of ability to conduct work (e.g., such as for doctors and teachers), in the case of medical professionals Zuzana Eliášová, spokeswoman for the health department, reported that "they can [get to] work relatively quickly in the form of a temporary professional internship institute; that is, they will be employed either by a hospital or an outpatient clinic that uses this status. They work under the supervision of a given worker in the department in their speciality".¹⁴⁵ Additionally, the Department of Health explained that if medical workers from Ukraine do not have all the necessary documents, the employer can test them for their mastery of skills and knowledge regarding the position they are applying for.¹⁴⁶

Despite this, the practical applications of these laws would need to be investigated. In the interviews, it was noted that the NGOs often hired Ukrainians with temporary protection status to work with them. However, People in Need and Tenenet reported that it was often difficult for the individuals offering support to help others in similar situations to themselves, and due to the psychological demand of the positions they did not always stay for long in their positions.

Solutions for Coordination & Effective organisation

The uniqueness of the situation in recent months in Slovakia, and the lack of previous experience with refugees have brought into being a number of coordination-related and organisational strategies. These include registration hubs where NGOs and state offices are housed under the same roof to create a 'one-stop-shop' for anything a refugee might need.

¹⁴⁰ Ministry page on Social Aid <https://www.employment.gov.sk/sk/rodina-socialna-pomoc/hmotna-nudza/> Accessed 22.10.2022

¹⁴¹ Legislative changes under Lex Ukraine. Deloitte, 11 April 2022

¹⁴² IPCKO website <https://ipcko.sk/> Accessed: 16.10.2022

¹⁴³ IOM response Ukraine <https://iom.sk/en/activities/iom-response-ukraine/results.html> Accessed 15.11.2022

¹⁴⁴ Article on equivalency of certificates – RTVS <https://spravy.rtvs.sk/2022/03/ukrajinski-zdravotnici-mozu-na-slovensku-pracovat-ako-stazisti/> Accessed: 12.10.2022

¹⁴⁵ Article on equivalency of certificates – RTVS <https://spravy.rtvs.sk/2022/03/ukrajinski-zdravotnici-mozu-na-slovensku-pracovat-ako-stazisti/> Accessed: 12.10.2022

¹⁴⁶ Article on equivalency of certificates – RTVS <https://spravy.rtvs.sk/2022/03/ukrajinski-zdravotnici-mozu-na-slovensku-pracovat-ako-stazisti/> Accessed: 12.10.2022

The Creation of Coordination hubs:

A key large-capacity assistance registration centre in Bratislava – the Capital of Bratislava – is located on Bottova street, informally called ‘Bottova’.¹⁴⁷ Here, Ukrainians may request temporary protection status, as well as organise many other administrative tasks. Among others, Bottova houses a police station, a sitting area for rest and socialisation, NGO help desks (including lawyers, UNHCR, Tenenet, and Mareena, which teaches Slovak), there is water and some food, a place for children to play, and desks for the ministry of employment and ministry of state. “It is a great space, we need such a space, maybe not so large but it helps a lot. It is also great for Ukrainians to meet others and get information. It is like a mini embassy for Ukrainians” (Tenenet – Interview).

This space is particularly beneficial, reports NGO Tenenet, which is based there as “a lot of the NGOs are not cooperating. In Bratislava it is great because we have a joint space at Bottova, we meet once a week and cooperate. In other regions, there is no such space”. Tenenet also noted the potential benefits of creating such a space in the eight main Regions of Slovakia in the largest cities so that NGOs could work together locally. Proximity and joint workspace would mean that it is easier to cooperate. Similarly, local smaller NGOs who have better knowledge of the region could join the conversation and provide localised support. It was suggested that this would also be more helpful for WHO, UNHCR, and IOM, as they would know about the plans and could help more directly.

Although the hub has been very successful at reducing the time taken to administratively support individuals and improve accessibility for refugees, the place has some limitations. “This place is only rented until the end of the year, but the city is looking for a new place. Bottova is owned by a company and although they have offered it so far, they now have other plans for the building” (Tenenet - Interview).

