



Risks to Community Cohesion Between Ukrainian Refugees and Host Communities

Slovakia Report

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Risks to Community Cohesion Between Ukrainian Refugees and Host Communities in Slovakia

In Slovakia, governments, non-governmental organisations, businesses, multilateral organisations, and ordinary citizens have provided substantial support to Ukrainians fleeing Russia's 2022 invasion of their country. However, as the war continues, the generosity shown to date might wane, including due to the challenges that Slovak host communities face, such as the rising cost of living, an overstretched healthcare system, and shortages of affordable housing, as well as disinformation campaigns relating to refugees, including from Russia-aligned

stakeholders. This report aims to help understand the factors that might undermine cohesion between Ukrainian refugees and host communities in Slovakia in the medium term. It provides programmatic recommendations to local, national, and international stakeholders on what they could do to mitigate those factors. In addition, the report details the factors that have increased (or can increase) different Ukrainian refugees' vulnerabilities to exploitation, discrimination, and ability to access necessary services, as well as incendiary and misleading discourses about Ukrainian refugees that have appeared and have the potential to be spread further.

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Executive Summary

Background

The world was shaken by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and the ensuing human suffering. By March 2023, European countries recorded more than 8 million people displaced by the violence in Ukraine, with more than 5 million having registered for temporary protection (TP) or similar national protection schemes on the continent, including 112,715 who registered for TP in Slovakia.¹

Ukrainian refugees have been warmly welcomed by Slovak institutions and citizens. Governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), businesses, multilateral organisations, and ordinary citizens provided whatever support they could to people fleeing the invasion. While a quick end is hoped for, it is possible that the war will become prolonged, and it is therefore likely that people displaced from Ukraine will continue to reside in neighbouring and other European countries.

Slovakia faces significant challenges, including rising economic pressures and relentless disinformation efforts. There is a risk that these factors may erode the current high levels of community cohesion in the longer term. In other crises, over time, tensions have led to increased polarisation of society and discrimination or hate crimes against minorities. Some early signs point to the support for refugees from Ukraine beginning to erode. For example, a poll conducted by the Institute for Sociology and the Institute for Research in Social Communication, MNFORCE, and Sesame between March and December 2022 found that during this period the proportion of respondents who strongly disagreed that people from Ukraine should receive the same rights as others in Slovakia increased from 15 percent to 25 percent. Those who disagreed that refugees should have the right to apply for asylum in Slovakia without annual limits constituted 35 percent of respondents in March 2022; this increased by almost half by December 2022.² Looking ahead, with the invasion ongoing, the priorities of organisations that currently support Ukrainian refugees might change, resulting in a drop in funding available to support refugees and the communities hosting them.

Despite these challenges, the disruption to the status quo leads to clear opportunities to improve the situation and general standards of living for both refugees and local communities.

Objectives

Several months into the war's second year, this report aims to help understand the factors that might undermine cohesion between Ukrainian refugees and host communities in Slovakia in the medium term and provide recommendations to relevant organisations for what could be done to mitigate those factors. We provide recommendations for specific programmes as well as programmatic and service delivery approaches that local, national, and international stakeholders could take to increase community cohesion and reduce the likelihood of these potential tensions occurring.

¹ UNHCR. 2023. [Operational Data Portal](#). Accessed 12 April 2023.

² European Commission. 2023. [Slovakia: Slight decrease in public support for those displaced from Ukraine](#). Accessed 12 June 2023.

Approach and methodology

The research was conducted between November 2022 and March 2023. The team first carried out desk-based research. This was followed by research workshops in Bratislava on 7 and 8 March and in Košice on 14 March with respectively, 22 and 17 experts from government, multilateral organisations, local and international NGOs, and academia in attendance. The desk-based research and the workshops focused on (1) the characteristics that can make refugees more vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation, and difficulty accessing services; (2) incendiary and misleading discourses about Ukrainian refugees in the country; and (3) tensions that might arise between refugees and host communities in the medium term (defined as by September 2023). The research team followed up with a survey that asked key experts to rate the effectiveness of various programmatic responses for mitigating the five tensions identified in the workshops as most likely to affect community cohesion by September 2023 and to share programmatic lessons that may be useful for others working in this space. The findings from the workshops and the surveys were supplemented by additional desk-based research.

Structure of the report

The report considers the characteristics that have increased (and can increase) different Ukrainian refugees' vulnerabilities to exploitation and discrimination, and their ability to access necessary services (Chapter 2); the incendiary and misleading discourses about Ukrainian refugees that have been noted and that have the potential to be spread further (Chapter 3); possible tensions that might occur between Ukrainian refugees and host communities in the medium term (Chapter 4); and various programmatic responses that could be applicable in the region to mitigate the risks at each stage of the refugees' journey (Chapter 5).

Each chapter is structured to cover the different stages of Ukrainian refugees' journeys in Slovakia: (1) entry, legal status, and registration for services; (2) healthcare; (3) housing; (4) education; (5) employment and income; and (6) community, social, and political life. This allows the report to bring out more clearly the links between misleading and incendiary discourses, underlying challenges that such discourses exploit, increased vulnerabilities of certain groups of Ukrainian refugees, and where tensions between Ukrainian refugees and host communities might emerge or become more significant, as well as to offer more targeted recommendations.

Summary and recommendations

Economic concerns are a key driver of potential tensions

From mid-2022 until mid-2023, financial concerns have been the most significant source of worry for Slovaks, as consistently shown by polling.³ For example, an October 2022 European Union (EU) poll showed that 95 percent of survey respondents in Slovakia were worried about the rising costs of living, including food and energy prices.⁴ While the unemployment rate fell from 7 percent in 2021 to 5.8 percent in 2023, long-term unemployment for unskilled workers, who may see themselves in competition with refugees for government resources remains an issue.

³ European Commission. 2023. [EP Autumn 2022 Survey: Parlemeter](#). Accessed 10 April 2023; European Commission. 2023. [Standard Eurobarometer 98 Winter Eurobarometer 2022 - 2023 Country Factsheets, Slovakia](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

⁴ European Commission. 2023. [EP Autumn 2022 Survey: Parlemeter](#). Accessed 10 April 2023.

Financial challenges, as well as inequalities, lay a fertile ground for misleading and incendiary discourses regarding refugees in Slovakia. Some discourses scapegoat refugees for economic challenges and inflation, suggesting that these are fuelled by Slovakia hosting refugees. Relatively common narratives claim that refugees get more support than the local population at a time when local populations struggle with high inflation. Discourses have also been noted about refugees taking jobs from the local population and ‘destroying the labour market’, as refugees are allegedly willing to work for significantly lower wages. There are also claims that Ukrainians are not genuine refugees, portraying them as economic migrants or coming from areas that are not as impacted by war. This in turn might contribute to tensions between host communities and refugees.

To mitigate potential tensions around economic concerns, this report’s recommendations include, among others:

- Ensure and communicate equity in the distribution of resources among Ukrainian and local populations that are in need, and publicise the additional resources (international funding and voluntary domestic donations) that the country received to support the refugees.
- Implement phasing programmes—that is, change approaches to target support to those who are most vulnerable as a conflict continues.
- Share positive stories through social media, for example about the contributions that Ukrainian refugees make to the country.
- Extend programs supporting refugees to more vulnerable local communities.
- Engage with businesses and organisations to help them make the most of a more diverse workforce.

Political discourses, fuelled by disinformation, have the potential to stir tensions

Russian-aligned stakeholders have been active in spreading disinformation in Slovakia.⁵ This includes anti-Ukraine narratives, for instance ‘blaming Ukraine and NATO for the war’,⁶ as well as those targeted directly at Ukrainian refugees. Slovakia is one of the most vulnerable of the five Central European countries studied by the series of reports produced by IFES and Palladium,⁷ due to higher proportions of pro-Russian populations and greater sympathy for Russia than in comparable EU countries.⁸ In 2022, for example, more than half of Slovaks believed that NATO deliberately provoked Russia by surrounding it with its own military bases.⁹

Alongside this, a prominent ‘peace narrative’ in Slovakia suggests that Ukraine should seek to end the war and ‘unnecessary suffering’, which might include compromises on the part of Ukraine. The message is that Ukrainians need to accept their fate, negotiate, and, if needed, give territory to Russia and move on, as they are endangering other countries by resisting and may draw Slovakia into active war. One study has called this narrative ‘a euphemism for stopping the military support for Ukraine’; this narrative has also been extended beyond the war to refer to stopping support to refugees.¹⁰

⁵ International Republican Institute (2023), [Hostile Narrative Brief War In Ukraine](#), Accessed 29 March 2023.

⁶ Bond, Shannon, NPR. 2023. [From TV to Telegram to TikTok, Moldova is being flooded with Russian propaganda](#). 9 March 2023. Accessed 29 March 2023.

⁷ The other countries studied in this series are Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Moldova, and Romania. Please see the regional report here: Kerasauskaite, I., Nimkar, R., Mulloy, L., Slota, A. (2023). [Risks to Community Cohesion between Ukrainian Refugees and Host Communities in Central Europe](#), IFES and Palladium.

⁸ GLOBSEC. 2022. [GLOBSEC Trends 2022: CEE amid the war in Ukraine](#). Accessed 11 April 2023.

⁹ European Digital Media Observatory. 2022. [Ukrainian refugees and disinformation: situation in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania](#). Accessed 11 April 2023.

¹⁰ Učeň, Peter. 2023. [The Russia-Ukraine War and the radicalization of political discourse in Slovakia](#). In *The Impacts of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine on Right-wing Populism in Europe*. Ivaldi, Gilles, and Zankina, E., eds. European Center for Populism Studies. 8 March 2023. Accessed 26 March 2023.

To mitigate potential tensions that can arise due to political discourses, this report's recommendations include, among others:

- Conducting more activities to increase interactions that members of both communities enjoy (such as movie screenings, sports events, or free or affordable after-school activities for both Ukrainian and Slovak children), providing opportunities for the groups to meet and get to know one another.
- Implementing strategic communications to reach target audiences and penetrate information bubbles. This includes working with journalists to support quality journalism that does not contribute to the spread of incendiary discourses and producing radio and TV programming to address tensions, including 'edutainment' programmes that use fiction to help build inter-community understanding.
- Improving the training of search engines and generative artificial intelligence to help reduce bias and potential abuse.
- Organising community dialogues around topics such as fear of insecurity and war, Ukrainian history and culture, and the realities of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
- Working with journalists to support quality journalism that does not contribute to the spread of incendiary discourses.
- Reviewing school curricula, including the teaching of history and digital literacy.

Many of the challenges are rooted in long-standing operational challenges

Many of the concerns that host communities in Slovakia expressed and, with them, the incendiary and misleading narratives regarding refugees, are rooted in long-standing issues, such as a strained healthcare system and shortages of affordable housing. Prior to the arrival of refugees from Ukraine, the Slovak healthcare system had already reported staff shortages,¹¹ long waiting times,¹² and below-average overall health outcomes.¹³ As an illustration, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, in 2017 the Slovak Republic had the highest proportion (74 percent) of patients in Europe reporting that they had visited an emergency department because no appropriate primary healthcare was available to them.¹⁴

In 2022, of all EU capitals, Bratislava was the second-most expensive city in which to buy a home for those earning an average local salary.¹⁵ Slovakia also has a very small private rental sector compared to other EU nations, with only 6 percent of properties across the country occupied by private renters.¹⁶ There is also less public rental housing available than in other EU states.¹⁷ Within this context, since Russia's invasion, discourses have been circulating claiming that Ukrainians have more or unfair access to housing in comparison to Slovaks and that they are creating a significant burden on the housing system—raising house prices, reducing availability, and taking locals' places.

While the arrival of Ukrainian refugees has highlighted some of these long-standing challenges, it also can speed their resolution, as these issues have become even more visible. Furthermore, in some cases, different sources

¹¹ European Commission. 2019. [Internships for doctors from third countries to address shortage of health professionals in Slovakia](#)

¹² OECD. 2017. [State of Health in the EU – Slovak Republic – country health profile 2017](#)

¹³ OECD. 2017. [State of Health in the EU – Slovak Republic – country health profile 2017](#)

¹⁴ OECD. 2017. [State of Health in the EU – Slovak Republic – country health profile 2017](#)

¹⁵ Kálmán, Attila. Investigate Europe. 2022. [Europe strains under rising prices as renters bear brunt of housing crisis](#)

¹⁶ The Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic. n.d. [Housing Policy of the Slovak Republic until 2030](#).

Accessed 13 April 2023.

¹⁷ The Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic. n.d. [Housing Policy of the Slovak Republic until 2030](#).

Accessed 13 April 2023.

of funding may have become accessible to address these issues, which could improve the situation for both Ukrainians and host communities.

To mitigate potential tensions around long-standing operational challenges, this report's recommendations include, among others:

- Linking community cohesion-focused work with broader efforts to improve operational challenges in relation to healthcare and housing.
- Conducting conflict and context analysis to inform programming and communication campaigns and to implement specific programmes to improve access to services for the local and refugee populations where needed (e.g., by providing translation services for healthcare, streamlining staffing processes for healthcare workers, or supporting social intermediaries in the rental process, guaranteeing rent payments and minimum tenancy standards).¹⁸

¹⁸ See, for example, Habitat for Humanity. n.d. [Introducing Social Rental Agencies in Poland](#). Accessed 27 March 2023.

Introduction

The world was shaken by Russia’s brutal escalation of hostilities and full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and the ensuing human suffering. By March 2023, European countries recorded more than 8 million people displaced by the violence in Ukraine. More than 5 million had registered for temporary protection (TP) or similar national protection schemes on the continent, including 112,715 in Slovakia.¹⁹

Ukrainian refugees have been warmly welcomed by Slovak institutions and citizens. Governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), businesses, multilateral organisations, and ordinary citizens provided whatever support they could to Ukrainians fleeing the invasion. A study by GLOBSEC estimated that up to 46 percent of Slovak citizens took individual actions to support fleeing Ukrainians in the early months of the war.²⁰ While a quick end is hoped for, it is possible that the war will become prolonged, and it is therefore likely that displaced Ukrainians will continue to reside in neighbouring and other European countries.

Slovakia, however, also faces significant challenges—rising economic pressures, relentless disinformation efforts,²¹ and potential policy pitfalls, among others. There is a risk that these factors may erode currently high levels of community cohesion in the longer term. In other crises, as time continues, tensions have led to increased polarisation of society and discrimination or hate crimes against minorities. This in turn can decrease the resilience of a society to disinformation and to shocks more broadly and, in the worst cases, can increase criminality and violence or conflict between communities and lead to human rights violations, including the exploitation of vulnerable individuals and lack of access to basic services.

Some early signs point to support for refugees from Ukraine beginning to erode. For example, a poll conducted by the Institute for Sociology and the Institute for Research in Social Communication, MNFORCE, and Sesame between March and December 2022 found that during this period the proportion of respondents who strongly disagreed that people from Ukraine should receive the same rights as others in Slovakia increased from 15 percent to 25 percent. Those who disagreed that refugees should have the right to apply for asylum in Slovakia without annual limits increased by almost half, from 35 percent in March 2022.²² A survey published in January 2023 suggested that 28 percent of respondents in Slovakia saw refugees as a threat to their society—the highest rates among the Visegrad countries (V4) surveyed.²³

Objectives

Several months into the war’s second year, this report aims to help understand the factors that might undermine cohesion between Ukrainian refugees and host communities in Slovakia in the medium term.

¹⁹ UNHCR. 2023. [Operational Data Portal](#). Accessed 12 April 2023.

²⁰ GLOBSEC. 2023. [Despite challenges, V4 societies generally remain supportive of Ukrainian refugees, with more negative attitudes apparent in Slovakia](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

²¹ Council of the European Union. 2022. [EU Imposes Sanctions on State-Owned Outlets RT/Russia Today and Sputnik’s Broadcasting in the EU](#). Accessed 31 March 2023.

²² European Commission. 2023. [Slovakia: Slight decrease in public support for those displaced from Ukraine](#). Accessed 12 June 2023.

²³ GLOBSEC. 2023. [Despite challenges, V4 societies generally remain supportive of Ukrainian refugees, with more negative attitudes apparent in Slovakia](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

We provide recommendations for specific programmes as well as programmatic and service delivery approaches that local, national, and international stakeholders could take to increase community cohesion and reduce the likelihood of these potential tensions occurring.

We understand community cohesion²⁴ as a society in which:

- All communities have a sense of belonging;
- The diversity of people's backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and valued;
- Similar life opportunities are available to all; and
- Strong and positive relationships exist and continue to be developed in the workplace, schools, and the wider community.

This report considers community cohesion at the local, regional, and national levels.

Approach, methodology, and structure of the report

The project team conducted research in five focus countries: the Czech Republic, Moldova, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. Six research reports have been produced: five country reports and a regional report. The regional report summarises the findings of the country reports and draws out key commonalities and differences in the potential tensions that might arise between the Ukrainian refugee and host communities. This report focuses on Slovakia.

To conduct the research, the project engaged a diverse team: a core team responsible for the overall research framework, methodology, and delivery across the five countries; country researchers in each focus country; and an advisory group of subject matter experts to provide specialist inputs. The project used the same approach and methodology for each country.

The research was undertaken in two phases. The inception phase took place between November and December 2022. The research team developed the approach and methodology and conducted initial desk-based research. This research examined the key relevant stakeholders in each country; existing programmes in this space; and characteristics that can make different refugee groups vulnerable to exploitation, discrimination, and challenges accessing services. Finally, the team completed an initial mapping of the tensions that might arise between the host communities and refugees in the medium term.

The research phase took place between January and March 2023. The research team organised interactive two-day workshops with key experts from local and national government, multilateral organisations, local and international NGOs, and academia. The morning session on the first workshop day was conducted with only Ukrainian refugees, who discussed the characteristics that can make refugees more vulnerable. Representatives from academia and local NGOs joined for the afternoon sessions, which focused on refugee journeys. The second day included a broad range of participants and focused on incendiary and misleading discourses about Ukrainian refugees in the country and tensions that might arise in the medium term. In Slovakia, the workshops were conducted on 7 and 8 March in Bratislava with 20 participants and on 14 March in Košice with experts from a broad range of organisations. In total, the project engaged with 229 workshop participants across the five

²⁴ Various schools and councils in the UK use slight variations of this definition, as does the Department for Children, Schools, and Families (now called the Department for Education).

countries. The discussions focused on the mid-term future, with September 2023 as a focus point, to orient the discussion toward risks that might become significant in the medium term. The research team followed up with key experts through a survey, asking them to rate how effectively various programmatic responses could mitigate the five tensions that are most likely to affect community cohesion by September 2023, and to share programmatic lessons learnt that could be useful for others working in this space. Finally, the findings from the workshops and the surveys were supplemented by additional desk-based research.

The report is structured according to the different stages of Ukrainian refugees' journeys in the country: (1) entry, legal status, and registration for services; (2) healthcare; (3) housing; (4) education; (5) employment; and (6) community, social, and political life. This allows the report to more clearly bring out links between misleading and incendiary discourses, the underlying challenges that such discourses exploit, the increased vulnerabilities of certain groups of Ukrainian refugees, and where tensions between Ukrainian refugees and host communities might emerge or become more significant, as well as to offer more targeted recommendations.

Chapter 1 provides a broad overview of the response to the refugee influx in Slovakia, including the set-up of legal structures to facilitate the reception of the refugees and the support provided to refugees by various organisations.

Chapter 2 details the characteristics that have increased (and can increase) different Ukrainian refugees' vulnerabilities to exploitation, discrimination, and their ability to access necessary services. This chapter draws on the desk-based research and research workshop findings.

Chapter 3 focuses on incendiary and misleading discourses about Ukrainian refugees. This section is based on International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) Chain of Harm framework,²⁵ which maps the path by which disinformation, misinformation, and dangerous speech (DMDS) move through an information ecosystem, depicting the ways in which directed disinformation commonly amplifies hate speech or other divisive narratives to achieve its aims. The discourses section draws from three sources of data: (1) findings from the in-country workshops, (2) research from third parties on misleading and incendiary discourses about Ukrainian refugees, and (3) Facebook content found via CrowdTangle.²⁶ The approach led to the development of recommendations regarding discrete intervention points where the Chain of Harm could be disrupted.

Chapter 4 summarises tensions that might occur between Ukrainian refugees and host communities in the medium term. This chapter presents a long list of possible tensions to highlight the possibility of malign actors relentlessly promoting related discourses and of underlying challenges worsening enough to increase tensions around a particular subject. The chapter draws on the desk-based research and research workshop findings.

Chapter 5 provides programmatic approach recommendations, first cross-cutting and then specific to the stages of the refugee journey, aimed at reducing potential tensions between Ukrainian refugees and host communities. The chapter particularly focuses on the five potential tensions identified as highest risk in the country. It draws on the survey on programmatic responses, information gathered during the workshops, and desk-based research to

²⁵ Reppell, Lisa and E. Shein, IFES. 2019. [Disinformation Campaigns and Hate Speech: Exploring the Relationship and Programming Interventions](#).

²⁶ The team used the CrowdTangle research tool to triangulate findings from the workshops and third-party research and to identify examples to incorporate into the report. See Crowdtangle 2023. [Welcome page](#). Accessed 22 March 2023.

discuss various programmatic responses that could be applicable in Slovakia to mitigate the risks of each of the five tensions. The programmatic recommendations are intentionally broad, but they include illustrative examples to enable a range of organisations—from governments and multilateral organisations to NGOs of various sizes, as well as small community initiatives, to consider and adapt in their programming.

Annex 1 provides a list of acronyms and abbreviations, and **Annex 2** presents data on the key political, economic, and demographic characteristics of the country as well as statistics on the numbers of refugees hosted, their demographic characteristics, financial support received, access to services and employment, and host population attitude polling figures.

Given that the political, economic, and broader context could change very quickly after the publication of this report, **Annex 3** provides a summary of key links to relevant statistics to consult for an up-to-date picture of the situation. Annex 3 also provides a range of recommended readings for deeper dives into the topics discussed in this report—Ukrainian refugees' needs and challenges, reports on discrimination, pressures on social services, public attitude polling, disinformation discourses, programme lessons learnt, and other topics.

This report was commissioned by the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office and delivered by a consortium of Palladium and IFES in collaboration with British embassies in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, and Moldova.

Chapter 1. Country Overview

In the 15 months since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, 112,715 refugees have registered for TP in Slovakia.²⁷ There has been a strong demonstration of support from government, NGOs, multilateral organisations, and regular citizens in response to the Ukrainian refugees. Such broad action was taken despite the country having little infrastructure or recent experience supporting large refugee inflows, having hosted between 965 and 1,046 refugees under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) mandate each year between 2019 and 2021.²⁸

The Slovak government has put in place strong legal structures to facilitate the reception of the refugees, as well as their stay in country: the ‘Lex Ukraine package’ of laws.²⁹ This package allows Ukrainian citizens, family members of Ukrainian citizens, and non-Ukrainian third country nationals (TCNs) who cannot safely return to their country of origin to claim TP in Slovakia.³⁰ TP gives refugees a range of rights in Slovakia, including the right to access education and healthcare services, seek accommodation, and enter the labour market.³¹

As in most of the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region, multilateral organisations such as the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), UNHCR, and International Organization for Migration (IOM) have served vital roles in the provision of services and delivery of activities for arriving refugees within Slovakia. The *Kto pomôže Ukrajině?* (Who will help Ukraine?) coalition of NGOs started extremely quickly following the invasion to provide comprehensive practical, legal, psychological, and humanitarian support to the arriving refugees.³²

Challenges, however, are likely to continue to arise as the war protracts and people’s needs and concerns evolve, particularly in the context of continuing high inflation³³ and disinformation campaigns from Russia-aligned stakeholders. Incendiary and misleading narratives about refugees, such as those claiming refugees are treated better than local citizens, exacerbate existing concerns and have the potential to negatively impact community cohesion. Such narratives are particularly potent in Slovakia, the CEE country that demonstrates the strongest support for Russia winning the war (although exact percentages vary)³⁴ and highest susceptibility to believing in conspiracies.³⁵ Looking ahead, with the invasion ongoing, the priorities of organisations that currently support Ukrainian refugees might change, which might result in a drop in funding available to support refugees and communities hosting them.

Despite these challenges, the disruption to the status quo can lead to opportunities to improve the situation for both refugees and local communities. With carefully designed programmes and counternarratives, there is an opening to strengthen public support and understanding of the true plight of Ukrainian refugees in the country.

²⁷ UNHCR. 2023. [Operational Data Portal](#). Accessed 12 April 2023.

²⁸ UNHCR. 2022. [Refugee Data Finder](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

²⁹ VOICE and HIAS. 2022. [Slovakia Assessment Report - Waiting for the Sky to Close: The Unprecedented Crisis Facing Women and Girls Fleeing Ukraine](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

³⁰ TP in Slovakia is valid until 4 March 2024, UNHCR. 2022. [Help Slovakia: Temporary Protection](#). Accessed 21 March 2023.

³¹ UNHCR. 2022. [Help Slovakia: Temporary Protection](#). Accessed 21 March 2023.

³² Hungarian Studies Review. 2022. [Narrating Crisis and Continuity in Migration Debates in the Viseqrád States](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

³³ Inflation was forecast at 9.7 percent as of February 2023. European Commission. 2023. [Economic Forecast for Slovakia](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

³⁴ Slovak Academy of Sciences 2023. How are you Slovakia? Accessed 29 March 2023; and GLOBSEC. 2022. [Opinion Poll in Slovakia on the perception of war](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

³⁵ Centre for Bioethics. 2022. [Worldwide Extremely High Conspiracy Index In Slovakia](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

Chapter 2. Vulnerabilities to exploitation and discrimination

2.1 Overview

This chapter details the official refugee journey through the six identified stages: (1) registering for legal status, welfare, and benefits; (2) healthcare; (3) housing; (4) education; (5) employment and income; and (6) community, social, and political life. It then delves into the practical challenges, varied experiences, discrimination, and difficulties faced by specific groups of refugees and identifies some intersectional characteristics that can make people particularly vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination and to experiencing challenges accessing services. These characteristics are summarised in Table 1. They have been selected because they have had an impact on refugees' experiences to date and are likely to affect refugees in the future, particularly if programmatic priorities change, financial support decreases, and/or disinformation efforts gain more traction.

TABLE 1: Characteristics that can make refugees vulnerable in Slovakia

Journey stage	Characteristics that can make refugees vulnerable
Legal status, welfare, and benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separated children who cross the border without a legal guardian, and unaccompanied children who cross the border without any guardian, face additional challenges and vulnerabilities. • The elderly, particularly if travelling alone and without knowledge of the Slovak language, can face difficulties accessing information (including online information) and therefore struggle to secure basic needs post-arrival. • People with disabilities, particularly those that limit mobility, face challenges with registration and accessing benefits, since many processes require in-person application. • People not in employment are at increased risk of poverty, given restrictions on some state social benefits (such as child allowance and maintenance allowance) for Ukrainians under temporary protection.
Healthcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refugees living in poorer regions (such as eastern Slovakia), where poverty is higher and the healthcare infrastructure is weaker, face challenges in accessing healthcare support. • People who require psychiatric or mental health support face delays in accessing services due to pre-existing long waiting times. • Adults not in employment are not automatically registered for healthcare insurance and, unless they register and pay independently, will have access to urgent healthcare only. • Children may face challenges accessing specialised paediatric support given the shortage of paediatricians in Slovakia.
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People with special needs (such as families with disabled children, people with addiction issues, and others) who require state accommodation are not able to access suitable accommodation. • People with low incomes cannot access private housing and therefore require collective, hosted, or subsidised rental accommodation which can be insecure and may not be appropriate for long-term use. • Families with children may face discrimination from landlords who prefer to rent to households without children.

- People without legal rental agreements lack proper tenancy rights and are vulnerable to exploitation, eviction, and homelessness.
- Women suffering abuse, including domestic abuse, face challenges in both reporting the abuse and finding suitable, safe alternative housing.

Education

- Children in their late teens are vulnerable to mental health issues, disrupted education, social isolation (including due to online study), and trauma.
- Children and young people who do not speak Slovak face challenges integrating into Slovak schools and can fall behind in their studies.
- Children experiencing bullying face heightened social exclusion and isolation.
- Children with disabilities struggle to access specialised education services due to the shortage of provision.

Employment and income

- People using employment agents to secure work, particularly those who do not speak Slovak, can face exploitation, including high deductions from wages, leaving them more vulnerable to poverty.
- People employed illegally are vulnerable to exploitation and do not have access to proper labour rights.
- People who do not speak Slovak face additional barriers to accessing employment and are often employed in lower-skilled roles that do not match their professional background, qualifications, and ability.
- Single mothers with children may be unable to work due to the lack of adequate childcare provision and over-subscription to kindergartens.
- People with disabilities may find securing employment more challenging due to discrimination from employers and barriers to access.

Community, social, and political life

- Elderly people face social isolation due to lack of targeted activities for seniors in Slovakia.
- People with disabilities can be 'invisible' in society, particularly in areas with limited services and/or transport to access social and cultural life.
- People suffering from trauma can struggle to participate in community life, particularly if they are unable to access mental health support and counselling.
- Children and young people in their teens, particularly if they do not speak Slovak and/or are enrolled in online Ukrainian schools, can experience social isolation.

2.2 Legal status, welfare, and benefits

According to data from the UNHCR, between 24 February 2022 and 14 March 2023, 1,239,412 people were recorded as having crossed the border from Ukraine to Slovakia, and 111,756 Ukrainian refugees were registered as residing in Slovakia.³⁶ In response to the volume of border crossings from Ukraine to Slovakia, the government provided updated online information³⁷ about access to and waiting times at the three road border crossings (Ubl'a, Vyšné Nemecké, and Veľké Slemence) and one rail border crossing (Čierna nad Tisou).³⁸ The government also waived regular entry conditions, including permitting individuals to enter without the normal requirement of a biometric passport. Alternative documents, including non-biometric passports or even driving licenses, were accepted.³⁹

³⁶ UNHCR. 2023. [Operational Data Portal](#). Accessed 21 March 2023.

