



# WISE BROWSING, SAFE POSTING

PROTECTING DISPLACED COMMUNITIES AGAINST  
DIGITAL THREATS – A COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH





## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In response to the Ukrainian crisis, online communities have become essential spaces for assisting refugees, connecting them with vital information and offering access to services. However, this rapid expansion of online platforms has also exposed refugees to increased risks, including technology-facilitated GBV, exploitation (through accommodation, transport, or employment offers), trafficking, grooming, phishing, doxxing, and financial scams.

To counter these challenges, UNHCR Hungary launched the "*Wise Browsing, Safe Posting*" project in August 2022, with the support of the UNHCR Innovation Services' Digital Innovation Fund. The initiative aims to promote safe and responsible online behaviour among refugees by providing them with the necessary tools, resources, and training to protect themselves and their families from online risks. It also focuses on capacity building for online community operators, promoting improved digital safety practices.

During the project, UNHCR engaged in a participatory design process with refugees, who voiced their concerns about their safety in online spaces and flagged their experience with exploitative schemes they regularly encounter. This was complemented by a technical roundtable with 45 stakeholders from 19 organisations, to discuss the challenges of managing online communities, curation strategies, and reporting mechanisms. Interviews with online community operators underscored the challenges of content moderation and the need for more robust training and informed approaches.

The project's outcomes include interactive workshops for adults and youths, resources on UNHCR Help Hungary website, a highly successful social media campaign, and the production of educational videos and practical booklets. In Hungary, the initiative reached more than 3,500 refugees in person, and over 50,000 viewers online. The materials were also used by the UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe in the Stay Safe campaign, reaching over 5 million viewers across 13 countries.

Looking ahead, the project aims to offer its suite of educational materials and digital safety resources to additional UNHCR offices and operations interested. The outcomes of the project are also streamlined into UNHCR Hungary's new innovation project of 2024, utilising digital tools and in particular Artificial Intelligence to harness protection-related information from online communities, in a safe, ethical and privacy-centred manner.

# SCALE-UP OF ONLINE COMMUNITIES DURING THE RESPONSE OF THE UKRAINE CRISIS

As the situation in Ukraine escalated rapidly, various **online platforms and communities emerged as critical lifelines for the millions displaced by the conflict**. When the response began, UNHCR Hungary could observe a remarkable mobilisation of resources and support through digital channels. Social media platforms, websites, and communication apps became essential tools for disseminating information, coordinating relief efforts, and connecting refugees with assistance.

Spontaneously established communities, often initiated by volunteers from host countries or members of the Ukrainian diaspora, **offered frequently updated information on safety, travel routes, shelter options, and essential services**. This proved to be invaluable for those seeking refuge from the conflict.

One and half years later, **these platforms continue to play an important role for the displaced populations as they settled at new locations**. Among the offered help, discussions with refugees highlighted the special significance of community-based information. These became essential for **gaining practical knowledge through each other's experience**, like accessing services, or understanding the implication of newly introduced legislations.



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Realising the importance of digital platforms, UNHCR Hungary conducted a **mapping exercise that identified over 70 online communities used by Ukrainians**, primarily Facebook and Telegram groups. The communities collectively host over 330,000 members (including volunteers from the host country and overlooking the potential overlap between groups).

During the initial days of the refugee response, **there were over a thousand messages shared daily in Telegram groups and hundreds of posts in Facebook groups**. Although the activity in these communities gradually decreased, there are still over a hundred messages per day on Telegram and 20 refugee-related posts on Facebook. The rest of the content now are mostly job offers targeting Ukrainians, however, these are typically published in communities that were created before the conflict started.

To understand the needs of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, the most active communities were included in **regular social media monitoring and the insights were published in weekly internal reports**. This information was positively received by UNHCR units and got streamlined into their daily work. **Digital engagement especially improved**, as the online materials (like UNHCR Help Hungary) got better aligned with the topics regularly discussed by refugees online.

