

UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN SLOVAKIA:

CARER'S BENEFIT FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIFIC NEEDS (SEVERE DISABILITIES AND HEALTH CONDITIONS)

General Q&A

Background to the cash assistance programme for Ukrainian refugee children and families

Since the war began in Ukraine on 24 February 2022, over 517,000 refugees from Ukraine have crossed into Slovakia. The vast majority (89 per cent) are women, children, older people and others with specific needs.¹ They include children with severe disabilities and health conditions, who face particular challenges as they – and those caring for them – adapt to a new and uncertain situation.

Slovakia's Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family (MoLSAF) already provides cash assistance to vulnerable households through its own Material Needs Benefit programme. However, given the sheer scale of this emergency, separate and temporary programmes are needed to support refugees who are caring for children with severe disabilities or health conditions and, more generally, to ensure that refugees can meet their own material needs.

The Government of Slovakia has asked the international community to support these programmes. UNICEF and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) are supporting and managing the Carer's Benefit programme. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNICEF and the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) are also supporting and managing a programme of short-term emergency cash assistance to meet the material needs of around 26,000 refugee households.²

These two programmes represent [a unique form of assistance in Slovakia](#). They are introducing a mechanism to deliver temporary financial support to refugees, while also providing targeted support for a particularly vulnerable group of children and those who care for them.

¹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/slovakia/inter-agency-operational-update-slovakia-22-june-2022>

² https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/slovakia-humanitarian-organisations-take-over-financial-support-system-those-fleeing-ukraine_en

What is the aim of the Carer's Benefit?

The programme aims to address the economic vulnerabilities of children with severe disabilities or health conditions and their carers.

The Carer's Benefit provides security for people who have children with severe disabilities or health conditions and who have been uprooted from their homes under the most traumatic of circumstances. It aims to ease the heavy financial pressure they face by enabling one parent or caregiver to care full-time for a child with severe disabilities or health conditions.

It goes further, however, aiming to connect them to services that can support their social inclusion and enable them to live life to the full, despite their changed circumstances.

Why provide cash assistance rather than supplies and equipment?

One key aspect of cash assistance is its role in restoring the sense of dignity that comes with the ability to make their own decisions, rather than have someone else make those decisions for them.³

Refugees, including those who are caring for children with severe disabilities or health conditions, are the best experts on their own situation: nobody else has a better understanding of what they need. There is growing recognition that cash transfers through bank accounts or vouchers provide refugees with more freedom of choice in meeting their own needs and in a way that maintains their human dignity.⁴ In contrast to the distribution of supplies that are shipped in from outside, which does not connect to (and can even undermine) local markets, cash transfers enable refugees to buy products from local suppliers.

This benefits both the refugees – who can buy precisely what they need – and local economies. It also brings refugees into daily contact with their host communities, helping to overcome a sense of exclusion and isolation at a difficult time. This is particularly important for children with severe disabilities or health conditions, who often face exclusion alongside other disadvantage, and those who care for them, who have little or no opportunity to earn an income, given the need to provide children with 24-hour care and support. The benefit helps to compensate the carer for their lack of a salary as a result of caring for a child with severe disabilities or health conditions.

In addition, the Carer's Benefit programme brings children with disabilities or health conditions and those who care for them into direct contact with UNICEF-trained operators who can assess

³ K. Berry and S. Reddy, *Safety with Dignity: Integrating Community-based Protection into Humanitarian Programming*, Network Paper 68 (London: ODI, 2010).

⁴ Paul Harvey and Sarah Bailey, 'Cash transfer programming in emergencies', *Good Practice Review Number 11*, Humanitarian Policy Group at ODI, London, 2011 (<https://odihpn.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/gpr11.pdf>).

their needs and refer them to additional services and support. This would not be possible if their families received supplies alone, without an assessment process.

How does this benefit promote the rights of children with severe disabilities or health conditions?

Under both Slovak and Ukrainian law, children with a severe disability or health condition are entitled to have a carer. By providing cash assistance to their carer, the benefit eases the financial burden on the household and frees up carers to provide the care their children need.

Management of the Carer's Benefit

Who is responsible for this programme?

The Government of Slovakia's MoLSAF has responded swiftly and with solidarity to the needs of Ukrainian refugees, and is providing overall guidance on this programme. The funding is being provided on a temporary basis by UNICEF and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Who is doing what?

- UNHCR enrolls potential beneficiaries alongside MoLSAF at Slovakia's Registration centres and passes their details to UNICEF.
- UNHCR makes a note of the age of each potential beneficiary. Those caring for adults with specific needs are referred to IOM for further assessment and, if eligible, for payment of the benefit. Those caring for children are referred to UNICEF. While the assessment tools differ for adults and children, the process and the amount of cash assistance paid (€ 508 per month) are exactly the same.
- UNICEF follows-up with households that have been registered by UNHCR as caring for children with disabilities or health conditions. They will be contacted by phone and SMS and an assessment will be carried out to assess their eligibility.

Applying for the Carer's Benefit

Who is eligible?

Ukrainian refugee households that have arrived in Slovakia since 24 February 2022 and who hold Temporary Protection status are eligible to apply for the benefit. Carers with children who hold a Ukrainian disability card or who self-report that they are caring for children with severe

disabilities or health conditions are contacted to assess the needs of their child and their eligibility for the Carer's Benefit.

How do those caring for children with severe disabilities or health conditions apply?