³⁷ Financial Administration of the Slovak Republic. 2022. [Waiting times at road border crossings](#). Accessed 21 March 2023.

³⁸ Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic. 2022. [State Border Crossings](#). Accessed 21 March 2023.

³⁹ Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic. 2022. [Situation in Ukraine – information and assistance](#). Accessed 21 March 2023.

Ukrainian citizens, family members of Ukrainian citizens, and non-Ukrainian TCNs who cannot return safely to their country of origin all have the right to claim TP in Slovakia.⁴⁰ On arrival, Ukrainian citizens and non-Ukrainian TCNs have the right to stay in Slovakia for a maximum of 90 days, after which they must apply for TP or alternative status, such as asylum or a work permit, to extend their stay.⁴¹ During the first 30 days in Slovakia, refugees from Ukraine also have the right to access urgent state-provided healthcare, even prior to applying for TP.⁴²

Refugees from Ukraine can apply for TP status either at registration centres established for this process⁴³ or in the offices of the Foreign Police.⁴⁴ There are dedicated spaces for TP registration in Bratislava and Michalovce for people classed as ‘vulnerable’, including pregnant women and people over age 65.⁴⁵ With TP, refugees from Ukraine have the right to access healthcare and education services, seek cash assistance and accommodation support, and enter the labour market.⁴⁶ However, there are restrictions on Slovak state social benefits for Ukrainians, even after claiming TP. For example, Ukrainian citizens with temporary status are not automatically entitled to the child, parental, maintenance, funeral, or childbirth allowances, and some of these benefits may be claimed only partially and/or if the claimant is in employment.⁴⁷ The groups discussed below were identified in the desk-based research and the research workshops as facing particular challenges at this stage of the refugee journey.

Separated children who cross the border without a legal guardian and unaccompanied children who cross the border without any guardian: The invasion of Ukraine resulted in the separation of many families, with minors often left in the care of people other than their immediate relatives. While there is no comprehensive data about the total number of unaccompanied children crossing the border, media⁴⁸ and government⁴⁹ reports cite cases of children leaving Ukraine and entering neighbouring countries (including Slovakia) alone. UNHCR research shows that 2 percent of households surveyed between October 2022 and March 2023 have children who are separated from both their parents.⁵⁰ While the government has policies in place to provide care for unaccompanied children, including appointing guardians,⁵¹ unaccompanied children are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and harm, including increased risks of trafficking and violence.⁵² Unaccompanied children also may not have access to proper identification documentation and can lack information about or understanding of how to access legal advice.⁵³ Participants in the research workshops noted that children aged 16–18 face particular challenges, as they are close to adulthood (and may socially be considered as adults in Ukraine) but are still children alone in a foreign country, waiting for social service support.⁵⁴ Other children arrive in Slovakia accompanied but without a legal guardian. Under Slovak family law, the process for legally registering

⁴⁰ UNHCR. 2022. [Help Slovakia: Temporary Protection](#). Accessed 21 March 2023.

⁴¹ UNHCR. 2022. [Help Slovakia: I arrived in Slovakia](#). Accessed 21 March 2023.

⁴² UNHCR. 2022. [Help Slovakia: Temporary Protection](#). Accessed 21 March 2023.

⁴³ UNHCR. 2022. [Help Slovakia: Temporary Protection](#). Accessed 21 March 2023.

⁴⁴ Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic. 2022. [Registration of temporary shelter](#). Accessed 21 March 2023.

⁴⁵ Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic. 2022. [Registration of temporary shelter](#). Accessed 21 March 2023.

⁴⁶ UNHCR. 2022. [Help Slovakia: Temporary Protection](#). Accessed 21 March 2023.

⁴⁷ Ministry of Employment, Social Affairs, and Family. 2023. [Useful information for citizens of Ukraine](#). Accessed 21 March 2023.

⁴⁸ The Guardian. 2022. [Slovaks hail boy, aged 11, who travelled 700 miles alone from Ukraine](#)

⁴⁹ SPRAVY. 2022. [Unaccompanied children fleeing Ukraine are also housed in Centers for Children and Families](#). Accessed 22 March 2023.

⁵⁰ UNHCR. 2023. [Protection Risks and Needs of Refugees from Ukraine](#). Accessed 13 April 2023.

⁵¹ Eurochild. 2022. [Policy and legal review for children in alternative care and unaccompanied and separated children from Ukraine arriving in Slovakia](#)

⁵² European Commission. 2022. [SRSG on Migration and Refugees publishes reports of visit to Czech and Slovak Republic](#)

⁵³ European Union. 2021. [Briefing – Vulnerability of unaccompanied or separated child migrants](#)

⁵⁴ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

guardianship is complex,⁵⁵ and participants in the research workshops noted that it can be difficult or time-consuming to secure.⁵⁶

People not in employment: Post-registration for TP, refugees from Ukraine are eligible to register for government support, including cash assistance and accommodation provision.⁵⁷ However, as noted above, there are restrictions on the state social benefits that recipients of TP can claim, and some benefits, such as child allowance, may be claimed only by those in employment in the Slovak Republic.⁵⁸ There are also challenges in accessing employment, particularly for specific groups such as single parents without access to childcare. Therefore, there is an increased risk of poverty for refugees who are not in employment, do not have incomes, and have limitations on their state benefits. One participant in the research workshops shared examples of unemployed refugees coming to NGOs unable to afford food.⁵⁹

The elderly: A protection assessment in Slovakia estimated that 11 percent of refugees from Ukraine were over 60 years of age.⁶⁰ Participants in the research workshops noted that the elderly, particularly if travelling alone and without knowledge of the Slovak language, may experience challenges in accessing information needed to register for TP and welfare support.⁶¹ One participant shared an example of elderly refugees struggling to meet their basic needs (such as food and clothing) post-arrival in Slovakia.⁶² This risk may be compounded for elderly refugees with low digital literacy, for whom it may be more challenging to access online information and who rely on the information provided in person at border crossings and registration centres.⁶³

People with disabilities, particularly those with disabilities that limit mobility: In October 2022, the UNHCR estimated that 12 percent of the Ukrainian refugee population in Slovakia were people with disabilities or functional diversity,⁶⁴ and 13 percent of households surveyed between October 2022 and March 2023 had at least one member with a serious medical condition or disability.⁶⁵ People with disabilities face challenges in registration and accessing benefits,⁶⁶ particularly since many processes require in-person application. Participants in the Bratislava research workshop commented that regional location also impacts this requirement, with people outside of Bratislava reporting longer and more difficult travel journeys to state offices. This is additionally challenging for people with mobility issues.⁶⁷

2.3 Healthcare

Healthcare in the Slovak Republic is based on a compulsory social health insurance system, in which three insurance companies (two private, one publicly owned) negotiate contracts with healthcare providers based on quality, volume, and price.⁶⁸ According to Slovak law, employed citizens and residents are obliged to pay

⁵⁵ Eurochild. 2022. [Policy and legal review for children in alternative care and unaccompanied and separated children from Ukraine arriving in Slovakia](#)

⁵⁶ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁵⁷ UNHCR. 2022. [Help Slovakia: Temporary Protection](#). Accessed 21 March 2023.

⁵⁸ Ministry of Employment, Social Affairs, and Family. 2023. [Useful information for citizens of Ukraine](#). Accessed 21 March 2023.

⁵⁹ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁶⁰ UNHCR. 2022. [Slovakia: protection brief – May-October 2022](#)

⁶¹ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁶² Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁶³ IOM. 2022. [Assistance to people fleeing the war in Ukraine: IOM Slovakia](#)

⁶⁴ UNHCR. 2022. [Slovakia: protection brief – May-October 2022](#)

⁶⁵ UNHCR. [Protection Risks and Needs of Refugees from Ukraine](#). Accessed 13 April 2023.

⁶⁶ UNHCR. 2022. [Slovakia: protection brief – May-October 2022](#)

⁶⁷ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁶⁸ European Health Observatory (2022). [Slovakia: Country Health Profile 2021](#). Accessed 11 July 2023.

healthcare contributions which represent 14 percent of their monthly salary: 10 percent paid by the employer and 4 percent by the employed citizen.⁶⁹ Self-employed citizens pay the full 14 percent themselves, and those who are unemployed, retired, or women on maternity leave must register with a public or private insurance company. Their contributions are paid by the state.⁷⁰

Refugees who have been granted temporary protection in Slovakia have the right to receive the same healthcare provision as Slovak citizens upon provision of the certificate of TP to the health service.⁷¹ This means that, for adults, emergency care⁷² is provided free of charge, but all other forms of healthcare require insurance coverage as long as they are employed with an income above the minimum monthly wage.⁷³ Therefore, an adult refugee under TP, but without health insurance, can access urgent medical care at no cost.⁷⁴ The Ministry of Health may authorise additional types of healthcare beyond urgent healthcare (that have been identified as ‘necessary’), in which case the authorising decision will be published on www.health.gov.sk.⁷⁵ Initially, this level of access was the same for adult and child refugees. However, since January 2023, refugees under the age of 18 have access to the full range of healthcare support that would be available under the main public insurance scheme.⁷⁶ In addition, the Ministry of Health established information resources specifically for Ukrainian refugees,⁷⁷ and other medical providers have offered free support to Ukrainian refugees, including psychological support services.⁷⁸

Prior to the arrival of refugees from Ukraine, the Slovak healthcare system faced a number of challenges, including unequal medical provision across regions, a shortage of trained medical staff,⁷⁹ and health outcomes below the European average.⁸⁰ In addition, the system of healthcare insurance and associated levels of access is complex. Among refugees surveyed in Slovakia between October 2022 and March 2023, 21 percent of respondents reported difficulties in accessing the healthcare system.⁸¹ Among the refugees that experienced difficulties accessing healthcare, the most cited cause was long waiting times (59 percent), followed by prohibitive cost (38 percent), language barriers at (30 percent), and 28 percent reported “being denied access”.⁸² People who do not speak Slovak can struggle to understand the healthcare system and how to access medical support; of those surveyed, 30 percent reported language as a main barrier to accessing care.⁸³ The groups discussed were identified by the desk-based research and the research workshops as facing particular challenges at this stage of the refugee journey.

Refugees living in poorer regions: Socio-economic development differs across regions of Slovakia. The southeast and northeast areas traditionally experience higher poverty than other parts of the country, as well as weaker infrastructure and service provision.⁸⁴ Faster rates of growth in certain areas, including Bratislava, have

⁶⁹ Kapalla, Marko, Kapallova, D., and Turecky, L. 2010. *An overview of the healthcare system in the Slovak Republic*. Accessed 12 April 2023.

⁷⁰ Slovensko. 2023. *Social and health insurance for foreigners in Slovakia*. Accessed 24 March 2023.

⁷¹ Union. 2023. *Health Insurance In Slovakia For People Displaced From Ukraine By War*. Accessed 13 April 2023.

⁷² The Ministry of Health defines what constitutes emergency/urgent care.

⁷³ IOM. UN Migration 2023. *Information and assistance in connection with the war in Ukraine*. Accessed 23 March 2023.

⁷⁴ IOM. UN Migration 2023. *Information and assistance in connection with the war in Ukraine*. Accessed 23 March 2023.

⁷⁵ <https://www.union.sk/health-insurance-in-slovakia-for-people-displaced-from-ukraine-by-war/>

⁷⁶ Ministry of Health. 2023. *Determination of the scope of healthcare needed*

⁷⁷ e-VÚC. self-government to citizens 2023. [e-VÚC portal](http://e-VUCportal.sk)

⁷⁸ Ipcko. 2023. Ipcko Slovakia.

⁷⁹ European Commission. 2019. *Internships for doctors from third countries to address shortage of health professionals in Slovakia*

⁸⁰ OECD. 2017. *State of Health in the EU – Slovak Republic – country health profile 2017*

⁸¹ UNHCR. *Protection Risks and Needs of Refugees from Ukraine*. Accessed 13 April 2023.

⁸² UNHCR. *Protection Risks and Needs of Refugees from Ukraine*. Accessed 13 April 2023.

⁸³ UNHCR. *Protection Risks and Needs of Refugees from Ukraine*. Accessed 13 April 2023.

⁸⁴ Gajdoš, P. Institute for Sociology, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, Slovak Republic. 2005. *Regional development in Slovakia – developmental trends and social-spatial impacts*

further increased regional disparities; in 2018, OECD estimated that Slovakia was among its member countries with the greatest economic disparity.⁸⁵ Participants in the research workshops shared examples of Ukrainian refugees resident in rural areas in poorer regions of Slovakia being unable to access information about local healthcare provision.⁸⁶ Participants also reported cases of refugees failing to access general practitioner assistance and even ambulance services.⁸⁷ Residence in poorer regions with existing service provision gaps can compound the vulnerabilities experienced by refugees.

People who require psychiatric or mental health support: The World Health Organisation estimates that one in five people fleeing war will have a mental health condition within 10 years, with one in 10 developing a severe condition like post-traumatic stress disorder or psychosis.⁸⁸ Exposure to war and experiences of displacement and family separation can lead to increased mental health needs.⁸⁹ However, a UNHCR area-based assessment in Slovakia which looked at the country's four main cities found that 54 percent of refugees surveyed were not aware of mental health and psychological support services available near their location.⁹⁰ Participants in the research workshops discussed barriers to accessing mental health support including pre-existing limitations in provision, long waiting times, and cost.⁹¹ One participant shared an example of a Ukrainian refugee with schizophrenia being admitted for a matter of days, released when deemed out of immediate harm, but then struggling to access longer-term care.⁹² However, initiatives have been launched where Ukrainians support other Ukrainians who are struggling with mental health, such as one by the League for Mental Health, a Slovak non-profit.⁹³

Adults not in employment: Participants in the workshops said that understanding the Slovak healthcare system could be challenging and that refugees without the support of an employer can struggle to understand how to access medical support and how to register for health insurance.⁹⁴ One participant noted this issue is more acute outside the major cities, where urgent healthcare (available to the uninsured) might be insufficient,⁹⁵ meaning that uninsured people are likely to struggle accessing healthcare.

Children: Children represent approximately 40 percent of Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia.⁹⁶ In addition to physical health needs, a UNHCR assessment indicated that children and young people are highly likely to require psychosocial support to manage both trauma and the consequences of displacement.⁹⁷ Research by VOICE found that girls are likely to be particularly susceptible to trauma and need mental health support.⁹⁸ Participants in the research workshop commented on shortages in child psychiatrists and dedicated general paediatric support, meaning that refugee children faced challenges accessing specialised support.⁹⁹

⁸⁵ OECD. 2020. [Regions and cities at a glance – country note Slovakia](#)

⁸⁶ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁸⁷ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁸⁸ ReliefWeb. 2022. [WHO promotes action on urgent mental health needs of Ukrainian refugees](#)

⁸⁹ UNHCR. 2023. [Slovakia: regional refugee response plan 2023](#)

⁹⁰ UNHCR REACH. 2023. [Slovakia: area based assessment \(Bratislava, Kosice, Nitra and Zilina\) - February 2023](#)

⁹¹ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023; Reliefweb. 2023. [As War Nears One Year Mark, Mental Health Services Provided by – and for – Ukrainian Refugees](#). Accessed 13 April 2023.

⁹² Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁹³ Reliefweb. 2023. [As War Nears One Year Mark, Mental Health Services Provided by – and for – Ukrainian Refugees](#). Accessed 13 April 2023.

⁹⁴ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁹⁵ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁹⁶ UNHCR. 2022. [Slovakia: protection brief – May-October 2022](#)

⁹⁷ UNHCR. 2022. [Slovakia: protection brief – May-October 2022](#)

⁹⁸ VOICE and HIAS. 2022. [Slovakia Assessment Report - Waiting for the Sky to Close: The Unprecedented Crisis Facing Women and Girls Fleeing Ukraine](#)

⁹⁹ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

2.4 Housing

The government of the Slovak Republic set up various facilities to provide accommodation and other emergency services for refugees in response to the sudden increase in demand for refugee accommodation after February 2022. This includes state-provided collective centres, hotels, and private accommodation options.¹⁰⁰ A dedicated web page from the Ministry of Transport and Construction contains information for Ukrainians in Slovak and Ukrainian about these options.¹⁰¹ Additional information is available directly at district, city, and municipal offices.¹⁰² The government also provides allowances to individual citizens who host Ukrainian refugees or offer accommodation free of charge.¹⁰³ In September 2022, the government amended legislation on the allowances, increasing them by 25 percent to a maximum of €710 to €1,790 per month for properties with one to four rooms.¹⁰⁴ However, securing sustainable longer-term accommodation for refugees remains a challenge, as noted by UNHCR in its Regional Refugee Response Plan 2023.¹⁰⁵

Of the respondents to the UNHCR protection profiling survey between October 2022 and March 2023, 21 percent rented their accommodation privately, 20 percent were resident in a collective centre, 18 percent were hosted by the government, a further 18 percent were hosted by other individuals, 12 percent were staying with relatives, 7 percent were in accommodation provided by their employer, and 4 percent were living in other arrangements.¹⁰⁶ The groups discussed below have been identified by the desk-based research and the research workshops as facing particular challenges at this stage of the refugee journey.

People with special needs and requiring state accommodation: Refugees from Ukraine who are unable to afford or access independent or citizen-hosted accommodation are eligible for state support through accommodation in a collective centre or temporary site.¹⁰⁷ While this provides immediate shelter, collective centre accommodation is intended to be temporary and is not suitable for people with special needs. For example, a UNHCR REACH multi-sectoral needs assessment found only 34 percent of collective accommodation sites accessible to people with disabilities.¹⁰⁸ Participants in the research workshop added that families with disabled children will be offered collective accommodation places if they are unable to secure alternative housing, but that this is often not suitable or appropriate for the needs of their children due to overcrowding, lack of privacy, and the absence of adaptation and/or assistive devices.¹⁰⁹ Participants also commented on the strict rules attached to certain forms of collective temporary accommodation,¹¹⁰ noting that rules to protect some vulnerable groups may inadvertently impact other groups. For example, one participant commented on the link between trauma and alcohol or drug use and expressed concern that people suffering from addiction could easily fall afoul of these social behaviour rules and face eviction and homelessness.¹¹¹

People on low incomes: In its regional refugee response plan, the UNHCR stated that the majority of Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia report benefitting from cash and food assistance through humanitarian aid and that the need

¹⁰⁰ Ukraine Slovakia. 2022. [Accommodation](#). Accessed 23 March 2023.

¹⁰¹ Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic. [Accommodation site](#). Accessed 23 March 2023.

¹⁰² Ukraine Slovakia. 2022. [Accommodation](#). Accessed 23 March 2023.

¹⁰³ Ukraine Slovakia. 2022. [Accommodation](#). Accessed 23 March 2023.

¹⁰⁴ European Commission. 2022. [Slovakia: accommodation allowance for refugees from Ukraine to increase](#)

¹⁰⁵ UNHCR. 2023. [Slovakia: regional refugee response plan 2023](#)

¹⁰⁶ UNHCR. [Protection Risks and Needs of Refugees from Ukraine](#). Accessed 13 April 2023.

¹⁰⁷ Ukraine Slovakia. 2022. [Accommodation](#). Accessed 23 March 2023.

¹⁰⁸ UNHCR REACH. 2022. [Slovakia multi-sectoral needs assessment 2022](#)

¹⁰⁹ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

¹¹⁰ City of Bratislava. 2023. [City Hostels](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

¹¹¹ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

for such assistance and accommodation support remained high at the end of 2022.¹¹² People on low incomes and/or reliant on cash assistance struggle to access private rental housing and therefore require alternative forms of accommodation such as collective, hosted, or state-subsidised accommodation, all of which can be insecure and not necessarily appropriate for longer-term use. Participants in the research workshops discussed the use of dormitories (*ubytovna*), which can be overcrowded and inadequate for large families or people with complex needs. Such conditions could lead to mental health deterioration for residents who stay there for extended periods.¹¹³ Government subsidies for hosts is under review; therefore, some refugees in hosted accommodation may face uncertainty and risk entering poorer-quality housing or returning to collective centres.¹¹⁴

Families with children: Women and children make up the largest demographic group among Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia (86 percent as of June 2022).¹¹⁵ Families with children face barriers to accessing housing. First, widespread family separation¹¹⁶ means many families are travelling with only one parent, which makes employment access harder and private housing less likely. Even for those in employment, private housing options are less affordable due to reliance on a single salary. In addition, participants in the research workshop raised risks of discrimination by landlords, who prefer to rent properties to households without children.¹¹⁷

People without legal rental agreements: Finding short-term rental accommodation can be challenging and more expensive. According to advice provided to refugees by the IOM, landlords in Slovakia typically require one to two months' rent as a deposit and have contractual notice periods of three months.¹¹⁸ This makes renting flexibly challenging for refugees on unstable income and uncertain of their intended length of stay in the country. One participant in the research workshops shared examples of landlords using 'unofficial' contracts to avoid tax payments, which can appeal to refugees because of the supposed flexibility but leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and without access to proper tenants' rights.¹¹⁹ People without legal rental agreements are also vulnerable to eviction and sudden homelessness. In addition, refugees without a rental contract may face issues when renewing their TP status without this proof of residency.¹²⁰

Women suffering abuse, including domestic abuse: When women are forced to leave their homes, they face increased risks of abuse, including gender-based violence, both on their journey and once temporarily settled.¹²¹ If women have few accommodation options, they can be forced to stay in places where they do not feel safe.¹²² Women refugees are at particular risk of violence in shelters and private accommodation.¹²³ Research from VOICE reports that poor accommodation in Slovakia affects exposure to gender-based violence and other risks to women,¹²⁴ supporting findings from the UNHCR multi-sectoral needs assessment that women and girls who

¹¹² UNHCR. 2023. [Slovakia: regional refugee response plan 2023](#)

¹¹³ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

¹¹⁴ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

¹¹⁵ UNHCR. 2023. [Inter-agency Operational Update – Slovakia, as of 22 June 2022](#). Accessed 13 April 2023.

¹¹⁶ UNHCR. 2022. [Displacement patterns, protection risks and needs of refugees from Ukraine – regional protection analysis 1](#)

¹¹⁷ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

¹¹⁸ IOM. UN Migration, IOM Migration Information Centre (2017). [Renting a flat](#)

¹¹⁹ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

¹²⁰ IOM. 2023. [Migration Information Centre](#). Accessed 13 April 2023.

¹²¹ UNHCR. 2023. [Ukrainian Refugee Women Answering the Call for their Compatriots in Crisis](#). Accessed 4 April 2023; Plan International. [Local partners provide lifesaving services to survivors of gender-based violence from Ukraine](#). Accessed 4 April 2023.

¹²² VOICE and HIIS. 2022. [Slovakia Assessment Report - Waiting for the Sky to Close: The Unprecedented Crisis Facing Women and Girls Fleeing Ukraine](#)

¹²³ Plan International. [Local partners provide lifesaving services to survivors of gender-based violence from Ukraine](#). Accessed 4 April 2023.

¹²⁴ VOICE and HIAS. 2022. [Slovakia Assessment Report - Waiting for the Sky to Close: The Unprecedented Crisis Facing Women and Girls Fleeing Ukraine](#)

live in collective centres shared impressions about the lack of safety and security.¹²⁵ However, perceptions around women’s safety vary region (*kraj*) to region, with households in the Košice *kraj* reporting the highest levels of concerns across the country. Even so, the levels of concern reported by households in the Regional Multi-Sectoral needs assessment remained low, with 89% of collective centre residents reporting “no concerns” and 83 percent of households living outside of collective centres reporting concerns.¹²⁶ Workshop participants highlighted that low-income households, living in poor-quality, smaller rented housing, were likely to experience challenges in both reporting any abuse and in finding suitable and safe alternative housing.¹²⁷

2.5 Education

School attendance is compulsory in Slovakia for children under the age of 16, including those under TP or refugee status. However, distance and online schooling are accepted in place of attending a national public school. According to the UNHCR, 55 percent of refugee children surveyed in Slovakia attend Ukrainian school online.¹²⁸ Reasons for online attendance include uncertainty over length of stay in Slovakia,¹²⁹ language barriers, and space restrictions in some schools.¹³⁰ In addition, 64 percent of those interviewed by the UNHCR in 2023 reported that their primary reason for not enrolling in Slovak schools was a preference for online Ukrainian school.¹³¹ The multi-sectoral needs assessment also found that the cost of equipment, uniforms, and supplies prohibits some parents from enrolling their children in public schools.¹³² According to the UNHCR, education is one of the core priorities for Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia, particularly widening inclusion in national systems, supporting language learning, and increasing informal learning opportunities.¹³³

Existing challenges in the Slovak education system include limited school places, poor staff salaries, and low morale among teachers. A 2021 OECD study of the Slovak education system found that low levels of wellbeing among Slovak teachers negatively impacted students’ own wellbeing and achievement, and that teacher training programmes did not sufficiently cover pedagogy and psychology to help address these issues.¹³⁴ Within this context, the integration of Ukrainian students can be challenging. A study by Comenius Institute found that 85 percent of teachers surveyed said that language barriers were the biggest challenge in educating and integrating Ukrainian refugees, with 67 percent requesting additional language support in education and 58 percent asking for support adapting the curriculum content for non-Slovak children.¹³⁵ The groups discussed below have been identified by the desk-based research and the research workshops as facing particular challenges at this stage of the refugee journey.

Children in their late teens: A UNHCR study indicates that youth are highly likely to require psychosocial support to manage both trauma and the consequences of displacement.¹³⁶ Furthermore, a VOICE/HIAS assessment found that girls are likely to be particularly susceptible to trauma and are likely to need mental health and

¹²⁵ UNHCR REACH. 2022. [Slovakia multi-sectoral needs assessment 2022](#) Accessed 4 April 2023.

¹²⁶ UNHCR REACH. 2022. [Slovakia multi-sectoral needs assessment 2022](#) Accessed 4 April 2023.

¹²⁷ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

¹²⁸ UNHCR REACH. 2022. [Slovakia multi sectoral needs assessment October 2022](#)

¹²⁹ UNHCR REACH. 2022. [Slovakia multi sectoral needs assessment October 2022](#)

¹³⁰ UNHCR. 2023. [Slovakia: regional refugee response plan 2023](#)

¹³¹ UNHCR. [Protection Risks and Needs of Refugees from Ukraine](#). Accessed 13 April 2023.

¹³² UNHCR REACH. 2022. [Slovakia multi sectoral needs assessment October 2022](#)

¹³³ UNHCR. 2023. [Slovakia: regional refugee response plan 2023](#)

¹³⁴ European Commission. 2021. [Education and training monitor - Slovakia](#). Accessed 26 March 2023.

¹³⁵ European Commission. 2022. [Slovakia: challenges in the education of refugee children from Ukraine](#). Accessed 26 March 2023.

¹³⁶ UNHCR. 2022. [Slovakia: Protection Brief - May - October 2022](#). Accessed 4 April 2023.

psychosocial support.¹³⁷ Ukrainian youth are more likely to study online than younger children and are less likely to be enrolled in schools; in Slovakia, an average of 38 percent of 15- to 18-year-olds were enrolled in Slovak schools versus 58 percent of 11- to 14-year-olds and 50.5 percent of 6- to 10-year-olds, according to one survey.¹³⁸ Online learning means fewer opportunities to socialise with peers and integrate into local communities.¹³⁹ Online learning can also result in missed psychological support without peers or teachers to support youth.¹⁴⁰

Children and young people who do not speak Slovak: Whilst access to compulsory education is technically free for refugees, language barriers remain the biggest obstacle to education once children are in schools.¹⁴¹ A survey of refugees in Slovakia reported that, for those who hadn't completed education, not speaking the language was the most commonly reported reason for not attending school (at 12 percent of respondents), alongside caring responsibilities.¹⁴² None of the nine schools that The Centre for Educational Analysis visited in Bratislava had the necessary tools to support children from Ukraine to overcome the language barrier, such as teaching materials in another language.¹⁴³ Language barriers, without adequate support, might mean that refugee children are at risk of achieving lower educational results, with subsequent risks when graduating into the labour market.¹⁴⁴

Children experiencing bullying: Due to multiple factors, such as language barriers, Ukrainian students in Slovakia can face social exclusion, isolation, and bullying.¹⁴⁵ Workshop participants noted especially that peers from pro-Russian parts of society might bully Ukrainians at school and online, sharing examples of kids wearing pro-Russian tee-shirts to taunt Ukrainian children.¹⁴⁶ Participants highlighted the mental toll on children when peers accuse them of lying about what happened in Ukraine to get support and hearing 'Why don't you go home? There's no bombing there anymore'.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, 28.3 percent of secondary school children in Slovakia reported being bullied multiple times per month, with the figure increasing for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.¹⁴⁸ This feeds into a culture where, as workshop participants explained, Slovak children are not told off for bullying and the behaviour is considered 'kids being kids'.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, without knowledge of the local language, Ukrainian children cannot effectively advocate for themselves.¹⁵⁰ Bullying is also known to have a negative impact on reading performance and wellbeing, risking further education gaps for Ukrainian refugees.¹⁵¹

¹³⁷ VOICE and HIAS. 2022. [Slovakia Assessment Report - Waiting for the Sky to Close: The Unprecedented Crisis Facing Women and Girls Fleeing Ukraine](#). Accessed 4 April 2023.

¹³⁸ UNHCR REACH. 2022. [Slovakia multi sectoral needs assessment October 2022](#). Accessed 13 April 2023.

¹³⁹ The Slovak Spectator. 2023. [The silent toll of the war in Ukraine is on minds](#). Accessed 4 April 2023.

¹⁴⁰ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

¹⁴¹ Centre for Educational Analysis. 2023. [Inclusion of male and female pupils from Ukraine in education. Qualitative survey of nine Bratislava schools](#). Accessed 4 April 2023.

¹⁴² European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2023. [Fleeing Ukraine: Displaced People's Experiences in The EU](#). Accessed 5 April 2023.

¹⁴³ Centre for Educational Analysis. 2023. [Inclusion of male and female pupils from Ukraine in education. Qualitative survey of nine Bratislava schools](#). Accessed 4 April 2023.