**70**  
Mapped  
communities

**330k**  
Combined  
membership

**650**  
Daily Facebook  
posts in Groups  
09 / 2022

**1000+**  
Daily Telegram  
messages  
03 / 2022

# RISE IN HARMFUL ONLINE BEHAVIOUR TARGETING REFUGEES

While the scale-up of the online initiative was a positive sign of solidarity, it also **presented clear protection risks to the forcibly displaced population (mostly women and children), who were already in a highly vulnerable situation.** Indeed, misuse of online platforms have led to a rapid growth in ICT-facilitated exploitation.

When **UNHCR Hungary engaged with refugee communities in focus group discussions**, participants reported frequently encountering financial scams disguised as governmental programs; fake job offers that required them to provide personal information or upfront payments; and cases of data theft. Underage participants mentioned instances of online harassment, often in the form of receiving unsolicited reactions to their publicly shared content from strangers. Boys specifically mentioned ongoing harassment from Russian players during gaming.

Additionally, UNHCR has gathered information on risks related to online luring and recruitment, children's exposure to grooming on social media and in gaming activities, exploitation and trafficking risks stemming from transport and accommodation advertisements, instances of gender-based violence, personal identity theft and scams resulting from fake announcements of humanitarian assistance, but also volunteers approaching adolescent refugees online.

*Participants of UNHCR led focus group discussions reported frequently encountering financial scams, unsafe job offers, online harassment, and difficulties accessing trustworthy information.*

**Against this backdrop, women and girls felt specifically vulnerable when seeking assistance** - including housing and jobs -, yet their growing financial insecurity after months of protracted displacement left them with little option but to keep using these channels and taking on the risks within. Adding to this, the trafficking of Ukrainian victims (especially girls) had already reached severe levels [IOM].



Adults voiced strong worries about their children's safety on social media. **They felt ill-equipped, lacking both the tools and knowledge to properly educate their children about threats online.** It also became apparent that both adults and youths lacked a clear understanding of the real-world consequences that could arise from online interactions, such as violence or exploitation.

Based on the experience of refugees and findings from the social media monitoring, **UNHCR Hungary built an internal repository of harmful online content**, with real-life examples and proper explanation of how each of the schemes work and exploit refugees. This helped to gain a better understanding of the frequent strategies and their evolution in the online communities. →

## FAKE OFFERS OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Scammers impersonate charity workers and humanitarian organisations, promising assistance to refugees in need. After requesting an upfront fee and personal information, the scammers either disappear or use the information to further exploit the victim.

These offers are often promoted with paid advertisements on social media platforms, and even regularly shared under UNHCR's posts using fake accounts.