- The first step is to register for Temporary Protection with the MoLSAF and then for cash assistance with UNHCR. As part of the registration process with UNHCR, they will be asked whether they or someone in their household has any specific needs. If they say "yes", they will be asked for more information, including answers to two simple Yes/No questions:
 - Do you or any member of your family travelling with you have a Ukrainian Disability Card? (If 'Yes', indicate who).
 - Do you think that you or any member of your family travelling with you might require additional support or services because of a recognized disability? (if 'Yes', indicate who).
- If they say 'yes' to either question in relation to a child, UNHCR shares their data with UNICEF. UNICEF will contact them to tell them that TENENET will be in touch with them to arrange an assessment interview to gauge the needs of their child.
- The assessment interview is carried out by Ukrainian speaking operators who have been trained on disability, inclusion and assessment techniques. These operators are available at registration centres or are part of mobile and outreach teams. They can answer questions on how the benefit is granted and also provide vital information on possible referrals for children with disabilities or health conditions.
- The assessment of the children is based on the answers of their parents or carers, who are taken through a questionnaire by trained operators. The questionnaire is a Child Functioning Module, which focuses on what a child needs to function, rather than on their disability, and is available in both Slovak and Ukrainian. The operators ask the carers the questions and record the answers in an app (KOBO) that generates the result automatically.
- Those who are not identified as eligible are contacted by SMS about this decision and referred to other follow up and support services. Those identified as eligible are notified and enrolled for the Carer's Benefit.

- UNICEF may refer children with disabilities or health conditions to UNHCR for enrolment in the Material Needs cash assistance programme if they are not already enrolled with UNHCR.
- **Please note: it is important that applicants have their own specific Slovak telephone number so that they can be reached directly about the Carer's Benefit.**

How is the assessment carried out?

Households are contacted via SMS and phone call informing them about the upcoming assessment. The assessment may take place at their accommodation or at the registration centre that is closest to their accommodation.

The assessment is carried out by a team of two operators, one of them Ukrainian-speaking operator, either face-to-face at the registration centre, by phone, or at the family's accommodation.

The operator uses a questionnaire to ask the carer questions about, for example, their child's level of functional disability, whether they need assistive devices and whether they need full-time care. The questionnaire has been designed to be answered by an adult – the parent or the carer – rather than the child.

Do children with disabilities or health conditions need to be present for the assessment?

No. An operator may visit the household to conduct the assessment, but the child does not have to be present. The assessment is conducted with the parent or carer.

How is the assessment carried out when a child cannot come to the registration centre because of their disability?

The assessment is carried out with the carer, rather than with the child. The child does not need to come to the registration centre or be present for the assessment. A team of two operators may, in some cases, visit the household.

How are applicants informed about the decision?

Applicants are informed via SMS a few days after their assessment to let them know whether they have been successful and, if so, given more details on the delivery of the cash.

Receiving the Carer's Benefit

Who receives the benefit? Who is the ultimate beneficiary?

The benefit is paid to the adult person who is caring for a child with severe disabilities or health conditions because that person will struggle to combine caring for their child with earning an income. The ultimate beneficiary is the child whose needs are met as a result of the benefit.

How much cash assistance do beneficiaries receive?

Financial support for caregivers is set at € 508 per month, based on the recommendation from the Government of Slovakia.⁵

How does the cash reach the beneficiaries?

Monthly payments started in June 2022. This support will last for at least three months, with potential for an additional three months based on agreement with the Government.

Beneficiaries can receive the money through a bank transfer to a Slovak bank account if they have one. They can also receive the money through Western Union. All beneficiaries get a SMS on their mobile phone explaining how they will receive the cash.

How long will the benefit last?

The monthly payments are planned to cover three months, starting from June 2022. The first payment is received after a successful assessment, and is backdated to June 2022. During this three-month period, UNICEF will work with the government and with non-government partners to help them prepare to take over the programme at the end of this initial period. There is also the potential for UNICEF support for an additional three months based on agreement with the Government.

Is the Carer's Benefit provided separately to the Material Needs Benefit?
And what is the difference between the two benefits?

The Carer's Benefit is provided to those caring for children with severe disabilities or health conditions in addition to the Material Needs Benefit. Those who are eligible for both benefits receive both benefits. One difference is that the Carer's Benefit is received by the person who provides the daily care for a child with severe disabilities or health conditions, while the Material Needs Benefit is payable to the head of household. If the head of household is also the primary carer for a child with severe disabilities or health conditions – a common scenario,

⁵ Cash assistance to cover material needs is also available for refugee families who are particularly vulnerable (see separate Q&A and other materials on this benefit).



given the high percentage of female-headed households among the refugee population – that person receives both benefits.

Who do beneficiaries contact to ask questions or report a problem?

Beneficiaries can call the toll-free UNICEF and UNHCR Cash Assistance Hotline if they have any questions or problems:

- **Toll-free number: 0800 22 12 30 (from a Slovak phone number)**
- **Toll-free landline: +421 2 22 11 56 50 (call from a telephone number other than Slovak).**

For any question related to the Carer benefits ofr adult with disability, call International Organization for Migration (IOM) Info line: (calls from Slovakia)

- **0800 500 099 (Tuesday and Wednesday, from 09:00 AM to 02:00 PM)**
- **0800 500 100 (Monday, Thursday, and Friday, from 09:00 AM to 05:00 PM)**

Or email them: IOMSlovakiaCBfeedback@iom.int