

Social Inclusion of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia

Leveraging national and
EU-level advocacy efforts
to call for a paradigm shift

SMART UA – Scaling the successful social inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia through an innovative multi-stakeholder cooperation

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SMART UA – Scaling the successful social inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia through an innovative multi-stakeholder cooperation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 SMART UA: Objectives and Approach
- 1.2 Housing and Employment as Pillars of Integration
- 1.3 Purpose of the Advocacy Report
- 1.4 Key Findings at a Glance

2. CONTEXT AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

- 2.1 From Emergency Protection to Longer-Term Integration
- 2.2 EU and National Policy Frameworks
- 2.3 From Policy Commitments to Implementation: The Gaps Addressed by SMART UA

3. ADVOCACY STRATEGY AND METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 Advocacy Objectives and Target Audiences
- 3.2 Stakeholder Mapping and Engagement
- 3.3 Research and Evidence Base
- 3.4 Exchange and Relevant Meetings

4. CROSS-COUNTRY FINDINGS

- 4.1 Cross-Country Findings on Housing
- 4.2 Cross-Country Findings on Employment

5. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 Conclusions
- 5.2 Recommendations

ANNEX: Overview of Advocacy, Stakeholder Engagement and Exchange Activities

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SMART UA – Scaling the successful social inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia through an innovative multi-stakeholder cooperation is an EU-funded project under the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) Social Innovation initiative, coordinated by JRS Europe and implemented with several partners. The project focused on two closely interconnected dimensions of longer-term integration: **access to adequate housing and sustainable employment**.

Implemented in three different national contexts, SMART UA combines research, stakeholder mapping, capacity building, pilot initiatives, and advocacy. Its multi-stakeholder approach brings together civil society organisations, public and local authorities, academia, service providers, labour-market actors and Ukrainian refugees. By connecting evidence with practical implementation and stakeholder dialogue, the project sought not only to identify barriers to inclusion, but also to highlight approaches that can contribute to more sustainable and coordinated responses.

The evidence generated through SMART UA showed that **formal access to housing and employment does not in itself guarantee sustainable integration**. Across the three countries, housing barriers include high rental costs, limited affordable and public housing, dependence on private rental markets, administrative obstacles and discrimination. In employment, recurring challenges include language barriers, skills mismatch, difficulties with qualification recognition, and practical obstacles such as childcare and transport.

A central finding is that **housing and employment are mutually reinforcing**. Stable income facilitates access to independent housing, while secure housing supports employment, training, and language learning. Effective responses therefore need to go beyond financial assistance or job placement alone and, where necessary, combine them with personalised social, administrative, language and employment support.

SMART UA also demonstrated the importance of **multi-stakeholder cooperation**. Public authorities, municipalities, civil society, employers, housing actors, researchers and refugee communities bring complementary capacities to address barriers that no single actor can resolve alone. Promising practices, however, require stable financing, institutional cooperation, and public-sector engagement if they are to become sustainable and scalable.

SMART UA – Scaling the successful social inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia through an innovative multi-stakeholder cooperation

As temporary protection has been extended until **March 2028**, the coming period should be used to move decisively from emergency responses towards **predictable, longer-term pathways to protection and inclusion**. SMART UA therefore recommends that EU institutions support and coordinate a people-centered and rights-based transition beyond temporary protection; national authorities develop clear transition strategies and reinforce access to affordable and stable housing; local authorities strengthen collaboration and coordination between housing, employment and other social services; and that civil society keeps complementing the role of the state by providing support to people and documenting good and bad practices.

1.INTRODUCTION:

1.1 SMART UA project: objectives and approach

Ukraine was invaded by Russia in February 2022, which has been leading since then to the continuous displacement of around 10 million people¹, constituting the largest humanitarian crisis in Europe since the Second World War. Across the European Union (EU), people have sought safety on EU's territory under the Temporary Protection framework, while Member States, local authorities, civil society and faith-based organisations alongside other actors have developed a wide range of responses to address immediate protection needs. As the displacement situation has evolved, the focus of support must now be shifted from emergency assistance towards sustainable integration and long-term inclusion of people.

Effective access to adequate housing and employment is central to this transition². Adequate stable housing provides the foundation from which people can access education, healthcare, employment and community life, while sustainable employment contributes not only to economic independence but also to social participation and longer-term stability.

¹ <https://unric.org/en/ukraine-over-6-million-refugees-spread-across-europe/>

² Jansen-van Vuuren, J.; Rijal, H.; Bobbette, N.; Lysaght, R.; Krupa, T.; Aguilar, D. Exploring the Connection between Social Housing and Employment: A Scoping Review. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 2024, 21, 1217.

SMART UA – Scaling the successful social inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia through an innovative multi-stakeholder cooperation

It is against this background that the *SMART UA – Scaling the successful social inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia through an innovative multi-stakeholder cooperation*³ project was developed. Co-funded by the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and coordinated by Jesuit Refugee Service Europe (JRS Europe), the project brings together partners from Hungary, Romania and Slovakia to strengthen the social and economic inclusion of Ukrainian refugees and, ultimately, empowering them and supporting them in seeking a safe life, through research, capacity building, stakeholder cooperation and pilot initiatives.

The project focused particularly on improving access to housing and employment for Ukrainian beneficiaries of temporary protection, while recognising that these areas are closely interconnected between them but also with other dimensions of integration. It combined the expertise of faith-based and civil society organisations, public institutions, researchers, academic partners and other stakeholders. Its approach is therefore not limited to identifying the challenges faced by Ukrainian refugees but also seeks to understand how existing support systems operate, identify promising responses and important challenges and strengthen cooperation between the actors involved.

Evidence through national research in the three participating countries has been generated, including institutional and stakeholder mapping, analyses of housing and labour markets, collection of various best practices, needs assessments and skills-related work. This evidence has been complemented by national workshops, stakeholder consultations, capacity-building activities and transnational exchanges. The resulting process has enabled partners to compare experiences across different national contexts and to identify with potential for wider adaptation and replication.

The **present SMART UA Advocacy Report** builds on this body of evidence and on the dialogue established throughout the project. Its aim is not to reproduce the national research reports, which include in depth details and evidence- as well as research-based analysis. Rather, it **brings their findings together from a transnational perspective, identifies common challenges and relevant**

³ <https://jrseurope.org/en/smart-ua-4/>

SMART UA – Scaling the successful social inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia through an innovative multi-stakeholder cooperation

differences between the three countries, and translates the evidence and stakeholder experience into policy and practice recommendations.

1.2 Housing and employment as pillars of integration

Housing⁴ is considered to be a basic human right, a social determinant of health, and a requirement for overall well-being. **As such, housing constitutes a key foundation of the integration process.** Access to affordable and stable accommodation is closely connected to people's ability to establish themselves in a new community, access stable employment and education, and make use of health and social services. Yet housing markets across Europe and beyond are facing structural pressures⁵, including limited availability of affordable housing and rising housing costs. These pressures affect both displaced people and host communities and can make the transition from emergency accommodation to independent housing particularly difficult. Through a policy brief in 2024, UNHCR⁶ highlighted that, in the context of the Ukraine response, support has in many cases continued to rely on shorter-term accommodation arrangements rather than sufficiently developed pathways towards autonomous housing embedded in broader socio-economic inclusion strategies. The UN agency also stresses that access to housing should be addressed through multi-stakeholder approaches involving public authorities, civil society, housing providers and other relevant actors. Today, 2 years after the publication of the brief and 4 years following the outbreak of the war, SMART UA found out that those observations and conclusions are, regrettably, still relevant.

The experience of displaced people from Ukraine illustrates the importance of considering housing as more than merely a question of accommodation capacity. Access to the private rental market may be constrained by affordability, requirements for deposits or proof of income, documentation and administrative procedures, limited knowledge of local systems and, in some circumstances, discrimination or reluctance among landlords. Access to social housing can be similarly restricted by limited availability, eligibility criteria and waiting times. The

⁴ Rolfe, S.; Garnham, L.; Godwin, J.; Anderson, I.; Seaman, P.; Donaldson, C. Housing as a social determinant of health and wellbeing: Developing an empirically informed realist theoretical framework. *BMC Public Health* 2020, 20, 1138

⁵ https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2026/05/wcr_2026_chapter_9.pdf

⁶ <https://www.unhcr.org/europe/sites/europe/files/2024-08/2024-Policy-brief-Promoting-Refugee-Integration-Inclusion-Empowering-Municipalities-Across-%20Europe.pdf>

European Migration Network's analysis of access to autonomous housing in the context of international protection⁷ underlines the **importance of moving beyond reception arrangements towards sustainable housing solutions that enable people to live independently**. Housing is also closely linked to economic inclusion. UNHCR identifies regular employment and sufficient income as important factors enabling refugees to secure and maintain accommodation on the private rental market, while noting that housing challenges cannot be addressed separately from wider socio-economic inclusion. This interdependence is particularly relevant for people displaced from Ukraine, many of whom have had to navigate housing and employment systems simultaneously while living with uncertainty about the duration of their stay, due to the very nature of Temporary Protection.