Moreover, it was suggested that such hubs where NGOs and state and international organisations can cooperate are associated with the specific benefit that this can support the move away from each office having its own strategy and website (which is often the case in Slovakia) and the shift towards building a holistic unified system for helping individual refugees and supporting all their needs (People in Need, Interview).

In the same region, there are often a number of Hubs for Ukrainians to visit to receive support. Each hub has a different purpose, as shared by Foundation DEDO when discussing the hubs available in the Kosice region. Below are descriptions of them (details from the interview):

- Michalovce Hub - offered by the state for the region; other smaller centres operated by charities (e.g., Christian Charity),
- Integracne Centrum Košického Kraja (Hub Coordinated by DEDO Foundation) - offered by NGOs, larger, with more areas of support than others listed above. “Other centres will help with more simple topics. If it is more complicated, then they come to us... they usually finally come if [something] can’t be solved elsewhere”. (Foundation DEDO)
- Other smaller-scale hubs offered by charities or NGOs that have niche areas of focus.

A learning that was shared by Foundation DEDO concerning the coordination of such hubs was that it is often beneficial to have a local NGO or organisation to coordinate. As with Integracne Centrum Košického Kraja, Foundation DEDO was selected to coordinate, and shared that they found it easier as

¹⁴⁷ ‘Bottova’ Registration hub <https://bratislava.sk/bratislava-pre-ukrajinu> Accessed: 10.10.2022

they were familiar with the local context.¹⁴⁸ When discussing long-term plans for the hub, Foundation DEDO in their interview reported that although the space was created to accommodate and support Ukrainian refugees, the plan now was for it to stay open to help people of all nationalities with complex support. Plans are primarily to use the centre for (1) supporting the integration of migrants who come to Kosice, and (2) the homeless population, since they have similar needs.

Although it was shared that it is not always better for the individuals in need, NGO People in Need claimed that when offering individual personalised support, it is easier to access those individuals who are looking for help through large-scale accommodation spaces.

In Slovakia, when exploring the cooperation between the state, ministries, municipalities and NGOs, NGO People in Need stated that many NGOs consider the local municipalities to be core partners of their organisations. Municipalities are the authorities who deal with many matters pertaining to the Ukrainian population, although they often do not have the knowledge, experience, or practical know-how for this. People in Need, like many other NGOs with particular specialities, often advise and suggest solutions in such cases, and this is often welcomed by the municipality.

Inter-Agency Refugee Coordination Forum:

A model that has been utilised in other countries is that of a coordinated inter-agency forum, whose coordination strengthens and provides support for countrywide capacity-building efforts, thereby ensuring the application of coherent and consistent approaches.¹⁴⁹ In Slovakia, such a working group was created and meets in the capital of Bratislava and the east of Slovakia and is co-chaired by both the Government and UNHCR.¹⁵⁰ Officially termed the Refugee Consultation Forum (RCF),¹⁵¹ this forum is comprised of seven sub-working groups that focus on “Anti-Trafficking, Cash, Child Protection, Health, Information Management, MHPSS, Protection and Inclusion”¹⁵²

“In early June, the Prime Minister announced the reactivation of a Steering Committee dedicated to integration. This body, created in 2014, to ‘find solutions for foreigners and looking at ways to integrate them’, is now being reactivated and tasked with the inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugees”. (Refugee Coordinator Forum - Multi-sectoral Needs Assessment)¹⁵³

As shared by UNHCR, the many coordination meetings at the top level and sectoral level are spaces at which partners can share good practices and gaps, all of which inform planning. Furthermore, “partners use this open platform for dialogue that informs their own internal procedures and their discussions with the government” (UNHCR - Interview). Overall, the goal is to support the “ongoing

¹⁴⁸ The funding from ‘Who will Help Ukraine’ covered salaries for coordination and the reception desk (Foundation DEDO - Interview)

¹⁴⁹ Inter-agency coordination Unit description <https://data.unhcr.org/en/working-group/9?sv=11&geo=5179> Accessed 22.11.2022

