Jo Sharpe: Hello and welcome to the Social Protection Podcast. I'm Jo Sharpe. Since conflict in Ukraine broke out at the end of February, the world has witnessed the fastest growing refugee crisis since World War 2, with over 2 million people, mostly women, children, and the elderly fleeing into neighbouring countries.

The outpouring of voluntary support and solidarity for Ukrainian refugees has been removed. But for those without family and friends in the region, what institutional support is available and what will refugees be able to access in the long term? In this episode, we look at the roles that social protection systems in receiving countries, along with humanitarian cash-based interventions are playing in the response to this fast-moving crisis.

With me today is Susanne Klink, who is the Livelihoods and Socioeconomic Inclusion Lead for UNHCRs Regional Bureau for Europe. Welcome to the podcast, Susanne, thank you so much for making the time.

Susanne Klink: Thanks for that Jo. It's a pleasure to be here.

Jo Sharpe: So Susanne it's Wednesday. It's the 9th of March and the situation is evolving every day, but can you give us a sense of the refugee situation currently, as people continue to flee?

Susanne Klink: Well, it is impossible to have an exact overview of the displacement, but we believe that over a million people may be displaced inside the country, inside Ukraine, and more than 2 million refugees have already crossed the international borders. We estimate that more than 4 million refugees from Ukraine may need protection and assistance in neighboring countries.

In the coming months, we don't yet have detailed information about the demographic profile. So there is no age or nationality break down of arrivals available for all countries, but we are following up with the different nationalities to collect the data. And we already know that the majority of refugees are women, children, and [inaudible] persons.

Jo Sharpe: So can you talk us through a little bit about how the UNHCR is responding?

Susanne Klink: I think it should be noted first that there has been tremendous solidarity and hospitality from the countries receiving refugees, including from the authorities and from the local communities. The UNHCR did emergency appeals for Ukraine and the region, which were launched on March 1st seeking a total of 1.7 billion to respond to the needs within Ukraine and also the neighbouring countries. The UN/Ukraine appeal asks for 1 billion to assist 6 million people inside Ukraine for initially three months. And the program includes a multipurpose cash assistance for the most vulnerable people, food assistance, wardens, annotations of health care and education services, shelter assistance to rebuild damaged
tombs. The plan also aims to deliver support to authorities, to maintain and establish transit and reception centres for displaced people and to prevent gender-based violence.

We also have an inter-agency refugee response plan or reaching a one for the Ukraine situation under the leadership of UNHCR which is asking for a preliminary 550.6 million to have refugees from Poland and the Republic of Moldova in Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia, as well as in other countries in the region in order to have host countries to provide shelter, emergency relief items, cash assistance, and mental health and psychosocial service to all those who fled Ukraine.

**Jo Sharpe:** Can you tell us a little bit about how you’re using cash-based interventions or CBIs and how those are being integrated into the refugee response?

**Susanne Klink:** We are supporting the governments in responding to the protection of basic needs of refugees fleeing Ukraine. And as part of these efforts, we are working to set up multi-purpose cash assistance programs to provide emergency assistance at my rival.

In Poland we are currently rolling out a pilot program, which will start in the coming days with a partner and [inaudible] unit signed a partner has started emergency cash distributions in temporary accommodation centres where the mechanism for larger scale assistance is being set up. I would just say a couple of risks of our CVI approach.

So, cash is the preferred modality of assistance in comparison to in kind and we aim at providing cash that promotes inclusion and access to local sustainable services. CVI has provided in an unrestricted manner, along with services as part of a basic needs approach. For UNHCR the participation of our presence of concern as partners in the design delivery and monitoring of CBI to address the protection concerns is fundamental and through CBI, refugees will also have access to digital payment solutions, what personal data is responsibly managed.

We also facilitate CBI through a collaborative cash approach to minimize the applications and finally refugees receive CVI in a simple, efficient, and accountable manner that addresses the protection risks. So, this is not only chief weather Ukraine situation, but this is our approach on CBI in general.

And I think it’s part of the overall learning on cash of all the different organizations involved of which you need to ask.