Employment is equally central on the pathway of integration. Access to work provides income and economic independence, but its significance extends beyond financial self-sufficiency. Employment can support social participation, the development of professional and social networks, the use and acquisition of skills and of course the adequate provision of one's self and their family members. For host societies, effective labour-market integration also represents an opportunity⁸ to make use of the considerable human capital brought by people displaced from Ukraine.

Evidence indicates that Ukrainian refugees have entered host-country labour markets relatively rapidly compared with many other refugee populations. OECD analysis shows that labour-market outcomes for displaced Ukrainians improved in most OECD countries⁹ between 2022 and 2024, although outcomes continue to vary substantially between countries. The OECD attributes part of this progress to measures facilitating labour-market access, including employment services, vocational training and simplified work authorisations¹⁰. The European Migration Network and OECD have similarly documented the rapid labour-market entry of beneficiaries of temporary protection, while identifying continuing challenges

⁷ https://emn.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/EMN_INFORM_Autonomous-Housing.pdf

⁸ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/migrant-labour-key-boosting-employment-eu-2025-10-14_en

⁹ <https://www.oecd.org/en/about/members-partners.html>

¹⁰ https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/international-migration-outlook-2025_ae26c893-en/full-report/recent-developments-in-international-migration-movements-and-labour-market-inclusion-of-immigrants_203de29e.html

related to skills and job mismatches, qualification recognition, language barriers and uncertainty concerning the duration of stay¹¹.

Importantly, **employment rates alone do not provide a complete picture of labour-market integration**. OECD research has found that much of the early employment uptake among Ukrainian refugees was concentrated in low-skilled occupations, resulting in significant skills mismatches¹². This is particularly relevant given the educational and professional profile of many people displaced from Ukraine. OECD analysis indicates that approximately two-thirds of adults displaced from Ukraine had completed tertiary education, with more than 40% of respondents holding a master's degree or higher¹³. The challenge is therefore not simply to increase labour-market participation and therefore official data in that sense, but to facilitate **sustainable, appropriately remunerated and skills-appropriate employment** that enables people to use their existing qualifications and experience.

A further characteristic of both housing and employment integration is their **interdependence**. ***Stable employment and sufficient income can increase people's ability to access independent housing, while secure housing can support job retention, access to employment opportunities and participation in training or language learning.*** Addressing these areas separately can therefore limit the effectiveness of integration measures. UNHCR's analysis of refugee integration¹⁴ emphasises the importance of combining housing interventions with broader socio-economic inclusion measures and strengthening cooperation between the different actors responsible for integration at local level. This interdependence also applies to the wider support ecosystem. Language learning, childcare, recognition of qualifications, transport, access to information, social protection and individual counselling can all influence people's ability to access and retain employment and housing. The evidence collected at European level suggests that effective responses increasingly require

¹¹ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/new-emn-oecd-inform-explores-labour-market-integration-beneficiaries-temporary-protection-ukraine-2024-05-21_en

¹² https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/what-we-know-about-the-skills-and-early-labour-market-outcomes-of-refugees-from-ukraine_c7e694aa-en.html

¹³ https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/ukraine-s-strategic-response-to-the-displacement-crisis_9b773da4-en/full-report/ukrainian-migration-and-displacement-crisis-in-numbers_84aa775c.html

¹⁴ See above under 3

SMART UA – Scaling the successful social inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia through an innovative multi-stakeholder cooperation

integrated and coordinated comprehensive support, rather than isolated interventions addressing individual barriers.

The European Union has extended temporary protection until March 2028¹⁵ while simultaneously Member States should be preparing for a coordinated transition towards other residence statuses and longer-term solutions¹⁶. This evolving context increases the importance of **using the remaining period of temporary protection to strengthen sustainable pathways to housing, employment and wider social inclusion**.

Against this broader European background, the SMART UA project conducted a more focused examination of how these challenges play out in **Hungary, Romania and Slovakia**. The following chapters therefore move from the wider European context to the evidence generated through the three national pilot projects, with particular attention to the conditions that can enable promising housing and employment practices to become more sustainable and transferable.

1.3 Purpose of the Advocacy Report

The purpose of this report is to translate the evidence and experience generated through SMART UA into actionable concrete messages for policy and practice.

The report has three complementary objectives:

1. **To synthesize the findings** emerging from the three national contexts and **identify the key challenges** affecting access to housing and employment for Ukrainian refugees;
2. **To document the project's advocacy and stakeholder engagement approach**, including the role of national and transnational meetings in connecting research evidence with practical experience as well as to refer to the target audience of the above meetings and the rest of the policy initiatives taken by the partners; and

¹⁵ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec_impl/2026/1912/oj/eng

¹⁶ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ%3AC_202505129

SMART UA – Scaling the successful social inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia through an innovative multi-stakeholder cooperation

- 3. To formulate evidence-based policy recommendations** for relevant actors at European, national and local levels, as well as for civil society organisations and other stakeholders involved in supporting refugee inclusion.

The report therefore moves **from evidence to action**. It considers not only what the SMART UA research has identified as a challenge, but also what responses have emerged, what conditions have enabled promising approaches to work, and what changes are required to make effective solutions more sustainable and transferable.

1.4 Key findings at a glance

The evidence generated through SMART UA points to several overarching conclusions.

- 1. All barriers to housing and access to labour market reinforce each other** and cannot be seen or addressed in a separate way; they are inextricably linked to each other.
- 2. Housing insecurity remains a structural challenge.** Across the three countries, refugees face combinations of high rental costs, limited availability of affordable accommodation, administrative barriers, discrimination and uncertainty about longer-term support. Existing assistance often remains short-term or dependent on individual projects, while sustainable housing pathways are not always sufficiently developed.
- 3. Employment integration is shaped by structural barriers as much as by individual circumstances.** Language barriers, difficulties in recognising qualifications, childcare and care responsibilities, transportation, administrative complexity and insecure employment can prevent refugees from fully using their skills and accessing stable employment.
- 4. Personalised and tailored support to individuals is key.** The project has identified approaches combining housing assistance with social work, legal guidance, language support, employment services, landlord mediation or other forms of individualised support. Similarly, employment initiatives

SMART UA – Scaling the successful social inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia through an innovative multi-stakeholder cooperation

involving counselling, skills assessment, employer partnerships and targeted support demonstrate the value of integrated tailored responses.

- 5. Multi-stakeholder cooperation is essential yet remains uneven across countries.** The three national contexts demonstrated and reaffirmed the value of cooperation between public institutions, municipalities, civil society, churches, employers and other actors. At the same time, coordination is frequently fragmented or dependent on individual projects and relationships. Strengthening institutional cooperation is therefore a central condition for moving from isolated good practices towards sustainable systems.
- 6. The transition from emergency response to longer-term integration depends on a much-needed policy shift that must happen now.** The experience of SMART UA suggests that the remaining period of temporary protection until March 2028 should be used not only to address immediate needs, but also to strengthen sustainable housing and employment pathways and the systems that support them. At the same time, all three countries should consider developing policies to transit from the EU level Temporary Protection Directive scheme to national protection systems.

2.CONTEXT AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

2.1 From emergency protection of Ukrainians to longer-term integration

The arrival of millions of people displaced from Ukraine following Russia's full-scale invasion at the very beginning of 2022 fueled an immediate European response. In March 2022, the European Union made use of the existing legal framework and activated the Temporary Protection Directive for the first time. Subsequently, collective protection and immediate access to a range of rights was provided, including residence, social assistance, healthcare, education and access to employment. The mechanism was designed to provide rapid protection while alleviating pressure on national asylum systems.

Over time, the nature of displacement has evolved for many. Numerous displaced people from Ukraine have now spent several years in their host countries, establishing households, entering education and employment, developing social networks and accessing local services. Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Europe has

SMART UA – Scaling the successful social inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia through an innovative multi-stakeholder cooperation

encountered this reality and its impact on the communities, as the organisation and its network have been accompanying Ukrainians since day 1 in this difficult journey.