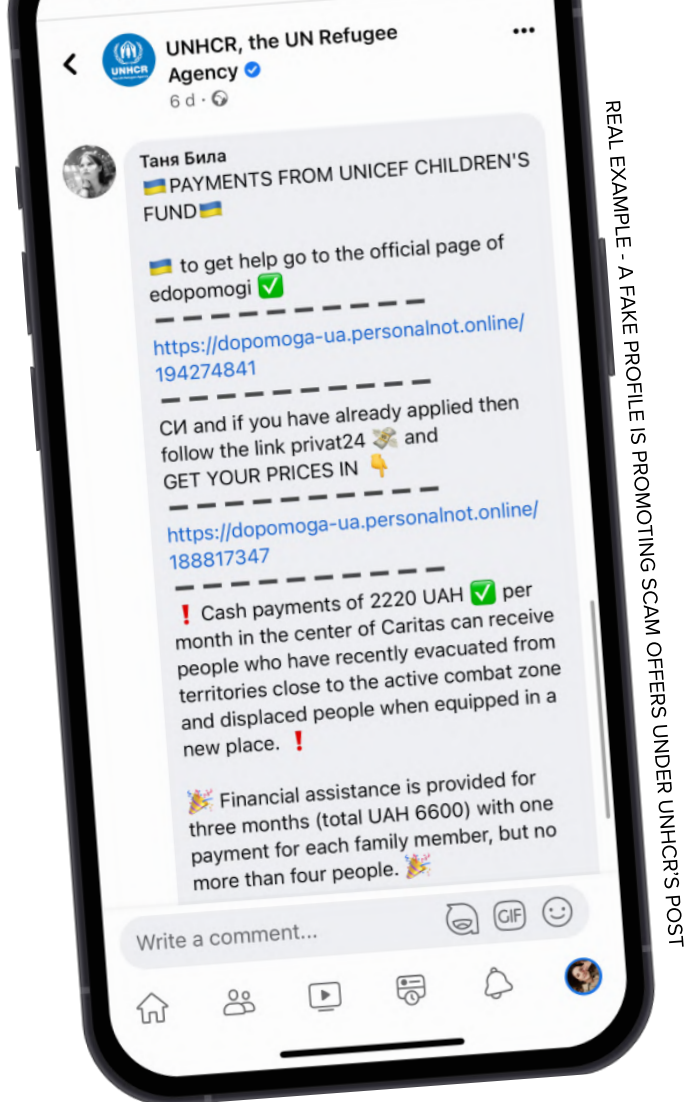
## RENTING BANK ACCOUNTS

Criminals are offering refugees money in exchange for using their bank accounts. The purpose is allegedly everyday banking activities, however the accounts will be used for illegal activities, such as money laundering. Victims unknowingly become accomplices to criminal actions and can face legal consequences.

## CRYPTO AND INVESTMENT SCAMS

Scammers are specifically targeting members of online Ukrainian communities with deceptive investment opportunities. Using fake profiles, they reach out to potential victims in direct messages for a friendly chat and gradually changing the topic into investment offers and promises of enormous return. These offers are of course fake, and all transferred funds will disappear immediately.

Alternatively, scammers also offer online platforms for managing investments, that despite looking legit (e.g. by displaying trusted banks and investment companies), are in fact fake.



REAL EXAMPLE - A FAKE PROFILE IS PROMOTING SCAM OFFERS UNDER UNHCR'S POST

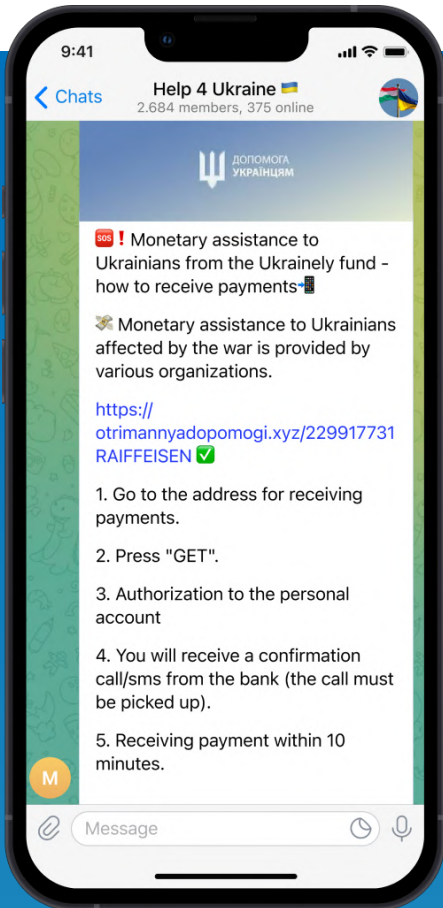


REAL EXAMPLE - A FAKE PROFILE IS APPROACHING WITH A SCAM OFFER IN DIRECT MESSAGES

# COPYCAT BANKING SITES

Offers of humanitarian assistance are also used to lure victims to copycat banking sites. These websites are copying real Ukrainian banking platforms to the smallest details, deceiving even the most careful eyes. If someone enters both their login credentials and the multi factor authentication token, scammers will gain complete access to their bank account.

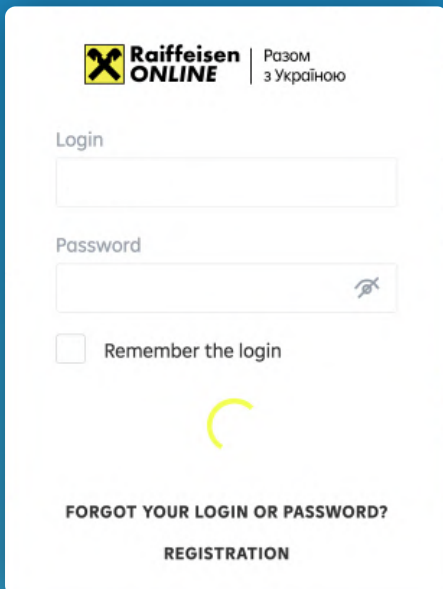
The websites are launched on different domains every day and promoted through Telegram bots, making it extremely difficult to continuously report and remove them from communities.