Just to take a quick step back, even prior to conflict, breaking out in Ukraine, due to the economic impact of COVID-19 many refugees already living in European countries have had to seek help from local social protection systems.

And I’d just be interested to hear from you. How are refugees included into social protection schemes in European countries? Perhaps, as a matter of course.
It’s been known many refugees formally must have reliance. Lost their jobs or it had to close down their businesses. Because of the COVID 19 impact.

And so they required social assistance, but we saw that oftentimes they weren’t able to access this assistance, but we did not have any representative data or good overview in this regard. So we conducted this mapping together with our country operations in order to really better understand the access to social protection and there we looked that social assistance, social insurance and labour market security schemes and also provided desegregated data by the legal status. So, on asylum seekers, refugees, subsidiary protection holders, and stateless persons for all countries in Europe. In general we can say that social protection systems throughout benefit from a largely favourable legal framework in comparison to many other parts of the world. Within the European Union article 34.1 of the EU charter of fundamental rights, stipulates that the union recognizes and respect the entitlement to social security benefits and social services to everyone legally residing in the EU. And this also includes prisons with a refugee status.

The right to social assistance specifically recognized as the means of ensuring a decent existence for those who lack sufficient resources and of combating social exclusion and poverty. So the situation is quite unique. As in other regions of the world, we often don’t have functioning social protection systems that can absorb refugees.

We do have a couple of exceptions, as for example, in Brazil, the Bolsa Familia responded to the Venezuela situation, including refugees. And there are also a couple of other examples in the Americas where is better still the social protection systems in a year, a very comprehensive and not comparable with social protection systems for the majority of the rest of the world.

For asylum seekers, because this is all for recognized refugees. So, for asylum seekers compared to refugees, they usually are not included in the mainstream social protection schemes that fall on those specialized programs to cover the basic needs. In the EU for example, we have the reception director that sets out the minimum criteria to support the asylum seekers and have other basic needs.

In Portland, however, under the COVID-19 situation, the government, in response to the economic challenges in this regard, opened the social protection schemes to asylum seekers and to migrants who were then granted full access to mainstream social protection schemes, which of course we highly applauded. But although the, as I said, the legal framework is quite favourable, we still have quite a few barriers that we have also identified through our mapping. So, let’s first look at the legal barriers, which existence do continue to impede the access by refugees. These barriers may include the length of residence in the country that is required in order to access the scheme or sometimes the nationalities required in order to access schemes. There’s also significant evidence suggesting that claims to social protection, specifically social assistance benefits can have some negative impacts on applications for regularization of legal status. Long-term residents, family reunification and naturalization.

So, this can disincentive refugees from applying for certain forms of social protection, even if these are legally entitled, but equally, and perhaps even more importantly, we have administrative barriers that also impede the access to social protection systems or that served
as effective deterrence. These include documentation requirements, which refugees may not meet for example, that you need a birth certificate in order to access specific benefits. The lack of access to bank accounts, which is required in order to register and receive social assistance and refugees often have challenges to access bank accounts, all to detour, numerous variables in disregard. And we have the ambiguous interpretation of the law. If refugees are not explicitly mentioned as eligible a lack of access to services, both in person and online for online surfaces.

For example, oftentimes an ID is required in order to access. And refugees don’t have the ID in order to have the right number to enter and access. You need the internet connection and the devices. Oftentimes the phone support is a mono lingual. And if you don’t speak the local language, you cannot access refugees may not have the means for transport in order to go to the social services, and so on.

So based on the mapping, we identified a couple of recommendations in order to enhance access to social protection schemes in general, many of which are also relevant now for the, for the Ukraine situation. So first of all, we continue to build public support for inclusion by highlighting the benefits of holistic approaches, access to safety nets and the potential contributions of refugees in creating diverse, robust societies.

We recommend the review of social protection, laws, and policies to ensure that they are inclusive non-discriminatory and consistent recommend raising awareness among social services and local authorities on administrative and practical barriers and how to tackle these. And we also recommend the participation of refugees in the assessment that development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of social protection schemes, and social services to ensure that these take into consideration their needs and capacities.

