

SOCIO-ECONOMIC INCLUSION GOOD PRACTICES ACROSS EUROPE

Introduction

Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, millions of refugees sought safety across Europe. Governments, the private sector and civil society in host countries responded generously, piloting new approaches to refugee inclusion. During this period, UNHCR actively strengthened capacity, catalysed action among key national stakeholders, fostered innovative partnerships with the private sector and development actors, enhanced evidence-based practices and advocated for addressing inclusion gaps. These efforts yielded good practices that support the socio-economic inclusion of refugees from Ukraine, and are replicable across various countries and contexts. This document provides selected examples of good and emerging practices employed by national authorities and UNHCR in the Czech Republic, Georgia, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, and Slovakia. Leading up to the second [Global Refugee Forum](#) (GRF), 13 – 15 December, these examples illustrate UNHCR’s support for stakeholders who work towards fostering the socio-economic inclusion of refugees.

In February 2023, UNHCR introduced a [Regional Inclusion Strategy for the Ukraine Refugee Response](#) to promote the inclusion of refugees from Ukraine. The strategy provides tools and approaches for creating an inclusive environment for refugees. These tools enable UNHCR to identify opportunities for engagement with relevant stakeholders. The strategy is based on the socio-economic needs of the displaced population, while considering the temporary protection frameworks to navigate, through **5 strategic objectives**.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1



Promote effective access to government social protection systems

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2



Enhance access to decent work

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3



Promote financial inclusion and access to business development services and start-up grants

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4



Advocate for the inclusion of refugee children and youth in national education systems

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5



Enhance effective socio-economic inclusion through partnerships with municipalities

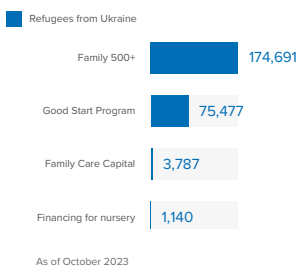
Strategic Objective 1: Promote effective access to government social protection systems



Supporting refugee access to social assistance benefits (Poland)

Allocation of social security numbers to refugees through the Common Electronic System of Population Register (PESEL), allowed rapid referrals, and registration to Government cash assistance benefits. This initiative enabled refugee households meet their immediate basic needs and work towards self-reliance. Access to social protection through temporary protection registration is praised, but withdrawing status and deactivating PESEL UKR for stays beyond 30 days outside Poland raises concerns. This leads to the loss of benefits, hindering access to healthcare, accommodation, and education. Restoration of benefits, post re-activation of status, often takes months, exacerbating vulnerabilities for affected refugees. To date, 42 per cent of all refugee households in Poland are under coverage of the social protection system, with many benefiting from social benefits provided by the Government (chart 1).

CHART 1: SOCIAL SERVICES ACCESSED BY REFUGEES FROM UKRAINE IN POLAND THROUGH PESEL IN 2023



Coordinating cash assistance benefits with the Government (The Republic of Moldova)

UNHCR and the Government collaborate to efficiently target, and support, refugee access to cash transfers. This cooperation allows UNHCR to address gaps in the coverage of the government’s Temporary Protection commitments, mitigate duplication and optimize resources for refugee

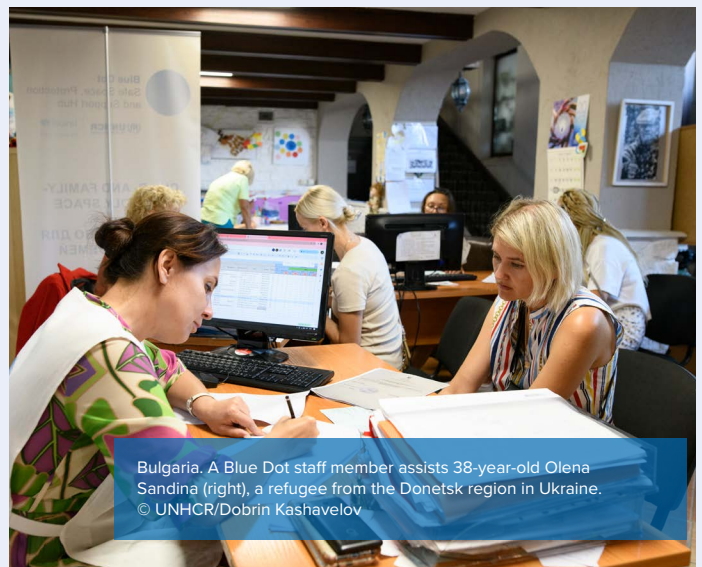
inclusion. UNHCR set up a ‘Crisis Module’ within the social assistance Management Information System. The Crisis Module is an initiative to streamline data collection on vulnerable households nationwide, validated at a local-level by social workers, thereby strengthening coordination and reducing duplication. The system, backed by a joint UN-MLSP memorandum of understanding (MoU) supports coordinated targeting for humanitarian Cash Working Group programs and the MLSP’s social assistance initiatives.