¹⁵⁰ Ukraine Situation Flash Update #32 UNHCR <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-situation-flash-update-32-7-october-2022#:~:text=The%20estimated%20number%20of%20internally,Internal%20Displacement%20Report%20by%20IOM.> Accessed 1.10.2022

¹⁵¹ Refugee Consultation Forum - Ukraine <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine/location/10785> Accessed 22.11.2022

¹⁵² Refugee Coordination forum - Multi-sectoral needs assessment 31 October <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/96557> Accessed 22.11.2022

¹⁵³ Refugee Coordination forum - Multi-sectoral needs assessment 31 October <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/96557> Accessed 22.11.2022

engagement of the Slovak Republic with the Global Compact on Refugees as a means of systematizing and sharing good practices with other countries facing similar challenges”.¹⁵⁴

#Whowillhelpukraine – the creation of a partnership:

One system that was created that appears to effectively coordinate efforts across the whole of Slovakia is ‘Who Will Help Ukraine.’¹⁵⁵ Who will Help Ukraine was a joint initiative of many individuals and organisations working through a single channel. This system has created benefits and challenges. All willing organisations shared data, which was then dispersed (with supporting organisations such as People in Need in the east, Kemp Zilina helping with integration, Tenenet helping the Hub, and ADRA working on supplies) (Who will Help Ukraine - Interview).

One of the benefits shared by Who will Help Ukraine in their interview was the access and status that the organisation has received. As Who Will Help Ukraine was created by people who run businesses, they were given more voice/credit than local NGOs, which helped secure funding and have their voice heard (e.g. governments appeared to listen more to the voices of the business individuals and international NGOs, so they often acted as a channel through which to share the insights of the NGOs). One of the activities that was found to be very useful was the handing of Slovak sim cards to all refugees at the border. This not only gives Ukrainians contact with their loved ones but ensures that they are automatically in contact and can be checked to make sure they are okay. In hindsight, it was reported that although KPU received a lot of attention and had a media presence, it would be good if more permanent organisations were more in the spotlight (Who will Help Ukraine - Interview). Furthermore, another challenge was that of long-term applications. The partnership was created as a temporary system with the long-term goal of passing on responsibilities to long-term actors. In the case of housing/accommodation, a call centre was employed to filter and clean the data concerning who was offering and being offered accommodation. The data was later passed to the UNHCR in the summer of 2022. Following June 2022, everything was distributed and the partnership was disbanded for the foreseeable future. As KPUs see itself as an intervention-based initiative, the organisation will only become involved again if there is a necessity (Who will Help Ukraine - Interview).

Last but not least, platforms were also created such as maps detailing all the spaces a Ukrainian refugee might need to go to receive support. This involved compilations of information and resources in Ukrainian and Russian.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Ukraine Situation Flash Update #32 UNHCR <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-situation-flash-update-32-7-october-2022#:~:text=The%20estimated%20number%20of%20internally,Internal%20Displacement%20Report%20by%20IOM>. Accessed 1.10.2022

¹⁵⁵ Who will Help Ukraine <https://Ktopomozeukrajine.sk> Accessed: 01.10.2022

¹⁵⁶ Map of resources https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1ngXZs3ilQp8GeW4Q68wTHYyRUTgtMgB0&hl=en_US&ll=48.45618168453559%2C19.647449603816472&z=8 Accessed: 15.10.2022

3 Evaluation of the gap between the needs of refugees and the housing solutions that are offered (complemented with social services)

The main gaps between the needs of refugees and the housing solutions offered are identified along eight dimensions.

1. Locational problems (e.g. access to services and transportation)

There is a focus on Ukrainians moving to cities, and while these locations may have the associated services and transportation, there is limited accommodation to support this demand. Moreover, as noted earlier in this document, in rural areas where space is available in education and housing, there is limited access to services and infrastructure, such as transportation, to support the working population.