REAL EXAMPLE

## HOW DOES IT WORK?

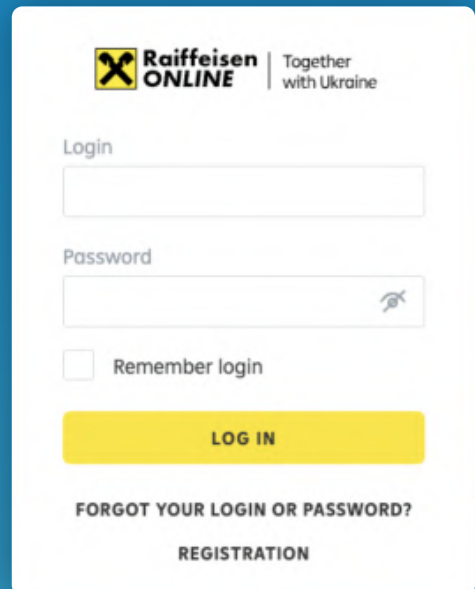
- DISGUISED UNDER HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE
- SPECIFICALLY TARGETING DISPLACED UKRAINIANS
- REDIRECTING TO A COPYCAT BANKING SITE
- REQUESTING LOGIN CREDENTIALS
- BYPASSING THE BANK'S MULTI-FACTOR AUTHENTICATION



REAL EXAMPLE

← FAKE WEBSITE

REAL WEBSITE →



## UNVERIFIABLE JOB OFFERS

Employment offers with low entry requirements specifically targeting Ukrainian refugees - like construction and factory jobs - quickly appeared. However, clear description of the positions, remunerations, working conditions, and most importantly, verifiable details of the employer were often completely missing from job offers, potentially leading to labour exploitation.

Unfortunately, refugees being in an already financially vulnerable position, can be easily tempted to apply for such positions, where they will be asked to pay a “brokerage fee” for a company that does not even exist, or be employed without a contract or for lower wages than originally promised.

An extremely common scenario is fraudulent job offers seeking to recruit drivers for attractive salaries. Upon taking the offer, victims are forced to transport immigrants illegally across borders, diverting attention away from real human traffickers. Police are on the lookout for such cars, they arrest and prosecute the victims, who have no proof of being hired for the job by someone else.

## REQUESTS AND OFFERS INCLUDING PROTECTION RISKS

When refugees turn to online communities for help, they often share sensitive information to explain their situation and seek assistance, including personal details like their location, family composition, or pictures of their documents. When shared online, this data can be susceptible to misuse, targeted harassment and surveillance, and bears a significant risk of identity theft.

Online communities have also been platforms where offers of help were specifically directed at vulnerable groups like women or underage girls. While offers of accommodation always include the risks of Gender-Based Violence, similar transportation offers carry the risks of human trafficking.



PRO\_100\_IRINA 🇺🇦

💰💰 SEASONAL WORK 💰💰

🚗🚗 FOR DRIVERS 🚗🚗

From 2000\$ to 5000\$

!! IN EUROPE WITHOUT BORDERS !!

Advantages:

✅ transportation of passengers with guarantees of payments !!

- payment by card/crypto

- fuel advance 🇺🇦

✅ support 24/7

- work every day

- proven routes

Requirement :

✅ the presence of any of your / rent a car

- ability to navigate in the navigator 🗺️

- Internet access 24/7 📶

- responsibility

Write to me, I will answer all questions!