In July 2026, the Council extended temporary protection for a further year, until **4 March 2028**. This will mark 6 years since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine and 6 years since the activation of the Temporary Protection scheme. As of 31 May 2026, approximately 4.38 million people displaced from Ukraine were under temporary protection in the EU. The extension is welcome, as beneficiaries will keep receiving protection under the said scheme. However, the need for long-term integration is becoming more acute, as years pass. The transition to national systems of protection for Ukrainians must happen now. The European Commission¹⁷ has committed since 2024 to prioritise a common way forward for Ukrainians, by ‘respecting their needs’. In September 2025, the Council of the EU¹⁸ adopted a recommendation establishing a coordinated approach towards the gradual transition of eligible displaced Ukrainians to other residence statuses, including statuses related to employment, education, training or family circumstances. Based on the collective experience of JRS Europe, only a few member states are advancing in this process, like Italy and Poland. The majority of the Member States though, including the ones participating in the project, to our knowledge have not put in place any concrete plan for transition to national protection schemes. Our empirical evidence showed that, **following the uncertainty that is occurring, not only Temporary Protection beneficiaries are led to vulnerability but also landlords face uncertainty that in turn affects the Ukrainian community**, as the absence of stability cannot lead in most of the times neither to considering offering stable housing nor formal long-term work contracts.

2.2 EU and national policy frameworks

The European Union's approach to integration is based on a whole-of-society and multi-level, ‘multi-stakeholder’ approach. While Member States retain primary responsibility for developing and implementing integration policies, the

¹⁷ <https://www.politico.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/15/October-2024-EUCO-Migration-letter.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/09/16/protection-of-displaced-ukrainians-council-adopts-recommendation-about-transition-out-of-temporary-protection>

EU supports coordination, funding, knowledge exchange and common policy objectives¹⁹. The European Commission identifies national, regional and local authorities, civil society, employers, social and economic partners, migrants and host communities as relevant actors in the integration process.

The **EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027**²⁰ provides the strategic framework for this approach. It identifies four principal areas of sectoral action—education and training, employment and skills, health, and housing—alongside cross-cutting priorities such as multi-stakeholder partnerships, access to EU funding, participation, digitalisation and evidence-based policymaking. Housing is explicitly recognised as a key dimension of integration. The Action Plan aims to improve access to adequate and affordable housing, including social housing, strengthen tools to combat discrimination in housing markets, and promote innovative housing solutions that support inclusion and counter segregation. At the same time, the employment and skills dimension of the Action Plan promote stronger cooperation between labour-market actors, improved skills assessment and validation, upskilling and reskilling, and greater participation in quality vocational education and training.

In December 2025, the European Commission presented the **European Affordable Housing Plan**²¹, the first EU-level comprehensive plan specifically addressing housing affordability and availability. The European Affordable Housing Plan focuses on four broad areas: boosting housing supply; mobilising investment and reforms; addressing short-term pressures in areas experiencing housing stress; and supporting people most affected by the housing crisis. It is particularly relevant to SMART UA because the Commission stresses that the European response and the European Housing Alliance in particular need to be “anchored in local realities” as put by the President of the European Commission, with action involving Member States, regions and cities. The Plan therefore provides an important wider policy context for the SMART UA focus on local housing systems and multi-stakeholder cooperation. It recognises that housing affordability cannot be addressed solely through short-term assistance, but requires structural action concerning housing supply, investment, planning,

¹⁹ <https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/migrant-integration/eu-integration-policy>

²⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_20_2179

²¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52025DC1025&qid=1779808979085>

existing housing stock and support for people experiencing housing vulnerability. The European Affordable Housing Plan is also extremely relevant to our project as, in pillar IV under the title “supporting the most affected”, it argues that **migrants, being among the social minority groups at risk of exclusion or discrimination, face critical challenges in accessing housing.**

Domestic contexts

In Hungary, people benefiting from temporary protection have access to employment under the national framework, while a range of public and civil-society actors provide complementary assistance. The SMART UA research shows, however, that access to longer-term housing and employment support depends substantially on local circumstances and on the capacity of municipalities, civil society organisations, churches and other actors to aid.

The Hungarian housing context is characterised by strong reliance on the private rental market, while access to state or institutional housing remains limited. The SMART UA research identifies affordability, limited housing supply, administrative barriers, language barriers, discrimination and overcrowding among the obstacles affecting Ukrainian refugees. In the absence of substantial state involvement in housing assistance, civil society and faith-based organisations have become important providers of rent subsidies, temporary accommodation, utility support and related assistance. The research also identifies promising examples of cooperation between municipalities, civil society organisations and church institutions. However, these partnerships remain fragmented and locally driven rather than embedded in a comprehensive national housing framework²². The employment research similarly identifies language barriers, difficulties in qualification recognition and limited coordination between actors as important challenges²³. While Ukrainian refugees have entered the Hungarian labour market, the research points to persistent difficulties in accessing employment corresponding to their qualifications, skills and previous professional experience.

In Romania, the policy and support framework has evolved from the emergency accommodation response towards mechanisms that increasingly rely on access

²² <https://jrseurope.org/en/news/access-to-housing-for-ukrainian-refugees-in-hungary-key-insights-from-the-smart-ua-research>

²³ https://jrseurope.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2026/06/NationalReport_on_Labour_market_Hungary_ENG.pdf

SMART UA – Scaling the successful social inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia through an innovative multi-stakeholder cooperation

to the private housing market and mainstream employment and social services. The SMART UA research²⁴ identifies local authorities, civil society organisations, social service providers and international organisations as important actors in this process. Housing support has increasingly included financial assistance and other targeted measures rather than the provision of long-term public accommodation. At the same time, access to social housing remains constrained by limited availability and locally administered eligibility arrangements. As a result, the private rental market remains an important route to independent accommodation for many Ukrainian refugees. The Romanian research also highlights the role of local authorities and civil society organisations in mediating access to housing and providing complementary support. These include housing counselling, landlord–tenant mediation, social assistance, legal information and targeted assistance for vulnerable households. However, the research identifies a continuing need for better coordination and more predictable, long-term support mechanisms. The employment framework²⁵ combines access to the labour market through the national system with complementary initiatives by NGOs and other organisations. The SMART UA employment research identifies also here language barriers, qualification recognition, coordination gaps and the need for better matching between refugees' skills and employment opportunities.

In Slovakia, the initial response to displacement included state-supported accommodation and the mobilisation of private, community and municipal housing resources. As the emergency phase has evolved, local authorities and other actors have assumed an increasingly important role in supporting access to accommodation and integration services. The SMART UA research²⁶ identifies municipalities as particularly relevant actors in the housing system. Depending on local capacity and circumstances, municipalities may provide or facilitate access to municipal accommodation, offer information and referral services, cooperate with NGOs, or act as coordinators between refugees and other service providers. At the same time, the availability of affordable housing remains limited and access to municipal or social housing is constrained by the existing housing stock and eligibility conditions. The Slovak employment²⁷ context similarly

²⁴ <https://jrseurope.org/en/smart-ua-asswr-ro>

²⁵ Same as above

²⁶ https://jrseurope.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2026/07/Final-report_housing-Slovakia_market-analyses-and-good-practises.pdf

²⁷ https://jrseurope.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2026/07/Final-report_-employment-Slovakia_market-analyses-and-good-practises.pdf

SMART UA – Scaling the successful social inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia through an innovative multi-stakeholder cooperation

reflects the interaction between national labour-market access and local implementation. Ukrainian refugees have entered sectors including manufacturing, logistics, services and healthcare, but language barriers and difficulties in recognising qualifications can limit access to employment corresponding to their professional background. The SMART UA research also identifies examples of locally anchored cooperation involving municipalities, employers and community organisations. These include workplace language support, employment assistance and integrated services combining language learning, administrative support and community integration.

2.3 From policy commitments to implementation: the gaps addressed by SMART UA

The right to adequate housing and the right to work, which includes the dimension of enjoyment of favorable conditions of work, are fundamental human rights that allow people to live in dignity and enjoy in turn other rights and liberties, such as the right to private and family life. **The right to housing** is stipulated in different international human rights instruments, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The right to housing is protected in EU Law through the Revised Social Charter and the European Convention of Human Rights. It constitutes the basis of stability and security for an individual or family – everybody should have a place to leave in peace, security and dignity²⁸.

At the same time, **the right to work** is also laid down in International Law, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It is also enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights provision of Article 15. It is well established that the right to work is essential in ensuring the inclusion of refugees in their host country and in guaranteeing that people lead a life of dignity. The Refugee Convention of 1951 includes the right to work in Article 17. To meet the objectives of International Refugee Law, as well as to facilitate integration, EU asylum law obliges the EU's Member States to provide asylum applicants with access to the labour market²⁹.