Jo Sharpe: So when you were conducting that mapping, of course, looking at the situation of refugees coming from outside of European countries who are fleeing different conflicts around the world, coming back to the Ukraine situation in line with your findings, how are you seeing Ukrainian refugees being integrated into social protection systems in neighbouring countries?

Susanne Klink: So, I think there's an important additional element, which we have not had before it, because the European Commission, EU justice and ministers met on the 3rd of February in order to discuss it, the European Commission proposal to activate the EU temporary protection director in order to respond to the situation in Ukraine and drive us to the U of people seeking safety. The ministers agreed to the proposal, and this is the first time ever that the temporary protection directive has been activated. And on March 4th it entered forest for one year, once implemented by the member states, it will provide immediate protection in the EU for Ukrainians and third country nationals for the refugees or permanent resident status in Ukraine who were living in Ukraine on February 24th.

So, this date of February 24th is important. The EU states should implement the temporary protection directive as soon as possible to quickly provide people fleeing with as much needed safety and protection. In the right directive, we have important elements which were not
there before for refugees. So, the temporary protection directive includes the access to social welfare or means of subsistence upon arrival.

As I said before that asylum seekers only had access to limited, specific social protection schemes under the reception directive. But now the temporary protection directive speaks about access to social welfare from the onset. And it also includes other rights that asylum seekers usually don’t have as, for example, the access to the right of employment, right upon arrival and also other important elements that are also included for asylum seekers in general, but for example, the access to education is mentioned there, the access to medical treatment, the access to accommodation or housing, which are all very important elements when we speak about excess to integration and inclusion in the country in accordance with the article seven of the directive.

Member states may also apply this decision to other persons, including to stateless persons internationals or third countries other than Ukraine who would be residing legally in Ukraine. And who were unable to return in safe and doable conditions to the country of origin. And also it’s important to mention that the temporary protection directive is a minimum directive, and member states may do more and expand it to additional caseloads or to provide more rights and services than stipulated there and the UNHCR very much encouraged with the broad application of the temporary protection directive to other nationalities in order to provide protection. How the directive is being implemented very much depends on each member state.

So, while some states are using this specific social protection system that are in the support being set up for asylum seekers, others, including them in the mainstream social protection schemes. And this is also still being developed currently in order to provide the response, refugees are also not necessarily always aware yet on the temporary protection directive.

So, this is one of the issues we are also seeing with the UNHCR, that there's a need to provide adequate information in order for refugees to be able to access these schemes and to ensure that they have access to their rights.

**Jo Sharpe:** It is really fascinating to see this crisis unfold in a part of the world where social protection is so well developed, perhaps not in every country, but certainly in aggregate and compared to many other regions of the world, in Africa, or even Latin America, Southeast Asia.

It’s really interesting as we start to hear some reports about how those might be made available to refugees, I saw, for example, Ukrainian families will have access to the family benefits that are provided in Poland to Polish families. And that, you know, over time they’ll have access to other services as part of the regular provision of social protection in that case.

So, you were saying that this is the first time that the temporary protection directive has been invoked. And it was really interesting to hear you describe the way it potentially extends social protections and other forms of support, not just to Ukrainians, fleeing Ukraine, but other people who need to leave Ukraine and are unable to return to home countries, for whatever reason.
I know it's early days, but how do you think this might advance the discussion in Europe about integration and how these sorts of protections might be extended to other refugees in the future.

**Susanne Klink:** Yeah. I mean, I've already mentioned that we encouraged the broad application of the temporary protection directed to other nationalities to provide effective protection.

In addition, we have huge interest of all kinds of stakeholders now to respond to the Ukraine crisis. And we very much hope that this will also positively influence the response to refugees from other nationalities. When we are looking at possible solutions and discussing what the different stakeholders, we always put the issue of refugees, of other nationalities on the table in order to enhance inclusion and ensure that everybody can benefit from the different programs and services being provided in order to ensure that anybody with a refugee status independent of the nationality has the same rights and access to services.

**Jo Sharpe:** As we see in the media. And when we hear about people leaving Ukraine, we often do hear about people who are traveling to stay with family and friends in neighbouring countries. There's a lot of informal support being provided by civil society, organizations, churches, community groups, those sorts of institutions.