¹⁴⁴ European Commission. 2022. [Slovakia: Ukrainian children at risk of unsuccessful integration into educational system](#). Accessed 4 April 2023. Centre for Educational Analysis. 2023. [Inclusion of male and female pupils from Ukraine in education. Qualitative survey of nine Bratislava schools](#). Accessed 4 April 2023.

¹⁴⁵ The Slovak Spectator. 2023. [The silent toll of the war in Ukraine is on minds](#). Accessed 4 April 2023; UNHCR REACH. 2023. [Area-Based Assessment, Slovakia](#). Accessed 6 April 2023.

¹⁴⁶ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

¹⁴⁷ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

¹⁴⁸ European Commission. 2021. [Education and Training Monitor 2021](#), Slovakia. Accessed 12 April 2023.

¹⁴⁹ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

¹⁵⁰ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

¹⁵¹ European Commission/ 2021. [Education and Training Monitor 2021](#), Slovakia. Accessed 12 April 2023.

Children with disabilities: Workshop participants highlighted that Ukrainian children (such as those with dyslexia or on the autistic spectrum) struggle to get the extra support they need at home and in schools.¹⁵² Participants stated that even getting into a school was a challenge.¹⁵³ This is partly due to a pre-existing shortage of support to cater to children with special needs, with only 12.1 percent of children under age 7 having access to early childhood services.¹⁵⁴

2.6 Employment and Income

Under the EU Temporary Protection Directive,¹⁵⁵ people under TP in Slovakia are granted the right to work on the same terms as Slovak citizens. The government of the Slovak Republic and national employment agencies have various initiatives to support Ukrainian refugees seeking employment. These include listing vacancies in Ukrainian on public employment service job portals such as Internetový sprievodca trhom práce, Kariera.sk, and Profesia.¹⁵⁶ Additional advice is provided by multilaterals such as IOM; its website dedicated to Ukrainians seeking employment in Slovakia presents information on rights and entitlements.¹⁵⁷ As of 1 January 2023, the government removed certain restrictions to make it easier for refugees to access the labour market; this included cancelling the previous requirement that TCNs could only be employed in districts where the employment rate was 5 percent or lower.¹⁵⁸ However, finding work is still reported to be one of the primary difficulties in Slovakia for refugees,¹⁵⁹ with 25 percent of individuals in a recent survey by the UNHCR reporting their main reason for unemployment is the lack of opportunities.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, 32 percent of those surveyed had been unemployed for the previous six months.¹⁶¹ Ukrainian refugees are entitled to the same basic benefits and allowances as citizens of the Slovak Republic, meaning they receive a ‘material need benefit’ financial aid distributed on a sliding scale that varies across the size of the household and monthly income (or lack of income).¹⁶² Refugees receive this benefit if their household income is lower than the state minimum living wage.¹⁶³ The groups discussed below have been identified by the desk-based research and the research workshops as facing particular challenges at this stage of the refugee journey.

People using employment agents to secure work: Across the EU, the UNHCR has reported on the likelihood of exploitation of Ukrainian refugees in employment and other spaces.¹⁶⁴ Within Slovakia, there are stories of temporary staffing agencies sending Ukrainian workers to work and accommodation that break applicable laws.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, workshop participants highlighted that third-party employment agencies have been reported to take financial cuts and exploit refugee workers, for example by paying them less than the minimum wage.¹⁶⁶

¹⁵² Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

¹⁵³ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

¹⁵⁴ European Commission. 2021. Education and Training Monitor 2021, Slovakia. Accessed 12 April 2023.

¹⁵⁵ IOM UN Migration. 2023. [How to get a job in Slovakia](#). Accessed 23 March 2023.

¹⁵⁶ European Union. 2022. [Council Implementing Decision \(EU\) 2022/382, 4 March 2022](#)

¹⁵⁷ IOM UN Migration. 2023. [How to get a job in Slovakia](#). Accessed 5 April 2023.

¹⁵⁸ IOM UN Migration. 2023. [How to get a job in Slovakia](#). Accessed 23 March 2023.

¹⁵⁹ GLOBSEC. 2023. [Ukrainian refugees in Visegrad countries: Societal Attitudes and Challenges of Accommodating People Fleeing the War](#). Accessed 5 April 2023.

¹⁶⁰ UNHCR REACH. 2023. [Area-Based Assessment, Slovakia](#). Accessed 6 April 2023.

¹⁶¹ UNHCR. [Protection Risks and Needs of Refugees from Ukraine](#). Accessed 13 April 2023.

¹⁶² UNHCR. [Protection Risks and Needs of Refugees from Ukraine](#). Accessed 13 April 2023.

¹⁶³ Mareena and Human Rights League. [State contribution: Financial support for migrants and refugees in Slovakia](#). Accessed 5 April 2023. Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family. 2023. [Užitočné informácie pre občanov Ukrajiny/Kopуcha інформація для громадян України/Useful information for citizens of Ukraine](#). Accessed 11 July 2023.

¹⁶⁴ Mareena and Human Rights League. [State contribution: Financial support for migrants and refugees in Slovakia](#). Accessed 5 April 2023.

¹⁶⁵ UNHCR. 2022. [Statement on risks of trafficking and exploitation facing refugees from Ukraine attributed to UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioner for Protection](#). Accessed 11 April 2023.

¹⁶⁶ Spiegel International. 2022. [Ukrainian Refugees Report Cases of Exploitation in Europe](#). Accessed 5 April 2023.

¹⁶⁷ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

Notably, the IOM provides specific guidance to refugees in Slovakia to ensure they understand that paying fees to intermediary employment agencies is a dangerous practice.¹⁶⁷ Since refugees do not always know their rights or have access to information in a language they understand,¹⁶⁸ they can be vulnerable to exploitation and ‘sent’ to do a job that they have little insight on, as the main contract is between the agency and the employer.¹⁶⁹

People who do not speak Slovak: Of refugees in Slovakia surveyed by REACH, 62 percent do not speak Slovak at all or speak it poorly, and multiple studies report that language barriers are the primary reason that refugees struggle to find employment.¹⁷⁰ Although exact numbers vary for the country, a survey across EU countries accepting refugees found that 52 percent of women and 45 percent of men reported not being employed due to their language skills, and 48 percent of respondents said that their current job was below their education level.¹⁷¹ A workshop participant put it simply: ‘you don’t know the language—you don’t work’.¹⁷²

People employed illegally: The number of migrant workers found to be working illegally was rising significantly before the Ukraine war,¹⁷³ creating an environment in which foreign workers are highly vulnerable to exploitation. Slovak legislation criminalises exploitative working conditions for migrants; however working illegally remains a criminal offence, and refugees risk deportation if caught.¹⁷⁴ A report from 2018 stated that Ukrainian workers’ rights are ‘widely violated’ and that, following labour exploitation, they are often treated as illegal migrants and forced to leave the country.¹⁷⁵ Refugees fleeing the war are at particular risk of exploitation due to limited options for work and being in desperate need of income, resulting in some workers signing contracts in the local language that they do not understand, working without contracts, and working below the minimum age or in conditions that break the law.¹⁷⁶

Single mothers with children: The vast majority (76 percent) of Ukrainian children left Ukraine with just their mothers and, accordingly, live with effectively single mothers.¹⁷⁷ However, without access to affordable and reliable childcare, women may have to care for their children full-time and be unable to work.¹⁷⁸ This is especially the case for mothers with children under age 6, as Slovak kindergartens are oversubscribed and, in addition, 25 percent of refugee households are not aware that they have free access to kindergarten.¹⁷⁹ Nearly half (49 percent) of households surveyed between October 2022 and March 2023 reported not being able to access

¹⁶⁷ IOM UN Migration. 2023. [How to get a job in Slovakia](#). Accessed 13 April 2023.

¹⁶⁸ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2023. [Fleeing Ukraine: Displaced People’s Experiences in The EU](#). Accessed 5 April 2023.

¹⁶⁹ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

¹⁷⁰ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2023. [Fleeing Ukraine: Displaced People’s Experiences in The EU](#). Accessed 5 April 2023.

¹⁷¹ UNHCR REACH. 2023. [Area-Based Assessment, Slovakia](#). Accessed 6 April 2023; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2023. [Fleeing Ukraine: Displaced People’s Experiences in The EU](#). Accessed 5 April 2023; UNHCR. [Protection Risks and Needs of Refugees from Ukraine](#). Accessed 13 April 2023.

¹⁷² European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2023. [Fleeing Ukraine: Displaced People’s Experiences in The EU](#). Accessed 5 April 2023.

¹⁷³ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

¹⁷⁴ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2023. [Fleeing Ukraine: Displaced People’s Experiences in The EU](#). Accessed 5 April 2023; POOSH. 2018. [Occupational Safety and Health of Posted Workers: Depicting the existing and future challenges in assuring decent working conditions and wellbeing of workers in hazardous sectors](#). Accessed 5 April 2023.

¹⁷⁵ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2023. [Fleeing Ukraine: Displaced People’s Experiences in The EU](#). Accessed 5 April 2023; POOSH. 2018. [Occupational Safety and Health of Posted Workers: Depicting the existing and future challenges in assuring decent working conditions and wellbeing of workers in hazardous sectors](#). Accessed 5 April 2023.

¹⁷⁶ European Commission. 2018. [Victims of labour exploitation or “illegal” migrants? Ukrainian workers’ labour rights protection in Slovakia](#). Accessed 5 April 2023.

¹⁷⁷ Spiegel International. 2022. [Ukrainian Refugees Report Cases of Exploitation in Europe](#). Accessed 5 April 2023.

¹⁷⁸ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2023. [Fleeing Ukraine: Displaced People’s Experiences in The EU](#). Accessed 5 April 2023.

¹⁷⁹ GLOBSEC. 2023. [Ukrainian refugees in Visegrad countries: Societal Attitudes and Challenges of Accommodating People Fleeing the War](#). Accessed 5 April 2023.

¹⁷⁹ UNHCR REACH. 2022. [Slovakia multi-sectoral needs assessment 2022](#)

childcare for their infants.¹⁸⁰ Workshop participants reported that, to be able to provide financially for their families, mothers are sometimes driven to leave the children home alone; they could be identified as at risk and social services could be called.¹⁸¹

People with disabilities: The UNHCR highlights that refugees with disabilities across the world experience obstacles to employment and without it lose out on self-reliance, a critical factor in their resettlement.¹⁸² This is the case in the current Slovak labour market, with refugees struggling to access work and the assistance mechanisms which can enable it.¹⁸³ Workshop participants highlighted that refugees with disabilities find securing employment challenging due to discrimination from employers and barriers to access, and many face exploitation at work including not being paid for hours worked.¹⁸⁴ Some support does exist, however. Slovak citizens who are unable to work due to their health can apply for an invalidity pension.¹⁸⁵ On 2 December 2022, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, and Family began the provision of a ‘severe disability allowance’ as a subsidy to support refugees with severe disabilities, either in or out work.¹⁸⁶

2.7 Community, social, and political life

The rich and complex communal, social, and political context in Slovakia that Ukrainian refugees arrive into has myriad impacts on their lives and experiences. While many Slovaks have welcomed Ukrainian refugees with open arms, there are also pockets of pro-Russian sentiment in parts of the country. Slovakia’s physical and political positioning in Europe places it in an unusual situation with cultural, linguistic, and political alliances to both the East and West.¹⁸⁷ Surveys frequently show mixed responses regarding the responsibilities and causes of the war, with recent data showing that 43 percent of those sampled believed Russia started the war and 46 percent believed Ukraine, NATO, or the United States did. These opinions on the war have spill-over effects on how those fleeing the war are viewed and, therefore, integrated into society, with countries where residents blame Ukraine, NATO, or the United States for starting the war reporting the most negative attitudes toward Ukrainian refugees.¹⁸⁸

The Slovak government and various other multilateral and non-governmental organisations have taken steps to formalise the integration of refugees, including by creating, reviewing, and updating their Ukraine regional refugee response plan which, in addition to outlining the government’s approach to providing material and basic needs, also focuses on its approach to social cohesion, inclusion, and peaceful coexistence between the hosting communities and those displaced.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁰ UNHCR. [Protection Risks and Needs of Refugees from Ukraine](#). Accessed 13 April 2023.

¹⁸¹ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

¹⁸² UNHCR. 2021. [Integration Handbook](#). Accessed 12 April 2023.

¹⁸³ UNHCR 2023. [Ukraine Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan - Slovakia Chapter \(January-December 2023\)](#). Accessed 5 April 2023.

¹⁸⁴ Košice research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

¹⁸⁵ European Commission. 2023. [Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion](#). Accessed 12 April 2023.

¹⁸⁶ Mareena and Human Rights League. [State contribution: Financial support for migrants and refugees in Slovakia](#). Accessed 11 April 2023.

¹⁸⁷ GLOBSEC. 2022. [War in Ukraine: A wake-up call for Slovaks](#). Accessed 11 April 2023.

¹⁸⁸ GLOBSEC. 2022. [New report shows that the V4 population supports Ukrainian refugees with some reservations](#). Accessed 22 March 2023. Although there has been debate about methodological approaches to polling conducted by GLOBSEC and the [Slovak Academy of Science](#), such as noting the different scales given to participants to respond to questions (1–5 or 1–10) and how responses were collected (online or in-person), even when the question posed is the same. See GLOBSEC. 2002. [New poll: Slovaks want Ukraine to win the war, Not Russia](#). Accessed 22 March 2023.

¹⁸⁹ European Commission, UNHCR. 2021. [Integration Handbook](#). Accessed 12 April 2023; [Slovakia: Updated Ukraine regional refugee response plan](#). Accessed 12 April 2023.

However, support for Ukrainians is slowly decreasing across the country, likely due to a combination of factors including the increasing disinformation and polarisation of society, as well as the economic crisis and inflation, which may pose challenges to Ukrainian refugees' full participation in community, social, and political life in Slovakia.¹⁹⁰ The groups discussed below have been identified by the desk-based research and the research workshops as facing particular challenges at this stage of the refugee journey.

People who are politically active in supporting the war effort: With a segment of society reporting pro-Russian sentiments and a sizeable (7 percent) part of the population blaming Ukraine for the war,¹⁹¹ Ukrainian refugees who overtly support the war effort risk attracting attention from pro-Russian Slovaks who are actively hostile to their presence and support for the war. Hostility against refugees has led international organisations like the IOM to run campaigns to reduce hate speech against migrants in Slovakia.¹⁹² Negative interactions that can impact the integration of Ukrainians, in particular appear to occur between older Slovaks and Ukrainians, with 21 percent of Ukrainians surveyed reporting this is due to cultural differences.¹⁹³

Elderly people: Older refugees are at particular risk of social isolation, having lost their social networks and lacking easy ways to form new relationships through children or education.¹⁹⁴ They may also experience difficulties due to mobility, hearing and sight restrictions which create additional barriers to accessing emergency protection or information and assistance.¹⁹⁵ Workshop participants also noted that refugees in this age group are the most vulnerable to social isolation due to lack of targeted activities for seniors in Slovakia.¹⁹⁶

People with disabilities: Refugees with disabilities can be 'invisible' in society, particularly in areas with limited services and/or transport for accessing social and cultural life. Slovak society has been noted to struggle to include Slovaks with disabilities; a 2017–18 assessment found that a high proportion were institutionalised rather than being integrated into communities and supported to live independently.¹⁹⁷ The assessment and workshop participants also highlighted that such institutions are already at, or close to, maximum capacity across the board.¹⁹⁸ More recent analysis also raised concerns about the lack of resources to provide quality community-based services and progress toward deinstitutionalisation.¹⁹⁹ Workshop participants also noted that the lack of accessible state schools or support for children with disabilities may lead to social isolation.²⁰⁰ The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) notes that refugees with disabilities may be overlooked, as they may be separated from their social and support networks and struggle to access information, leaving them less able to seek services to which they have rights.²⁰¹ Within the EU, Slovakia also has among the highest internal economic disparities among regions,²⁰² and participants highlighted that these regional differences translate to

¹⁹⁰ Slovak Academy of Sciences, 2023. [The public support for displaced Ukrainians in Slovakia is slowly decreasing](#). Accessed 12 April 2023.

¹⁹¹ GLOBSEC. 2023. [Ukrainian refugees in Visegrad countries: Societal Attitudes and Challenges of Accommodating People Fleeing the War](#). Accessed 11 April 2023.

¹⁹² IOM. [Say #NoToHate speech against migrants](#). Accessed 13 April 2023.

¹⁹³ UNHCR REACH. 2023. [Slovakia: area-based assessment \(Bratislava, Kosice, Nitra and Zilina\) - February 2023](#). Accessed 12 April 2023.

¹⁹⁴ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

¹⁹⁵ UNHCR. 2021. [Integration Handbook](#) Accessed 13 April 2023.

¹⁹⁶ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

¹⁹⁷ The Academic Network of European Disability Experts. 2019. [Country report on Living independently and being included in the community - Slovakia](#). Accessed 12 April 2023.

¹⁹⁸ The Academic Network of European Disability Experts. 2019. [Country report on Living independently and being included in the community - Slovakia](#). Accessed 13 April 2023. Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

¹⁹⁹ World Psychiatric Association and European Psychiatric Association. 2021. [Recommendations regarding psychiatric care in Slovakia](#). Accessed 13 April 2023.

²⁰⁰ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

²⁰¹ OHCHR. 2022. [Ukraine: 2.7 million people with disabilities at risk, UN committee warns](#). Accessed 12 April 2023.

²⁰² The World Bank. 2023. [Narrowing economic disparities between Slovakia's regions is essential for economic growth](#)

severe inequalities in access to services for those with disabilities.²⁰³ The European Commission's 2021 fiche on Slovakia echoed these concerns, highlighting that access to employment for people with disabilities varies region by region, and that municipal staff receive different levels of education on how to work with disabled communities, resulting in a deeper regional disparity in access to public services among the disabled community than non-disabled counterparts.²⁰⁴

People suffering from trauma: Nearly two in three (63 percent) of adult refugees in a survey reported experiencing trauma since the war started, and 62 percent reported impacts on their wellbeing such as panic attacks and loss of self-confidence,²⁰⁵ affecting their ability to participate actively in social and community life. A workshop participant highlighted, 'everyone coming from Ukraine these days is traumatised'.²⁰⁶ This can be the case particularly for those unable to access mental health support and counselling, with 14 percent of refugees seeking medical or psychological support in Slovakia reportedly not receiving it.²⁰⁷ Slovakia's League for Mental Health also argues that many refugees who hope to return to Ukraine imminently struggle to integrate as their disbelief in their 'new reality' means that they invest less in their current situation.²⁰⁸

Children and young people in their late teens: Children and adolescents can experience social isolation, particularly if they do not speak Slovak or are enrolled in online Ukrainian school.²⁰⁹ Participants in the research workshops raised that some children experienced bullying online and in schools, including through pro-Russian taunts regarding the war.²¹⁰ Workshop participants highlighted that the deterioration of social relations in themselves can deepen people's sense of isolation and can lead to depression.²¹¹ Moreover, participants shared that social isolation can lead to a variety of additional vulnerabilities and risks including mental health issues, addictive behaviours, and stagnation of opportunities.²¹²

LGBTQIA+ refugees: There are numerous cases of harassment of the LGBTQIA+ community, hate speech, and violence, including the recent murders of two people outside a gay bar on 13 October 2022 by a 'radicalized teenager'.²¹³ LGBTQIA+ persons from Ukraine report having experienced discrimination, physical violence, and in some cases detention by Slovak authorities.²¹⁴ Discrimination has tangible impacts on how people integrate into society, with just 25 percent of LGBTQIA+ refugees living in the EU reporting feeling part of their communities compared to 34 percent of their non-LGBTQIA+ counterparts.²¹⁵ Discrimination can also lead to social isolation and hostilities, with 20 percent of LGBTQIA+ respondents in one survey reporting not getting along with those they had to share accommodation with.²¹⁶ LGBTQIA+ refugees also may have specific needs and sensitivities

²⁰³ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

²⁰⁴ European Commission. 2021. [European Semester 2020-2021 country fiche on disability equality: Slovakia](#). Accessed 11 July 2023.

²⁰⁵ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2023. [Fleeing Ukraine: Displaced People's Experiences in The EU](#). Accessed 11 April 2023.

²⁰⁶ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

²⁰⁷ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2023. [Fleeing Ukraine: Displaced People's Experiences in The EU](#). Accessed 11 April 2023.

²⁰⁸ Relief Web. 2022. [Supporting Mental Health as Ukrainian Refugees Navigate Life in Slovakia](#). Accessed 12 April 2023

²⁰⁹ The Slovak Spectator. 2023. [The silent toll of the war in Ukraine is on minds](#). Accessed 4 April 2023 UNHCR REACH. 2023. [Area-Based Assessment, Slovakia](#). Accessed 6 April 2023.

²¹⁰ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

²¹¹ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

²¹² Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

²¹³ Reuters. 2022. ['Radicalised teenager' killed two outside Slovakia gay bar](#). Accessed 12 April 2023.

²¹⁴ VOICE and HIAS. 2022. [Slovakia Assessment Report - Waiting for the Sky to Close: The Unprecedented Crisis Facing Women and Girls Fleeing Ukraine](#). Accessed 12 April 2023.

²¹⁵ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2023. [Fleeing Ukraine: Displaced People's Experiences in The EU](#). Accessed 12 April 2023.

²¹⁶ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2023. [Fleeing Ukraine: Displaced People's Experiences in The EU](#). Accessed 12 April 2023.

which are more difficult to meet when they are displaced. For example, 47 percent of Ukrainian LGBTQIA+ respondents in the EU considered lack of privacy in their housing to be a problem—figures higher than among non-LGBTQIA+ refugees surveyed.²¹⁷ Furthermore, LGBTQIA+ refugees in the EU struggle to know where to access services and information to support their specific needs more than non-LGBTQIA+ refugees (45 percent versus 30 percent in one survey).²¹⁸ Crucially, it is clear that the physical impacts of displacement affects the emotional well-being of LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians much more than non-LGBTQIA+ refugees, with LGBTQIA+ refugees living across the EU reporting not dealing as well with problems, feeling less optimistic about the future, and feeling less valued than their non-LGBTQIA+ counterparts.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2023. [Fleeing Ukraine: Displaced People's Experiences in The EU](#). Accessed 12 April 2023.

²¹⁸ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2023. [Fleeing Ukraine: Displaced People's Experiences in The EU](#). Accessed 12 April 2023.

²¹⁹ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2023. [Fleeing Ukraine: Displaced People's Experiences in The EU](#). Accessed 12 April 2023.

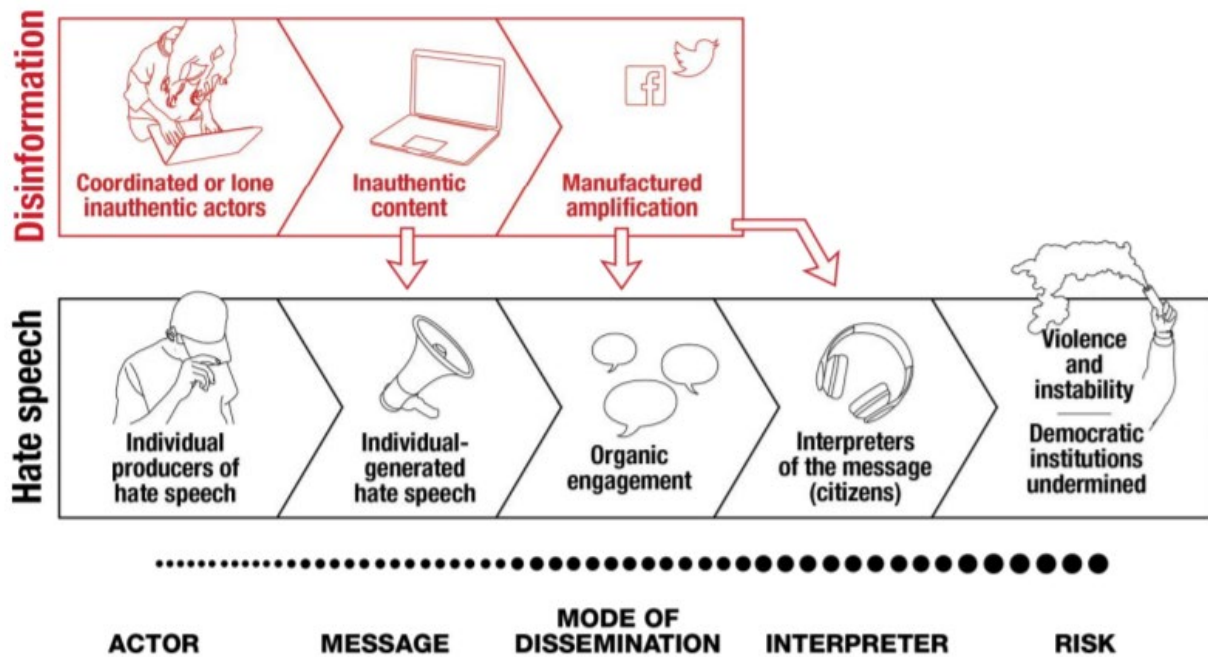
Chapter 3. Misleading or incendiary discourses about Ukrainian refugees

3.1 Overview

This chapter discusses key misleading or incendiary discourses about refugees in Slovakia, as well as modes of dissemination, host community ‘interpreters’, and the risks of such discourses impacting local communities.

The analysis of misleading and incendiary discourses below is based on the IFES Chain of Harm framework (Figure 1)²²⁰ which maps the path by which disinformation, misinformation, and dangerous speech (DMDS) move through an information ecosystem, depicting the ways in which directed disinformation commonly amplifies hate speech or other divisive narratives to achieve its aims. The Chain of Harm framework allows researchers and practitioners to map DMDS along five stages, from initial actors creating DMDS to the ultimate risks that manifest. Breaking down the challenges of DMDS in this way allows researchers and practitioners to identify discrete intervention points where the Chain of Harm can be disrupted to reduce the ultimate harms that would otherwise occur.

FIGURE 1: The IFES Chain of Harm Framework



The five stages of the Chain of Harm—actor, message, mode of dissemination, interpreter, and risk—are used below to analyse aspects of narratives in circulation in Slovakia.

²²⁰ IFES. 2019. *Disinformation Campaigns and Hate Speech: Exploring the Relationship and Programming Interventions*. Accessed 31 March 2023.

Actors spreading misleading or abusive messages

Slovakia emerges as a ‘country of paradoxes’ in polling on topics regarding Russia, the EU, and Ukraine.²²¹ GLOBSEC’s Trends 2022 report highlighted that 60 percent to 70 percent of Slovaks support remaining in NATO and the EU, yet these sentiments come against the backdrop of pre-war, pro-Russian sentiments: Until 2021, a strong proportion (around 50 percent) of Slovaks viewed Russia as a strategic partner.²²² Following Putin’s illegal invasion of Ukraine, the Russia-Ukraine war has contributed to the increased radicalisation of public discourse in Slovakia,²²³ and the online world has seen a marked increase in the levels of DMDS in a country that already experienced disinformation at a large scale on topics such as COVID-19 and migrants.²²⁴

Russia is an active participant in the disinformation space in Slovakia. The Russian embassy in Bratislava has played a key role in disseminating pro-Kremlin disinformation, although some of its social media posts have since been deleted by the embassy’s account or removed following interventions by Meta.²²⁵ However, despite continuous posting of pro-Kremlin propaganda on the embassy’s Facebook page, there was no increase in interactions with individual posts compared to before the war, and readership did not reach high levels.²²⁶ Pro-Russian public demonstrations have taken place in Bratislava, although there have been more in support of Ukraine.²²⁷ Pro-Russian media and think tanks also exist in Slovakia, and a study by the Marshall Centre found that the number of Slovak-language pro-Russian, non-Kremlin-affiliated media outlets grew after 2013.²²⁸ This has accompanied a growing distrust in the mainstream media, and Slovakia reports a high rate of belief in conspiracy theories which include anti-Western and pro-Russian messaging.²²⁹

The other key communicators in this area are political actors, particularly from opposition parties²³⁰ (primarily, but not exclusively, those on the far right).²³¹ Analysis of key Facebook pages found that among the most influential individual disseminators of DMDS were two active politicians from one far-right party who consistently posted content hostile to Ukraine, the war, and the EU.²³² Each of their pages ‘received over 160,000 interactions from only five and ten posts respectively ... nearly 100,000 more interactions than the second highest page [spreading anti-refugee material], TV channel TA3, which only managed to attract 67,697 interactions from 161 posts’.²³³ Much of the visibility of these and other political actors arose precisely because of their hate speech and spread of disinformation, particularly using the rhetoric of the COVID-19 era.²³⁴

²²¹ GLOBSEC. 2022. [GLOBSEC Trends 2022: Slovakia](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

²²² GLOBSEC. 2022. [GLOBSEC Trends 2022: Slovakia](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

²²³ European Centre for Populism. [The Russia–Ukraine War and the Radicalization of Political Discourse in Slovakia](#). Accessed 27 March 2023

²²⁴ Department of Communication and Prevention of the Presidium of the Police Force. 2023. [Report of the police force on disinformation](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

²²⁵ Department of Communication and Prevention of the Presidium of the Police Force. 2023. [Report of the police force on disinformation](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

²²⁶ Department of Communication and Prevention of the Presidium of the Police Force. 2023. [Report of the police force on disinformation](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

²²⁷ Department of Communication and Prevention of the Presidium of the Police Force. 2023. [Report of the police force on disinformation](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

²²⁸ Smolenova, Ivana. 2013. [The Pro-Russian disinformation campaign in Czech Republic and Slovakia](#). Accessed 11 April 2023.

²²⁹ Meseznikov, Grigorij. 2022. [Stance of the V4 countries towards Russian military aggression against Ukraine](#). Accessed 11 April 2023.