²⁸ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-housing/human-right-adequate-housing>

²⁹ https://ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/ECRE-Policy-Paper-12_The-Right-to-Work-for-Asylum-Applicants-in-the-EU.pdf

SMART UA – Scaling the successful social inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia through an innovative multi-stakeholder cooperation

Despite a robust legislative framework, at both European and International level, according to the European Council,³⁰ housing crisis is a Europe-wide phenomenon, of multifaceted and intergenerational nature³¹, that concerns both local and migrant population. The experience documented through SMART UA nevertheless demonstrates as well that formal policy commitments do not automatically translate into equal or sustainable access in practice. **One important gap concerns the availability of affordable and sustainable housing. A second gap concerns the transition from labour-market access to sustainable employment. The third gap identified concerns coordination and continuity of support.** These gaps are particularly relevant in light of the current European policy direction. This is the space in which SMART UA adds value. Its three-country approach is particularly important; comparing Hungary, Romania and Slovakia makes it possible to distinguish between challenges that are common across different national systems and those that are strongly shaped by national or local circumstances. It also allows practices developed in one context to be considered from the perspective of their potential adaptation elsewhere.

3. ADVOCACY STRATEGY AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Advocacy objectives and target audiences

Advocacy within SMART UA project was conceived as an integral part of the project's wider approach and effort to strengthening the social and economic inclusion of people displaced from Ukraine in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. Rather than treating advocacy as a stand-alone communication activity, the project sought to connect research findings, direct implementation experience, stakeholder dialogue and the perspectives of Ukrainian refugees to identify gaps in existing housing and labour market systems and promote practical responses with potential for wider application. This approach was embedded in the design³² of SMART UA in the first place, which combined research and mapping, capacity

³⁰ [The EU's housing crisis](#)

³¹ [Council highlights demographic dimension of Europe's housing crisis](#)

³² Within Work Package 4 in particular, dedicated activities focused on raising awareness and advocating for improved access to employment and housing for Ukrainian refugees, including the sharing of scalable practices and policy recommendations on housing and labour-market schemes identified or developed in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, through both conducting meetings and reporting.

SMART UA – Scaling the successful social inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia through an innovative multi-stakeholder cooperation

building, pilot activities, multi-stakeholder cooperation, transnational exchange and dissemination.

Within this framework, the project's advocacy work pursued several interrelated objectives. First, it sought to make the evidence generated through SMART UA visible to relevant decision-makers and practitioners, particularly evidence concerning barriers to stable housing, sustainable employment and access to appropriate support. Second, it aimed to translate research and implementation experience into practical and policy-relevant messages, linking identified problems with possible responses and promising practices. Third, it sought to create spaces for dialogue, in which research findings could be discussed and validated by actors with different forms of expertise, including public authorities, service providers, researchers, civil society organisations and refugees themselves. Finally, through national and transnational exchange, the project sought to identify which lessons and practices might be transferable or adaptable beyond the context in which they originated.

The target audience was consequently broad and reflected the project's multi-stakeholder approach. At national and local levels, the project engaged public administrations, municipalities and local authorities, social-assistance services, immigration and employment authorities, civil society and faith-based organisations and other church-related actors, universities and research institutions, humanitarian organisations, employers and labour-market actors, housing-related actors, organisations providing direct services to refugees, political parties and members of Ukrainian communities. At European and transnational level, dissemination and exchange also reached organisations and stakeholders working on refugee protection, integration, employment, housing and social inclusion across national borders, including civil society, European Institutions such as the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European Council, the latter through its final event as well as both webinars, organised in July 2026.

The composition of national activities illustrates this diversity and has been documented also for the present report³³. In Hungary, the housing and

³³ Note: A full, detailed table listing all advocacy initiatives and meetings conducted by the consortium of SMART UA has been prepared and will be annexed to this report, as it has not been deemed necessary to mention all of them in the actual text of the report.

SMART UA – Scaling the successful social inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia through an innovative multi-stakeholder cooperation

employment workshops brought together Ukrainian refugees and representatives of humanitarian organisations, civil society, universities, municipal bodies and international organisations. The employment workshop, for example, included organisations working on migration, humanitarian assistance and social support as well as representatives of the Municipality of Budapest and academic institutions. In Slovakia, workshops involved NGOs from several self-governing regions, state institutions, labour and social-affairs offices, education authorities, the City of Trnava, the Trnava Self-Governing Region, researchers and Ukrainian participants. In Romania, targeted advocacy and dissemination additionally reached municipal social-assistance authorities, immigration authorities and political parties.

It is important to highlight that the nature and intensity of engagement nevertheless differed between the three countries. This should not be understood simply as a difference in project activity, but also in relation to the institutional and policy environments in which national partners operate. Romania provided clear documented examples of direct advocacy meetings with public authorities and policy actors. Slovakia developed a strong model of engagement through research-to-practice workshops, public-institution participation and locally anchored cooperation. In Hungary, partners reported considerably more limited opportunities for meaningful professional dialogue with national government representatives on refugee-related issues, in the context of the specific political and institutional environment during the project implementation period.

3.2 Stakeholder mapping and engagement

Stakeholder mapping constituted an important methodological foundation for SMART UA. It served both a research function, by examining the ecosystem of organisations involved in housing and employment support, and an engagement function, by helping national partners identify relevant actors for consultation, cooperation, capacity building, dissemination and advocacy.

The national mappings examined the range of public institutions, municipalities, civil society organisations, humanitarian and faith-based organisations, service providers, employers and other actors involved in supporting Ukrainian refugees. This provided a picture not only of which services existed, but also of the

distribution of responsibilities, existing cooperation mechanisms, service gaps and areas in which coordination could be strengthened. This approach is particularly visible in the Romanian research. The housing strand mapped 28 organisations, while the employment strand mapped 41 institutions. These exercises were complemented by refugee surveys and focus groups with institutional and civil-society actors. The resulting evidence identified a diverse network of public institutions, NGOs, employers and other stakeholders operating at local, regional and national levels.

Stakeholder mapping also revealed that the existence of multiple actors does not necessarily imply the existence of a coordinated support system. In Hungary, for example, the employment mapping found that organisations provide services including job counselling, CV support, language training and mentoring. The mapping also identified informal, bottom-up forms of coordination and information exchange among civil society and faith-based organisations. However, structured coordination and communication with relevant state actors remains limited. Similarly, the Romanian housing mapping identified local authorities, civil society organisations and social-service providers but found that much support remained short-term or project-based. Stakeholder engagement subsequently extended beyond the mapping exercise. National workshops were used to bring research findings back to actors working directly in the field. In Hungary, through case-based group work, mixed groups of NGO, faith-based organizations and Ukrainian refugees identified key challenges and proposed possible solutions. The policy recommendations developed by Szociometrum were subsequently consolidated on the basis of these outcomes. The Slovak process provides another example of this research-to-engagement model. The Housing and Integration workshop held in Trnava brought together 45 experts and representatives from NGOs, state institutions, labour and social-affairs structures, education authorities, the City of Trnava, the Trnava Self-Governing Region and Ukrainian participants. Research findings were combined with group discussion and practitioner experience to identify barriers, needs and promising practices. Another employment workshop similarly brought together 46 representatives of organisations supporting Ukrainian refugees to discuss employment, integration and recognition of education and qualifications. Additionally, engagement also emerged directly from project implementation. LifeStarter's proposals to the City of Trnava in Slovakia and Connectt, for example, were based on feedback gathered through IT, soft-skills and self-employment

SMART UA – Scaling the successful social inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia through an innovative multi-stakeholder cooperation

courses with Ukrainian adults. Observed barriers were translated into concrete proposals concerning orientation sessions, digital literacy, bilingual information, referral pathways, visible Ukrainian-speaking contact points and regular consultation with Ukrainian community representatives.

3.3 Research and evidence base

Across Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, national partners examined both the institutional environment surrounding refugee inclusion when it comes to housing and labour and the experiences of Ukrainian refugees themselves navigating said markets. A common methodological orientation enabled comparison across the three countries while allowing research partners to adapt their methods to national circumstances. The evidence base included, apart from the stakeholder mapping, housing and labour-market analyses, surveys with refugees, focus groups and interviews with service providers and other relevant actors. The transnational housing exchange, which happened through the webinar of 23 July, explicitly records and serves as an outcome of this combination of stakeholder mapping, market analysis, surveys, focus groups and interviews.