✉️ @PEREVOZKI\_EU7 📩



Accommodation, Help & Shelter for

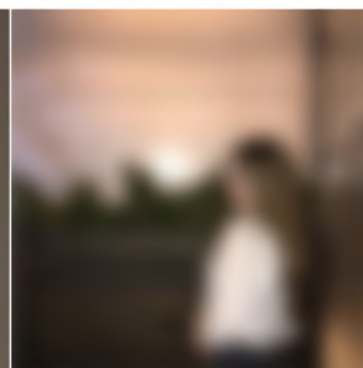
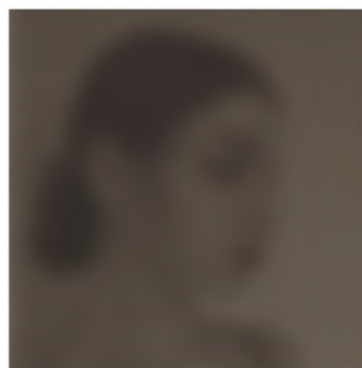
Ukraine

★ +2 · 7 h · 🌐

Hello, my name is Dasha, I am looking for a sponsor.

I am from Ukraine from the city of Kharkov. In Ukraine, I was a model, and I would very much like to continue doing this in the UK. My English is not very good, but I can speak and understand a little. Now I am looking for someone who can accompany me until my 18th birthday. My parents gave their consent that I could go alone. I would prefer to live in London or close to it, because such an area would be very good for my future. I am a very cheerful, purposeful and responsible girl, I always try to achieve my goals! I always keep the house clean, I love to cook and will be happy to help my new family with this.

Best wishes Daria 😊



Ahmed

👤 · 5 g · 🌐

Country:Italy

City: Colonna (Rome) .

People i can host : 1 girl or a mum with child (0-10)

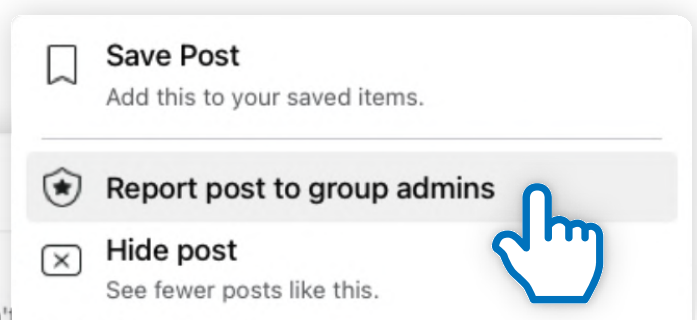
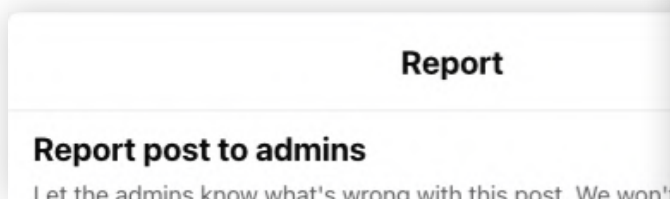
For how long : until 2 month and help to settlement.

# CHALLENGES OF MODERATING ONLINE COMMUNITIES

While mapping the relevant online communities of Ukrainians in Hungary, it was found that around **two-thirds of them lacked visible moderation, leading to lower quality content** and potential risks of spreading scams and exploitative offers among refugees. This was also underpinned by recording a higher volume of daily posts in unmoderated groups compared to those with some level of moderation. Among the communities, the largest one, with more than 130,000 members stood out for having strong moderation guidelines, structured information materials, and a well-organised volunteer team.

By engaging the administrators of seven online communities, **UNHCR Hungary explored the implemented content moderation, vetting, and information-sharing practices**. While the immense voluntary effort that the administrators invested into managing their communities has to be recognised, there are multiple aspects where the lack of comprehensive safety measures and systematic vetting processes could potentially expose refugees to additional risks.