²³⁰ INFOSECURITY.SK. 2023. [Kremlin Watchers Movement Policy Brief – January 2023](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

²³¹ INFOSECURITY.SK. 2023. [Slovak far-right politicians are spreading false narratives about refugees, the West is being blamed for the ongoing energy crisis](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

²³² INFOSECURITY.SK. 2023. [Slovak far-right politicians are spreading false narratives about refugees, the West is being blamed for the ongoing energy crisis](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

²³³ The Beacon Project. 2023. [Hostile Narrative Brief: War in Ukraine: A Year of Aggression](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

²³⁴ INFOSECURITY.SK. 2023. [Kremlin Watchers Movement Policy Brief – January 2023](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

The UK Government Communications Service has identified a variety of reasons why actors could spread misleading or incendiary content.²³⁵ The motivations listed below could contribute to a variety of actors spreading misleading or incendiary narratives about Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia:

1. **Genuine belief in the messages**, which might resonate with strongly held personal beliefs. In some instances, the actors sharing messages may recognise they are false or misleading but believe the sentiment illustrates ‘the kind of thing that goes on’. In this context, messages could refer, for example, to Slovaks being dismissed from their employment to enable employers to hire Ukrainians at lower wages.
2. **Grievances**: As inflation rises, for example, some people’s standards of living are deteriorating. Others might have lost their jobs, and Ukrainian refugees might be easy scapegoats for such problems.
3. **Lack of consequences for promoting misleading messages**: Actors may take advantage of the anonymity of online spaces and gain respect within certain online communities.
4. **Personal or institutional gain** by discrediting specific individuals (e.g., politicians) or organisations (e.g., government institutions, businesses, NGOs, multilateral organisations, and others). This may also be for the purpose of **mobilising voters** in response to an imagined threat and building support as a result of anti-refugee rhetoric.²³⁶
5. **Contributing to polarisation**, aiming to crowd out any differing opinions.
6. **Financial gain**, either benefiting from increased traffic to websites to view posts, or by selling specific products.
7. **Geopolitical gain**, through which hostile actors aim to destabilise other countries, whether financially or in terms of security. The aim of Russian trolling is often to create a sense of chaos and confusion as to what information is true, given the large number of conflicting ‘facts’ being proposed to audiences.²³⁷

Types of messages and approaches

Table 2 summarises discourses about refugees that were identified in the workshops and through research from third parties and triangulated using CrowdTangle. The five discourses that are likely to have the highest potential to affect community cohesion in the medium term, taking into account the prevalence of the narratives and the likelihood of their having an impact on community cohesion, are boldfaced. These are analysed in more detail in the following section.

²³⁵ Government Communication Service. 2021. [Resist 2: Counter-disinformation toolkit](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

²³⁶ International Republican Institute. 2023. [Hostile Narrative Brief War In Ukraine](#). Accessed 29 March 2023; Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights. 2023. [Raport „Granice nienawiści”](#), page 91. Accessed 31 March 2023.

²³⁷ Tymińska, Ada. 2022. [Granice nienawiści. Mowa nienawiści w kontekście kryzysów humanitarnych na granicy polskiej \(2021/2022\)](#). Helsińska Fundacja Praw Człowieka.

TABLE 2: Misleading or incendiary discourses about refugees in Slovakia

Journey stage	Misleading or Incendiary Discourses about Ukrainian Refugees
Legal status, welfare, and benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are economic migrants who could be planning to stay in the host countries permanently. • Refugees from western Ukraine or less affected regions are not genuine refugees; the war hasn't really affected them; they don't deserve support. • They abuse the benefits system (e.g., cross the border just to get money). • Ukrainians are supported more than other refugees.
Healthcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukrainians create a burden on the healthcare system, taking locals' places. • Local doctors don't want to treat Ukrainians. • They misuse services (unnecessary ambulance calls and emergency room and doctor visits). • They are a health or disease risk.
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukrainians create a burden on the housing system. • Refugees have more or unfair access to housing.
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukrainians create a burden on the education system – schools and kindergartens – taking locals' places. • Ukrainian students are not making an effort at school.
Employment and income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic challenges and the energy crisis are fuelled by hosting refugees ('they drive prices up'). • New arrivals from Ukraine take jobs from local population; they are willing to work for significantly lower wages; they are destroying the labour market. • Refugees are supported more financially and get better benefits than the local population; help to refugees comes at the cost of the local population: 'We should help our poor, not the Ukrainians'. They don't want to work. • Ukrainians are rich, drive around in fancy cars, and spend their time in malls and cafés while locals work; they're in the host country on holiday; they don't need assistance.
Community, social, and political life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukrainian refugees create diplomatic tensions with Russia. They need to accept their fate, negotiate, and, if needed, become part of Russia and move on. They are also endangering other countries (including the host country) by resisting. • Refugees are ungrateful, have high expectations or demands for support and shelter, and abuse hospitality – they leave messy apartments and are disrespectful. Refugees are selective about the types of support that they receive (e.g., don't want to live in small cities, only want certain types of products). • They should be in Ukraine defending their country, not here. • Women come to look for husbands and citizenship. • They are not really traumatised; they go to cafés and live a nice, normal life. • Ukrainians and Russians are basically the same. • Negative perceptions of refugees caused by political views relating to Russia. • Local men will be required to serve in the military if support to Ukraine and Ukrainians continues. • Refugees pose crime risks and security threats (e.g., prone to criminality, anti-social behaviour; organised crime coming from Ukraine).

Modes of dissemination

Online (social media, websites, email, and messaging apps): Slovakia has an extremely active and powerful interlinked online disinformation space, with a network of over 1,800 Facebook pages and groups that spread various DMDS.²³⁸ The website *Konspiratori.sk*, which was established to identify and list online spaces that propagate disinformation, names 280 websites that publish factually incorrect content or conspiracy theories.²³⁹ Over the last few years, this content has persistently embedded itself across the Slovak information space.²⁴⁰

Facebook has been the primary channel for the war and refugee-related disinformation online.²⁴¹ Other social media platforms are used to a lesser extent, with Telegram becoming a domain of increasing importance,²⁴² and some Telegram channels that share pro-Russian disinformation are seeing a relatively small increase in followers.²⁴³ Similarly, some Instagram posts on related topics have been receiving pockets of engagement.²⁴⁴ Memes were a popular way to spread disinformation before the war; since then, in social media and the internet more broadly, xenophobic comments positioned beneath newspaper articles have generally been a key mode of dissemination.²⁴⁵ Of web domains that are typically shared on these platforms, the socialist-leaning website *mronline.org* has seen the most engagement.²⁴⁶ This website has historically spread DMDS, such as ‘narratives about Nazis infiltrating Ukrainian institutions or that the war is just a proxy war initiated by the United States to defeat Russia’.²⁴⁷ Reuters reports that YouTube channels are often not officially affiliated to politicians and contain unfiltered, uncensored information that is poorly regulated outside of EU norms.²⁴⁸

Online media have also spread disinformation related to refugees and the war, including Russia-aligned content. Sites such as *Hlavné správy*,²⁴⁹ *Hlavný denník*,²⁵⁰ *Zem a Vek*,²⁵¹ and *Extraplus*²⁵² have shared content that has heavily criticised the government policy of accepting refugees whilst also sharing inflammatory content related to Ukraine. In April 2023, *Hlavné správy* reshared an article from 2019 alleging that fascism was rampant in the Ukrainian government and that, by visiting Ukraine, the Slovak president indicated that she accepted these values.²⁵³ Such media have used inflammatory language to criticise EU policy on Ukraine. For example, in March 2023, a member of the European Parliament alleged that the EU agreement to continue to provide ammunition to the Ukrainian war effort was a ‘devil’s plan’ and that ‘Western Europe will drown in Slavic blood’.²⁵⁴ This

²³⁸ *Bibec.online*. 2023. [Disinformation synthesis website](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

²³⁹ *Konspiratori.sk*. 2023. Accessed 11 April 2023.

²⁴⁰ *Bibec.online*. 2023. [Disinformation synthesis website](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

²⁴¹ Police of the Slovak Republic 2023. [Report of the police force on disinformation](#). Accessed 28 March 2023. [Russian disinformation in Slovakia in January 2023](#). Accessed 27 March 2023.

²⁴² Department of Communication and Prevention of the Presidium of the Police Force. 2023. [Report of the police force on disinformation](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

²⁴³ Department of Communication and Prevention of the Presidium of the Police Force. 2023. [Report of the police force on disinformation](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

²⁴⁴ Department of Communication and Prevention of the Presidium of the Police Force. 2023. [Report of the police force on disinformation](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

²⁴⁵ Bratislava research workshop, 8 March 2023.

²⁴⁶ International Republican Institute. 2023. [Hostile Narrative Brief War In Ukraine](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

²⁴⁷ International Republican Institute. 2023. [Hostile Narrative Brief War In Ukraine](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

²⁴⁸ Reuters Institute. 2022. [Slovakia](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

²⁴⁹ [Hlavné správy](#). Accessed 11 April 2023.

²⁵⁰ [Hlavný denník](#). Accessed 11 April 2023.

²⁵¹ [Zem a Vek](#). Accessed 11 April 2023.

²⁵² [Extraplus](#). Accessed 11 April 2023.

²⁵³ *Hlavné Správy*. 2023. [Hovoril niekto, že na Ukrajine nie sú fašisti? Po zhladnutí tohto videa asi zmení názor](#). Accessed 11 April 2023.

²⁵⁴ *Zem a Vek*. 2023. [Radačovský: Diabolský plán Bruselu pre Ukrajinu bude mať na svedomí milióny ľudských životov!](#). Accessed 11 April 2023.

supports reporting by the Heinrich Boll foundation that Slovak sympathy for Russia's position can be 'disguised as pan-Slavism'.²⁵⁵

Word of mouth: Some discourses spread through regular conversations between individuals, including narratives that they first came across online—particularly where discourses relate to increasing financial pressures or other ways in which refugees may be impacting on people's quality of life.

Host community reactions (interpreters)

Slovakia is one of the countries in the CEE region most prone to believing in conspiracy theories, as stated in a 2022 GLOBSEC report.²⁵⁶ Moreover, the country reports the greatest fear toward 'other groups' (migrants and western societies) in the region regarding threats to values and identity.²⁵⁷ Slovakia also consistently demonstrates higher sympathy for Russia than comparable EU countries. More than one in three (37 percent) Slovaks regard Russia as an important strategic partner, and over half believe that Slovakia belongs 'somewhere between east and west' geopolitically.²⁵⁸ Slovakia is also one of only two countries that has recorded an increase in support for closer relations with Russia since 2021, according to GLOBSEC (the other being Romania).²⁵⁹ The popularity of pan-Slavism, reliance on Russia's hydrocarbon industry, and positive recollections of history all contribute to this position.²⁶⁰ This provides a context for which disinformation regarding Ukrainian refugees is likely to flourish.

There is also a correlation between the perceived wellbeing of host communities and the level of support for accepting refugees or supporting populism. This has been observed in Slovakia²⁶¹ and is important to consider when reflecting on the material impact of the war and arrival of refugees on Slovak communities. As living conditions are perceived to deteriorate, resentment toward refugees and support for populism is likely to grow and contribute to an increase in receptiveness to certain discourses regarding Ukrainian refugees and types of disinformation.

The European Digital Media Observatory found that disinformation about refugees was directed at three groups of recipients:²⁶²

- Racist-minded individuals who already had negative attitudes toward refugees;
- Supporters of conspiracy theories—in Slovakia, this particularly refers to politicised pan-Slavism, which strongly emphasises the influence of Russian culture on Slovakia; and
- Average concerned citizens, referring to rising prices and longer queues for healthcare and education.

The latter group can be quite broad: Many Slovaks are under significant financial strain due to rising inflation and face challenges related to services and the economy, as discussed in Chapter 4. Therefore, some of the

²⁵⁵ Meseznikov, Grigorij. 2022. [Stance of the V4 countries towards Russian military aggression against Ukraine](#). Accessed 11 April 2023.

²⁵⁶ GLOBSEC. 2022. [GLOBSEC Trends 2022: Central and Eastern Europe amid the War in Ukraine](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

²⁵⁷ GLOBSEC. 2022. [GLOBSEC Trends 2022: Slovakia](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

²⁵⁸ GLOBSEC. 2022. [GLOBSEC Trends 2022: CEE amid the war in Ukraine](#). Accessed 11 April 2023.

²⁵⁹ GLOBSEC. 2022. [GLOBSEC Trends 2022: CEE amid the war in Ukraine](#). Accessed 11 April 2023.

²⁶⁰ Instytut Europy Środkowej. 2022. [Slovakia: an unstable public support for Ukraine and the West](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

²⁶¹ MUNI ECON. 2023. [Attitudes towards migrants and preferences for asylum and refugee policies before and during Russian invasion of Ukraine: The case of Slovakia \(Working Paper\)](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

²⁶² European Digital Media Observatory. 2022. [European Digital Media Observatory. 2022. 'Ukrainian refugees and disinformation: situation in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania'](#). Accessed 31 March 2023.

messages referring to matters that affect day-to-day life may increasingly resonate with members of host communities. The financially worse-off segments of the Slovak population, particularly in regions with higher unemployment, may see Ukrainian migrants as a threat to their own economic well-being and jobs. According to the International Republican Institute's analysis, narratives on Ukrainian refugees used as political tools (for example, as puppets to NATO or the West, or part of an extremist liberal agenda) were particularly prevalent, largely for an audience of far-right supporters and, to some extent, the general public due to concerns around the economy.²⁶³

Finally, workshop participants and GLOBSEC has reported that the Hungarian minority in Slovakia might be more susceptible to disinformation that might appear in the Hungarian media, due to their consumption of it.²⁶⁴

Considerations for Countering Anti-refugee Messaging:

Nudges for people to look at different sources of information could be considered. The Redirect Method is a way to do this online. When an internet user enters keywords 'that indicate an interest in extremist propaganda', a pop-up ad directs them to more information on the topic or redirecting them to content that counters the extremist messaging. This could be set up through a partnership with social media platforms or search engines such as Google.²⁶⁵

Accuracy prompts—reminders that 'most people want to share accurate information' can be used online, for example as promoted posts on social media platforms. Such non-political and non-ideological prompts have been shown to reduce the spread of misinformation.²⁶⁶

Risks

Incendiary and misleading discourses about refugees present risks on various levels.

First, there are risks to Ukrainian refugees, particularly in relation to discrimination and increased challenges in accessing services, jobs, and housing, which are likely to have the greatest impact on more vulnerable groups. Discourses about Ukrainians being rich and receiving better benefits than Slovaks may lead to discrimination in the provision of services. Should employers believe that Ukrainians do not want to work, this may lead to greater discrimination in the job market. A perception may also grow that Ukrainians are not competent to work in certain professions. Micro-aggression and more overt aggression from host communities toward refugees may develop due to growing frustrations regarding the perceived unfairness of Ukrainians receiving state support. All discourses risk moving from the online and verbal space into tangible actions. This is already apparent, with Euractiv reporting that, during the period of free public travel for refugees, some bus drivers refused refugees access without payment.²⁶⁷

²⁶³ International Republican Institute. 2023. [Hostile narrative brief: war in Ukraine, a year of aggression](#)

²⁶⁴ Klingova, Katarína. 2022. [Hungarian minority in Slovakia: Cultural Ties and Deliberate Building of Influence](#). Accessed 13 April 2023; Bratislava research workshop, 8 March 2023.

²⁶⁵ Moonshot. 2019. [Redirect Method Canada Final Report](#). Accessed 5 April 2023.

²⁶⁶ Pennycook, Gordon. McPhetres, J., Zhang, Y., Lu, J. G., and Rand, D. G. 2020. Fighting COVID-19 misinformation on social media: Experimental evidence for a scalable accuracy-nudge intervention. *Psychological Science*, 31, 770–780.

²⁶⁷ Euractiv. 2022. [Resentment for Ukrainian refugees grows in central and eastern Europe](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

Should the economic situation in Slovakia worsen, discourses about refugees driving prices up, deepening economic challenges, or taking locals' jobs could become much more prevalent, fuelling resentment toward Ukrainians by the host community. As early as May 2022, Euractiv noted that a 'Ukrainian family's car in Slovakia was sprayed with the Russian Z symbol'.²⁶⁸ Ukrainian refugees could be used as scapegoats for economic problems such as inflation, a rising cost of living, and housing shortages and high costs.

Finally, such discourses present risks to community cohesion more broadly. There may be increased distrust and polarisation among the Slovak and Ukrainian communities, which could in some cases manifest in instances of physical and verbal abuse. Tensions between polarised parts of the host society can lead to more protests, clashes between opposing politicians on news channels, and fiery, often aggressive comments and discussions on social media channels between groups with opposing values. This is a particular risk in Slovakia, whose society has been noted to be polarised, particularly regarding topics related to Russia as well as support for Ukrainian refugees.²⁶⁹ The spread of negative narratives relating to Ukrainian refugees is likely to impede integration efforts undertaken by NGOs, foundations, and agencies. In addition, various negative narratives can exacerbate sentiments of isolation among Ukrainians in the host country, making them feel unwelcome.²⁷⁰ Participants in the research workshop noted that incendiary political discourses could increase in the run-up to the 2023 elections, which in turn could increase tensions between refugees and host communities.²⁷¹

Considerations for Countering Anti-Refugee Messaging:

Continue to monitor and analyse the discourses around refugees to understand trends regarding their prevalence and acceptance by the public, and their impact on community cohesion.

3.2 Top five discourses

The top five discourses identified during the desk-based research and workshops are analysed below. Each is explored in turn, covering all stages of the Chain of Harm and the underlying challenges that are particularly distinct for this narrative.

Discourse 1: 'Ukrainian refugees create diplomatic tensions with Russia. They need to accept their fate, negotiate, and, if needed, become part of Russia and move on. They are endangering other countries by resisting'

Message: This messaging exploits anti-war sentiments in Slovakia, playing on perceptions that Ukraine, the EU, and NATO are extending the war by supplying weapons or supporting resistance against Russia's invasion. The message suggests that Slovakia's acceptance of refugees is enabling further tensions, placing Slovak citizens in

²⁶⁸ Euractiv. 2022. [Resentment for Ukrainian refugees grows in central and eastern Europe](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

²⁶⁹ GLOBSEC 2023. [Despite challenges, V4 societies generally remain supportive of Ukrainian refugees, with more negative attitudes apparent in Slovakia](#). Accessed 11 March 2023.

²⁷⁰ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

²⁷¹ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

danger.²⁷² Workshop participants noted that the narrative exploits fears that Slovakia will also be dragged into the war.²⁷³

The narrative also suggests that Russia is seeking peace whilst Ukraine is responsible for prolonging the war, and it often exploits Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelenskyi's rejection of Russia's ceasefire offer over Christmas 2022 (which Zelenskyi stated would primarily help Russia to build strength).²⁷⁴ Much of the focus of pro-Kremlin propaganda is on justifying and validating the Russian invasion,²⁷⁵ thereby undermining the legitimacy of refugees' claims. In Slovakia, this discourse has been used to suggest that support for Ukraine, especially military aid, contributes to prolonged suffering.²⁷⁶ A prominent figure from the largest opposition party suggested that sending military aid was indicative of the Slovak government having 'resigned on the language of peace'. Some politicians have spread strong anti-war narratives that position the protection of Slovakia at their heart and that often characterise the country's approach to refugees as an 'extremist liberal' approach by the government.²⁷⁷ This type of messaging contributes to a growing discourse that support to Ukraine, including to refugees, is enabling the war. Further, portraying Ukraine as an aggressor can undermine support for refugees.²⁷⁸

Some narratives attack the legitimacy of refugees, suggesting that fighting is not taking place across the entirety of Ukraine and therefore there is no need for Ukrainians to leave the country.²⁷⁹

Considerations for Countering Anti-refugee Messaging:

Incendiary messages should be countered by ones based in reality. The focus should be placed on balancing the type of information that is available and easily accessible online so that audiences can access fact-based information with as much ease as the far-right narrative.

Counternarratives to address this discourse could focus on evidence regarding the realities of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the suffering that Russian forces have perpetrated on civilians in Ukraine, such as in Bucha or Irpin. Sharing positive stories and examples about Ukrainian refugees could also help strengthen community cohesion.

As much as possible, counternarratives should target specific audiences and the fora with which they engage, and should be tailored based on these audiences' attitudes, perceptions, values, and norms.

It is also important to use emotionally evocative language to capture attention, increase recall of the messages shared,²⁸⁰ and build on the target audience's values²⁸¹ (for example, aligning with patriotic ideals and showing how Ukrainians are fighting for all of

²⁷² International Republican Institute. 2023. [Hostile Narrative Brief War In Ukraine](#). Accessed 29 March 2023. Bratislava research workshop 7 March 2023.

²⁷³ Bratislava research workshop, 8 March 2023.

²⁷⁴ Infosecurity.sk. 2023. [Russian disinformation in Slovakia in January 2023](#). Accessed 27 March 2023.

²⁷⁵ Department of Communication and Prevention of the Presidium of the Police Force. 2023. [Report of the police force on disinformation](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

²⁷⁶ Učeň, Peter. 2023. [The Russia-Ukraine War and the radicalization of political discourse in Slovakia](#). In *The Impacts of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine on Right-wing Populism in Europe*. Ivaldi, Gilles, and Zankina, E., eds. European Center for Populism Studies. 8 March 2023. Accessed 11 April 2023.

²⁷⁷ International Republican Institute. 2023. [Hostile Narrative Brief War In Ukraine](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

²⁷⁸ Učeň, Peter. 2023. [The Russia-Ukraine War and the radicalization of political discourse in Slovakia](#). In *The Impacts of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine on Right-wing Populism in Europe*. Ivaldi, Gilles, and Zankina, E., eds. European Center for Populism Studies. 8 March 2023. Accessed 11 April 2023.

²⁷⁹ Bratislava research workshop, 8 March 2023.

²⁸⁰ Brady, W. J., Gantman, A., and Van Bavel, J. 2020. [Attentional capture helps explain why moral and emotional content go viral](#). *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 149, 746-756.

²⁸¹ Feinberg, Matthew, and Willer, R. 2015. [From Gulf to Bridge: When Do Moral Arguments Facilitate Political Influence?](#) *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 41(12), 1665-1681.

Europe). Correcting facts alone is unlikely to be effective when attempting to change attitudes regarding sensitive issues tied to people’s values, social norms, and beliefs.

Mode of dissemination: Although certainly spread via social media and especially Facebook (like most of the discourses), workshop participants reported this message is often spread face to face.²⁸² The messaging also occurs in political discourse. However, in the political arena the tone appears to be less targeted on refugees and more suggestive of support to Ukraine as an enabler of violence.

Interpreter: In 2022, 56 percent of Slovaks believed that NATO deliberately provoked Russia by surrounding it with its own military bases,²⁸³ and 68 percent (particularly in households that do not believe Russia is responsible for the war) agreed that support to Ukrainian refugees should be decreased.²⁸⁴ This highlights how existing political perceptions directly impact perceptions and opinions of Ukrainian refugees and provides a fertile ground for DMDS to be believed and spread. On 3 March 2023, hundreds of anti-NATO protestors joined a March for Peace rally, campaigning against providing weapons to support Ukraine.²⁸⁵ The rally again demonstrated that many citizens are against the war and seek peace with Russia.²⁸⁶ Although the march called for peace, proponents of this belief see the route to achieving peace through Ukraine’s surrender and not the withdrawal of Russian troops, characterising parties like Ukraine, NATO, and the West more broadly as responsible for prolonging the war.²⁸⁷ However, younger generations in Slovakia are typically more pro-Western than older people,²⁸⁸ suggesting that such narratives might resonate more with older generations.

Considerations for Countering Anti-refugee Messaging:

Intergenerational dialogue and projects targeting older generations might be beneficial to increase awareness of the advantages of the EU and NATO.²⁸⁹

Underlying challenges: The discourse builds on an existing, complex political situation and historical and current pro-Russia and anti-EU narratives. These are highlighted by the GLOBSEC Trends surveys conducted in 2020 and 2021 which revealed that Slovaks were the most critical of NATO and the United States of all V4 countries’ inhabitants.²⁹⁰ Concurrently, pan-Slavism, shared history, and the notion that Slovakia and Russia are culturally linked have contributed to more positive perceptions of Russia.²⁹¹ This places Slovakia at an intersection of pro-NATO and pro-Russian narratives that can be exploited politically.

²⁸² Bratislava research workshop 7 March 2023.

²⁸³ European Digital Media Observatory. 2022. [Ukrainian refugees and disinformation: situation in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania](#). Accessed 11 April 2023.

²⁸⁴ GLOBSEC. 2022. [New report shows that the V4 population supports Ukrainian refugees with some reservations](#). Accessed 22 March 2023. It should be noted that there has been debate about methodological approaches to polling conducted by GLOBSEC and the [Slovak Academy of Science](#), such as noting the different scales given to participants to respond to questions (1–5 or 1–10) and how responses were collected (online – in-person), even when the question posed is the same. See GLOBSEC. 2002. [New poll: Slovaks want Ukraine to win the war, Not Russia](#). Accessed 22 March 2023.

²⁸⁵ Tasnim News Agency. 2023. [Massive Anti-NATO Rally Held in Slovakia](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

²⁸⁶ EURACTIV. 2022. [Slovaks view Ukrainian refugees most negatively among V4](#). Accessed 11 April 2023; GLOBSEC. 2023. [Ukrainian refugees in Visegrad countries: Societal Attitudes and Challenges of Accommodating People Fleeing the War](#). Accessed 11 April 2023.

²⁸⁷ Infosecurity.sk. 2023. [Bi-Weekly Report on Emerging Disinformation Trends March 15, 2023](#). Accessed 11 April 2023.

²⁸⁸ International Republican Institute 2023. [Hostile Narrative Brief War In Ukraine](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

²⁸⁹ GLOBSEC. 2022. [Perceptions of Ukrainian refugees in the V4](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

²⁹⁰ GLOBSEC. 2022. [New report shows that the V4 population supports Ukrainian refugees with some reservations](#). Accessed 22 March 2023. Although there has been debate about methodological approaches to polling conducted by GLOBSEC and the [Slovak Academy of Science](#), such as noting the different scales given to participants to respond to questions (1–5 or 1–10) and how responses were collected (online or in-person), even when the question posed is the same. See GLOBSEC. 2002. [New poll: Slovaks want Ukraine to win the war, Not Russia](#). Accessed 22 March 2023.

²⁹¹ GLOBSEC (2021). [The image of Russia in Central & Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans](#). Accessed 12 April 2023.

High faith in conspiracy theories and low trust in mainstream media in Slovakia have been reported.²⁹² The most widely believed conspiracy theory identified by GLOBSEC in 2020 was that the United States aimed to occupy Slovakia by placing NATO bases in the country.²⁹³ While data suggests a negative correlation between age and level of education and a propensity to believe in conspiracy theories, there was only a 12 percent reduction in belief in the NATO conspiracy theory between people with no formal education and those with university-level education; furthermore, a majority of university-educated people (56 percent) believed in the conspiracy.²⁹⁴ Even more easily disproven, over half (51 percent) of respondents with university-level education believed outlandish theories such as claims that Jewish groups controlled the world's governments.²⁹⁵ This suggests high vulnerability to disinformation among the Slovak population.

Many Slovaks are unhappy about EU sanctions against Russia. Early in the war, the Slovak government requested exemptions from EU sanctions due to the country's reliance on Russian gas.²⁹⁶ The October 2022 EU poll showed that 49 percent of Slovak respondents somewhat or strongly disapproved of actions taken by the EU to support Ukraine since the start of the war (including sanctions and financial, military, and humanitarian support).²⁹⁷ This was in the context of only 24 percent of the respondents in the EU as a whole having had such an opinion of the EU's support.²⁹⁸ Over half (55 percent) of Slovak respondents to the Winter Eurobarometer 2022–2023 were not satisfied with the EU's response to the invasion of Ukraine (compared to 38 percent in the EU as whole).²⁹⁹ The same survey showed an even more negative assessment of the Slovak government's response to Russia's invasion, with 61 percent of respondents saying they were not satisfied.³⁰⁰ The least popular measures taken were financing of military equipment (56 percent disapproved), followed by imposing economic sanctions (44 percent disapproved) and providing financial support (42 percent disapproved). Welcoming people fleeing the war stood at 15 percent disapproval compared to 9 percent in the EU as a whole.³⁰¹

Considerations for Countering Anti-Refugee Messaging:

To support more critical assessments of information spread by the media, work with schools to organise activities for youth to promote critical thinking, debating skills, and understanding of history from different perspectives.

²⁹² GLOBSEC. 2022. [GLOBSEC Trends 2022: CEE amid the war in Ukraine](#). Accessed 11 April 2023.

²⁹³ GLOBSEC (2020). [Voices of Central and Eastern Europe: Slovakia Country Report](#). Accessed 11 April 2023.

²⁹⁴ GLOBSEC (2020). [Voices of Central and Eastern Europe: Slovakia Country Report](#). Accessed 11 April 2023.

²⁹⁵ GLOBSEC (2020). [Voices of Central and Eastern Europe: Slovakia Country Report](#). Accessed 11 April 2023.

²⁹⁶ GLOBSEC. 2022. [Reliance on Russian oil and gas impacts Slovak economy](#). Accessed 11 April 2023.

²⁹⁷ European Commission. 2023. [EP Autumn 2022 Survey: Parlemeter](#). Accessed 10 April 2023.

²⁹⁸ European Commission. 2023. [EP Autumn 2022 Survey: Parlemeter](#). Accessed 10 April 2023.

²⁹⁹ European Commission. 2023. [Standard Eurobarometer 98 Winter Eurobarometer 2022 - 2023 Country Factsheets. Slovakia](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

³⁰⁰ European Commission. 2023. [Standard Eurobarometer 98 Winter Eurobarometer 2022 - 2023 Country Factsheets. Slovakia](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

³⁰¹ European Commission. 2023. [Standard Eurobarometer 98 Winter Eurobarometer 2022 - 2023 Country Factsheets. Slovakia](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

Discourse 2: ‘Economic challenges/energy crisis are being fuelled by hosting refugees (“they drive prices up”).’