The national housing and labour-market mapping and analysis reports³⁴ constituted the principal research basis for the advocacy process. They were used to identify structural and practical barriers, examine existing responses, and identify practices that appeared capable of addressing specific gaps. Rather than relying only on aggregate indicators, the research incorporated the experiences of people displaced from Ukraine and organisations working with them. **This combination was important because the project sought to understand not only whether formal rights or services existed, but how if and to what degree they were accessed in practice.** Across the national studies, recurring issues included housing affordability and availability, dependence on private rental markets, language barriers, discrimination, administrative complexity, qualification recognition, skills mismatch, childcare and transportation, as well as fragmentation in the provision of support. The relative importance and expression of these barriers varied between countries and local contexts.

³⁴ Six national reports have been produced in total: three on housing market mapping and analysis and three more on labour market mapping and analysis. All six reports can be found on www.rseurope.org

Research findings were then subjected to further discussion and validation through stakeholder workshops and project activities. In Hungary, the national workshops explicitly provided an opportunity to validate research findings and ensure that recommendations reflected both research evidence and the practical experience of organisations and refugees. In Slovakia, the January 2026 workshop *From Research to Solutions* was explicitly designed to transform Trnava University research findings into a more systemic action plan, addressing issues including language adaptation, retraining, qualification recognition and psychosocial support.

3.4 Exchange and relevant meetings

Exchange activities were organised at national, transnational and European levels. The different forms of national engagement reflected the specific policy and institutional context of each country. Romania generated comparatively extensive documented direct engagement with public institutions and policy actors. Slovakia developed a strong model centred on expert dialogue, research-to-practice exchange and cooperation with local and regional actors. In Hungary, partners were able to establish significant dialogue among researchers, civil society, faith-based organisations, refugees and some municipal actors, but reported substantially fewer opportunities for structured engagement with national government representatives. We believe that these differences are important when interpreting the advocacy activities: the number or type of meetings alone does not provide necessarily an adequate measure of the engagement achieved in each context.

National level

In Hungary, JRS Hungary, Szociometrum and Lutheran Diaconia organised a housing capacity-building workshop in Budapest on 22 January 2026³⁵, attended by more than 50 participants. Participants included Ukrainian refugees as well as representatives of humanitarian organisations, universities and other relevant institutions. A second workshop on 27 January 2026³⁶ focused on employment,

³⁵ <https://jrseurope.org/en/smart-housing-report-on-a-capacity-building-workshop-2>

³⁶ <https://jrseurope.org/en/smart-employment-report-on-a-capacity-building-workshop-2>

bringing together refugees, civil-society organisations, universities and municipal actors to discuss language barriers, informal employment, qualification recognition, childcare and stakeholder coordination. The workshops provided an opportunity to discuss and validate research findings, reflect on existing practices and identify gaps in current support systems. Policy recommendations developed about the Hungarian context were successfully informed by these discussions. This participatory approach helped ensure that the recommendations reflected not only research evidence but also the practical experience of organisations and refugees themselves.

In Slovakia, the national exchange process began in 2025. The employment workshop held on 17 September 2025³⁷ involved 46 representatives from organisations supporting Ukrainian refugees and addressed employment, integration and recognition of education and qualifications. The housing and integration workshop of 29 September 2025³⁸ brought together 45 experts and representatives from public institutions, municipalities and regional authorities, civil society and Ukrainian communities. This was followed by the 20 January 2026³⁹ *From Research to Solutions* workshop, attended by 53 experts, institutional stakeholders and displaced Ukrainians and designed specifically to move from research findings towards systemic responses.

Romania combined national workshops with a targeted series of advocacy and dissemination meetings. Between February and August 2026, six documented meetings involving 13 policy-makers were organised to present findings and discuss possible policy responses. Meetings involved Bucharest municipal social-assistance structures, the General Inspectorate for Immigration and policy actors. Discussions addressed affordable housing, homelessness risks, the transition from emergency accommodation, discrimination, social housing, administrative barriers, employment, national-local coordination and opportunities to incorporate project findings into institutional work.

³⁷ <https://jrseurope.org/en/workshop-o-zamestnavani-ukrajinskych-odidencov-na-slovensku>

³⁸ <https://jrseurope.org/en/workshop-on-housing-and-integration-for-ukrainian-refugees>

³⁹ <https://jrseurope.org/en/employment-workshop-report-employment-of-ukrainian-displaced-people-in-slovakia>

Transnational level

Exchange also occurred across national borders. On 4 February 2026⁴⁰, project partners met in Brussels in-person for a ‘kick-off’ coordination meeting. Country-level presentations of housing and employment mapping and research formed part of the agenda, enabling partners to compare emerging evidence and coordinate subsequent implementation. JRS Europe also represented SMART UA project at the ESF Social Innovation+ 3rd Mutual Learning Event, which took place in Vilnius from 23–25 March 2026⁴¹, providing an additional opportunity to situate the project's housing and employment work within a wider European exchange on social innovation and inclusion. Across all meetings, discussions highlighted the importance of collaboration, knowledge exchange, and evidence-based approaches in addressing complex social challenges, reinforcing the relevance of transnational cooperation.

Also, two dedicated transnational thematic meetings in the form of webinar subsequently provided a structured space for comparison and exchange across Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. The first, *Pathways to Affordable Housing for Ukrainian Refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia*⁴², took place online on 23 July 2026 and brought together 54 participants. Researchers and project partners presented national findings and implementation experience alongside testimonies from Ukrainian refugees. Discussion highlighted common problems including unaffordable rents, limited public housing, dependence on private rental markets, discrimination, legal uncertainty and difficulties accessing information. The exchange also reinforced the conclusion that financial assistance alone is insufficient: housing stability often requires social work, landlord mediation, legal and administrative assistance, interpretation and cooperation among public authorities, civil society and private actors. The second transnational meeting, *Pathways to the Labour Market for Ukrainian Refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia*⁴³, was held on 30 July 2026, with 71 participants

⁴⁰ <https://jrseurope.org/en/news/smart-ua-partners-meet-in-brussels-for-in-person-coordination-and-kick-off-meeting>

⁴¹ <https://jrseurope.org/en/news/smart-ua-at-the-3rd-mutual-learning-event-in-vilnius>

⁴² <https://jrseurope.org/en/news/smart-ua-partners-share-research-and-good-practices-to-advance-affordable-housing-solutions-for-ukrainian-refugees/>

⁴³ <https://jrseurope.org/en/news/smart-ua-explores-pathways-to-the-labour-market-for-ukrainian-refugees/>

SMART UA – Scaling the successful social inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia through an innovative multi-stakeholder cooperation

in total attending. Presentations and discussions addressed language barriers, recognition of qualifications, skills mismatch, childcare, transportation, informal employment and administrative complexity, while also presenting the employment, language, skills-development and self-employment interventions tested by project partners. The meeting highlighted the importance of holistic and personalised support and cooperation among NGOs, employers, educational institutions and public authorities.

European level

JRS Europe, located in Brussels and having a broad network of partners and allies, has had the opportunity to be invited and participate in one key event, which was held in the form of closed roundtable discussion. The topic discussed was the extension and the transitioning out of Temporary Protection Directive that at the time (i.e. 10 July 2026) was still under negotiation. In the framework of this policy dialogue, JRS Europe via its policy and advocacy coordinator referred to the SMART UA project, among others, and shared a few relevant comments related to why a swift transition to national permits and statuses would be important for Ukrainians and how their integration through housing and labour market-related elements should be fostered when policies are designed.

The exchange process was further culminated in the project's final event, *Creating Pathways to Inclusion: Housing and Employment for Ukrainian Refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia*,⁴⁴ held in Brussels in hybrid format on 15 September 2026. More than 100 participants joined in person and online. The event brought together comparative research findings, implementation experience, policy recommendations and refugee testimony, providing a European-level space in which the lessons generated by SMART UA could be presented beyond the three national contexts.

Taken together, these activities formed a multi-level exchange process rather than a uniform sequence of advocacy meetings. National research and dialogue generated context-specific evidence; transnational meetings enabled comparison and peer learning; and European-level activities increased the

⁴⁴ <https://jrseurope.org/en/news/smart-ua-final-event-creating-pathways-to-inclusion/>

SMART UA – Scaling the successful social inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia through an innovative multi-stakeholder cooperation

visibility and potential relevance of the project's findings beyond the participating countries.

Further to advocacy initiatives and priorities, the project's dissemination activities complemented this targeted advocacy by increasing the reach of findings and messages beyond direct meeting participants. National partners published research findings, articles and other communication materials through organisational websites and social-media channels. In Romania, project communication used Facebook, Instagram, the JRS Romania website and YouTube in Romanian and English; project reporting records 37,793 impressions by 31 March 2026. Szociometrum published nine dissemination articles communicating project activities, research findings and key messages from the SMART UA project. Four videos⁴⁵ have been created and uploaded on Youtube platform showcasing and explaining the work done in all three countries, leveraging, among others, testimonies of beneficiaries and partners.