Blue Dot Hubs

UNHCR also provided legal advice to refugees to mitigate, or overcome, barriers in accessing registration or services. Supplementing government services, refugees from Ukraine can also benefit from services provided at UNHCR supported Blue Dot hubs. The hubs serve as one-stop-shops for registration and referrals to social assistance benefits programs offered by UNHCR, the Government and other local services providers and, from child protection and GBV support to social care services.

Blue Dots

Established in Bulgaria, Hungary, Moldova, Poland and Slovakia, Blue Dot Hubs offer safe spaces and immediate support to refugees from Ukraine. Hubs provide services including information on services, psycho-social support and legal counselling.



Bulgaria. A Blue Dot staff member assists 38-year-old Olena Sandina (right), a refugee from the Donetsk region in Ukraine. © UNHCR/Dobrin Kashavelov

Strategic Objective 2: Enhance access to decent work



Supporting Refugee Employment Platforms (Romania)

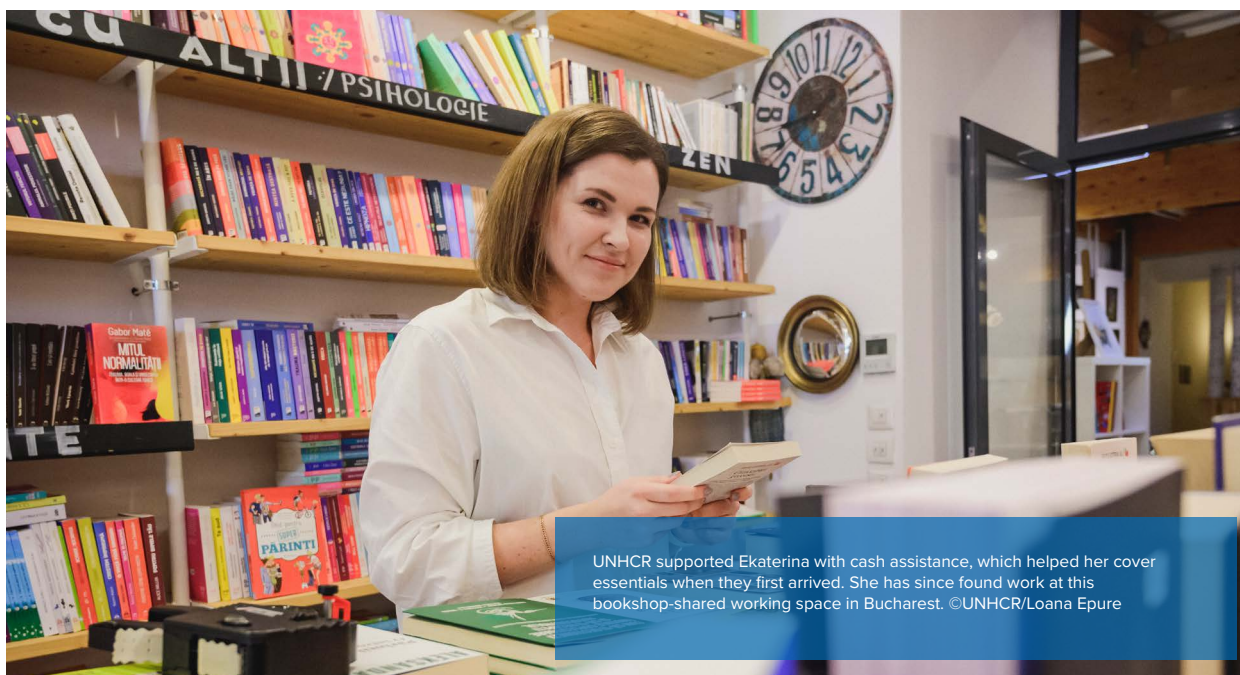
UNHCR supported [Refugee Employment Platforms](#) help connect companies with refugee job-seekers by providing employers with information on navigating national frameworks to hire refugees for decent work. They also serve as guidance for refugees on accessing employment opportunities. In March 2022, UNHCR partner [Project Voyager](#) launched [Jobs4Ukraine](#), a free online employment platform supporting refugees from Ukraine access the formal labour market. In just over a year, the platform registered 11,500 refugee job-seekers, 2,300 potential employers and facilitated some 8,300 job interviews and applications. UNHCR is supporting Jobs4Ukraine to expand its services in Romania to provide similar opportunities to all refugees nationally. UNHCR has supported employment platforms similar to Jobs4Ukraine in Romania in [Cyprus](#), [Greece](#), [Italy](#) and is expanding to seven more countries in 2024.