- Administrators had no prior experience in content moderation and had to acquire these skills on their own, however **guidelines specifically designed for a humanitarian context were not available**.
- Built-in **reporting features in social media platforms are not commonly used** by community members, except when there is a personal dispute between them, often involving hate speech.
- There is a **difference between a platform's moderation guidelines and humanitarian protection principles**. Even though some content shows potential signs of exploitation, this is usually not enough to get it removed by the platform.
- **Content moderation features and tools vary between platforms**. While Facebook offers a way for reviewing content before publishing it in a group, such features are not available on Telegram, resulting in a larger rate of harmful content.
- Administrators often received feedback from community members about their negative experience with offers, companies, and organisations. They **sought guidance about forwarding these to authorities**, as the responsible party for handling such cases was unclear.
- **Supplying up-to-date information to communities was difficult** due to the many independent NGOs, governmental authorities, and humanitarian organisations whose service offerings are often found unclear. There was also a considerable difference between the official and the in-practice handling of issues for refugees.
- Refugees stated that information was only trusted if it could be determined that the community is safe and credible. **Referring to official sources was identified as a key element of reliability**, but the sources (e.g. governmental websites) were sometimes perceived as not user friendly by refugees.
- **Administrators were open to re-share UNHCR information materials** when they are designed to be easy to understand. It was also mentioned that refugees would welcome a wider variety of digital channels offered by humanitarian actors.
- Administrators recognised that online scams and harmful "trends" quickly evolve. The communities investigated these cases on their own but expressed their **interest in collaboration and sharing information with each other and UNHCR**.



# FOSTERING EXPERT DISCUSSION AROUND DIGITAL THREATS

On 6 December 2022, UNHCR convened a Technical Round Table with 45 participants from 19 different institutions, practitioners, expert organisations, and administrators to discuss the **challenges of managing online communities, identifying harmful content, risk trends, and reporting mechanisms.**

Participants raised concern over the **lack of training available for new moderators and reported that most administrators do not have the time to provide adequate training.** This could lead to lower efficiency in vetting, and high turnover rates within moderation teams.

They also expressed concern over the legal implications of handling data of both refugees and volunteers, and **asked for guidance on data privacy and protection issues.**

Language barriers and lack of digital literacy were identified as major challenges that can hinder the effectiveness of information dissemination, with many participants noting that users from different linguistic backgrounds may struggle to navigate complex reporting mechanisms and be at higher risk of falling prey to misinformation and online exploitation.



## Recommendations

- Build strong and effective online communities through **collective effort and enhanced coordination between stakeholders**, administrators, platform providers, and expert organisations.
- **Develop clear guidelines for moderation and reporting**, incorporating real-life use cases to equip administrators with the skills to identify online abuse and exploitation.
- **Streamline information for refugees on platforms by grouping it into key thematic areas**, and provide this information with relevant laws and regulations.
- Gather all essential and practical information online for refugees, **including trusted sources and detailed instructions for administrative matters.**

Some recommendations have already been implemented in UNHCR Hungary's digital engagement strategies, with others remaining for future work.



# LAUNCHING THE *SAFE ONLINE* EDUCATIONAL CAMPAIGN IN HUNGARY

## NEW SECTIONS IN HELP! HUNGARY

A newly developed educational section was integrated into UNHCR's dedicated website to provide information for refugees, including nine pages of educational content that equips refugees with essential knowledge on understanding online risks, responding to threats, reporting incidents, and accessing expert organisations.

The launch of the website gained enthusiastic support and positive feedback from UNHCR colleagues even outside of Hungary, and is currently being rolled in the Czech Republic.

9

Thematic pages

2

Languages translated

7000+

Unique visitors

8000+

Page views

## EDUCATIONAL VIDEOS ON YOUTUBE

A series of three live-acting videos, each ranging from one to three minutes in duration. The videos feature UNHCR's Ukrainian-speaking Refugee UN Volunteers, addressing complex topics related to online safety, such as how to respond to online violence and provide practical guidance to empower refugees in safeguarding their digital well-being.