4. CROSS-COUNTRY FINDINGS

4.1 Cross-country findings on housing

Across Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, the SMART UA research points to a common challenge: **while the immediate accommodation response to displacement from Ukraine provided essential protection, the transition towards stable, affordable and independent housing remains difficult**. The specific housing systems and support mechanisms differ between the three countries, but the national studies identify several recurring barriers affecting the ability of displaced Ukrainians to establish sustainable housing arrangements.

The most consistent challenge is **affordability**. Ukrainian refugees increasingly depend on the private rental market, where high rents and other housing costs can place significant pressure on household incomes. Public, municipal or social housing options are limited, while financial assistance and temporary accommodation schemes do not necessarily provide a pathway towards longer-term housing stability. The transnational housing exchange consequently identified the lack of affordable housing—combined with limited public housing

⁴⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/@jrseurope3025/videos>

SMART UA – Scaling the successful social inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia through an innovative multi-stakeholder cooperation

and dependence on private rental markets—as the principal common challenge across the three countries.

Affordability is compounded by **practical barriers to accessing and retaining accommodation**. Across the national research, these include language difficulties, limited information about housing options and procedures, administrative requirements and, in some cases, discrimination by landlords. Informal or insecure rental arrangements can create additional difficulties. In Romania, for example, informal rental contracts were found to restrict access to services and benefits requiring a registered address, while the research also documented discriminatory practices in the private rental market.

The research also demonstrates that **housing insecurity** does not affect all displaced people equally; some are more exposed and therefore more vulnerable. **Single-mother households, older people, persons with disabilities and households with limited or unstable income** can face specific difficulties in securing accommodation independently. This reinforces the need to distinguish between people who primarily require information or short-term assistance and those who may need more intensive and sustained support from the beginning. The Hungarian housing research identified discrimination in the rental market and additional disadvantages associated with lower educational attainment among Roma households. While the Romanian and Slovak reports do not examine this group separately, the Hungarian findings warrant mentioning Roma refugees among the particularly vulnerable groups.

A central cross-country finding is therefore that **financial assistance alone is rarely sufficient to address housing insecurity in a sustainable way**. The project identified greater value in approaches combining financial or housing assistance, where needed, with social work, individual counselling, landlord mediation, interpretation and legal or administrative support. In Romania, for instance, short-term “bridge” support and NGO-mediated communication between landlords and tenants emerged as useful responses at critical moments of housing transition.

This is also **where multi-stakeholder cooperation becomes particularly important**. Housing barriers often fall across the responsibilities of different actors: municipalities and social services, civil society organisations, landlords

SMART UA – Scaling the successful social inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia through an innovative multi-stakeholder cooperation

and housing providers, legal and administrative services, and organisations providing employment or social support. SMART UA activities demonstrated the value of bringing these actors together, both to improve individual pathways and to identify wider gaps in housing systems. **The project evidence nevertheless suggests that such cooperation remains uneven and frequently depends on local initiatives or temporary projects rather than stable coordination mechanisms.** The cross-country evidence therefore points towards a shift from providing accommodation to enabling housing stability. Sustainable responses need to combine access to affordable housing with personalised support where necessary and stronger cooperation among the public, civil-society and private actors involved in housing and integration.

4.2 Cross-country findings on employment

The employment research presents a similarly nuanced picture. People displaced from Ukraine have demonstrated a strong willingness to participate in the labour market, and many have entered employment in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, as shown by the labour market analysis reports. **The central challenge identified by SMART UA is therefore not simply access to employment, but access to employment that is stable,** retainable, adequately protected and commensurate with people's qualifications, skills and previous professional experience.

Across the three countries, **language proficiency emerged as one of the most significant barriers to labour-market integration.** Limited knowledge of the host-country language can restrict job-search opportunities, access to training and communication in the workplace, and can contribute to refugees accepting positions below their qualification level or relying more easily on abusive contracts.

Skills mismatch and recognition of qualifications represent a second major cross-country finding. Many displaced Ukrainians possess substantial professional experience and qualifications, yet they face at national level complex or costly recognition procedures, language requirements and difficulties demonstrating or transferring previous experience can restrict access to corresponding occupations. Furthermore, across the three countries, the structure of labour demand also plays an important role. The above results in people being employed in lower-skilled or temporary positions despite considerably higher

SMART UA – Scaling the successful social inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia through an innovative multi-stakeholder cooperation

levels of education or professional experience. The SMART UA research therefore points to the importance of looking beyond employment rates and considering the quality and sustainability of labour-market integration.

Other barriers vary in prominence between the three countries but reinforce the same general conclusion. **These include childcare responsibilities, transportation, limited job-search support, administrative complexity and informal or insecure employment.** In Hungary, childcare and transport were identified as additional barriers, particularly for women; in Romania, the research raised concerns about informal employment and the resulting exposure to exploitation; and in Slovakia, language difficulties, childcare, housing and qualification-recognition procedures contributed to underemployment.

The evidence generated through project implementation suggests that effective employment support consequently needs to extend beyond job placement. Language learning linked to employment, skills assessment, qualification recognition, vocational and digital training, career guidance, legal counselling, mentoring and support after recruitment can all contribute to more sustainable employment pathways. The Hungarian research similarly emphasised that employment support should continue beyond recruitment where necessary, particularly where communication or practical difficulties might otherwise result in job loss.

As in housing, multi-stakeholder cooperation is essential because no single actor controls the complete employment pathway. Public employment services, employers, training and educational institutions, municipalities and civil society organisations possess different responsibilities and forms of expertise. Project activities showed how civil society organisations can provide flexible and personalised support, while employers and public institutions are necessary for access to jobs, recognition procedures and longer-term institutionalisation of successful approaches.

The employment findings therefore point towards a transition from labour-market access to sustainable labour-market inclusion. The objective is not only to enable people to find employment, but to reduce skills mismatch, remove practical barriers and create pathways through which existing qualifications and capabilities can be used more effectively.

5.CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

Our project SMART UA was implemented during a period when the response to displacement from Ukraine should be moving beyond its initial emergency phase. After some years of temporary protection rules, the question facing displaced people themselves primarily is increasingly not only how to enjoy immediate access to protection and services, but also how to transform that access into sustainable pathways towards independent living, stable employment and participation in the societies of host countries. The extension of temporary protection until March 2028 provides additional time for the authorities as well as the civil society to work towards that much needed direction, especially in view of the fact that the EU has simultaneously established a framework to allow for a gradual transition towards other national residence statuses for beneficiaries of temporary protection.

It is important to highlight that such transitions beyond temporary protection give project's findings additional importance. Legal uncertainty that stems from the temporary nature of this type of protection (as dictates the very title of this European piece of legislation) affects decisions made by refugees, employers and landlords alike. Transition arrangements therefore need to provide sufficient predictability and legal certainty while ensuring that people who cannot readily move into employment- or income-based residence pathways, including particularly vulnerable groups, are not left without adequate protection.

Housing and employment are mutually reinforcing, and they cannot be seen separately. The evidence generated through SMART UA in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia demonstrates that **formal access by law to housing and employment does not necessarily lead alone to sustainable inclusion of people**. In housing, affordability, limited public and social housing, dependence on private rental markets, discrimination and administrative barriers can restrict access to stable accommodation. In employment, language barriers, skills mismatch, qualification recognition, childcare, transport and insecure or informal employment can prevent people from making full use of their professional experience and capabilities.

The research and pilot activities also demonstrate that **single interventions are rarely sufficient where people face multiple barriers simultaneously**. Financial assistance can be critical in preventing housing insecurity, but its longer-term effectiveness increases when combined with social work, landlord mediation and legal or administrative assistance. Similarly, job placement is more likely to result in sustainable employment when accompanied, where necessary, by language learning, skills development, qualification recognition, childcare, transport or continued counselling. **The project experience therefore supports an integrated and person-centred approach rather than isolated interventions.**

SMART UA further highlights the importance of **multi-stakeholder cooperation and the creation of synergies among actors**. Municipalities, national authorities, civil society and faith-based organisations, employers, housing actors, universities and research institutions, social services and refugee communities **each hold different forms of responsibility, knowledge and capacity**. Cooperation between these actors enabled research findings to be validated, individual barriers to be addressed more comprehensively and promising practices to emerge.