Message: Incendiary and misleading narratives suggest that Ukrainian refugees are fuelling the cost-of-living

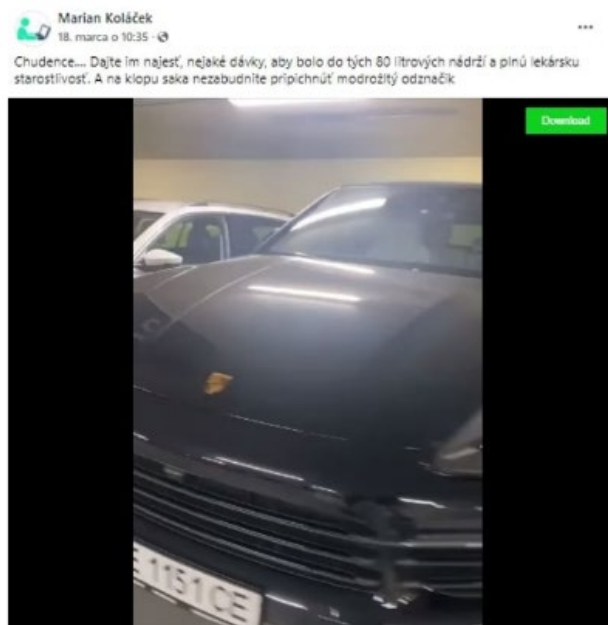
crisis. Such links to refugees have been made in various discourses; the most common is that Ukraine, and the government’s support to Ukraine, are causing price rises. For example, a story on the Hlavne spravy website (see Figure 2) claimed that the ‘pro-Ukrainian’ Heger government causes not only exorbitant food prices in Slovakia but also the highest inflation in the EU.³⁰² A 2022 report by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation stated that Slovaks’ perception of increased costs of supporting refugees is accompanied by scepticism of the government’s

FIGURE 2: Story on Hlavnespravy.com



economic approach more broadly—specifically highlighting the government’s postponement of anti-inflation packages in light of the refugee crisis as evidence that controlling price rises for Slovaks was secondary to support for Ukrainians.³⁰³

FIGURE 3: Facebook post on support received by Ukrainians, highlighted by Topky.sk



Related to these narratives, workshop participants shared that discourses about Ukrainians being rich and undeserving of support, including stories of refugees driving expensive cars, are abundant.³⁰⁴ These discourses have appeared online, such as the post depicted in Figure 3: ‘Poor things. Give them food, some rations to put in those 80-litre tanks and full medical care, and don’t forget to pin a blue and yellow badge to the lapels of their jackets.’³⁰⁵

Specific narratives relate to Ukrainians driving up the prices of certain products, as well as rents.³⁰⁶ The majority of respondents (57 percent) to one survey said they believed refugees were weakening the Slovak economy, whereas labour market analyses show the opposite—that Ukrainians are filling labour shortages.³⁰⁷

³⁰² Autor veľkyrudolf, Hlavnespravy.com. 2023. Jednotné nezávislé Slovensko, Výsledkom proukrajinskej Hegerovej vlády sú nielen extrémne ceny potravín na Slovensku, ale aj jej najvyšší podiel na inflácii v rámci EÚ. Accessed 11 April 2023.

³⁰³ Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. 2022. *Russian’s War against Ukraine: A view from Slovakia*. Accessed 12 April 2023.

³⁰⁴ Bratislava research workshop, 8 March 2023.

³⁰⁵ Topky.sk. 2022. *Slováci sa zasa vyfarbili: Ukrajincom závidia pomoc aj zdravotnú starostlivosť, fotia si ich „drahé“ autá!*

Accessed 13 April 2023.

³⁰⁶ Bratislava research workshops, 8 March 2023.

³⁰⁷ EURACTIV. 2023. *Slovaks believe Ukrainian refugees are making the country worse*. Accessed 29 March 2023.

Considerations for Countering Anti-Refugee Messaging:

The government should make better use of strategic communication to permeate online information spaces, using presence in local regions and relevant local key actors and community leaders to explain in monetary terms the benefits of having Ukrainians in Slovakia.³⁰⁸

Counternarratives to address this discourse could focus on evidence regarding the Ukrainian migrant workforce's benefits for the Slovak economy—for example, on the country's economy, tax base, and the diversity that Ukrainians can bring to companies, which can drive efficiency and innovation.³⁰⁹ There has been no negative effect on unemployment rates. A counternarrative could also shed light on the fact that the refugees did not want to leave their homes and relocate to Slovakia; they were forced to do so to save their lives. That counternarrative could highlight the challenges faced by Ukrainian migrants coming to Slovakia, no matter what their economic situation. These might include how they have been separated from their families and fear for the safety of those remaining in Ukraine, thereby building on the family values espoused by right-of-centre segments of society.

This approach should be combined with a messaging strategy that seeks to assure as much as to convince. This means including messaging such as 'There's enough to go around' or 'We're in this together'.

As much as possible, the counternarrative should not be tied to the state of politics in Slovakia so as not to let voters believe that this may be a political campaign of the opposing camp.³¹⁰

Mode of dissemination: Stories are disseminated on social media and websites, and they can also be used in political contexts. Because Slovaks are very concerned about the cost of living,³¹¹ such narratives can also spread by word of mouth among citizens who are struggling financially.

Considerations for Countering Anti-Refugee Messaging:

Social media campaigns could be aimed at the groups most likely to be swayed by the economic migrant narratives, engaging influencers for these groups. Social media, especially in the form of engaging videos and visuals, could also provide guidance on how to talk to friends and family members who say incendiary things about refugees.

Media organisations could help identify refugees who can be called on for quotes in the media or appear on TV and news shows as commentators to increase the representation of refugee voices.

Interpreter: Slovaks' anxiety over already increasing energy prices and inflation was heightened by their fears of the economic crisis brought about by the nearby war.³¹² The Winter Eurobarometer 2022–23 reported that 83 percent of Slovaks judged the national economy to be 'bad', and 60 percent believed it would become worse over

³⁰⁸ Bratislava Research Workshops, 8 March 2023.

³⁰⁹ Deloitte. 2022. *Refugees from Ukraine in Poland: Challenges and potential for Integration*, page 8. Accessed 26 March 2023.

³¹⁰ KPRM. 2022. *#PomagamUkrainie. Potrzebujesz pomocy?*

³¹¹ European Commission. 2023. *EP Autumn 2022 Survey: Parlemeter*. Accessed 10 April 2023.

³¹² Papcunova, Jana. Slovak Academy of Sciences. 2022. *The Public Support for Displaced Ukrainians in Slovakia Is Slowly Decreasing*. Accessed 11 April 2023.

the next 12 months.³¹³ It can be an easy logical leap to make to blame Ukrainian refugees, and their continued support for Ukraine in the war, for the economic challenges that Slovakia faces.

Underlying challenges: Underlying the narrative that refugees are harming Slovakia's economy is a severe economic and cost of living crisis. The former Slovak Prime Minister stated that the significant increase in prices following the 2022 invasion would 'kill' the country's economy without billions of euros of support from the EU.³¹⁴ Whilst there is genuine and founded concern about the nation's economic situation, research suggests that refugees have had a net positive impact on economic growth due to additional labour market participants from Ukraine.³¹⁵

There are also communication challenges. Workshop participants noted that some people believed that much of the support to refugees that was funded by the EU or voluntary charitable donations was funded by Slovak taxpayers.³¹⁶ The general public might also underestimate the economic benefits of Ukrainians in Slovakia.³¹⁷

Considerations for Countering Anti-Refugee Messaging:

Communications campaigns could highlight the positive contributions that Ukrainians can make to Slovakia, as well as the longer-term economic benefits of Ukraine winning the war and of peace in the region, including regional stability and resulting financial benefits.

Events and activities to help Ukrainians and Slovaks to meet and get to know one another could help Slovak communities better understand the refugee experience. More educational activities in form of books, events, and theatre performances to explain the diversity of Ukrainian refugee experiences should be promoted.

Discourse 3: 'New arrivals from Ukraine are taking jobs from the local population, they are willing to work for significantly lower wages, they are destroying the labour market'.

Message: This narrative alleges that Ukrainians are taking quality jobs from Slovaks.³¹⁸ Similarly, if a company lays off employees, narratives have been noted to suggest that Slovaks are being fired so the company can hire Ukrainians willing to work for a lower wage, or even illegally, at a time when everything is becoming more expensive.³¹⁹ Workshop participants highlighted that if people lose their jobs, the easy scapegoats can be Ukraine and Ukrainians.³²⁰

³¹³ European Commission 2023. *Standard Eurobarometer 98 Winter Eurobarometer 2022 - 2023 Country Factsheets, Slovakia*. Accessed 29 March 2023.

³¹⁴ Financial Times. 2022. *Slovakia energy crisis could 'kill our economy', premier warns*. Accessed 30 March 2023.

³¹⁵ GLOBSEC. 2023. *Despite challenges, V4 societies generally remain supportive of Ukrainian refugees, with more negative attitudes apparent in Slovakia*. Accessed 30 March 2023.

³¹⁶ Bratislava workshop, 8 March 2023.

³¹⁷ EURACTIV. 2023. *Slovaks believe Ukrainian refugees are making the country worse*. Accessed 29 March 2023.

³¹⁸ Bratislava research workshop, 8 March 2023.

³¹⁹ Bratislava research workshop, 8 March 2023.

³²⁰ Bratislava research workshop, 8 March 2023.

FIGURE 4: Post by Pracujúca chudoba Facebook group



The civic association Pracujúca chudoba ('Working party') posted on Facebook (see Figure 4) about the arrival of refugees from Ukraine and their impact on the labour market: 'The possible arrival of labour from Ukraine may not harm Slovakia. However, care should be taken that companies do not use Ukrainians as cheap labour. "Of course, it may happen that some Slovak businessmen will try to use the misfortune of the Ukrainian people for social dumping. People from Ukraine can help our labour market," Ján Košč reminds.' Comments in response to this post illustrate how Slovak labour market participants have publicly disparaged Ukrainians. For example, 'Enough how they abuse Slovakia as cheap labour'; 'How many have already come to Slovakia? Aren't we already a national minority?'; 'I think it's always a shame when strangers are accepted. Instead of Slovaks paying Slovaks and maintaining a healthy economy, there will be different ones who pay a little less. And the stupid businessman is happy as he has "messed" with the system again and expects a fantastic income because he wants to save money on people ... in tears. In the end we will all pay'; and 'They will beat Slovakia and take cheaper labour'.³²¹

Considerations for Countering Anti-Refugee Messaging:

Counternarratives should be disseminated describing how Ukrainian refugees have contributed, and have the potential to contribute more, to GDP growth in Slovakia, filling labour shortages in key sectors.

Mode of dissemination: Workshop participants noted that this narrative is spread through pro-Russian public media as well as word of mouth and in social media, where frustrations around jobs are aired and blame is placed on Ukrainians for changes and difficulties in the job market.³²² Hard-line politicians leveraged this messaging ahead of the regional elections in October 2022.³²³ One candidate's official material stated that '[Ukrainians] are already replacing Slovaks in many job positions only because they are willing to work for a lower salary [...] If this continues, in the end, people will lose their jobs because of the Ukrainians'.³²⁴

³²¹ Facebook post. Pracujúca chudoba 2023. Accessed 13 April 2023.

³²² Bratislava research workshop, 8 March 2023.

³²³ Dlhoplec, Peter. 2022. *Pro-Russian far-right parties are not expected to succeed in Slovakia's municipal and regional elections*. Accessed 12 April 2023.

³²⁴ Naše Slovensko. 2022. *Slovo Mariana Kotlebu: O globalistoch a zničení identity*. Accessed 12 April 2023.

Considerations for Countering Anti-Refugee Messaging:

Support should be given to host communities and influential individuals and community leaders to proactively disseminate counternarratives via word of mouth regarding the benefits of Ukrainian refugees in the labour market.

Interpreter: Unemployment is a significant challenge for Slovakia. Even as unemployment fell from 7 percent in 2021 to 5.8 percent in 2023, long-term unemployment for unskilled workers remained an issue.³²⁵ The country is among those in the EU at highest risk for joblessness due to automation, which has made unemployment an especially polemic issue.³²⁶ Workshop participants highlighted that this narrative will resonate particularly with those who already struggle, including with their employment, and that they might look for someone to blame—in this case, Ukrainian refugees. This links to evidence that Slovaks who identify as poor are far more likely to oppose the hosting of Ukrainian refugees (nearly 70 percent, compared to the national average of 52 percent),³²⁷ possibly in part because they might see refugees as competing for the same resource pool, namely social support and lower-skilled employment.³²⁸

Considerations for Countering Anti-refugee Messaging:

Participants in workshops highlighted that personal experience working alongside refugees can be a critical way to break down barriers and facilitate social cohesion.³²⁹ Similarly, it would be helpful to increase opportunities for Slovaks and Ukrainians to interact with one another daily. This could include after-school activities for Ukrainian and Slovak children or cultural platforms and activities where local and Ukrainian populations can get to know one another, including more events in the workplace (with translation provided as necessary).

Underlying challenges: Challenges exploited by this narrative include those described for the previous discourses. Beyond broad-ranging challenges that can facilitate the spread of misleading and incendiary narratives, this narrative builds on fear of unemployment and a misunderstanding of the skills and potential economic benefits the refugees bring to the host society. There are also some barriers to Ukrainians accessing jobs commensurate with their skills and experience (discussed in Chapter 2), including language barriers.³³⁰

Discourse 4: ‘Refugees are supported more financially and get better benefits than the local population; help to refugees comes at the cost of the local population: “We should help our poor, not the Ukrainians”.’

Message: This particularly pervasive discourse suggests that refugees receive better benefits and rights than Slovaks, and that this comes at locals’ expense.³³¹ Specific narratives can relate to housing and social support.

³²⁵ OECD. 2022. *OECD Economic Surveys: Slovak Republic*. Accessed April 11, 2023.

³²⁶ OECD. 2022. *OECD Economic Surveys: Slovak Republic*. Accessed April 11, 2023.

³²⁷ GLOBSEC. 2023. *Despite challenges, V4 societies generally remain supportive of Ukrainian refugees, with more negative attitudes apparent in Slovakia*. Accessed 30 March 2023.

³²⁸ MUNI ECON. 2023. *Attitudes towards migrants and preferences for asylum and refugee policies before and during Russian invasion of Ukraine: The case of Slovakia (Working Paper)*. Accessed 29 March 2023.

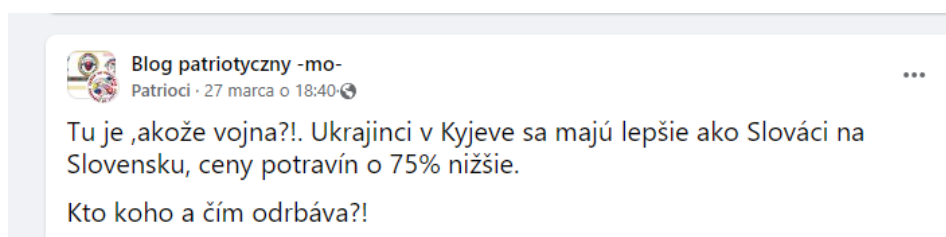
³²⁹ Bratislava research workshop, 8 March 2023.

³³⁰ Bratislava research workshop, 8 March 2023; GLOBSEC. 2023. *Despite challenges, V4 societies generally remain supportive of Ukrainian refugees, with more negative attitudes apparent in Slovakia*. Accessed 30 March 2023.

³³¹ Research workshop, 8 March 2023.

For example, the post in Figure 6 says, ‘There’s a war going on?! Ukrainians in Kiev are better off than Slovaks in Slovakia, food prices 75 percent lower. Who is ripping off whom and with what?!’³³²

FIGURE 5: Facebook post about food prices in Slovakia and comparisons with Ukraine



A similar, related type of message questions whether Ukrainians in Slovakia are genuine refugees. Workshop participants noted that ‘The idea of a refugee as a ragged and dirty poor person does not fit with who comes from Ukraine—people with cars, phones, women with perfect manicures’.³³³

A study conducted in September 2022 identified Slovaks as the most likely citizens in any V4 country to report that their lives had been negatively influenced by refugees (29 percent).³³⁴ A Slovak activist highlighted in May 2022, that ‘*The first protests and public disapproval of aiding refugees from Ukraine are appearing across Slovakia. The “what about us and our Slovak children” narrative is starting to gain momentum*’.³³⁵ This statement is supported by research in a Slovak Police Force report on disinformation (2023) which pointed to a new emergence of the phenomenon of ‘whataboutism’ on the Slovak disinformation scene, focusing on addressing the needs of Slovaks first (including healthcare, housing) and then providing aid to Ukrainians.³³⁶ Some ‘alternative’ (disinformation and conspiracy) platforms such as [Hlavný denník](#) (Main Daily) suggest that it is not the national government that helps refugees, but that local governments and citizens are forced to provide aid whilst the politicians ‘brag about it in Brussels as their own merit’.³³⁷

Considerations for Countering Anti-Refugee Messaging:

The government should use strategic communication more effectively to permeate online information spaces, using presence in local regions and relevant local key actors and community leaders to explain in monetary terms the benefits of Ukrainians’ presence in Slovakia.³³⁸

Mode of dissemination: This discourse is spread by typical actors in the disinformation space (some politicians, far-right extremists, populists, and others) primary via social media sites such as YouTube and Facebook.³³⁹ Complaints around the benefits provided to refugees are also spread by word of mouth.³⁴⁰

³³² Facebook. Vlasteneckéblogovisko -mo- 2023. Accessed 13 April 2023.

³³³ Research workshop, 8 March 2023.

³³⁴ GLOBSEC. 2023. [Despite challenges, V4 societies generally remain supportive of Ukrainian refugees, with more negative attitudes apparent in Slovakia](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

³³⁵ Euractiv. 2022. [Resentment for Ukrainian refugees grows in central and eastern Europe](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

³³⁶ Department of Communication and Prevention of the Presidium of the Police Force. 2023. [Report of the police force on disinformation](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

³³⁷ Hlavný denník. 2023. [About those who destroy not only the image of Slovakia](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

³³⁸ Research workshops, 8 March 2023.

³³⁹ Research workshops, 8 March 2023.

³⁴⁰ Euractiv. 2022. [Resentment for Ukrainian refugees grows in central and eastern Europe](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

Considerations for Countering Anti-refugee Messaging:

Use social media platforms such as Google's (GOOGL.O) Jigsaw subsidiary's initiative, which runs ads on YouTube, Twitter, TikTok, and Meta to promote counternarratives and help individuals identify misleading narratives in the news and educate people on disinformation.³⁴¹

Interpreter: Slovaks who identify as poor are far more likely to oppose the hosting of Ukrainian refugees (nearly 70 percent compared to the national average of 52 percent),³⁴² suggesting that this narrative is interpreted and internalized differently across socio-economic classes. Further, 61 percent of Slovaks believe their country has an embedded history of oppression and that they will never be able to control Slovakia's future.³⁴³ This links to the persistent mindset of many Slovaks that the country is not a strongly established nation capable of helping others and that, in fact, Slovaks should be helped.³⁴⁴ Accordingly, many will interpret messaging on this discourse as tying into their outlook that Slovakia lacks the capacity to support other nations.

Considerations for Countering Anti-refugee Messaging:

GLOBSEC suggests that Slovakia's role in 'shaping the contemporary history of the country and Europe' should be embedded into Slovak 'education, promoted by pro-democratic political forces and regularly used in public discussions as a key narrative about Slovakia' to reduce the oppression narrative throughout society.³⁴⁵

Underlying challenges: This narrative also links to underlying economic challenges and negative prognoses for the future. Ukrainians did receive support that Slovaks were not entitled to, particularly at the start of the war, such as free transport. However, these benefits were temporary, with free public transport ending in January 2023.³⁴⁶ In addition, individuals and organisations, including charities and church groups, provided support voluntarily.

Finally, workshop participants spoke of challenges related to the simple answers that misleading and disinformation messaging can provide to very complex challenges.³⁴⁷ They also suggested that some people might be disenfranchised by the political discussions, which they might perceive as not getting to the heart of their worries, and that the clear, simple answers provided in disinformation discourses could be an easy alternative.³⁴⁸

Considerations for Countering Anti-refugee Messaging:

Use a combination of values-based arguments for hosting refugees in addition to explaining the monetary benefits of Ukrainian refugees to the Slovak economy (filling longstanding vacancies, attracting additional EU funding, etc.).³⁴⁹

³⁴¹ Reuters. 2022. [Google to roll out anti-disinformation campaign in some EU countries](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

³⁴² GLOBSEC. 2023. [Despite challenges, V4 societies generally remain supportive of Ukrainian refugees, with more negative attitudes apparent in Slovakia](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

³⁴³ GLOBSEC. 2022. [GLOBSEC Trends 2022: Slovakia](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

³⁴⁴ Research workshops, 7 March 2023.

³⁴⁵ GLOBSEC. 2022. [GLOBSEC Trends 2022: Slovakia](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

³⁴⁶ Visit Ukraine. 2022. [Slovakia cancels free travel in public transport for Ukrainians](#). Accessed 12 April 2023.

³⁴⁷ Research workshops, 8 March 2023.

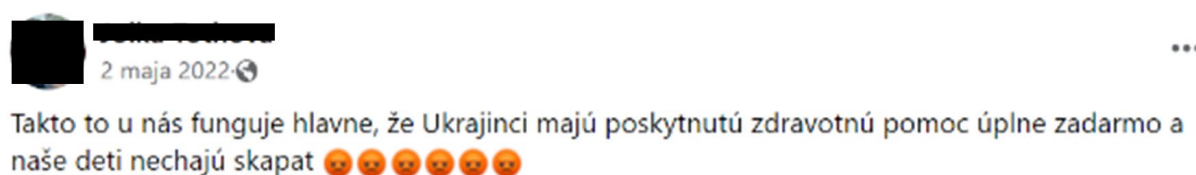
³⁴⁸ Research workshops, 8 March 2023.

³⁴⁹ Research workshops, 8 March 2023.

Discourse 5: ‘Ukrainians are creating a burden on the healthcare system; taking locals’ places’.

Message: Messaging around this discourse typically focuses on Ukrainians overloading the Slovak healthcare system which is already in a critical state, with Slovaks themselves struggling to get care. This is illustrated by the Facebook post in Figure 6, which says, ‘This is how it works in our country, especially as Ukrainians receive medical care completely free of charge, while our children are left out in the cold’.³⁵⁰

FIGURE 6: Facebook post about the healthcare system



Ukrainians are not always aware of how to navigate the healthcare system so they may believe care is not available; this can create pressures and tensions.³⁵¹ Some discourses claim that Ukrainians abuse health services, such as through unnecessary ambulance calls and doctor or emergency room visits.³⁵² For example, workshop participants reported that people said they had to wait for a long time for special services (such as mental health care) or procedures (e.g., knee joint replacements) and that Ukrainian refugees make the situation worse by extending already long waiting periods.³⁵³

Mode of dissemination: This discourse spreads online and through word of mouth.

Interpreter: This discourse can resonate with different groups in the host society, particularly those with healthcare concerns.

Underlying challenges: The Slovak healthcare system faces deep-seated challenges; the OECD has noted that investment levels could be higher and that the population faces risk factors such as smoking and high alcohol consumption.³⁵⁴ The numbers of qualified nurses and doctors worsened following the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, Slovakia has one of the lowest life expectancies in Europe at 76.9 years.³⁵⁵ The arrival of Ukrainian refugees highlights the existing problems. This was exemplified by a quote from the Slovak health minister in March 2022 as the scale of the displacement became clear: ‘The fact that our system is going to be overwhelmed—that’s clear to everyone. We’re expecting some problems in the cancer wards, emergency wards, and the burn and trauma wards’.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁰ Facebook [post](#). 2023. Accessed 13 April 2023.

³⁵¹ Bratislava research workshop 7 March 2023.

³⁵² Bratislava research workshop 7 March 2023.

³⁵³ Bratislava research workshop 8 March 2023.

³⁵⁴ OECD. 2021. [State of Health in the EU: Slovakia Country Health Profile 2021](#). Accessed 12 April 2023.

³⁵⁵ OECD. 2021. [State of Health in the EU: Slovakia Country Health Profile 2021](#). Accessed 12 April 2023.

³⁵⁶ Politico, 2023. [Eastern EU countries in cry for help over refugee health costs](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

Considerations for Countering Anti-refugee Messaging:

Increasing the availability of telehealth options (phone or online health services) could alleviate pressures on the Slovak healthcare system. Ukrainians often reach out to doctors in Ukraine via phone or online appointments to avoid long delays in Slovakia, so this would be a familiar way to access services. Telehealth options could be promoted among Slovaks as well.

Recognition of the medical qualifications of Ukrainian refugees could be expedited, expanding a cadre of medical staff that could help address healthcare needs in the country.

Chapter 4. Potential tensions

4.1 Overview

This chapter discusses the phenomena, policies, and characteristics which are (or could in the future be) sources of tensions between Ukrainian refugees and host communities. It is important to stress that, at the time of writing, these had not necessarily harmed community cohesion. However, they could do so in the medium term—for example, should contextual factors change or should disinformation actors take intentional actions to magnify the tensions. Thus, this chapter notes specific types of risks related to each aspect of the refugee journey, how they have manifested to date, and signs pointing to the likelihood of the tensions becoming more significant. Table 3 summarises potential sources of tensions between Ukrainian refugees and host communities in Slovakia.

The five tensions that are likely to have the highest potential to affect community cohesion in the medium term, considering their propensity to occur or by potential impact, are highlighted in bold in table below. While the overall risks are generally low, the categorisation of the five top risks below is made in relation to the overall risks to community cohesion in the country. This means that the top five tensions might still be unlikely to materialise, but they are a higher risk than other tensions in Slovakia. For example, tensions around the generally lower benefits received by TCNs not eligible for TP are unlikely to significantly threaten community cohesion given the very small number of such TCNs in Slovakia; on the other hand, economic concerns are widely felt by the host and refugee populations.

TABLE 3: Potential sources of tensions between Ukrainian refugees and host communities in Slovakia

Journey stage	Potential sources of tensions between Ukrainian refugees and host communities
Legal status, welfare, and benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception that Ukrainians abuse the benefits system (e.g., cross the border just to get the money). • Unknown, unclear, or bureaucratic procedures to register for TP and services; (perceived) lack of information on the rights and obligations of people with TP status. • Differences in provision of welcome and support to refugee or migrant groups who are not from Ukraine. • NGO funding allocated specifically to support Ukrainians can be a source of tension when compared to funding for Slovak families and individuals.
Healthcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukrainians add to pressures on a health system which already experiences challenges (including long waiting times). • Differences in how services are used, resulting in perceived abuse of services (such as unnecessary ambulance calls, emergency room visits, doctors' visits). • Ukrainians face additional challenges or bureaucratic hurdles in receiving healthcare.
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional pressures on housing and rising cost of housing (also in the context of a lack of private and public rental housing). • Overcrowding of refugees in apartments and state-run dormitories, creating pressures on surrounding communities. • Ukrainian refugees, and Roma in particular, are seen as undesirable tenants. • Uncertainty regarding length of stay for Ukrainian refugees in the host country, leading to lack of commitment to long-term contracts.

Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional pressure on the school system. • Additional pressure on kindergartens and available spaces for children. • Integration issues in schools and a lack of specialised programmes, resulting in negative social experiences (such as Ukrainian children experiencing bullying). • Uncertainty regarding length of stay for Ukrainian refugees in the host country, leading to poor school attendance and high dropout rates. • Bureaucratic hurdles required to go to school.
Employment and income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money received by NGOs is earmarked for Ukrainians and cannot be used for local populations. • High or rising unemployment strains the host community and Ukrainian refugees and could lead to scapegoating of refugees. • High inflation pressures on host and refugee communities. • Rising inequalities. • Low Ukrainian engagement in the labour market or entrepreneurial activities. • Tensions over distribution of scarce resources between disadvantaged local populations and Ukrainians, including poverty among local populations. • Reductions in financial assistance to refugees could lead to more refugees experiencing poverty, and the state (or organisations) might need to step in to support the vulnerable. • Underemployment of refugees, including difficulties in recognising qualifications. • Ukrainians are perceived to receive higher benefits than host communities, and communication about the amount and sources of support is poor. • Ukrainian refugees receive more support (such as financial support and labour market access) than other refugee groups, including TCNs from Ukraine.
Community, social, and political life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locals' fatigue in supporting refugees. • Negative views of Ukrainians provoked by political discourses. • Lack of integration of Ukrainian refugees into the host society. • Language barriers or not learning the local language due to lack of opportunity or difficulty of the language. • Differences amongst Ukrainians' experiences, particularly origins in Ukraine. • Lack of understanding of Ukrainian trauma and its consequences. • Fear of insecurity and war; refugees seen as making the situation worse. • Tensions between Ukrainians and the host community about who started, is responsible for, or should de-escalate the war and how, leading to tensions between host communities and refugees. • Expectation of more gratitude from refugees. • Individual incidents that harm people (e.g., a car crash) might frame Ukrainians as a danger to the host society. • Xenophobia and discrimination.

4.2 Legal status, welfare, and benefits

Perception that Ukrainians abuse the benefits system (e.g., cross the border just to get the money):

Participants in the research workshops said that pre-existing social grievances in Slovakia related to housing, healthcare, and other services feeds a perception that Ukrainians are abusing the benefit system.³⁵⁷ This perception is linked to the discourse that refugees from Ukraine receive better benefits than Slovaks and that the refugees arriving in Slovakia do not fit conventional narratives or stereotypical images of refugees (akin to beggars). This perception also aligns with the narrative shared by workshop participants that the war is not active across the entire country and that Ukrainians should stay in those regions and/or fight for Ukraine from Ukraine.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁷ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

³⁵⁸ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

Unknown, unclear, or bureaucratic procedures to register for TP and services; (perceived) lack of information on the rights and obligations of people with TP status: Despite efforts to ensure that Ukrainians are well-informed about their legal status and benefits, gaps remain. A World Vision assessment found that 39 percent of Ukrainian refugees lacked information about available services, 30 percent about their legal rights, and 23 percent about how to register for asylum.³⁵⁹ Access to information depends on language, location, and access to technology, and barriers to services can be particularly acute for the most vulnerable groups. As a result, Ukrainians may feel unwelcome due to the procedures, and Slovaks may perceive refugees as not conforming with required policies and procedures.

