



Reading the news in Ukrainian helps you feel that you are not alone UNESCO launches a project to give displaced Ukrainians a voice

12 September 2023, Bratislava - With over 5.8 million refugees from Ukraine across Europe, some 1.6 million have crossed the border into Slovakia. Approximately 107,000 received a temporary protection status in the country for whom access to reliable and relevant information is a challenge. As such, a new UNESCO project addresses this challenge by helping the mainstream media to make news available in Ukrainian and fight stereotypes by strengthening dialogue with host populations.

The project was launched on 30 August in Bratislava and will be conducted in Moldova, Romania, and Slovakia. Its main goal is to increase access of Ukrainian refugees to reliable information and to create favorable conditions for peaceful co-existence and possible integration of refugees into host communities in all three countries.

"The media is key to strengthening and promoting inclusive and fact-based public debates. As the fourth estate, news organizations hold the means to counter suspicion, fear, and social stigmas.

Tawfik Jelassi, the UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information

The project will enhance the capacities of host-country broadcasters in providing reliable news and factual information on key topics of interest and concern to the Ukrainian refugees in collaboration with Deutsche Welle Akademie, international experts, and national partners. The project takes a novel approach by enabling refugees to tell their own stories in the mainstream national and local media.

"It is crucial for Ukrainians to have news in their own language. Not only do they have useful information about Slovakia, but it is hard to explain how much it means for a refugee to read or hear news in their own language. You understand that you are not alone."

Alina Graffyová, Ukrainian journalist working at Slovak Spectator

The project is implemented by UNESCO with support from the Government of Japan. The initiative is part of UNESCO's contribution to the UN-wide Regional Refugee Response Plan for the Ukraine Situation, coordinated by UNHCR.

"The media play a critical role in reaching the refugees and in providing them with useful information. This project will assist in building such capacity of media and assist Ukrainian refugees to care about themselves".

Hiroshi Nawata the Embassy of Japan

In the initial phase of the project, UNESCO has partnered with the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) to provide a baseline study on the media habits and information needs of the Ukrainian refugees in the three countries. The research used both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, such as focus groups, stakeholder discussions, and nearly 600 interviews with

Ukrainian refugees, carried out in different locations such as schools, private households, and support centers. The research findings will guide the project's second stage: supporting host-country media organizations to create refugee-related media programs.

“Refugees also bring their experiences and skills. Slovak Finance Ministry projects that in 2023, the government will spend just about the same amount on refugees that they will through employment, taxes, and consumption. In the years after 2024, the contributions from refugees will exceed the money the government had to pay for them, so there are very clear economic benefits of the refugee presence in Slovakia.”

Danijela Popovic-Efendic, the Head of the UNHCR Office in Slovakia

By giving displaced Ukrainians a voice, the project aims to fight stigmas and disinformation. The content will be produced for, with, and by Ukrainian refugees, covering topics that they deem of priority concern. Ukrainian refugees and host citizens alike will engage with the editorial teams, providing comments on refugee-related news content or media programming issues. Through this project, UNESCO will strengthen fact-based information exchange between refugees and host citizens as audience members to foster social cohesion.

“Almost nobody in Slovakia knows that so far, the war in Ukraine has cost us only 11 EUR per citizen. It’s nothing. So I’m really grateful for this project as it will not only give a voice to Ukrainians but will also help in objectively informing the public about migration.”

Ján Orlovský, Head of the Migration Office

The Support for Ukrainian Refugees through Media project falls under UNESCO’s mandate to foster media development and support media in crisis preparedness and response. The current implementation phase spans a period of 12 months, lasting until January 2024. In Slovakia, the project will be implemented by MEMO 98.