What role do you think informal social protection will play in this crisis?

**Susanne Klink:** We have seen incredible generosity from all sides and from citizens, from civil society organizations, from public services, nation, and local governments, and also the private sector. There are financial and material donations, such as for example, food or hygiene items.

There is office for free transport and accommodation. Very sitting in people's homes and also in hotels, made available by private companies. We have seen office of interpretation, psychological counselling access to mobile communication to be able to contact family members and friends, information provision and so on.

So, it's really quite impressive. The current response and many reception centres are not fully occupied because there is so much accommodation in private settings, through families and friends and other networks in also from citizens from the different countries. But we also have to say that, I mean, many Ukrainians who are currently arriving half networks of families and friends, because there is a huge diaspora of Ukrainians in Europe.

We are also expecting more Ukrainians to arrive in the future that perhaps have less networks of families and friends, and this may require more assistance and who are also more vulnerable, we also have already seen people who have arrived more disoriented and without a clear country where they would like to reach and settle this way, also have less support and need more institutional support in order to respond to the needs.
And of course, we do have, refugees who are not Ukrainian. You were already refugees or asylum seekers are in other needs of international protection in Ukraine, and now arriving in the European countries who don’t have this network and need institutional support from the onset. On the other side is also important to say that the situation is very volatile, and it’s just started and we don’t know how long this will last.

So perhaps in the beginning we have a very generous support from everybody in order to find private solutions. But at some point. The networks and friends and families may not be able to cope anymore. And they will need to have support from institutional site in order to cope with the situation and to provide the necessary access, not only to cover their basic needs, but also for people to be able to get included in the host society to access the different services, to be able to find employment and so on. So, it is very difficult to say right now how this will evolve over the time. But for now, it's really impressive. And it's wonderful to see that it's really the whole of society approach with everybody wanting to support and provide assistance.

**Jo Sharpe:** What other lessons about providing cash-based interventions and other forms of social assistance from other humanitarian emergencies in other parts of the world can be applied to this crisis?

**Susanne Klink:** Well, the situation is quite unique in my view. So, it’s difficult to compare this situation to other previous refugee crisis.

I was just describing this whole society response from everybody. And depending on where you are in this response, it's just not available. It's not existing. I also spoke about units, the UNHCR approach to cash. And I think this is perhaps something that it's important to link to two previous crises as part of the learning, just because we now have a very inclusive cash approach in order to ensure the connection to social protection systems and to avoid any parallel mechanisms, but to facilitate inclusion from the onset and through CBI facilitated access to social protection, to employment, to financial inclusion. So, this is something that I think is important from previous crisis.

That it's the learning that is being applied. But of course, as I was saying, we are only providing emergency cash [inaudible] the government which are providing, the longer-term support and the introduction of the social protection systems. So, it’s still a bit different than in other contexts. One additional point I would also very much like to underline is just the need not to forget the other refugee crisis. When we are speaking about the Ukraine crisis, this is now in the media. Everybody is thinking of it, but we also have many other refugee crises around the world in Syria, Yemen, Somalia, and Iraq, just to name a few, and these should not be forgotten. On the other side, we also see a very generous support in these countries, from the neighbouring countries in those regions that have welcomed refugees in their territory in large numbers.

And which is also something that is very much to applaud. So, the response now in the Ukraine crisis is also comparable to what is being done in other parts of the world. And we would also like to highlight the neighbouring countries. Often playing in a very important role to support refugees arriving to their territories,
Jo Sharpe: Susanne Klink.

I know you’re very busy at the moment responding to this situation. So thank you once again for making the time to talk to us today.

Susanne Klink: No, thanks a lot, Jo. It’s been a big pleasure and it’s really important also for us to speak about social protection and refugee inclusion to social protection systems, not only as part of the Ukraine situation, but also in general.

So many thanks for this opportunity.

Jo Sharpe: And thank you for tuning into this bonus episode of the social protection podcast. We are a production of socialprotection.org from the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth. Follow us on Twitter at SP_gateway and find us on Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn. Subscribe to this podcast by your favourite podcast provider.

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