2. The current legislative system

The privatisation of the housing market and the lack of previous experience with such a large number of refugees has resulted in the need for a comprehensive system that can be utilised in such situations. Although there is an accommodation subsidy scheme to encourage the provision of state-owned, private and individual-owned accommodation to Ukrainians, the instability of the situation is making it difficult to find enough accommodation.

Furthermore, according to changes to Act No. 461/2003 Coll. on Social Insurance, the time Ukrainian citizens previously employed in Slovakia spent undertaking military service will be counted towards their pension contribution.¹⁵⁷ Additionally, they are not obligated to pay mandatory social insurance for the time they are conscripted into the Ukrainian military.¹⁵⁸

3. The financial framework (for both providers/landlords and refugees)

As noted above, a funding scheme offers landlords a financial subsidy. Although in recent months the subsidy has been raised to encourage landlords to provide more accommodation, the reality is that the Ukrainian tenants are unsure of their long-term plans, and the subsidy itself is only promised for a few months at a time. This creates a high-risk situation that is not ideal for landlords. However, the recent renewal of the scheme involves a promise to offer the subsidy for a longer period, which might positively impact housing availability for refugees. However, this does not even begin to address the need for social housing schemes in Slovakia, about which there has been some conversation but no mention of specific projects.

4. The lack of long-term feasibility of long-term solutions

One of the main difficulties identified with the housing system is that limited short and long-term accommodation is available, and the interest in offering housing is also declining. An increase in the financial allowance for accommodation for five months was implemented in October 2022 to encourage and renew interest in renting to Ukrainian refugees. It will take time to evaluate whether the monetary incentive will have an impact. However, this scheme is not a systematic state-run housing scheme but a more ad hoc initiative based on present opportunities and availability.

Limited long-term plans have been shared regarding large-scale solutions to the housing issue. However, it is important to note that many NGOs and state organisations have expanded their capacity

¹⁵⁷ Legislative changes under Lex Ukraine. Deloitte, 11 April 2022

¹⁵⁸ Legislative changes under Lex Ukraine. Deloitte, 11 April 2022

in the past months due to the influx of refugees, often with long-term plans. However, a key theme that has been raised is the need for more data to guide such solutions.

5. The main housing regime framework

As mentioned above, although a comprehensive state-run system is lacking and needs to be created, many institutions have expanded their capacities and knowledge in the field. Most notably, from the interviews with core organisations, it appears that Tenenet has expanded its activities. In addition, the foundation DEDO has supported the creation of a registration centre, the goal of which is to be a support hub for refugees in the long term. Additionally, a novel organisational grouping under the name 'Who will Help Ukraine' was created that has the potential to increase collaboration (the exact details of this are yet to be decided). The Hub, currently coordinated by Foundation DEDO, is an example of an outcome of this initiative. Furthermore, many conversations with NGOs and the state are leading to more collaboration and creating the foundation for future solutions. Similarly, the UNHCR Inter-Agency Refugee Coordination Forum is an example of another partnership and learning space, and although not yet an efficient solution, is a space in which solutions may arise.

6. Cultural acceptance issues

With more data, this question can be better addressed. At the moment, however, the main difficulties are related to the demographics of the Ukrainian population coming to Slovakia. As they are largely considered vulnerable (consisting of children and women), issues of human rights and safety have often been raised, with difficulties arising in relation to relationships with landlords and employees. The issue of language skills is also being explored, as although it was noted that Slovak is not very different from Ukraine (so Ukrainians may be able to understand more than in many other European countries), there is still a language barrier that needs to be addressed.

7. Lack of required social assistance

Although initially lacking, social assistance has been increasing and is now offered on a large scale. One issue that has been raised is the need for accompaniment rather than the availability of support. Language and access were two concerns that were mentioned in this regard. Grassroots organisations that work on a daily basis to accompany individuals to integration noted the lack of capacity to provide the required level of regular support. Similarly, it was suggested that there is a significant difference in the level of support offered in urban areas within the largest regions compared to in more rural, less central locations.

In Slovakia, the state has created a unified tenancy agreement for all individuals involved in the scheme to increase security and provide equal access to housing. This process should ensure faster access to accommodation, fair contracts between landlords and Ukrainians in temporary protection, and reduce the administrative burden for landlords and tenants.