5.2 Recommendations

The following policy and practice recommendations draw on the national housing and employment research conducted by the partners of the SMART UA project (JRS Hungary, JRS Romania, Lutheran Diaconia, Szociometrum, LifeStarter, the Family Help Center, the Association of Schools of Social Work in Romania, Trnava University, the City of Trnava, and Personal Service), stakeholder consultations, pilot activities, advocacy meetings and transnational exchanges undertaken and delivered through the project. They also reflect and build on the policy recommendations consolidated by project partners towards the end of the project. As we wish to encounter evidence-based policy change through our project work, we will strongly keep advocating for the following recommendations.

SMART UA – Scaling the successful social inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia through an innovative multi-stakeholder cooperation

We urge the EU Institutions to:

- **Encourage EU Member States to ensure already the transition from Temporary Protection Directive regime to national permits and statuses.** The Council's 2025 recommendation already calls for a gradual transition to other residence statuses for eligible persons alongside sustainable return and reintegration when conditions allow.
- **Integrate Temporary Protection Beneficiaries into the scope of the EU long-term residence permit.** Monitor transition to national protection schemes to include also rules and measures for transition to stable housing and promotion of access to labour market.
- **Design housing and employment policies that take into consideration the needs of people,** and especially of vulnerable groups, like elderly people and single mothers, to ensure success and sustainability of the practice at national level.
- **Promote and monitor Member States' compliance with the findings and recommendations of initiatives, like the Housing Summit and the European Housing Alliance.**
- **Establish opportunities for a stable, predictable and transparent funding system via European Funds.** Services supporting refugees should not rely exclusively on short-term projects. Predictable, multi-year and transparently allocated funding is needed to ensure continuity and professional capacity. More stable financing would enable organisations to maintain services and plan support over a longer period.

We urge national and local authorities to:

- **Initiate immediately the design and implementation of national legislation to allow the transition of Temporary Protection beneficiaries to other legal statuses.** Legal uncertainty stemming from temporary protection schemes leads to instability of all involved actors and parts and eventually harms society as a **whole** as it can create social **tension**.

SMART UA – Scaling the successful social inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia through an innovative multi-stakeholder cooperation

- Design and implement transition to national protection schemes to include also **rules and measures for transition to stable housing and promotion of access to labour market**. This way landlord uncertainty will be mitigated, which will have a positive impact on the hosting community and the beneficiaries of protection themselves.
- Allow **Temporary Protection beneficiaries' transfer to legal statuses based on work** and develop labour mobility and long-term residency frameworks to address long-term stay of people. They should have the option to apply for temporary residence permits based on employment or business activity, with flexible eligibility criteria.
- **Reinforce and encourage the participation of Hungary and Romania in the EU Talent Pool Pilot for people fleeing Ukraine and monitor its implementation.** This initiative has been created to help Ukrainians join the labour market in hosting Member States and, as such, should lay a basis and create the conditions for efficient job matching for Temporary Protection beneficiaries in light of the skills mismatch that is observed.
- **Establish labour market services that support not only job search and entry into employment, but also workplace integration and job retention.** Dedicated employment services are needed that understand and can respond to the specific circumstances of refugees, including language barriers, foreign qualifications, administrative issues related to legal status and cultural differences.
- **Reduce administrative barriers related to the obligation to have a registered residence in order to work in the country, as this** can delay or complicate employment. The inability to have permanent accommodation can be inherent to the situation of a Temporary Protection beneficiary and, more in general, of a displaced person. Landlord consent or proof of accommodation should be sufficient.
- **Make legal and administrative information about housing and access to labour market widely available and reachable at national level.** Strengthening legal awareness about processes and against exploitative employment is key.

SMART UA – Scaling the successful social inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia through an innovative multi-stakeholder cooperation

- Promote **measures of early integration, like free, flexible, job- and housing-oriented language training as well as mediation and interpretation services.** For example, create a clear ‘first-steps’ information package in Ukrainian and the language of the hosting country, including employment services, housing and renting rules, opening hours of competent services and partner NGOs and other actors.
- **Expand self-employment opportunities for people with temporary protection** People holding temporary protection status should be able to become self-employed and establish a sole proprietorship under straightforward administrative conditions.
- **Strengthen partnerships and foster synergies between public sector and civil society;** learn from and replicate successful NGO-led and faith-based housing models and community initiatives. Connecting those models systematically with public and municipal services would allow effective approaches to be maintained and, where appropriate, scaled up.
- Combine housing assistance with employment and social support and legal assistance **through a coordinated, holistic system.** Those areas are inextricably linked and therefore comprehensive integration services are required.
- Broaden public housing support policies and integrate housing framework in all national policies.
- Provide **rent subsidies based on clear and attainable eligibility criteria and monitor high renting prices, especially for vulnerable people,** while setting maximum limits for monthly rent prices. Consider introducing a rent guarantee fund (deposit/advance), managed by local authorities or in partnership with NGOs, to reduce initial barriers to access to the private rental market.
- **Forbid by law clauses that result in discrimination** and build legislation to protect all tenants from landlords’ abuse by defining clear rules concerning renting apartments. Details related to refugees’ and temporary protection beneficiaries’ lives, like smoking, pet owning, having small kids, have been factors

SMART UA – Scaling the successful social inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia through an innovative multi-stakeholder cooperation

that create difficulties and in turn can lead to exclusion from accessing adequate housing.

- Establish a time-limited **‘bridge support’ financial mechanism** to prevent abusive and arbitrary eviction.
- **Extend employment support beyond job placement.** Provide solutions for transport and childcare support for parents and especially single mothers, both during training and actual working. The lack thereof can directly practically prevent labour market participation and successful integration.
- **Promote diploma and qualifications recognition and reduce bureaucratic and administrative obstacles to effectively accelerate the latter.** It is crucial to take into consideration how the absence of necessary documents or qualifications can be linked with legal discrepancies, cultural differences as well as inherent incapability of a person fleeing war to hold always and upon request needed documentation. Make available bridging and upskilling programmes.

We suggest to NGOs and other civil society actors to:

- **Continue providing personalised and low-threshold support while advocating for pathways into mainstream services.** Civil society and faith-based organisations are particularly well placed to identify individual barriers, build trust and reach people who may have difficulty accessing public services. Their role should complement rather than permanently substitute for public systems.
- **Document and evaluate promising practices.** Organisations implementing original or alternative approaches should systematically record who is reached, which barriers are addressed, what outcomes are achieved and which resources and partnerships are required. This is essential to allow for successful practices to be assessed for adaptation or replication elsewhere.
- **Involve Ukrainian and other refugees in programme design and evaluation.** Combining professional expertise with lived experience is of extremely high value. Refugees should therefore be involved not only as beneficiaries but as

SMART UA – Scaling the successful social inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia through an innovative multi-stakeholder cooperation

participants in identifying needs, assessing services and developing possible solutions.

- **Seek to build coalitions for sustainability and scaling of practices.** Civil society organisations, universities, employers, municipalities, social-service providers and refugee-led or community organisations should use their complementary expertise to advocate for the institutional and legal establishment of approaches that have demonstrated value. The objective should be to move towards sustainable local and national systems.
- **Monitor formal employment uptake to address resorting to informal job market.** With the prior consent of the person(s) concerned, report to competent national and local authorities as well as the National Ombudspersons about abusive practices related to insecure housing or violating conditions of employment. A do-no-harm approach should be always present upon every relevant action.

SMART UA – Advocacy, Stakeholder Engagement and Exchange Activities

Annex-ready activity matrix | Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, transnational and European-level activities