Differences in provision of welcome and support to refugee or migrant groups not from Ukraine: Processes, procedures, and legal status related to an individual from Ukraine who is eligible for TP differs from those applied to people from another country who seek asylum. For example, people from other countries who seek asylum must wait for six months (or until their claim is processed) before being granted a work permit to access the labour market. In contrast, Ukrainians on TP can access the labour market on arrival.³⁶⁰ Specific procedures and protections were set up for Ukrainian refugees, with a faster and easier process to access these protections, including housing support, financial assistance, and access to the labour market, than for other groups of refugees and asylum seekers (see Section 2.2). Although this difference concerns a small group of people, workshop participants noted that it could create resentment among the other refugee groups that did not receive such treatment (and experience the associated tensions), as it can be perceived as unfair to them.³⁶¹

Government or NGO funding allocated specifically and for a long period to support Ukrainians can be a source of tension: Participants in the research workshops commented on the sudden and visible availability of funding to support Ukrainian refugees.³⁶² Such support, while valuable, can create tensions, particularly if it is perceived as exclusively for the assistance of Ukrainians, without providing benefit or additional funding for Slovak citizens in need (such as single mothers, people facing homelessness, or people in poverty).³⁶³ This tension was linked to the discourse that ‘refugees are better supported than the host population, and such support comes at the expense of funding for the host population’.³⁶⁴ Workshop participants added that, for Slovak citizens, maintaining a good quality of life on benefits is challenging and that, should the economic situation in Slovakia continue to worsen, this narrative may gain more traction.³⁶⁵ The tension may be linked to the length of time the government offers support. Opinion polling conducted by the Institute for Sociology and the Institute for Research in Social Communication in March and December 2022 found that a growing number of people polled favoured only short-term support to Ukrainians, and that overall public support for people displaced from Ukraine to Slovakia had slightly decreased.³⁶⁶

4.3 Healthcare

Ukrainians add to pressures on the health system, which already experiences challenges (including long waiting times): Even before the arrival of refugees from Ukraine, the Slovak healthcare system reported staff

³⁵⁹ World Vision International. 2022. [Warm welcomes, lurking tensions.](#)

³⁶⁰ Ukraine Slovakia. 2023. [Legal residence in Slovakia: a large overview of options for studying, working and obtaining social security.](#) Accessed 5 March 2023.

³⁶¹ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

³⁶² Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

³⁶³ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

³⁶⁴ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

³⁶⁵ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

³⁶⁶ European Commission. 2023. [Slovakia: slight decrease in support for those displaced from Ukraine](#)

shortages,³⁶⁷ long waiting times,³⁶⁸ and below average overall health outcomes.³⁶⁹ Workshop participants said that the arrival of Ukrainian refugees exacerbates these issues and could be perceived to create additional burdens on an overstretched system. One participant shared the example of people waiting for long periods for non-urgent specialist care (such as knee and hip surgery) and a perception that these times were longer since the arrival of Ukrainian refugees.³⁷⁰ This perception is particularly challenging given that the arrival of Ukrainians also increased the number of people seeking healthcare and demand for specific issues (e.g., war-related injuries and psychosocial issues) that require scarce specialist support. A March 2023 Eurobarometer survey found that up to 44 percent of Slovaks polled believed Ukrainians are making the country 'a worse place'.³⁷¹

Differences in how services are used, resulting in perceived abuse of services (such as unnecessary ambulance calls, emergency room and doctor visits): There is evidence of frustration in accessing healthcare in Slovakia. For example, according to the OECD, in 2017 the Slovak Republic had the highest proportion (74 percent) of patients in Europe reporting that they had visited an emergency department because no appropriate primary healthcare was available to them.³⁷² In addition, workshop participants shared that many Ukrainians arriving in Slovakia have little or no knowledge of Slovak healthcare and therefore may have unrealistic expectations of the level of healthcare available or try to access services in a manner different to what might be expected in Slovakia.³⁷³ A perceived misuse of services, particularly in the context of a stretched healthcare system, could cause tensions between the Ukrainian and Slovak communities.

Ukrainians face additional challenges in receiving healthcare: The Slovak TP system grants Ukrainian refugees free access to healthcare through their registration status.³⁷⁴ However, they face additional challenges in receiving healthcare benefits. The October 2022 UNHCR REACH multi-sectoral needs assessment found that a primary challenge experienced by Ukrainians was lack of information about where to go and what services were available.³⁷⁵ Workshop participants said that Ukrainians can have limited knowledge of the system.³⁷⁶ The same UNHCR REACH assessment found in its sample polling that 23 percent of Ukrainian residents in collective centres and 19 percent of Ukrainian residents in other accommodation reported service providers' refusal as a reason for failing to access healthcare.³⁷⁷ Explanations could include the perception amongst some segments of Slovak society that refugees should not have the right to free healthcare; one survey from September 2022 found that 54.4 percent of respondents in Slovakia held this opinion.³⁷⁸ Other potential barriers to accessing healthcare could include having the incorrect insurance provision or evidence, or using the incorrect referral route. Challenges in accessing healthcare can lead to discontent on the part of Ukrainians, which the host population can perceive as ingratitude, contributing to tensions.

³⁶⁷ European Commission. 2019. [Internships for doctors from third countries to address shortage of health professionals in Slovakia](#)

³⁶⁸ OECD. 2017. [State of Health in the EU – Slovak Republic – country health profile 2017](#)

³⁶⁹ OECD. 2017. [State of Health in the EU – Slovak Republic – country health profile 2017](#)

³⁷⁰ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

³⁷¹ Hudec, Michal. Euroactiv 2023. [Slovaks believe Ukrainians are making the country worse](#)

³⁷² OECD. 2017. [State of Health in the EU – Slovak Republic – country health profile 2017](#)

³⁷³ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

³⁷⁴ European Union Agency for Asylum. 2022. [Slovakia Asylum Procedures](#).

³⁷⁵ UNHCR. 2022. [Slovakia: Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment](#)

³⁷⁶ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

³⁷⁷ UNHCR. 2022. [Slovakia: Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment](#)

³⁷⁸ GLOBSEC. 2023. [Ukrainian refugees in Visegrad countries: Societal Attitudes and Challenges of Accommodating People Fleeing the War](#)

4.4 Housing

Ukrainians add to pressures on and the rising cost of housing (also in the context of a lack of private and public rental housing): A 2022 report by Investigate Europe found that, since 2010, house prices in all EU countries except Cyprus, Italy, and Spain had risen faster than the average rate of growth or inflation.³⁷⁹ The same report found that Bratislava was the second-most expensive of all EU member capital cities in which to buy a home for people earning average local salaries.³⁸⁰ Slovakia also has a very small private rental sector compared to other EU nations; the Ministry of Transport and Construction estimates that only 6 percent of properties across Slovakia are occupied by private renters.³⁸¹ Similarly, public rental housing (purchased by the state and provided below market rates for people with specific housing needs) in Slovakia serves fewer people than other EU states.³⁸² This has the potential to generate resentment among those looking for rental accommodation, as well as those who are prone to disseminate narratives stating that Ukrainians place unacceptable pressure on the housing market.

Overcrowding of refugees in apartments and state-run dormitories creates pressures on surrounding communities: As discussed in Section 2.4, the provision of collective state-subsidised accommodation has led to concerns about poor quality housing and overcrowding. Workshop participants commented that a worsening economic situation for refugees could lead to more significant overcrowding of collective centres, referencing the humanitarian centre in Gabčíkovo³⁸³ as a specific example of where the number of refugees (reportedly 900)³⁸⁴ is very high in comparison to the local population³⁸⁵ of approximately 5,250³⁸⁶ to 5,550 inhabitants.³⁸⁷ Such sites can draw negative media attention and can also contribute to the emergence of localised tensions, including concerns about burdening local services and the impact of concentrated groups of refugees seeking support in a single area.³⁸⁸ In addition, workshop participants expressed concerns about the impact of long-term overcrowded living on both refugees and host communities, citing fatigue with the situation and lack of long-term solutions.

‘We’ve been talking about this for one year, but nothing changes. We still have dormitories with three families living in one room’,³⁸⁹ said a workshop participant discussing refugee accommodation.

Ukrainian refugees, and Roma in particular, are seen as undesirable tenants: Prior to the arrival of refugees from Ukraine, housing conditions for Roma populations were poor, with reports of segregation,³⁹⁰ low-quality housing, impoverished communities,³⁹¹ and limited signs of improvement.³⁹² Workshop participants noted that

³⁷⁹ Kálmán, Attila. Investigate Europe. 2022. [Europe strains under rising prices as renters bear brunt of housing crisis](#)

³⁸⁰ Kálmán, Attila. Investigate Europe. 2022. [Europe strains under rising prices as renters bear brunt of housing crisis](#)

³⁸¹ The Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic. n.d. [Housing Policy of the Slovak Republic until 2030](#). Accessed 13 April 2023.

³⁸² The Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic. n.d. [Housing Policy of the Slovak Republic until 2030](#). Accessed 13 April 2023.

³⁸³ Reliefweb. 2023. [Living in the moment: Ukrainians find hope in Slovakia](#)

³⁸⁴ Reliefweb. 2023. [Living in the moment: Ukrainians find hope in Slovakia](#)

³⁸⁵ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

³⁸⁶ City Population. 2022. [Gabčíkovo](#). Accessed 10 April 2023.

³⁸⁷ City Facts. 2022. [Gabčíkovo, Trnava Region, Slovakia](#). Accessed 10 April 2023.

³⁸⁸ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

³⁸⁹ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

³⁹⁰ OHCHR. 2022. [Experts of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination Commend Slovakia on Improving Census Methodologies, Ask about Low School Enrolment Rates for Roma Children and Housing Segregation of the Roma Community](#)

³⁹¹ Strickland, Patrick. Al Jazeera. 2017. [Life in Slovakia's Roma slums: poverty and segregation](#)

³⁹² Amnesty International. 2022. [Slovakia 2022](#)

Ukrainian refugees are sometimes considered undesirable tenants for reasons including uncertain length of stay, family size and composition (e.g., families with children), and concerns about employment and income levels.³⁹³ Roma fleeing Ukraine have faced additional discrimination in many host countries in Europe, including in accommodation provision.³⁹⁴ This could lead to increased vulnerabilities and resentment on the part of the refugees. Poor housing conditions could also reinforce negative stereotypes of both refugees and Roma.

Uncertainty regarding length of stay for Ukrainian refugees in the host country, leading to lack of commitment to contracts: Ukrainians may also be at a structural disadvantage in the housing market. Their return intentions are complex; regional surveys indicate that the majority of Ukrainian refugees say they intend to return to Ukraine, with many planning to do so once the war ends.³⁹⁵ This uncertainty about return intentions can translate to unwillingness to sign long-term rental contracts with landlords, which makes it harder for Ukrainians to find accommodation, particularly in an overcrowded rental market.³⁹⁶ This could lead to increased housing vulnerability and a potential need to live in overcrowded conditions, which could contribute to tensions between Ukrainians and those living in the vicinity.

4.5 Education

Ukrainians add to pressure on schools: This is currently a low risk given that, as of 15 September 2022, only 8,739 of 33,827 refugee children granted TP had been enrolled in pre-school, primary, and secondary schools in Slovakia. However, these numbers are likely to rise and have the potential to disproportionately affect areas where refugee populations are higher.³⁹⁷ In 2022, the OECD reported that the annual expenditure per student from the primary to tertiary levels in Slovakia was among the lowest in member countries.³⁹⁸ Low spending on education may be associated with both results and classroom experiences. For example, the same OECD study found that 25- to 34-year-olds in Slovakia had amongst the lowest levels of secondary education attainment in the OECD and that the reading, mathematics, and science scores of current students have declined.³⁹⁹ This also has consequences for Slovak perceptions of the education system. A study conducted by Comenius University found that approximately half of Slovak students leaving school prefer to study at universities abroad to obtain higher-quality education.⁴⁰⁰ In this context, Ukrainians may represent additional pressure on an already stretched system. Participants in the research workshop commented on a lack of information on how to manage class quotas (caps on the number of children per class at the kindergarten, primary, and secondary school levels); they cited cases where Ukrainian children could not access specific school places due to caps, as well as concerns about the impact of changing the quota system which was introduced to improve the quality of education.⁴⁰¹ Ukrainian children also face mental and psychological trauma due to their recent experiences; for teachers who are already poorly paid and facing practical challenges,⁴⁰² it can be difficult to cope with this additional burden.⁴⁰³

³⁹³ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

³⁹⁴ European Parliament. 2022. [Russia's war on Ukraine: The situation of Roma people fleeing Ukraine](#)

³⁹⁵ Vyshlinsky, Hlib, Tomilina, M., Samoilink, M., and Mykhailyshyna, D. 2023. [Ukrainian Refugees: Who are they, where did they come from and how to return them?](#) Accessed 28 March 2023; UNHCR. 2022. [Lives on Hold: Intentions and Perspectives of Refugees from Ukraine #2 \(September 2022\)](#). Accessed 25 March 2023.

³⁹⁶ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

³⁹⁷ UNHCR 2023. [Refugee Response Plan: Slovakia Chapter](#), page 12. Accessed 12 April 2023.

³⁹⁸ OECD. 2022. [Slovakia Country Profile](#)

³⁹⁹ OECD. 2022. [Slovakia Country Profile](#)

⁴⁰⁰ Emerging Europe. 2018. [Slovak Education System Failing Students](#)

⁴⁰¹ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁴⁰² OECD. 2022. [Slovakia Country Profile](#)

⁴⁰³ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

Ukrainians add to pressure on kindergartens and available spaces for children: Lack of early childhood education options is another challenge for both Slovaks⁴⁰⁴ and Ukrainians. The arrival of Ukrainians places additional demands on a system that is already stretched, with workshop participants pointing out that it is difficult for both Slovaks and Ukrainians to get places in kindergarten.⁴⁰⁵ Lack of childcare can have an effect on children's development⁴⁰⁶ and limit parents' employment options.⁴⁰⁷ EU research findings are similar, noting that a Ukrainian participant stated, 'It is impossible to find a place in a kindergarten (it is a vicious circle, if a mother arrived alone with a child, she cannot go to work, but must stay at home with the child), it is difficult with free places in schools'.⁴⁰⁸ Ukrainian refugees could be seen as 'taking locals' places' in kindergartens, particularly in regions where kindergartens are more burdened.

Integration issues in schools and a lack of specialised programmes, resulting in negative social experiences: Ukrainian children face a number of challenges with regard to integration. The first concerns their experiences of trauma, with the UNHCR reporting that many Ukrainian children arriving in Slovakia need mental health and psychosocial support.⁴⁰⁹ Schools in Slovakia suffer from a chronic lack of funding and are therefore unable to provide specialised programmes and specific mental health and psychosocial support.⁴¹⁰ The second challenge concerns social cohesion issues. Workshop participants discussed the bullying of Ukrainian children extensively, suggesting that teachers or school administrations do not sufficiently address the issue.⁴¹¹ Third, a significant proportion of Ukrainian students study online due to differences between the Ukrainian and Slovak education systems.⁴¹² This can cause integration issues when Ukrainian and Slovak students do not meet and Ukrainians do not learn about Slovak language and culture.⁴¹³ Lack of integration in wider society can cause challenges relating to community cohesion.⁴¹⁴

Uncertainty regarding length of stay for Ukrainian refugees in the host country, leading to poor school attendance and high dropout rates: Surveys indicate that, regionally, significant proportions of Ukrainian refugees plan to return to Ukraine, with many intending to do so once the war ends.⁴¹⁵ Uncertainty around length of stay has affected enrolment choices for Ukrainian refugees living in Slovakia. An October 2022 UNHCR REACH survey found that, of those surveyed, only 50 percent of parents living in collective centres and 53 percent of parents living in other accommodation intended to enrol their children in Slovak schools in the next academic year; the remainder of respondents were either undecided or intended to have their children continue or return to Ukrainian education systems (online and potentially in Ukraine).⁴¹⁶ Workshop participants said that the perception that refugees are in Slovakia only temporarily is a reason for lack of enrolment at Slovak schools, which would require a significant investment: 'The children would need to learn Slovak and adapt to a new curriculum' in the

⁴⁰⁴ In 2022, the percentage of Slovak children in early childhood education was among the lowest among OECD countries: OECD. 2022. [Slovakia Country Profile](#).

⁴⁰⁵ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁴⁰⁶ UNICEF. 2021. [The formative years: UNICEF's work on measuring ECD](#)

⁴⁰⁷ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁴⁰⁸ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2023. [Fleeing Ukraine: Displaced People's Experiences in The EU](#). Accessed 5 April 2023.

⁴⁰⁹ UNHCR. 2023. [Refugee Response Plan: Slovakia Chapter](#)

⁴¹⁰ UNHCR. 2023. [Refugee Response Plan: Slovakia Chapter](#) and OECD. 2022. [Slovakia Country Profile](#)

⁴¹¹ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁴¹² UNHCR 2023. [Refugee Response Plan: Slovakia Chapter](#)

⁴¹³ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁴¹⁴ European Union. 2022. [Slovakia: Ukrainian children at risk of unsuccessful integration into educational system](#)

⁴¹⁵ Vyshlinsky, Hlib, Tomilina, M., Samoilink, M., and Mykhailyshyna, D. 2023. [Ukrainian Refugees: Who are they, where did they come from and how to return them?](#) Accessed 28 March 2023 and UNHCR. 2022. [Lives on Hold: Intentions and Perspectives of Refugees from Ukraine #2 \(September 2022\)](#). Accessed 25 March 2023.

⁴¹⁶ UNHCR. REACH. 2023. [Slovakia: Multi-sectoral Needs Assessment 2022](#)

meantime, they might fall behind in subject-matter knowledge.⁴¹⁷ Poor school attendance and high dropout rates could lead to the perception that Ukrainian refugees do not want to integrate. This would also be a missed opportunity to build friendships between the host and refugee communities.

Bureaucratic hurdles required to go to school: To register in Slovak schools, Ukrainian refugees need to overcome several bureaucratic hurdles. The first is finding schools with adequate space. Following this, children must be examined by a paediatrician and produce a certificate of the examination and vaccinations. While the Slovak government is working to make information available in Ukrainian, language barriers and cultural differences add to bureaucratic challenges and hurdles. Participants in the research workshop noted, regarding issues of service access (particularly in healthcare, education, and kindergartens) that a lack of information puts more pressure on those delivering the services as well as those trying to access them and increases the risk of misinformation.⁴¹⁸ This could contribute to potential increased tensions, as discussed above, related to Ukrainian refugees' lack of integration.

4.6 Employment and Income

High inflation pressures are acutely felt by both host and refugee communities. In 2022, inflation in Slovakia rose steeply to 12.1 percent,⁴¹⁹ up from 3.1 percent in 2021.⁴²⁰ While inflation is expected to reduce in 2023, it will remain high compared to previous years, with the EU predicting 9.7 percent inflation in 2023.⁴²¹ An October 2022 EU poll found that 95 percent of Slovak respondents worried about the rising costs of living, including increasing food and energy prices.⁴²² Respondents to the Winter Eurobarometer 2022–2023 selected the rising cost of living as by far the most important issue facing Slovakia.⁴²³ Ukrainian refugees have the potential to improve Slovak GDP,⁴²⁴ but the economic benefits that they could bring might be (1) longer-term; (2) not very visible to the population as a whole at this stage, particularly in the context of rapid and noticeable price increases in basic goods; and (3) concentrated among the more affluent, such as business owners. The impact of Russia's invasion on European energy prices is also widely reported in Slovak media, linking the energy crisis to ongoing inflation and economic pressures in Slovakia.⁴²⁵ High inflation, the increased cost of living, and the energy crisis can generate resentment. Workshop participants noted that these issues, combined with extensive media reporting on Ukraine, increases the possibility of the blame being shifted to others, with Ukrainian refugees at risk of becoming scapegoats.

High inflation, increased cost of living, and the energy crisis can generate resentment. Workshop participants noted that these issues, combined with extensive media reporting on Ukraine, increases the possibility of the blame being shifted onto others, with Ukrainians refugees at risk of becoming scapegoats.⁴²⁶

⁴¹⁷ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁴¹⁸ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁴¹⁹ European Commission. 2023. [Economic forecast for Slovakia](#)

⁴²⁰ World Bank. 2022. [Inflation, consumer prices \(annual %\) Slovak Republic](#)

⁴²¹ European Commission. 2023. [Economic forecast for Slovakia](#)

⁴²² European Commission. 2023. [EP Autumn 2022 Survey: Parlemeter](#). Accessed 10 April 2023.

⁴²³ European Commission. 2023. [Standard Eurobarometer 98 Winter Eurobarometer 2022 - 2023 Country Factsheets, Slovakia](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

⁴²⁴ GLOBSEC. 2023. [Despite challenges, V4 societies generally remain supportive of Ukrainian refugees, with more negative attitudes apparent in Slovakia](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁴²⁵ The Slovakia Spectator. 2022. [Energy crisis will force Slovak economy into recession in 2023](#)

⁴²⁶ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

Workshop participants also noted that the upcoming 2023 elections in Slovakia could be a trigger point for some of these tensions, particularly given the context of early elections being called following criticism of the government's handling of inflation and rising energy costs.⁴²⁷

Rising inequalities: Price increases generally have a disproportionate effect on the poorest populations. As a result, some pockets of resentment have been noted over the distribution of government support between refugees and Slovaks who identify as poor.⁴²⁸ An October 2022 EU poll showed that 84 percent of Slovak respondents worried about poverty and social exclusion.⁴²⁹ In the same poll, 63 percent of Slovaks said that they were experiencing some or a lot of difficulties with their income, compared to 45 percent of respondents in the EU more broadly.⁴³⁰ Moreover, the government's increased its allowance to individual citizens who host Ukrainian refugees or offer accommodation free of charge⁴³¹ September 2022 to a maximum of €710 to €1,790 per month for properties with one to four rooms.⁴³² Such generous support to landlords has the potential to further increase inequalities when lower-income Slovaks have to absorb rent rises. This could in turn lead to potential tensions and discontent among lower-income populations that may struggle to afford rent.

Low Ukrainian engagement in the labour market and entrepreneurial activities: According to IOM figures from March 2023, 30,000 Ukrainians were reported to be working in Slovakia.⁴³³ In addition, other Ukrainians engage in occasional and contract-based work. Some major barriers to engaging with the labour market are lack of language skills, challenges accessing childcare, and lack of recognition of qualifications.⁴³⁴ The perception of low refugee employment can lead to discourses about 'freeloading' and contribute to tensions.

Tensions over distribution of scarce resources between disadvantaged local populations and Ukrainians: According to 2020 data from the World Bank, Slovakia has a poverty rate of 14.8 percent.⁴³⁵ A 2022 OECD report found that regional economic disparities have increased since 2000 to the extent that GDP in the richest region of Bratislava is 3.3 times greater than in the poorest region of eastern Slovakia. This regional GDP difference is reflected in disparities in jobs, income, and safety.⁴³⁶ Tensions can arise around the ways in which limited government resources or services—such as kindergarten places or public rental housing—are allocated. Participants in the Bratislava workshop noted the risks of discourses suggesting that 'we should support our poor, not the Ukrainians' gaining traction if the economic situation worsens.⁴³⁷ This tension may also be more acute in areas facing greater levels of poverty.

Reductions in financial assistance to refugees could lead to more refugees experiencing poverty, and the state (or organisations) might need to step in to support the vulnerable: Workshop participants expressed fear that the international community would stop funding refugees; this would put more pressure on

⁴²⁷ Reuters. 2023. [Slovakia's former coalition heads agree to early parliamentary elections](#)

⁴²⁸ GLOBSEC. 2023. [Despite challenges, V4 societies generally remain supportive of Ukrainian refugees, with more negative attitudes apparent in Slovakia](#) Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁴²⁹ European Commission. 2023. [EP Autumn 2022 Survey: Parlemeter](#). Accessed 10 April 2023.

⁴³⁰ European Commission. 2023. [EP Autumn 2022 Survey: Parlemeter](#). Accessed 10 April 2023.

⁴³¹ Ukraine Slovakia. 2022. [Accommodation](#). Accessed 23 March 2023.

⁴³² European Commission. 2022. [Slovakia: accommodation allowance for refugees from Ukraine to increase](#)

⁴³³ IOM. 2023. [Slovakia: Surveys with Refugees from Ukraine: Needs, Intentions and Integration Challenges](#). Accessed 11 July 2023.

⁴³⁴ UNHCR. 2023. [Refugee Response Plan: Slovakia Chapter](#); also see Section 2.6 of this report.

⁴³⁵ The World Bank. 2020. [Multidimensional poverty headcount ratio \(% of total population\) - European Union](#). Accessed 30 March 2023. Data are compiled from official government sources or are computed by World Bank staff using national (i.e., country-specific) poverty lines.

⁴³⁶ OECD. 2022. [OECD regions and cities at a glance, country note: Slovak Republic](#)

⁴³⁷ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

the social services system and the government.⁴³⁸ In October 2022, the UNHCR found that 59 percent of refugee households surveyed had received humanitarian cash assistance in the past 30 days; yet overall, 30 percent of households surveyed in collective centres and 35 percent of households surveyed outside the centres reported insufficient regular income to support their monthly needs.⁴³⁹ A potential reduction in international support could put the refugees in a more precarious situation, which could increase the prevalence of negative discourses about them, including that they receive more Slovak government support than Slovaks.

High and rising unemployment can put strain on the host community and Ukrainian refugees and could lead to scapegoating of refugees: Recent polling suggests that the general economic outlook among the Slovak population is pessimistic, with 56 percent of people polled by Eurobarometer stating that Ukrainians are weakening the Slovak economy.⁴⁴⁰ Overall unemployment in Slovakia decreased to 6.35 percent in summer 2022 following the COVID-19 pandemic,⁴⁴¹ and fell from 7 percent in 2021 to 5.8 percent in 2023.⁴⁴² Unemployment patterns are distributed unevenly across regions (with eastern districts regularly reporting unemployment above 5 percent) and segments of the population experiencing long-term unemployment.⁴⁴³ These differing patterns, as well as low-income employment, could lead to localised tensions, including around perceived competition for jobs.⁴⁴⁴ Workshop participants also noted a perception that Ukrainian workers are willing to work for lower wages (or even illegally), contributing to salary depression and reducing the number of available jobs, especially ‘lower-skilled jobs’ for Slovaks.⁴⁴⁵ One participant mentioned rumours that Ukrainian men were evading military service and were being smuggled across borders to take up low-paid or illegal employment in Slovakia.⁴⁴⁶ Potential increases in unemployment and/or perceived increases in competition for jobs could create resentment toward Ukrainian refugees. Such risks to community cohesion could be localised based on specific job sectors or regions with higher unemployment.

Underemployment of refugees, including difficulties with recognition of qualifications: The UNHCR has noted that employment opportunities for refugees remain low, in part due to barriers to the recognition of refugees’ formal qualifications and expertise.⁴⁴⁷ One survey respondent noted that many jobs taken by refugees are those ‘in which the local population is not interested’, categorised as ‘unqualified work’ (33.1 percent), machinery operation (26.3 percent), or trade- and services-related (12.8 percent).⁴⁴⁸ The uncertainty of refugees’ length of stay in Slovakia can also contribute to their taking jobs below their qualifications and experience. Participants in the research workshops discussed the prevalence of employment agencies in Slovakia and the risk that they can exploit Ukrainians’ lack of knowledge of the Slovak labour market and language through exploitative contracts and/or wage deductions.⁴⁴⁹ Underemployment of Ukrainian refugees could lead to missed opportunities for

⁴³⁸ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁴³⁹ UNHCR REACH. 2022. [Slovakia: Multi-sectoral Needs Assessment 2022](#)

⁴⁴⁰ Hudec, Michal. Euroactiv 2023. [Slovaks believe Ukrainians are making the country worse](#)

⁴⁴¹ The Slovakia Spectator. 2022. [Unemployment under 20% in all Slovak districts](#)

⁴⁴² OECD. 2022. [OECD Economic Surveys: Slovak Republic](#). Accessed April 11, 2023.

⁴⁴³ The Slovakia Spectator. 2022. [Unemployment under 20% in all Slovak districts](#)

⁴⁴⁴ MUNI ECON. 2023. [Attitudes towards migrants and preferences for asylum and refugee policies before and during Russian invasion of Ukraine: The case of Slovakia \(Working Paper\)](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

⁴⁴⁵ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁴⁴⁶ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023. There is little data on this topic, although media reports have suggested that smuggling rings found in Moldova may be operating in other European countries. Gettleman, Jeffrey, and Pronczuk, M. The New York Times. 2022. [Ukraine’s draft dodgers face quilt, shame and reproach](#)

⁴⁴⁷ UNHCR 2023. [Refugee Response Plan: Slovakia Chapter](#), page 12. Accessed 12 April 2023.

⁴⁴⁸ GLOBSEC. 2023. [Despite challenges, V4 societies generally remain supportive of Ukrainian refugees, with more negative attitudes apparent in Slovakia](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁴⁴⁹ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

refugees to realise their potential and showcase their broad skills and experience, thereby mitigating potential tensions arising due to Slovaks' frustrations with Ukrainians not contributing (significantly) to Slovak society.

Money received by NGOs is earmarked for Ukrainians and cannot be used for local populations: The workshops surfaced a concern that the most vulnerable Slovaks were not receiving support, whereas less eligible Ukrainians were beneficiaries of international humanitarian efforts. Representatives of government and NGOs pointed out that they received funding for Ukrainian refugees which at times could not be used for other potentially vulnerable groups, including local populations.⁴⁵⁰

One NGO representative in the workshops also noted that tension can arise because of perceptions that 'there are finances for integration for refugees only, not much for single mothers, families, or the homeless. Money is here to sustain the Ukrainian community'.⁴⁵¹

This has the potential to cause discontent among the local population, and a perception that Ukrainians are treated better than Slovaks in their own country. Such narratives can be amplified if the source of funding for Ukrainian refugees is misunderstood, as discussed below.