Supporting opportunities for refugee employment (Czech Republic)

UNHCR supported legislative amendments to exempt specific language requirements for refugees from Ukraine. The amendments targeted former teachers and enabled refugees with teaching qualifications to work in schools in non-teaching positions. To date, some 2,090 refugees from Ukraine are employed in schools in the Czech Republic, with half working as pedagogues. Upon successfully passing a standardized Czech language examination, the refugee teachers are certified, giving them access to opportunities by expediting their inclusion within the formal labour market.

Promoting inclusion through Job Fairs (Poland)

In 2023, UNHCR has advocated for refugee inclusion through participating in more than 20 job fairs, offering concrete support to refugees such as CV development, promotional materials, outreach programs for refugees, and interpretation services. UNHCR's active involvement in job fairs across Poland extends to cities like Krakow, Wroclaw, Lublin, Rzeszow, Gdynia and others. Job fairs are a valuable platform for job seekers, including refugees, and employers to connect, exchange information, and identify suitable candidates.



UNHCR supported Ekaterina with cash assistance, which helped her cover essentials when they first arrived. She has since found work at this bookshop-shared working space in Bucharest. ©UNHCR/Loana Epure

Strategic Objective 3: Promote financial inclusion and access to business development services and start-up grants



Encouraging inclusion and support to refugee entrepreneurs from Ukraine (Georgia)

While refugees under the temporary protection directive have the right to access banking services and many banks have provided access to basic banking products, barriers remain. These are often

linked to a lack of basic information among refugees, documentation issues (particularly for refugees without a biometric passport), lack of awareness of financial services providers and anti-money laundering and counter financing of terrorism (AML / CFT) regulations that particularly affect non-Ukrainian asylum seekers and refugees coming from [AML/CFT high-risk third countries](#).

UNHCR engaged Crystal, the leading financial inclusion organization and largest non-banking institution in Georgia to provide catered support for refugees. These initiatives, combined with business mentoring services, provide the tools for Ukrainian entrepreneurs to re-establish their businesses in Georgia. So far, 23 refugee entrepreneurs have benefited from microfinancing, with additional proposals awaiting review. UNHCR will continue to support Crystal as they offer products to promote the inclusion and economic self-reliance of refugees.



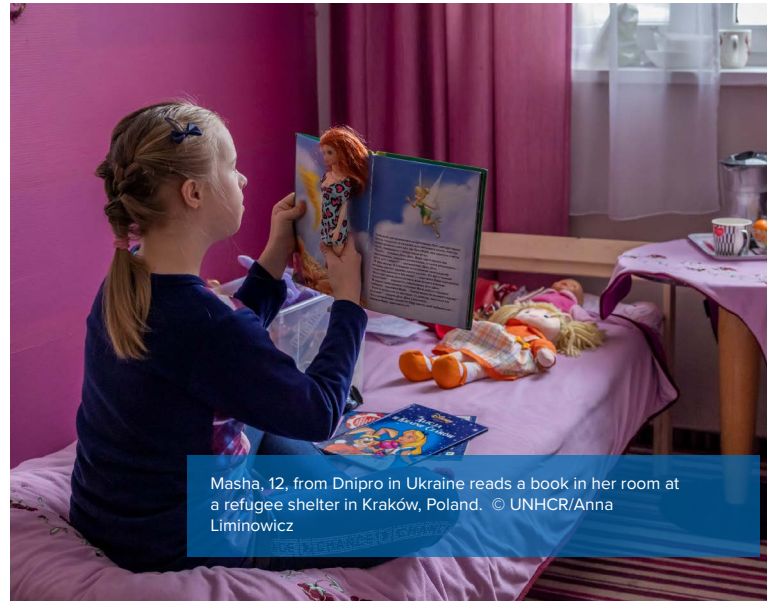
Refugees attend a workshop on financial literacy with the National Bank of Georgia ©UNHCR

Strategic Objective 4: Advocate for the inclusion of refugee children and youth in national education systems



Promoting refugee needs in, and refugee knowledge of, national education systems (Poland)

UNHCR's "[Teaching About Refugees](#)" materials enhance local teachers' and host community student's understanding of the educational needs of refugee children. The materials, translated into Polish, are designed for use in awareness-raising and training programs. They provide information



Masha, 12, from Dnipro in Ukraine reads a book in her room at a refugee shelter in Kraków, Poland. © UNHCR/Anna Liminowicz

which help foster an environment of understanding within the classroom, enabling refugee children feel they are in an inclusive educational environment.