Date	Country / level	Activity	Target audience / participants	Main agenda / topics discussed	Function / relevance
17 Sep 2025	Slovakia	Expert workshop on employment of Ukrainian displaced people	46 participants; NGOs from six self-governing regions, state institutions, labour/social-affairs offices, education authorities, City of Trnava, Trnava Region, Ukrainian participants	Employment and integration; language; education and qualification recognition; practical barriers and recommendations	Expert consultation; identification of barriers and development of practical recommendations.
29 Sep 2025	Slovakia	Housing and Integration expert workshop, Trnava	45 experts/representatives; NGOs, state institutions, local/regional authorities, researchers and Ukrainian participants	Housing and integration; research findings; mental health and psychosocial dimensions; barriers; good practices	Research validation, multi-sector dialogue and identification of practices relevant to future policies/projects
20 Jan 2026	Slovakia	From Research to Solutions: Employing Ukrainian Displaced Persons in Slovakia	53 participants; experts, institutional stakeholders and Ukrainian displaced persons	Research findings; systemic gaps; language adaptation; retraining, qualification recognition; psychosocial support	Translation of academic research into a systemic action-oriented discussion.
21-Jan-26	Romania	Employment workshop	Social-work professionals, researchers, civil society, public institutions and practitioners	Employment stakeholder mapping; employment-market analysis; evidence on access to employment; exchange of practices	Launch/dissemination of research and evidence-based stakeholder dialogue.
22 Jan 2026	Hungary	Housing capacity-building workshop, Budapest	50+ participants; Ukrainian refugees, humanitarian/civil-society organisations, university/research actors and other housing stakeholders	Housing research; affordability; housing supply; integration barriers; long-term support	Validation and dissemination of research; stakeholder dialogue on sustainable housing responses.
23 Jan 2026	Romania	Housing workshop and launch of national housing reports	Social-work professionals, researchers, civil society, public institutions and practitioners	Housing stakeholder mapping; housing-market analysis; evidence on access to housing; exchange of practices	Launch/dissemination of research and evidence-based stakeholder dialogue.
27 Jan 2026	Hungary	Employment capacity-building workshop, Budapest	Ukrainian refugees/asylum seekers; NGOs; humanitarian organisations; universities; municipal actors	Language barriers; informal employment; qualification recognition; childcare; coordination	Validation of employment evidence and development/discussion of recommendations.
4 Feb 2026	Transnational	SMART UA in-person kick-off coordination meeting, Brussels	Project consortium and national research/implementation partners	Country housing and employment mappings; research analyses; coordination; implementation priorities	Cross-country evidence exchange and alignment of project implementation.
17 Feb 2026	Romania	Advocacy meeting with Bucharest municipal social-assistance authority	Municipal social-assistance authority	Housing research; affordable rentals; social-service barriers; vulnerable groups; homelessness; transition from emergency accommodation	Presentation of evidence and exploration of public-civil society cooperation.
24 Feb 2026	Romania	Targeted policy advocacy meeting	Policy/political actor	Housing findings; national-local coordination; funding; rent subsidies; anti-discrimination	Translation of housing findings into policy dialogue and possible follow-up actions.
24 Feb 2026	Romania	Meeting with General Inspectorate for Immigration	National immigration authority	Housing findings; vulnerable persons; institutional responsibilities; barriers; possible cooperation	Dissemination and exploration of institutional uptake of project conclusions
23-25 Mar 2026	European / transnational	ESF Social Innovation+ Mutual Learning Event, Vilnius	Social-innovation projects and European stakeholders	Social innovation; inclusion; knowledge exchange; housing/employment pathways; study visit	Positioned SMART UA within wider European peer learning and social-innovation exchange.
3 Apr 2026	Romania	Follow-up policy advocacy meeting	Policy/political actor	Housing mapping/analysis; rents; discrimination; registration; public/social housing; municipal programmes	Follow-up policy dialogue; discussion of policy papers and local-level action.
19-May-26	Slovakia	Learning City Trnava, 1st working meeting	municipal authorities, Lifestarter, CPPR	First mapping session for the "Learning City Trnava" strategy (2026-2031); introduction of 6 strategic pillars (culture of learning for all, digital skills, entrepreneurship, foreigner integration, mental health/wellbeing, sustainable city)	Important space for further cooperation and feedback on the material, in which CPPR will actively continue.
21-May-26	Slovakia	Dialogue for Slovakia	Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government for the Development of Civil Society (main organizer), Ministry of the Interior of Slovakia, local stakeholders, NGOs (CPPR, etc.), and regional representatives	Multi-stakeholder dialogue across 5 thematic tables (Volunteering, Societal Resilience, Food Aid, Employment & Integration of Displaced Persons from Ukraine, Societal Polarization); focused on addressing legal and practical labor market barriers for Ukrainian displaced persons	Dissemination of SMART UA findings regarding employment of Ukrainian workers
9-Jun-26	Slovakia	Learning City Trnava - 2nd working meeting	National Institute for Education (NIVAM), Trnava Self-Governing Region (TTSK), City of Trnava (Department of Social Affairs), CPPR, Lifestarter, ConnectTT, Batekár, Coburg Center, RCPU, Jan Palák Theatre, civil society actors	Evaluation of 6 development pillars (adult learning, digital proficiency, entrepreneurship, foreigner integration, mental health, environmental sustainability); built on the outcomes of the 1st mapping session held on 19/05/2026 for the Learning City Trnava strategy 2026–2031	expert consultation, participation at the creation of strategic document
11 Jun 2026	Romania	Dissemination meeting with Bucharest Sector 5 social-assistance authority	Local social-assistance/public authority	Housing and employment mappings and market analyses; challenges; institutional role; cooperation	Dissemination and discussion of institutional use of SMART UA evidence.
12 Jun 2026	Hungary	Stakeholder meeting involving JRS Hungary and Terre des Hommes Hungary	Research, humanitarian, faith-based and civil-society organisations; IOM and SMART UA actors	Professional exchange concerning refugee inclusion and project findings	Stakeholder networking and professional dialogue in a context of limited national-level policy access.
19 Jun 2026	Slovakia	Kick-off Conference of the project Work with Dignity: Eliminating Employment Barriers for Refugees in the Trnava Region	Family Help Center (CPPR) in cooperation with the Trnava Archdiocesan Charity (TADCH), Eduhub Slovakia organization	Office project presentation, hybrid counselling center, first roundtable, connection with the Ukrainian community	continuity with SMART UA research findings, advocacy for change and networking
10 Jul 2026	Romania	National findings/recommendations meeting	Institutional stakeholders and Ukrainian refugee community	Presentation and distribution of national research findings and recommendations	Dissemination combined with institutional and community engagement.
10 Jul 2026	European	Closed policy exchange, roundtable	ECRE, civil society, ICMPD, academic experts on TPD, Ukrainian Voices	Extension of and the transitioning out of Temporary Protection Directive regime	open policy dialogue, multi-level multi-stakeholder exchange
17 Jul 2026	Romania	National findings/recommendations meeting	Institutional stakeholders and Ukrainian refugee community	Presentation of national reports and policy recommendations	National dissemination and dialogue.
23 Jul 2026	Transnational	Pathways to Affordable Housing for Ukrainian Refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia	54 participants; researchers, project partners, practitioners, stakeholders and Ukrainian refugees	National research; refugee testimony; affordability; discrimination; private rental markets; integrated support; good practices	Comparative exchange; identification of shared housing messages and potentially transferable approaches.
28-Jul-26	Slovakia	Multi-sectoral Forum on the Integration of Foreigners in Trnava	City of Trnava (main co-organizer), ConnectTT Initiative, KUBIK Cultural Center, CPPR, Trnava University students/researchers, local community advocates	Evaluation of the Action Plan 2026-2027; formulation of 11 community proposals and selection of 4 priority initiatives (Food & Foot Fest, World Picnic, Field Social Worker in hostels, Language Coffee Club) for the creation of a Bid-book to secure external funding	Strengthening local partnerships and advancing practical solutions for the integration of foreigners in Trnava
29 Jul 2026	Hungary	Closing event of a relevant AMIF project	40 participants; project partners and wider stakeholders	Project experience and findings; refugee inclusion and project responses	National dissemination and stakeholder exchange.
30 Jul 2026	Transnational	Pathways to the Labour Market for Ukrainian Refugees in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia	71 participants; researchers, national partners, practitioners and Ukrainian refugees	Language; qualification recognition; skills mismatch; childcare; transport; informal work; employment interventions	Comparative exchange and consolidation of common labour-market lessons/messages.
5 Aug 2026	Romania	Dissemination meeting with Bucharest Sector 2 social-assistance authority	Local social-assistance/public authority	Housing and employment research; institutional support; inter-institutional cooperation	Dissemination and discussion of institutional uptake.
2025–2026	Slovakia / local	Lifestarter advocacy input to City of Trnava / Connect	Municipal/local integration actors and Ukrainian community	Public-service navigation; digital inclusion; qualification information; referrals; Ukrainian-language information; feedback mechanisms	Converted participant feedback and implementation experience into concrete local proposals.
15 Sep 2026	European	SMART UA final event, Brussels/hybrid	100+ participants; project partners, researchers, practitioners, European/national stakeholders and Ukrainian participants	Comparative housing/employment research; implementation experience; promising practices; refugee testimony	European-level dissemination and advocacy; synthesis of project evidence and experience.
29-Sep-26	Hungary	Inter-organizational meeting	several NGOs; ULE, Terre des Hommes, Hungarian Inter-church aid, Caritas, Evangelical Diaconia, a high school, UNHCR	Participants reported on the programs currently running at each organization, focusing specifically on those arriving from Ukraine and discussing their housing and employment situations.	relevant components of the SPART UA project discussed in detail (vulnerability, research findings)

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