Ukrainians receive higher benefits than host communities, and communication about the amount and sources of support is poor: Systems for administering support to Ukraine were established shortly after refugees started arriving.⁴⁵² As discussed in Section 3.2, the benefits that Ukrainian refugees have been eligible for, particularly in early 2022, have been a cause of discontent among some groups, and misleading narratives on the topic continue to circulate. In parallel, workshop participants noted misconceptions about the sources of the funding, such as beliefs that EU or voluntary NGO donations were coming from Slovak taxpayers, which could lead to frustrations.⁴⁵³

Ukrainian refugees receive more support (such as financial support and labour market access) than other refugee groups, including TCNs from Ukraine: Workshop participants noted the unprecedented support extended to Ukrainians, while others do not enjoy similar treatment. Participants commented that this level of support has the capacity to generate discontent among different groups of refugees⁴⁵⁴ despite the smaller number of other refugees in Slovakia.

4.7 Community, social, and political life

Negative views of Ukrainians provoked by political discourses: Sizeable segments of the Slovak population harbour pro-Russian sentiments.⁴⁵⁵ In March 2023, attendees at anti-NATO rallies in Slovakia called for Slovak military neutrality.⁴⁵⁶ Participants in the research workshops noted that attitudes toward Russia are polarising. Indeed, even in the workshops, opinions diverged; one participant explained that those who support a negotiated

⁴⁵⁰ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁴⁵¹ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁴⁵² Council of Europe. 2022. [SRSG on Migration and Refugees publishes reports of visit to Czech and Slovak Republics](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

⁴⁵³ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁴⁵⁴ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁴⁵⁵ Euractiv. 2022. [Most Slovaks want Russia to win Ukraine war](#); GLOBSEC. 2022. [New report shows that the V4 population supports Ukrainian refugees with some reservations](#). Accessed 22 March 2023; GLOBSEC. 2022. [New poll: Slovaks want Ukraine to win the war, Not Russia](#). Accessed 22 March 2023.

⁴⁵⁶ Tasnim News Agency. 2023. [Massive Anti-NATO Rally Held in Slovakia](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

settlement between Russia and Ukraine (which might include significant concessions from Ukraine) were incorrectly cast as ‘pro-Putin and promoting a dangerous split in society’.⁴⁵⁷ Given the polarising nature of this issue, this tension risks affecting community cohesion within Slovak society and potentially between the host society and Ukrainian refugees.

Lack of integration of Ukrainian refugees into host society: In February 2023, the UNHCR found that 77 percent of refugees surveyed reported good or very good relationships between Ukrainians and Slovaks but that barriers to integration remained. These included language and cultural differences, lack of time available for refugees to participate in community life, and emerging tensions, notably around perceived competition for jobs.⁴⁵⁸ Participants in the research workshops added that the two communities remain poorly connected, with limited occasions for integration or relationship-building.⁴⁵⁹ This can be a missed opportunity to build trust and connections among the communities.

Language barriers or not learning the local language due to lack of opportunity or the difficulty of the language: In February 2023, the UNHCR found that 48 percent of people surveyed (including Ukrainian refugees and members of Slovak host communities) reported communication difficulties as contributing to tensions in community life, making this the primary barrier to further integration found in this survey.⁴⁶⁰ Participants in the research workshops commented on the need for more language courses for Ukrainian refugees and greater support for teachers of the Slovak language to meet increased demand.⁴⁶¹ Language barriers can reduce opportunities to build friendships and community cohesion and can increase the risks of misunderstanding, frustration, and potential resentment between groups.

Differences between Ukrainians' experiences, particularly around their origins in Ukraine: Workshop participants noted discourses about Ukrainians from the western regions of Ukraine not being seen as genuine refugees.⁴⁶² Participants shared a narrative that the war was not affecting all parts of the country, and therefore Ukrainians could stay in safe areas and fight for their country. Further, the narrative suggests that Ukrainians in Slovakia are more like economic migrants than refugees.⁴⁶³ Such narratives have the potential to generate tensions between the communities and make refugees from western Ukraine feel less welcome.

Lack of understanding of Ukrainian trauma and its consequences: There are indications that Ukrainian refugees in many host countries, including Slovakia, have experienced high levels of trauma which affect their day-to-day lives.⁴⁶⁴ Lack of understanding of trauma can lead to friction with the local populations, which might perceive some types of behaviour as ‘lazy’ or ‘ungrateful’, while in reality these might be due to strong trauma. The traumatised people, in turn, might perceive insistence on finding work immediately or participating in ‘fun’ community activities as irritating and diminishing their experience.

⁴⁵⁷ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁴⁵⁸ UNHCR REACH. 2023. [Slovakia: Area-based assessment - Cities of Bratislava - Kosice -Nitra - Zilina \(February 2023\)](#)

⁴⁵⁹ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁴⁶⁰ UNHCR REACH. 2023. [Slovakia: Area-based assessment - Cities of Bratislava - Kosice -Nitra - Zilina \(February 2023\)](#)

⁴⁶¹ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁴⁶² Bratislava research workshop, 8 March 2023.

⁴⁶³ Bratislava research workshop, 8 March 2023.

⁴⁶⁴ OECD. 2022. [Supporting the social and emotional wellbeing of refugee students from Ukraine in host countries](#) and Politico. 2022. [Ukrainian refugees' trauma creates 'crisis on top of crisis' for Eastern Europe](#)

Fear of insecurity and war: Participants in the workshops identified fear of increased insecurity and war as a potential source of tension.⁴⁶⁵ They also mentioned fears about conscription and a perception that Russia is not affected by sanctions to the extent that Europe is.⁴⁶⁶ A European Commission poll from October 2022 found that 85 percent of Slovak respondents were worried about the spread of the war from Ukraine to other countries.⁴⁶⁷ This resonated with workshop participants, who shared that people were unhappy about EU sanctions because they believed these sanctions were more damaging to Slovakia than Russia.⁴⁶⁸ This could lead to reduced support for Ukrainian refugees and potential resentment toward Ukrainians in Slovakia.

Tensions between Ukrainians and host community about who started, is responsible for, or should de-escalate the war, and how: De-escalation of the war is linked to fears about conflict in Slovakia, as discussed above.⁴⁶⁹ Political parties can use fear of war to generate anti-refugee discourses. This is particularly visible in Slovakia, where the ‘peace narrative’ suggesting that Ukraine should seek to end the war and ‘unnecessary suffering’, which might include compromises on the part of Ukraine, is particularly prominent. One study called this narrative ‘a euphemism for stopping the military support for Ukraine’; it has also been extended beyond the war to refer to support to Ukrainian refugees.⁴⁷⁰ As the war in Ukraine continues, this tension could pose a risk to community cohesion in Slovakia and potential hostility to Ukrainian refugees if Ukrainians become a focus of frustrations about the continuation of war.

Locals’ fatigue with supporting refugees: Immediately after the 2022 escalation of the war, positive perceptions of Russia and Putin among Slovaks declined significantly.⁴⁷¹ Yet since then, Slovak perceptions of Ukrainian refugees have worsened.⁴⁷² Participants in the Bratislava workshop reported that they had not expected the war to last this long.⁴⁷³ One poll in Slovakia suggested that, in September 2022, a majority of Slovaks opposed hosting Ukrainians and disapproved of continuing support.⁴⁷⁴ Fatigue with supporting refugees is linked to perceptions that Slovak citizens do not receive the same level or quality of support; it is likely to worsen as the time since the initial displacement lengthens.⁴⁷⁵ Fatigue is also impacted by scarce resources and rising costs. This is an area of growing potential tension between communities.

Expectation of more gratitude from refugees: Related to the potential for increasing fatigue with supporting refugees, some workshop participants commented on an expectation that refugees should be grateful but that they appear not to appreciate the support they receive.⁴⁷⁶ The expectations around gratitude occur in a context in which Slovaks believe, according to workshop participants, that people should ‘deserve society’s help’ by contributing to society.⁴⁷⁷ Depicting Ukrainians as ungrateful may stoke further division and tension between Ukrainian and Slovak communities.

⁴⁶⁵ Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.

⁴⁶⁶ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁴⁶⁷ European Commission. 2023. [EP Autumn 2022 Survey: Parlemeter](#). Accessed 10 April 2023.

⁴⁶⁸ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁴⁶⁹ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁴⁷⁰ Učeň, Peter. 2023. [The Russia-Ukraine War and the radicalization of political discourse in Slovakia](#). In *The Impacts of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine on Right-wing Populism in Europe*. Ivaldi, Gilles, and Zankina, E., eds. European Center for Populism Studies. 8 March 2023. Accessed 26 March 2023.

⁴⁷¹ GLOBSEC. 2022. [War in Ukraine: A Wake-Up Call for Slovaks](#)

⁴⁷² GLOBSEC. 2023. [Ukrainian refugees in Visegrad countries: Societal Attitudes and Challenges of Accommodating People Fleeing the War](#)

⁴⁷³ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁴⁷⁴ GLOBSEC. 2023. [Ukrainian refugees in Visegrad countries: Societal Attitudes and Challenges of Accommodating People Fleeing the War](#)

⁴⁷⁵ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁴⁷⁶ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁴⁷⁷ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

Individual incidents that harm people (e.g., a car crash) might frame Ukrainians as a danger to the host society: Research workshop participants raised risks that the media or populations could generalise individual incidents involving Ukrainians to portray all Ukrainians in a negative light.⁴⁷⁸ One participant cited issues of public safety, such as road safety, as potential triggers for this tension worsening. For example, the media or politicians in the pre-election period could use an individual car accident involving a Ukrainian to generate disinformation and resentment toward Ukrainians more broadly.⁴⁷⁹

Xenophobia and discrimination: Amnesty International has reported on insufficient protection of the rights of minority groups coming from Ukraine, including TCNs and Roma, and verbal abuse at borders toward transgender refugees from Ukraine from both Slovak and Ukrainian officials.⁴⁸⁰ A report from UN Women reported that Roma refugees were also treated differently at the border, with some turned away due to lack of documentation.⁴⁸¹ As noted in Chapter 2 of this report, the Roma community experiences discrimination in Slovakia which impacts their access to services, and this is likely to impact Roma refugees from Ukraine as well. Participants in the research workshop noted that discriminatory political discourses could increase in the run-up to the 2023 elections, which in turn could increase tensions between different parts of society.⁴⁸²

⁴⁷⁸ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁴⁷⁹ Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

⁴⁸⁰ Amnesty International. 2022. [Slovakia 2022](#)

⁴⁸¹ UN Women. 2022. [Rapid gender analysis of Ukraine](#)

⁴⁸² Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

Chapter 5. Programmatic approach recommendations

5.1 Overview

This report has focused on medium-term risks to community cohesion. While we present a range of overarching recommendations to facilitate the refugee and Slovak communities' development of strong relations and trust, other recommendations are more operational. Our research demonstrates that many of the concerns that host communities expressed (and, with them, incendiary and misleading narratives shared by actors with malicious intent as well as some population segments), are rooted in longstanding issues, such as a strained healthcare system which the arrival of Ukrainian refugees has emphasised. The arrival of refugees could speed the resolution of some of these issues, which have become even more visible. In some cases, different sources of funding might become available to address them, which could improve the situation for both Ukrainians and host communities.

This section presents an overview of the programmatic approaches that could help mitigate potential tensions at each stage of the refugee journey. It focuses in more detail on the potential approaches to mitigate the five tensions that are likely to have the most significant effect on community cohesion in the medium term. Identified in the workshops, interviews, and research from third parties,⁴⁸³ the five tensions for Slovakia are listed in Table 4.

TABLE 4: Programmatic approaches to mitigate potential tensions between refugees and host communities

Stage	Top five potential tensions identified
Housing	Tension 1: Overcrowding of refugees in apartments and state-run dormitories
Healthcare	Tension 2: Additional pressures on a health system which is already experiencing challenges, including long waits
Employment and income	Tension 3: High inflation
Community, social, and political life	Tension 4: Negative views of Ukrainians provoked by political discourses and parties
Community, social, and political life	Tension 5: Tensions between Ukrainians and host communities about responsibility for the war

⁴⁸³ The research team designed the potential approaches based on desk research as well as a survey that had been circulated to key experts. The survey focused on the key five tensions, the potential effectiveness of the proposed mitigation approaches, and lessons learnt from existing programmatic interventions in the country.

5.2 Cross-cutting programmatic approaches

Some best-practice programmatic approaches can be integrated across programme interventions and funding streams to better understand and reduce potential tensions between Ukrainian refugees and host communities.

Conduct conflict and context analysis: A cornerstone of cohesive and conflict-sensitive programming is a solid conflict and context analysis. The importance of such analysis has been pointed out by actors including the UN, INGOs that specialise in peacebuilding, and the World Bank.⁴⁸⁴ To be effective, conflict and context analyses need to incorporate various points of view. It is generally considered important to specifically include the points of view of women and marginalised groups. Analyses which could be done at various levels—intervention, project, or sector-wide—should outline current political, economic, and social factors, as well as historical contexts and conditions that may contribute to conflict. In the context of Slovakia, some factors that should be taken into account include (1) the medium-term macroeconomic context, including inflation and rising housing prices; (2) inequalities within the current Slovak population, with strong and increasing disparities within host communities which could be aggravated by the refugee response; (3) the relative weaknesses of social service systems, notably education and health; and (4) political factors, including the prevalence of Russia-aligned rhetoric.

Share positive stories through social media: Social media is being used as a tool to disseminate incendiary and misleading discourses about Ukrainian refugees, as discussed in Chapter 3.⁴⁸⁵ This use of social media corresponds with wider literature showing that social media can be an effective conduit for misinformation and disinformation.⁴⁸⁶ In part to counter this tendency, sharing positive stories on social media would support the creation of a counter-movement that mobilises communities to come together. There is evidence that counter-messaging can be effective, particularly when coupled with in-person local activities and activism.⁴⁸⁷ Dynamics around sharing stories, including which ones to share, by whom, and through what outlets, should be planned around the most effective ways to penetrate current information bubbles. Findings from business research show that sharing positive stories can improve morale;⁴⁸⁸ there is also evidence that social cohesion, or ‘glue’, can form around social media messages and stories.⁴⁸⁹ Positive stories and messages can and should be developed both around Ukrainians’ contributions to the Slovak economy and society and around Slovaks’ hospitality to Ukrainians (that is, positive stories should be developed about both the refugees and the host community). For example, stories could build on findings such as those of a 2023 GLOBSEC survey which found that Slovaks are open to having Ukrainians as neighbours, close friends, and colleagues,⁴⁹⁰ as well as individual positive stories. Positive messages should be developed within the context of a strong context analysis, including of political attitudes and preconceptions. For example, one workshop participant pointed out that what was meant as a positive story about medical support to Ukrainian refugees received hundreds of negative comments within hours, suggesting that local citizens were suffering in order for a Ukrainian to receive treatment.⁴⁹¹ Building stories on a solid

⁴⁸⁴ Saferworld. n.d. [Conflict Analysis, Chapter 2](#). Accessed 28 March 2023; UN. 2016. [UN Conflict Analysis Practice Note](#). Accessed 28 March 2023; World Bank. n.d. [Conflict Analysis](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

⁴⁸⁵ See also, as an example, Walter, Jan D. DW. 2023. [Fact Check: How propaganda denigrates Ukrainian refugees](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

⁴⁸⁶ Bunse, Simone. 2021. [Social media: A tool for peace or conflict?](#) Accessed 28 March 2023.

⁴⁸⁷ Bunse, Simone. 2021. [Social media: A tool for peace or conflict?](#) Accessed 28 March 2023.

⁴⁸⁸ Cecchi-Dimeglio, Paola. MIT Sloan Management Review. 2020. [Why sharing good news matters](#). Accessed 26 March 2023.

⁴⁸⁹ Duffy, Andrew, and Ling, R. 2020. [The Gift of News: Phatic News Sharing on Social Media for Social Cohesion](#), Journalism Studies. Accessed 26 March 2023.

⁴⁹⁰ GLOBSEC. 2023. [Ukrainian refugees in Visegrad countries: Societal Attitudes and Challenges of Accommodating People Fleeing the War](#).

⁴⁹¹ Warsaw research workshop 9 February 2023.

understanding of local sensitivities and testing messages to ensure that the framing of the message is optimal can help minimise the occurrence of similar situations.

Implement strategic communications to reach target audiences and penetrate information bubbles: A range of tactics can counteract misleading and incendiary discourses, including proactive efforts to ‘pre-bunk’ or increase society’s resilience to misleading content. These can include awareness-raising campaigns and resilience and network building.⁴⁹² Reactive efforts to ‘de-bunk’ could include counter-narratives, crisis communications, and policy responses.⁴⁹³ These should be tailored and targeted to specific audience groups and their interests, values, language, norms, and beliefs. While providing accurate information to audiences is important—for example, by engaging dedicated teams of fact-checkers—disseminating facts is usually not sufficient to change attitudes and behaviours around sensitive issues.⁴⁹⁴ An Overseas Development Institute (ODI) report on understanding public attitudes toward refugees and migrants suggests that communications should highlight that the situation is manageable and emphasise shared values.⁴⁹⁵ Fact-checking, while particularly important in the context of policy debates and strategy, should be accompanied by other strategies when seeking to resonate with diverse groups. These could include (1) framing messaging to align with target audiences’ moral values, which has been proven to shift attitudes on highly sensitive and often politicised topics;⁴⁹⁶ (2) appealing to emotions, which are strong drivers of decisions and behaviours and which make content more likely to be accessed and remembered;⁴⁹⁷ and (3) shifting social norms or using normative messaging regarding the expectations of behaviour to promote behaviour change.⁴⁹⁸

When using accurate, factual information to counter specific falsehoods, this information should be repeated multiple times within targeted fora. Repeated statements have been shown to be easier to process and are therefore perceived as more truthful, even for those who have prior knowledge of the facts.⁴⁹⁹ As such, repeated facts are crucial because they counter falsehoods to which the audiences have been exposed multiple times. Research indicates that misinformation and disinformation can be promoted through specific hubs: media outlets used by local and foreign actors to influence public opinion.⁵⁰⁰ After information is disseminated, it can be taken up by individuals who do not actively question the information they receive, since there is a global bias toward believing that ‘fake news’ is something that affects other people.⁵⁰¹ Finally, it is crucial that the target audience considers the disseminators of the communications to be credible, and that institutions take as much care in selecting the messengers as the message.⁵⁰² In the Czech Republic, for example, there are active efforts to counter disinformation and engage in positive strategic communications, such as by the ‘Czech Elves’, a citizen group that focuses on this topic.⁵⁰³

⁴⁹² Government Communication Service. 2021. [Resist 2: Counter-disinformation toolkit](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

⁴⁹³ Government Communication Service. 2021. [Resist 2: Counter-disinformation toolkit](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

⁴⁹⁴ Dempster, Helen, and Hargrave, K. Overseas Development Institute. 2017. [Understanding public attitudes towards refugees and migrants](#).

⁴⁹⁵ Dempster, Helen, and Hargrave, K. Overseas Development Institute. 2017. [Understanding public attitudes towards refugees and migrants](#).

⁴⁹⁶ Feinberg, Matthew, and Willer, R. 2015. [From Gulf to Bridge: When Do Moral Arguments Facilitate Political Influence?](#) *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 41(12), 1665–1681.

⁴⁹⁷ Brady, W. J., Gantman, A., and Van Bavel, J. 2020. [Attentional capture helps explain why moral and emotional content go viral](#). *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 149, 746–756. 3.

⁴⁹⁸ Petit, Vincent, and Zalk, T.N. UNICEF and PENN SoNG. 2019. [Everybody Wants to Belong: A Practical Guide to Tackling and Leveraging Social Norms in Behaviour Change Programming](#).

⁴⁹⁹ Fazio, L. K., Brashier, N. M., Payne, B. K., and Marsh, E. J. 2015. [Knowledge does not protect against illusory truth](#). *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 144(5), 993–1002.

⁵⁰⁰ Citizens' Association ‘Why Not’. 2019. [Disinformation in the online sphere: The case of BiH](#). Accessed 26 March 2023.

⁵⁰¹ Ipsos. 2018. [Fake news, filter bubbles, post-truth and trust](#). Accessed 26 March 2023.

⁵⁰² RAN C&N Academy. 2019. [Effective Narratives: Updating the GAMMMA+ model](#). 19 December 2019.

⁵⁰³ Centre for European Policy Analysis. 2021. [Czech elves battle in the disinformation forest](#).

Organise joint activities that enable refugees and host populations to get to know one another: Daily pressures around work, family life, and the broader challenges mentioned in Section 4.7 may prevent Slovak and refugee communities from engaging socially. All types of stakeholders could organise activities to bring the two communities together socially and build informal networks—governments, municipalities, NGOs, or citizens' groups. Such activities have been noted to reduce prejudice.⁵⁰⁴ A workshop participant in the Czech Republic shared that a community held film screenings with short 'chat to your neighbour' intervals to help people who come to watch the film get to know each other, with the movie providing a basis for conversation.⁵⁰⁵ While some Slovak NGOs noted that activities designed to bring Ukrainian and host community youth together were poorly attended, one NGO shared that it usually attracted equal numbers of local and refugee children but that it does not advertise the activities as 'come meet Ukrainians'. Rather, it focuses on activities that the children are interested in and advertise in different places to Ukrainian and Slovak youth separately, using posters in both languages.⁵⁰⁶

Offer additional free or affordable after-school activities: Support for free or highly subsidised after-school activities has multiple benefits. First, after-school activities can help bridge the gap between the school day and the workday, allowing mothers to work without seeking childcare and/or incurring additional costs. Second, such activities create opportunities for Ukrainian and Slovak students to meet, get to know each other, and build trust and mutual understanding. Third, they could include language classes, which Ukrainian students need. These activities can also facilitate organic language learning as Ukrainian and Slovak children engage in joint activities. Fourth, after-school activities could be beneficial to young people's mental and physical health.⁵⁰⁷ Participants in the research workshops noted that teenagers are particularly vulnerable to social isolation and poor mental health; some also noted potential risks of youth engaging in harmful behaviours if they do not spend time on hobbies or other activities. Given the high rates of online schooling, after-school activities may be particularly suitable for bringing Ukrainian and Slovak youth and children together.

Train search engines and generative artificial intelligence to recognise bias and potential abuse: Digital advances, including social media platforms, have enabled messages and disinformation to spread much more rapidly than previously, facilitating the creation of echo chambers that can reinforce confirmation bias.⁵⁰⁸ Research also shows that false information can spread more quickly than facts, potentially due to the degree of novelty and emotional reactions that the false stories can evoke.⁵⁰⁹ However, some technologies, such as ChatGPT, have built-in safeguards to limit the spread of negative rumours about refugees. When asked to generate negative headlines about Ukrainian refugees, ChatGPT instead provided recommendations for how to approach news stories about refugees 'with empathy and sensitivity, and to give a voice to those who are often marginalized and underrepresented in the media'.⁵¹⁰ ChatGPT also appeared to have mechanisms to recognise

⁵⁰⁴ Pettigrew Thomas F., and Tropp, L. R. [A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory](#). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Accessed 28 March 2023.

⁵⁰⁵ Prague research workshop 1–2 February 2023.

⁵⁰⁶ Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.

⁵⁰⁷ Nabors et al. 2022. [A University and Community-Based Partnership: After-School Mentoring Activities to Support Positive Mental Health for Children Who Are Refugees](#).

⁵⁰⁸ OECD. 2022. [Disinformation and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine: Threats and governance responses](#). Accessed 31 March 2023.

⁵⁰⁹ Vosoughi, Soroush, Roy, D., and Aral, S. Science. 2018 [The spread of true and false news online](#). Accessed 31 March 2023.

⁵¹⁰ General guidelines for how to do so were also provided:

'1. Avoid sensationalism: Avoid using inflammatory language or sensational headlines that can stigmatize refugees or perpetuate stereotypes.

'2. Use person-centered language: When reporting on refugees, refer to them as individuals rather than as a monolithic group. Use person-centered language that acknowledges their humanity and individual experiences.

false assumptions, as illustrated below. Similar notices could be used by search engines, for example, to seek to minimise the spread of falsehoods about refugees.

Request: Why do Ukrainian refugees in Poland not want to integrate?

GPT-3: I'm sorry, but I cannot provide an answer to this question as it is based on a false assumption. The majority of Ukrainian refugees in Poland do want to integrate and establish a new life in their host country. Like any other refugees, they face significant challenges in terms of language, culture, and finding employment, which can make integration difficult. However, many Ukrainian refugees actively seek out language classes, job training, and other resources to help them integrate successfully.

5.3 Recommendations around legal status, welfare, and benefits

Any changes to (re)registration processes and procedures should be simple and clearly communicated via a range of media. Digital literacy support for vulnerable groups could also be provided to help them understand and use online services. Streamlined processes and procedures adopted for Ukrainians in recognition of the complexity and length of time required to prove that one's experiences qualify under the refugee definition could also be provided to other refugees fleeing war and persecution who qualify under the 1951 Refugee Convention.

5.4 Recommendations around healthcare

Overarching recommendations to mitigate potential tensions related to healthcare revolve around addressing the operational challenges relating to an overstretched healthcare system⁵¹¹ which predated the Ukrainian refugees' arrival in Slovakia. The inflow of Ukrainians could be seen to add pressure on an already weak system. It may be possible to mitigate some of these tensions by channelling some funding for Ukrainian refugees to broader prior efforts to reform the Slovak health system.⁵¹² In the short term, this report makes the recommendations below.

Streamline staffing processes, involving Ukrainians with skills in the health sector: In 2016, Slovakia had only three physicians per 100,00 people compared to the EU average of 3.5. The country also faces a shortage of other medical and technical personnel.⁵¹³ Programmes that identify Ukrainians with appropriate qualifications and skills in the health sector, support them with language or other training as needed, and place them in the Slovak health system could be beneficial. Such programmes would likely consist of outreach efforts to identify qualified Ukrainians, processes to speed recognition of skills and qualifications, tailored language training, and

³. Provide context: Provide context for why refugees are fleeing their home countries and the challenges they face in their host countries. This can help readers understand the complexities of the issue and challenge any misconceptions or misperceptions.

⁴. Interview refugees and stakeholders: Seek out perspectives from refugees themselves as well as experts and stakeholders in the field. This can help humanize the issue and provide more nuanced and accurate reporting.

⁵. Highlight stories of resilience and hope: Highlight stories of refugees who have overcome challenges and made positive contributions to their host communities. This can help counter negative stereotypes and give a more balanced perspective of refugees' experiences.

'Remember that every person has inherent dignity and deserves to be treated with respect and compassion.'

⁵¹¹ Discussed in Section 4.3 of this report.

⁵¹² Smatana, Martin, et al. 2016. 'Health Systems in Transition: Slovakia'. *Slovakia Health System Review* 18 (6). <https://healthcareconsulting.sk/sites/default/files/hit-slovakia.pdf>

⁵¹³ Smatana, Martin, et al. 2016. 'Health Systems in Transition: Slovakia'. *Slovakia Health System Review* 18 (6). <https://healthcareconsulting.sk/sites/default/files/hit-slovakia.pdf>

placements in Slovak hospitals and clinics. UNICEF is conducting some similar programming in the Czech Republic, and best practices could be adapted to Slovakia.⁵¹⁴

Increase the number of interpreters: The presence of interpreters is a best practice for the provision of healthcare to refugees.⁵¹⁵ This aids in cultural sensitivity and helps ensure that refugees understand both their health issues and the procedures and systems they engage with. Investment in interpreters can also reduce the strain on Slovak doctors who are already stretched by making it easier to communicate with their patients.

5.5 Recommendations around housing

Overarching recommendations to mitigate tensions related to housing focus on addressing the operational challenges of a lack of affordable housing. Doing so could benefit both Ukrainians and Slovaks. The potential overcrowding of refugees in apartments and state-run dormitories has been identified as one of the most significant potential tensions between Ukrainian refugees and the Slovak host community, relating directly to the pre-existing lack of rental market and public rental housing infrastructure. The Slovak government is making efforts to invest in housing; to the degree possible, housing aid to Ukrainians should be harmonised with these programmes and efforts.⁵¹⁶ In addition, this report specifically recommends the programmatic approaches below.⁵¹⁷

Provide viable opportunities for people to live, work, and go to school outside of major cities: Choosing whether to live in large or smaller cities or rural areas often poses a dilemma for refugees. Larger cities offer more employment opportunities and options for education, and often provide proximity to healthcare facilities. On the other hand, smaller cities have more affordable housing options. A workshop participant in Poland cited a pilot project offering relocation to smaller villages or towns, with both housing and employment offers and funding to renovate old homes.⁵¹⁸ This kind of scheme could be expanded in Slovakia to ease housing pressures in cities. Good practice exists around companies providing well-rounded support to refugees, including from the private sector. For example, PepsiCo supported 900 Ukrainian PepsiCo associates and their families to relocate to Romania, arranged for the employees to continue working for PepsiCo there (in addition to recruiting other Ukrainian refugees), arranged housing, and established the PepsiCo learning centre—a Ukrainian school for refugee children, employing Ukrainian teachers.⁵¹⁹

Support social intermediaries in the rental process: A social rental agency model could be piloted through which a non-profit intermediary negotiates between property owners and people in need of housing.⁵²⁰ The intermediary would guarantee rent payments and minimum tenancy standards to the owners, who in turn would charge discounted rents, guaranteeing stable, affordable, and high-quality accommodation to the tenant. The intermediary can help mitigate challenges and issues associated with discrimination against Ukrainian tenants and support the management of concerns and issues related to the tenants' short-term housing needs. In Poland, Habitat for Humanity founded the Social Rental Agency, which provides housing and employment services.⁵²¹

⁵¹⁴ UNICEF 2023. [UNICEF Refugee Response in the Czech Republic: Initial Results and Priorities](#). Accessed 10 March 2023.

⁵¹⁵ BMA. 2022. [Managing language barriers for refugees and asylum seekers](#). Accessed 5 April 2023.

⁵¹⁶ Housing 2030. 2023. [Slovakian State Housing Policy](#); Spirkova, Daniela. 2018. [Housing Policy in the Slovak Republic](#).

⁵¹⁷ These could include subsidised mortgages, tax relief, housing allowances, and subsidies for companies investing in sustainable and affordable housing.

⁵¹⁸ Warsaw research workshop 9 February 2023.

⁵¹⁹ PepsiCo. 2022. [The story behind PepsiCo's school for displaced Ukrainian children](#). Accessed 27 March 2023.