Strategic Objective 5: Enhance effective socio- economic inclusion through partnerships with municipalities



Promoting local inclusion and socio-economic resilience (Slovakia)

UNHCR scaled up engagement with Slovakia's self-governing regions and municipalities to gather evidence on promising local inclusion opportunities. As part of its whole-of-society approach, UNHCR places a strong focus on collaboration with self-governing regions, who have competencies in service provision relating to education, social

services and socio-economic development. UNHCR collaborates with the Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia (ZMOS), a Government Agency working towards promoting the interests of territorial self-government in legislative regulations. This collaboration aims to encourage refugee inclusion and develop joint positions on accommodation and socioeconomic inclusion. Furthermore, in partnership with the Ministry of Education, UNHCR supports regional and municipal education authorities to facilitate school enrolment for refugees.

UNHCR advocates for the inclusion of refugees in regional and municipal social protection and community strategies, traditionally designed for the local population. UNHCR presented the, [Effective Inclusion of Refugees: participatory approaches for practitioners at the local level](#) toolkit to local authorities and other strategic regional actors. This approach aims to avoid creating parallel systems, while providing refugees access to existing local services and structures, such as municipal

community centres. In the same vein, UNHCR is assisting the Banska Bystrica self-governing region in establishing integrated centres for social services accessible to both local and refugee communities.

Supplementing UNHCR’s advocacy, national partners [Slovak Humanitarian Council](#), [Human Rights League](#), [Mareena](#), [People in Need Slovakia](#) and the refugee-led organization (RLO) [Sme Spolu](#) also engage in advocacy and programmatic support with regional authorities and municipalities. With UNHCR’s support, NGO Mareena mapped local services available to refugees in five regional cities and prepared leaflets for refugees jointly with

municipalities. The leaflets provide refugees with information on how, where and when they can find relevant local services and refugee-friendly spaces. UNHCR engaged its partner Mareena to develop a Manual on Community-Based Protection and Inclusion at the Local Level as well. The manual provides practical guidance to local NGOs, municipalities and regional authorities on how to apply community-based approaches to benefit refugees at the local level. To ensure access to information, UNHCR translated the leaflets on available services in [Bratislava](#), [Kosice](#), [Banska Bystrica](#), [Nitra](#) and [Trencin](#) to Ukrainian and hosted it on its Data Portal and Help site.

Key Takeaways

A whole-of-society approach is vital in achieving refugees’ socio-economic inclusion within their host countries. UNHCR’s collaboration and engagement with relevant stakeholders, including multi-stakeholder partnerships with national and local governments, the private sector, development actors, NGOs and RLOs are pivotal in facilitating refugees’ access to services that promote their socio-economic inclusion. By fostering new, or strengthening existing partnerships, stakeholders can address the challenges faced by refugees and identify opportunities to build on. This collaborative approach improves effective inclusion in national systems and services, such as education, the labour market and social protection, while supporting social cohesion and a sense of belonging within host communities.

Across Europe, an increasing number of refugees from Ukraine are accessing employment opportunities. As seen in the Lives on Hold: Intentions and Perspectives of Refugees from Ukraine surveys (1, 2, 3 and 4), the number of refugees on the path towards self-sufficiency has remained on an upward trajectory since 2022, see chart 2. However, major [challenges](#) such as limited

local language skills and difficulties in obtaining recognition for professional qualifications remain, rendering many refugees employed below their skill levels or unable to access decent work. In the approach to the second GRF in December 2023, UNHCR promotes the replicable accomplishments of national authorities, NGOs and RLOs across Europe based on lessons learned since February 2022. Through the replication of the practical solutions provided in this document, stakeholders can enhance refugee self-reliance and provide a foundation for their inclusion within their host communities in differing contexts.

CHART 2: PATH TOWARDS SELF-SUFFICIENCY