8. Lack of other services and the link between housing measures and other services

As mentioned in interviews with several key organisations presently involved in action and discourse, housing is so central to integration that it is difficult to separate the two factors. As a result, the work of several NGOs that provide complex services with an integrated approach and related capacity has also increased. However, the lack of data and longer-term funding hinders the more systematic filling of territorial gaps.

Integrating Ukrainian children into the Slovak educational system is a key challenge. Territorially uneven school capacity (in cities, schools are full, while in smaller localities, there is capacity) and language barriers must be addressed. In this regard, there are some promising initiatives.

It appears that language courses and psychological treatment services are not available to the extent needed.

4 Main lessons and recommendations

The development of longer-term and more systematic solutions for housing refugees is necessary because the return of refugees to Ukraine is not realistic in the near future. The main lesson is that the private rental sector can play a substantial role in delivering rapid solutions when appropriately incentivised, but if support is not predictable, then private property owners will not be willing to engage in initiatives in the long term. Experience also shows that the sector needs to be better regulated to become safer and more transparent and that long-term, large-scale solutions can only be based on the private sector, as the municipal sector is small. Moreover, municipalities are not interested in expanding their housing sectors, a problem which should also be addressed.

To deliver solutions, the Slovak government can rely on its well-functioning State Housing Development Fund, which distributes EU and nationally funded subsidies to the municipal and private sectors. Some main elements of the required schemes already exist, such as grants and preferential loans for municipal housing construction and the renovation of private residential buildings, but what new interventions should be included in state housing policy to increase affordable housing supply should be considered. However, there is a lack of strategic thinking at the government level and efficient cooperation between ministries, NGOs and other civil society actors in this regard. NGOs have played a crucial role in providing services to refugees and finding rental accommodation on the local housing market. Furthermore, concrete recommendations have come from the NGO sector, which the government should listen to.

The following recommendations can be made based on the main findings of the case study:

Elaborate a longer-term housing strategy for refugees that uses a holistic approach

- The strategy should be elaborated with the participation of municipalities, the NGO sector, and grassroots civil organisations.
- It should include housing provision and other areas of refugee provision, such as employment, education, social and health services, and financial aid.
- It should be based on data and information collected from organisations that work on the ground.
- It should involve developing a plan to distribute refugees around the country more evenly; mid-size towns should play an important role. In addition, if education and other services are sufficiently developed, they can be an essential part of the solution, as housing is cheaper and more available in these localities.
- In terms of education, the Regional Coordinators for Education program (developed by the state and UNICEF) is a promising initiative; if implemented in smaller localities, it may make them more attractive to refugee families.

More substantial involvement of municipalities in delivering short and long-term housing for refugees

- More incentives should be put in place to increase the willingness of municipalities to increase their refugee-housing options:
 - o Larger cities should participate in the presently available scheme that supports social housing construction.
 - o Mid-sized cities should receive subsidies to help them renovate their unused municipal buildings and convert them into temporary accommodation facilities, including those with shared facilities (kitchens and bathrooms)

More systematic involvement of the private rental sector

- The state compensation (quasi-rent supplement) paid to private property owners should be more predictable, and mechanisms should be developed to monitor the sector (housing quality and tenant safety, especially since refugees are primarily women with children).
- A means-tested rent supplement subsidy should be introduced to help families that already work and have a somewhat higher income but still need support to rent on the market.
- Renovation support could be provided to private landlords who are willing to rent out their flats to refugees for longer periods.
- NGOs could be given a more substantial role in involving the private rental sector through social rental agency models, which could also increase the safety of refugee families.

Better coordination among service providers and the more predictable financing of services

- The government should support and incorporate more successful civil initiatives into its coordination system, like the “Who Will Help Ukraine” initiative, which integrated local international NGOs, organisations, and business actors.
- The government should provide more predictable and longer-term financing to service providers, including NGOs, enabling them to plan the development of their services more systematically.