⁵²⁰ Habitat for Humanity. n.d. [Introducing Social Rental Agencies in Poland](#). Accessed 27 March 2023.

⁵²¹ Habitat for Humanity. n.d. [Introducing Social Rental Agencies in Poland](#). Accessed 27 March 2023.

The approach could be leveraged in Slovakia to support the provision of housing to refugee groups, particularly those who are more likely to experience discrimination and stigma, such as Roma.

5.6 Recommendations around education

Slovak language and mental health support in schools would be particularly useful for Ukrainian refugees, as would training for teachers and educational staff in supporting Ukrainian students who might have experienced trauma. Making spaces available for Ukrainian children to continue studying online while physically present in school or public places where their peers may congregate (for example, at community centres or on library premises) could be useful in encouraging social interaction, integration, and social bonds among Ukrainian and local students. Specific investment in kindergartens and early childhood education may be useful too, as it would support parents to find jobs and work standard hours and encourage contact between Slovak and Ukrainian children, thus laying a foundation for longer-term positive perceptions.

5.7 Recommendations around employment and income

Pressure related to high inflation was one of the top five potential tensions identified. However, a range of other potential tensions associated with employment and income are possible (see Chapter 4.6). Broad-ranging recommendations for this stage include (1) higher-level macro-economic approaches; (2) further engagement with multilateral organisations for specific macroeconomic support on imports and exports; (3) approaches to ensure and communicate equity in the distribution of resources among the Ukrainian and local populations that are in need; and (4) boosting labour market participation and entrepreneurship. The recommendations below explore some of the more immediate approaches within these options in more detail.

Introduce phasing programmes, focusing on the most vulnerable: Phasing programmes involves adapting programmes to target support to more vulnerable people, particularly in longer-term conflict situations. Phasing relies on an underlying principle of 'nexus' programming to bring together humanitarian, development, and peace actors and link relief, rehabilitation, and development programming. Shortcuts associated with quick assistance—notably, status-based targeting with little analysis of needs (for example, providing the same assistance to all people granted TP)—are likely during the initial phases of a crisis. However, over time, it is possible to change the structure of support to ensure equitability and access. This might involve giving more support to those who are most vulnerable and need additional assistance (e.g., people who are disabled or unemployed), in line with national benefit systems. In the Slovak context, significant inequality already exists between segments of the population, and there is a perception that disadvantaged Slovaks receive insufficient support. Adopting needs-based targeting mechanisms may mitigate tensions around inequalities in the distribution process. Phasing programmes may help to manage potential tensions associated with community resentment of refugees receiving more support than poorer host populations.⁵²²

Introduce employment creation programmes with flexible work structures: Several efforts have been made to establish employment creation programmes to support peacebuilding and conflict mitigation initiatives.⁵²³ Such programmes could address areas in which labour shortfalls exist, such as healthcare. One way to do this is

⁵²² Analysed in more detail under Sections 3.2 and 4.6.

⁵²³ Cramer, Christopher, Goodhand, J., and Morris, R. 2016. [Rapid Evidence Assessment for Conflict Prevention](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

through work structures that could include work-from-home arrangements and flexible work hours so, for instance, mothers can pick up their children from school. It is also critical to tailor employment opportunities to the skills of the target populations.⁵²⁴ A programme in the Czech Republic, for example, integrated language courses into employment placement programmes.⁵²⁵ Another good practice could be taken from Turkey and Jordan, where employment creation programmes systematically included host and refugee communities, and host community beneficiaries were often 50 percent of the people supported.⁵²⁶ In 2021, Slovakia experienced issues with the labour market: Employers expressed difficulty in finding suitable candidates for open positions, but youth unemployment was relatively high.⁵²⁷ This context presents opportunities for Ukrainian refugees to be employed through flexible work structures, although it would be critical to take conflict mitigation measures to minimise risks associated with youth unemployment.

Engage with businesses and organisations to make the most of a more diverse workforce: For decades, business research has suggested that a diverse workforce boosts creativity and innovation, enhances problem-solving and understanding of consumers' diverse needs, leads to better decisions, can have reputational benefits, and can reduce prejudice.⁵²⁸ These benefits in turn can boost the economy.⁵²⁹ The Ukrainian refugee population, and particularly the professionals within it, can help catalyse such benefits for Slovak businesses. To take full advantage of the benefits of a more diverse workforce or candidate pool, trainings for businesses on working in diverse environments and on identifying and addressing potential bias in recruitment processes would be useful. These efforts might also include reducing challenges to skilled Ukrainians in accessing employment, such as through language training and workplace activities that engage both Ukrainian and Slovak staff. Finally, assuring smooth processes for recognising qualifications will help skilled Ukrainians to find appropriate positions and maximise their contributions to economic growth.

Introduce and publicise incentives to start businesses: A more favourable environment for starting businesses could reduce potential challenges associated with unemployment for Ukrainians and Slovaks alike and could also contribute to Slovakia's economic growth. Literature on best practices for supporting small business start-ups suggests funding innovation labs rather than investing directly in small businesses.⁵³⁰ Multilateral organisations' learnings suggest (1) profiling migrant and refugee skills, their complementarity to host community skills, and associated entrepreneurship possibilities; (2) clarifying and simplifying the regulatory environment for refugee businesses, including by removing restrictions on ownership of property, access to finance, and right to work; (3) strengthening synergies between education initiatives (e.g., vocational training) and entrepreneurship opportunities; and (4) developing digital 'bazaars' to support the export of products and

⁵²⁴ International Alert. 2019. [Consolidating peace through inclusive access to livelihoods in Nepal](#). Accessed 28 March 2023 and International Alert. n.d. [Practice note 2: Integrating conflict analysis into peace-conducive economic development programming](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

⁵²⁵ Deutsche Welle. 2023. [Well integrated: Ukrainian refugees in the Czech Republic](#)

⁵²⁶ Meraki Labs. 2022. [Gender Analysis of Programming in Jordan for Caritas](#).

⁵²⁷ Eurofound. 2021. [92% of Slovakian companies report difficulties in recruiting adequately skilled employees, amid high youth unemployment](#).

⁵²⁸ For example, Brodock, Kate, and Massam, G. 2016. [How and Why to Hire a Diverse Workforce: What You Need to Know](#); Rosenzweig, Philip. 1998. [Managing the New Global Workforce: Fostering Diversity, Forging Consistency](#); Ely, Robin J., and Thomas, D. A. 2020. [Getting Serious About Diversity: Enough Already with the Business Case](#); and Moon, Kuk-Kyong, and Christensen, R. K. 2020. [Realizing the performance benefits of workforce diversity in the US federal government: The moderating role of diversity climate](#).

⁵²⁹ For example, Brunow, Stephen, and Brenzel, H. 2012. [The effect of a culturally diverse labour supply on regional income in the EU](#); Shaban, Abdul, and Khan, S. 2022. [Cultural diversity, human capital, and regional economic growth in India](#).

⁵³⁰ For example, Newman, Arielle Badger, and Christensen, L. J. 2021. [Doing it Right, but Getting it Wrong](#); Bizri, Rima M. 2017. [Refugee Entrepreneurship: A Social Capital Perspective](#); Meister, Alexander Dominik, and Mauer, R. 2019. [Understanding refugee entrepreneurship incubation – an embeddedness perspective](#); Fong, Rowena, et al. 2007. [Pathways to self-sufficiency: Successful entrepreneurship for refugees](#).

exchange of information.⁵³¹ Business start-up programmes could also consider conflict sensitivity training for entrepreneurs and encourage joint Slovak-Ukrainian initiatives.⁵³²

Increase day care provision, possibly by employers: A high proportion of Ukrainian refugees are women, many with childcare responsibilities. In Slovakia, childcare challenges have been identified as a barrier to women's participation in the labour market⁵³³ that might be addressed through the provision of day care. Possibilities for programmes include (1) subsidising childcare for refugee children, (2) supporting the start-up of day care centres by Ukrainian refugees, providing dual benefits, and (3) encouraging businesses to provide day care.

5.8 Community, social, and political life

Potential tensions in community, social, and political life are diverse, as discussed in Chapter 4.7. Two tensions in this stage of the refugee journey were identified as having the potential to affect community cohesion most significantly: negative views of Ukrainians provoked by political discourses or parties and potential tensions between Ukrainians and host communities about responsibility for the war. The approaches described below, in addition to the cross-cutting measures suggested at the start of this chapter, could be particularly useful.

Organise community dialogues: Community dialogue programming refers to targeted efforts to bring different elements within a community together to exchange information, experiences, and stories around specific topics.⁵³⁴ Discussing topics such as fear of insecurity and war, Ukrainian history and culture, and the realities of Russia's invasion of Ukraine could build mutual understanding and mitigate emerging issues. Community dialogue programmes have been widely used including the Balkans, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia.⁵³⁵ Benefits include the capacity to scale up over time, ability to leverage local resources, ability to put forward practical small-scale solutions, cost-effectiveness, and relevance to local contexts. Challenges include the possibility of sabotage, lack of sustained funding, and reliance on volunteers.⁵³⁶ The literature indicates a slight but positive relationship between community dialogues and mitigation of local tensions.⁵³⁷

Use radio and TV programming to address tensions: Radio and TV dramas have been used as a peacebuilding tool for many decades and in many contexts. In general, there is evidence that they can affect attitudes and counteract negative messages.⁵³⁸ However, they do not significantly affect deep-seated beliefs, meaning they need to be aired alongside other efforts if such beliefs are at the root of tensions. Challenges associated with setting up radio and TV drama programmes relate to the willingness and interests of media owners; lack of audiences for peace stories compared to those on violence and conflict; resource constraints;

⁵³¹ European Commission. 2018. [Policy Guide on Entrepreneurship for Migrants and Refugees](#). Accessed 2 April 2023.

⁵³² International Alert. 2020. [Business and Peace: It Takes Two to Tango](#); International Alert. 2019. [Economic Development and Peace Practice Note Series](#).

⁵³³ See Section 2.6 of this report.

⁵³⁴ Cramer, Christopher, Goodhand, J., and Morris, R. 2016. [Rapid Evidence Assessment for Conflict Prevention](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

⁵³⁵ Bolton, Laura. 2020. [Lessons from conflict resolution interventions](#). Accessed 29 March 2023; Cramer, Christopher, Goodhand, J., and Morris, R. 2016. [Rapid Evidence Assessment for Conflict Prevention](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

⁵³⁶ Bolton, Laura. 2020. [Lessons from conflict resolution interventions](#). Accessed 29 March 2023; Cramer, Christopher, Goodhand, J., and Morris, R. 2016. [Rapid Evidence Assessment for Conflict Prevention](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

⁵³⁷ Bolton, Laura. 2020. [Lessons from conflict resolution interventions](#). Accessed 29 March 2023; Cramer, Christopher, Goodhand, J., and Morris, R. 2016. [Rapid Evidence Assessment for Conflict Prevention](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

⁵³⁸ Cramer, Christopher, Goodhand, J., and Morris, R. 2016. [Rapid Evidence Assessment for Conflict Prevention](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

legal and regulatory restrictions; and lack of media outreach.⁵³⁹ It could be possible for stabilisation funding to be used to overcome some of these hurdles. Radio and TV dramas, as well as mass campaigns, can take place in collaboration with governments, academic institutions, and civil society. This joint engagement can focus on reconciliation, specifically around historical tensions.

Work with media to limit the spread of incendiary messages: Quality journalism that does not contribute to the spread of incendiary discourses should be supported, including by providing journalists with evidence of what works and what does not to debunk misinformation, as this is not always obvious. For example, repeating ‘fake news’ brings audiences’ attention to it again and can therefore contribute to its being believed.⁵⁴⁰ Countering disinformation requires strong collaboration between multiple actors and actions including mapping and tracking disinformation actors, providing intelligence reports, and conducting information literacy activities. It is possible to build or leverage existing coalitions among the media, civil society, and government entities. Such coalitions would allow access to disinformation tracking mechanisms and promote information sharing between types of actors. Tracking mechanisms include specific mapping and analysis by civil society, academia, and government actors that influence policy.

Review school curricula, including the teaching of history and digital literacy: Various organisations have recognised the role of history education in helping students to better understand the past, approach information critically, and reduce the risks of prejudice and discrimination.⁵⁴¹ Participants in the research workshops discussed the need for longer-term engagement of young people in critical analysis, including through mainstream education curricula, to proactively prevent polarisation, misinformation, and prejudice.⁵⁴² Aside from curriculum content itself, history (and/or social sciences) education can also be effective in improving critical thinking and source analysis. A 2021 book published by the OECD that examined digital literacy among young people found that only 54 percent of students reported receiving training at school on identifying bias in information sources.⁵⁴³ Yet the European Commission has recognised the role that education, particularly in source literacy, can play in combatting misinformation.⁵⁴⁴

Establish an infrastructure to support refugee dialogue with local and national governments: A significant amount of literature is devoted to infrastructures for peace; these can take place in a bottom-up fashion (through the community dialogues discussed above) or top-down mechanisms (those in which formal structures for discussion and engagement are built between a host country government and a displaced community, often involving local and national institutions). Such infrastructure could allow for clearer and more open discussion between members of disadvantaged local groups, such as the Roma, rural communities, and refugees. The advantages of a top-down approach are that a government agency has a clear mandate for conflict resolution, accountability mechanisms can be established, and media coverage and strategic communications can take

⁵³⁹ Cramer, Christopher, Goodhand, J., and Morris, R. 2016. [Rapid Evidence Assessment for Conflict Prevention](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

⁵⁴⁰ Pennycook, Gordon, Cannon, T. D., and Rand, D. G. 2018. [Prior exposure increases perceived accuracy of fake news](#). *Journal of Experimental Psychology*.

⁵⁴¹ UNESCO. 2020. [A future we can all live with: how education can address and eradicate racism](#) and Brookings Institute. 2022. [Learning to live together: how education can help fight systemic racism](#).

⁵⁴² Bratislava research workshop, 8 March 2023.

⁵⁴³ OECD. 2021. [Twenty-first century readers: developing literacy skills in a digital world](#).

⁵⁴⁴ European Commission. 2022. [Commission steps up action to tackle disinformation and promote digital literacy among young people](#).

place around established peacebuilding efforts. The disadvantages include reliance on the willingness of the national government and the possibility that the process could become excessively bureaucratic.⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴⁵ Cramer, Christopher, Goodhand, J., and Morris, R. 2016. [Evidence Synthesis: What interventions have been effective in preventing or mitigating armed violence in developing and middle-income countries?](#) London: Department for International Development. Accessed 29 March 2023.

Annex 1. Acronyms and abbreviations

Acronym	Meaning
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CHATGPT	Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DMDS	Disinformation, Misinformation, and Dangerous Speech
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
INGO	International Non-governmental Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and More
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RRP	Regional Refugee Response Plan
TCN	Third-Country National
TP	Temporary Protection
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USD	United States Dollar
V4	Visegrád Group

Annex 2. Key statistics

The table below summarises Slovakia's key economic, political, and demographic factors and the numbers and characteristics of refugees hosted by Slovakia.

Type	Characteristic	Slovakia statistics
Economic factors	GDP/per capita purchasing power parity in USD for 2021 in thousands	33.0 ⁵⁴⁶
	Harmonized index of consumer prices in January 2023	15.1% ⁵⁴⁷
	Official development assistance eligible?	No ⁵⁴⁸
	Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) funding requested for 2022 (USD million)	87.5 ⁵⁴⁹
	RRP funding requested for 2023 (USD million)	80.1 ⁵⁵⁰
Political factors	Political party in power	Coalition: Ordinary People and Independent Personalities, We Are Family, and For the People ⁵⁵¹
	Next presidential election	2024 ⁵⁵²
	Next parliamentary election	2023 ⁵⁵³
	Next local election	2026 ⁵⁵⁴
Country demography	Total population (millions)	5.5 ⁵⁵⁵
	Poverty rates	14.8% ⁵⁵⁶
	Unemployment rate in December 2022	5.8% ⁵⁵⁷
	Size of Russian minority or citizens living in country before 2022	3,245 (2021) ⁵⁵⁸
	Size of Ukrainian minority/Ukrainians living in country before 2022	9,451 (2021) ⁵⁵⁹
	Refugees from Ukraine recorded in country as of March 2023 (UNHCR)	113,024 ⁵⁶¹

⁵⁴⁶ The World Bank. 2021. [GDP per capita, PPP \(current international \\$\)](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁵⁴⁷ Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. 2023. [Harmonized indices of consumer prices in January 2023](#). Accessed 13 April 2023.

⁵⁴⁸ OECD. [DAC List of ODA Recipients | Effective for reporting on 2022 and 2023 flows](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁵⁴⁹ UNHCR. 2022. [Ukraine Situation: Recalibration - Regional Refugee Response Plan \(March - December 2022\)](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁵⁵⁰ UNHCR. 2023. [Ukraine Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan \(January-December 2023\)](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁵⁵¹ Dębiec, Krzysztof, Centre of Eastern Studies. 2022. [Slovakia: the Matovič government with an agenda for hard times](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁵⁵² Muller, Robert, and Hovet, J. Reuters. [Slovak parliament dumps centre-right cabinet, early election an option](#). 2022. Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁵⁵³ Politico 2023. [Slovakia – National parliament voting intention](#). Accessed 12 April 2023.

⁵⁵⁴ volby.statistics.sk. Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, Elections and Referenda. [The elections to the bodies of communal self-government 2022 – 2026](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁵⁵⁵ The World Bank. 2021. [Population, total - European Union](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁵⁵⁶ The World Bank. 2020. [Multidimensional poverty headcount ratio \(% of total population\) – European Union](#). Accessed 30 March 2023. Data are compiled from official government sources or are computed by World Bank staff using national (i.e., country-specific) poverty lines.

⁵⁵⁷ Eurostat | Euroindicators. 2023. [December 2022 Euro area unemployment at 6.6%, EU at 6.1%](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁵⁵⁸ Population statistics of Eastern Europe & former USSR, [Slovakia](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁵⁵⁹ Population statistics of Eastern Europe & former USSR, [Slovakia](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁵⁶¹ UNHCR 2023. [Refugees from Ukraine recorded across Europe](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

Number of refugees hosted ⁵⁶⁰	Ukrainian refugees hosted as a percentage of total population	2% ⁵⁶²
	Total refugees hosted in 2022	84,885 ⁵⁶³
	Total refugees hosted in 2021	1,046 ⁵⁶⁴
	Total refugees hosted in 2020	1,006 ⁵⁶⁵
	Total refugees hosted in 2019	965 ⁵⁶⁶
Ukrainian refugee demographics	Percentage of women and children	84% ⁵⁶⁷
	Percentage refugee households with at least one member with disability	12% ⁵⁶⁸
	Percentage refugee households with at least one elderly member	11% ⁵⁶⁹
Support received by Ukrainian refugees	Euros received upon arrival/registration	One-time payment of €150 (£132, 165 USD) per person, with a maximum of €400 (£352, 441 USD) per family ⁵⁷⁰
	Total euros received by adult/month	€80 (£70,50, 88 USD) for an adult. The maximum amount of support for one household is limited to €380 (£334, 419 USD) (per month). ⁵⁷¹ €508 (£447, 560 USD) to the carer of a person with a disability; and €300 (£264, 330.7 USD) directly to the person with specific needs (per month). ⁵⁷²
	Total euros received by child/month	€60 (£53, 66 USD) for a child aged 3–18, and €160 (£141, 176 USD) for a child under 3 years of age ⁵⁷³
	Total euros received by hosts (OECD data)	€7 (£6, 7.7 USD) per person per night (€3.50 (£3, 3.8 USD) for minors under the age of 15) ⁵⁷⁴
Access to services	Employment rate	32,000 individuals (November 2022) ⁵⁷⁵
	Total number of Ukrainian children in country enrolled in school	9,000 ⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁶⁰ UNHCR. 2022. [Refugee Data Finder](#). Accessed 17 March 2023.

⁵⁶² Authors' calculations, taking the figures as follows: Slovak population: 5,466,958 as of 12 April 2023; Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia: 113,024 as of 9 April 2023; figures sourced as in the table above,

⁵⁶³ UNHCR. 2022. [Refugee Data Finder](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁵⁶⁴ UNHCR. 2022. [Refugee Data Finder](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁵⁶⁵ UNHCR. 2022. [Refugee Data Finder](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁵⁶⁶ UNHCR. 2022. [Refugee Data Finder](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁵⁶⁷ UNHCR. Operational data portal, Refugee situation. 2022. [Slovakia: Factsheet September 2022](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁵⁶⁸ UNHCR. Operational data portal, Refugee situation. 2022. [Ukraine Situation: Slovakia - Protection Profiling and Monitoring Factsheet - October 2022](#). Accessed 30 March 2023

⁵⁶⁹ UNHCR. Operational data portal, Refugee situation. 2022. [Ukraine Situation: Slovakia - Protection Profiling and Monitoring Factsheet - October 2022](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁵⁷⁰ UNHCR Help Slovakia. [Cash Assistance](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁵⁷¹ Ministerstvo práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny Slovenskej Republiky. 2022. [Medzinárodná finančná pomoc odídencom z Ukrajiny pomôže aj Slovensku](#). Accessed 30 March 2023

⁵⁷² IOM. UN MIGRATION Slovensko. 2023. [Assistance to people fleeing the war in Ukraine: IOM Slovakia](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁵⁷³ European Commission. 2022. [Slovakia: Humanitarian organizations take over financial support system for those fleeing Ukraine](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁵⁷⁴ OECD Library. 2022. [Rights and Support for Ukrainian Refugees in Receiving Countries](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁵⁷⁵ Trend.sk. 2022. [Cudzincov pracujúcich na Slovensku pribudlo, najpočetnejšou skupinou sú Ukrajinci](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁵⁷⁶ UNICEF. 2022. [Europe and Central Asia Region \(ECAR\) Ukraine Refugee Response in Neighboring Countries Humanitarian Situation Report No. 18 – 2022](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

Housing used by refugees	Percent hosted in large cities	71% of refugees reside in the largest cities (Košice, Prešov, Bratislava), with 43% in Košice ⁵⁷⁷
	Percent hosted by local family (in date)	37% (October 2022) ⁵⁷⁸
	Percent rental (paid) accommodation	20% (October 2022) ⁵⁷⁹
	Percent hosted in refugee centres	17% (October 2022) ⁵⁸⁰
Host population attitude polling	Percent of host population believing that Russia is not responsible for starting the war (it's NATO/Ukraine)	46% ⁵⁸¹
	Percent of host population positive toward Ukrainian refugees (spring 2022)	64% ⁵⁸²
	Percent of host population positive toward Ukrainian refugees (in winter 2022)	42% (findings of the two studies not comparable due to methodological differences) ⁵⁸³

⁵⁷⁷ IOM. UN MIGRATION SLOVAKIA. [IOM Slovakia: Assistance to people fleeing the war in Ukraine. Reports: IOM report #17. 6/12/2022](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁵⁷⁸ UNHCR. 2022. [Slovakia Protection Profiling and Monitoring: Profiles, Needs & Intentions of Refugees from Ukraine \(October 2022\)](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁵⁷⁹ UNHCR. 2022. [Slovakia Protection Profiling and Monitoring: Profiles, Needs & Intentions of Refugees from Ukraine \(October 2022\)](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁵⁸⁰ UNHCR. 2022. [Slovakia Protection Profiling and Monitoring: Profiles, Needs & Intentions of Refugees from Ukraine \(October 2022\)](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁵⁸¹ GLOBSEC. 2022. Szicherle, Patrik, and Kazaz, J., Centre for Democracy & Resilience. [Perception of Ukrainian refugees in the V4](#). Accessed 1 March 2023.

⁵⁸² European Commission. 2022. [Slovakia: Public opinion in favour of supporting those arriving from Ukraine](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

⁵⁸³ GLOBSEC. 2022. Szicherle, Patrik, and Kazaz, J., Centre for Democracy & Resilience. [Perception of Ukrainian refugees in the V4](#). Accessed 1 March 2023.

Annex 3. Statistics, surveys, and research reports

The table below lists sources for up-to-date statistics and deeper dives into specific subject matter areas.

Subject area	Source	Type ⁵⁸⁴	Language	Notes
Statistics				
Number of Ukrainian refugees	UNHCR. 2023. Operational Data Portal	MLR	ENG	
	UNHCR. 2022. Ukraine situation: Regional protection profiling and monitoring factsheet	MLR	ENG	Source type is multilateral, but the report's original data source is aggregated data from national governments.
Demographics of Ukrainians under TP	UNHCR. 2022. Displacement patterns, protection risks and needs of refugees from Ukraine, Regional protection analysis	MLR	ENG	
	IOM. 2022. Ukraine Returns Report October 2022	MLR	ENG	
	IOM. 2022. Ukraine Internal Displacement Report October 2022	MLR	ENG	
Support for Ukrainians under TP	EU Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2022. Online survey on persons displaced from Ukraine	MLR	ENG	
	OECD. 2022. Rights and support for Ukrainian refugees in receiving countries	MLR	ENG	
	EU Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2022. Online survey on persons displaced from Ukraine	MLR	ENG	
Access to social services	Mareena and Human Rights League. Ukraineslovakia.sk. 2023. Healthcare. How the public health insurance and doctors work in Slovakia.	NGO	ENG	
Accommodation for Ukrainians under TP	Ministerstvo vnútra Slovenskej republiky. 2023. Informácie k príspevku za ubytovanie cudzinca podľa zákona o azyle	NGO	SK	Information on foreigner's accommodation allowance according to the Asylum Act.
	ÚPSVaR. 2023. Information on temporary refuge, as well as employment and current humanitarian aid.	NGO	ENG/SK	

⁵⁸⁴ AR = Academic research; DR = Donor report; ENG = English; MLR = Multilateral report; MR = Media report; NG = National government; NGO = NGO report; PD = Polling data; SK = Slovak; SM = Social media.

Subject area	Source	Type ⁵⁸⁴	Language	Notes
	Mareena and Human Rights League, Ukraineslovakia.sk. 2023. Temporary refuge. Get protection, work permit and social security.	NGO	ENG	
Public attitude polling	Łukasz Lewkowicz, Institute of Central Europe. 2022. Slovakia: an unstable public support for Ukraine and the West	MLR	ENG	
Donor support	UNHCR and UNICEF. 2023. UNHCR & UNICEF extend the possibility for vulnerable refugees from Ukraine to register for one-time winter cash assistance	MLR	ENG	
	UNHCR Help Slovakia. 2023. Cash Assistance	MLR	ENG	
Deeper dives				
	Direct Relief. 2022. Supporting Mental Health as Ukrainian Refugees Navigate Life in Slovakia	NGO	ENG	
Ukrainian refugees' needs; analyses of vulnerabilities	UNHCR. 2023. Ukraine Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan - Slovakia Chapter (January-December 2023)	MLR	ENG	
	UNHCR. 2022. Ensuring the protection of persons with disabilities fleeing from Ukraine	MLR	ENG	Closer analysis of barriers faced by people with disabilities fleeing the war.
	UNHCR. 2022. Displacement patterns, protection risks and needs of refugees from Ukraine. Regional protection analysis	MLR	ENG	
Examples of discrimination	Amnesty International 2022/23. Slovakia, Amnesty International Report 2022/23	NGO	ENG	
Pressures on social services	European Investment Bank. 2022. How bad is the Ukraine war for the European recovery?	MLR	ENG	Source type is multilateral, but the report's original data source uses aggregated data from national governments and other NGOs.
	European Commission. 2022. Slovakia: Challenges in the education of refugee children from Ukraine	MLR	ENG	
Profile of host communities	GLOBSEC. 2022. GLOBSEC 2022 Trends Slovakia	NGO	ENG	
Public attitudes	European Union. 2022. EP Autumn 2022 Survey: Parlemeter	MLR	ENG	
	GLOBSEC. 2023. Despite challenges, V4 societies	NGO	ENG	

Subject area	Source	Type ⁵⁸⁴	Language	Notes
	generally remain supportive of Ukrainian refugees, with more negative attitudes apparent in Slovakia			
	GLOBSEC. 2023. Ukrainian refugees in Visegrad countries: Societal Attitudes and Challenges of Accommodating People Fleeing the War.	NGO	ENG	
	GLOBSEC. 2022. Perception of Ukrainian refugees in the V4: Support with some reservations	NGO	ENG	
	Ukrainian Refugees: Situation in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania	NGO	ENG	
Tensions between host and refugee communities	Katarína Klingová, GLOBSEC. 2022. War in Ukraine: A wake-up call for Slovaks	NGO	ENG	
	Hrabovska Francelova, Nina., Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, Reporting Democracy. 2022. From vaccination to War: Slovak disinformation outlets quick to shift the conversation	MLR	ENG	
Disinformation discourses	Ukraine World & Adapt Institute. 2023. Disinformation and Propaganda about the Ukrainian Far-Right in Slovakia and Ukraine: Shaping the Narrative	NGO	ENG	
	International Republican Institute. 2023. Hostile Narrative Brief: War in Ukraine. A Year of Aggression.	NGO	ENG	
Good practice examples	Bunse, Simone. 2021. Social media: A tool for peace or conflict?	NGO/AR	ENG	Explains the potential of social media and how it can be used to better comprehend conflict dynamics and fight extremism.
	Repell, Lisa, and Shein, E., IFES. 2019. Disinformation Campaigns and Hate Speech: Exploring the Relationship and Programming Interventions	NGO	ENG	Documentation of good practice.
	Cramer, Christopher, Goodhand, J., and Morris, R. 2016. Evidence Synthesis: What interventions have been effective in preventing or mitigating armed violence in developing and middle-income countries? London:	NGO/AR	ENG	

Subject area	Source	Type ⁵⁸⁴	Language	Notes
	Department for International Development.			
	Duffy, Andrew and Ling, R. 2020. The Gift of News: Phatic News Sharing on Social Media for Social Cohesion . Journalism Studies.	AR	ENG	Describes how social media works in the context of social cohesion.
	Wodzicki, Michael, Pichola, I., and Patorka, J. Monitor Deloitte. 2022. Refugees from Ukraine in Poland Challenges and potential for integration	Private sector report	ENG	
	International Alert. 2020. Model on integrating conflict sensitivity and social stability into services provision	NGO	ENG	



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