8

Videos created

3

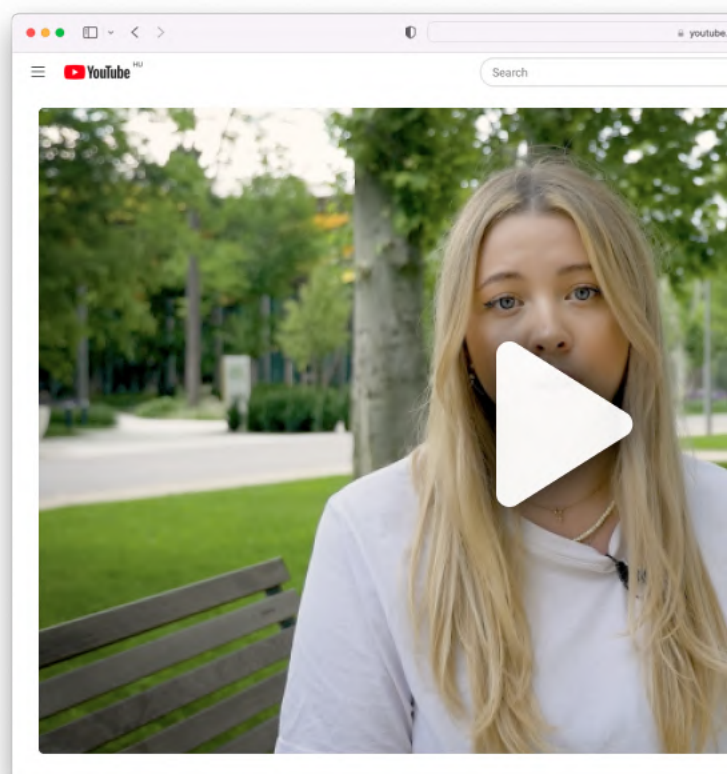
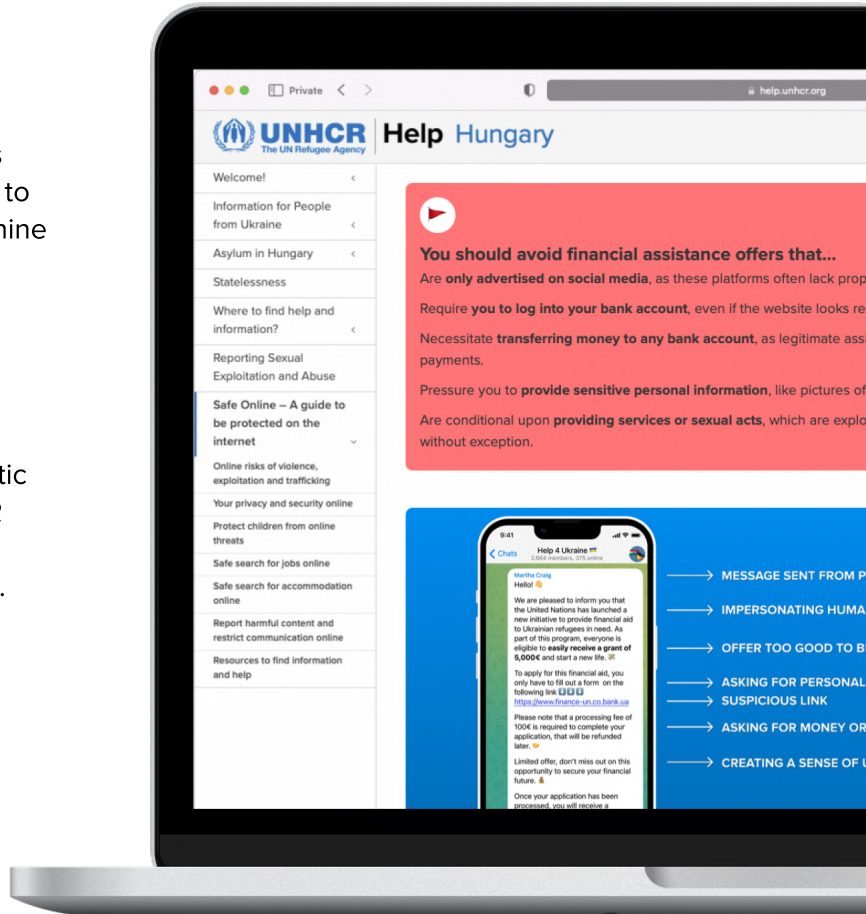
Refugee UNVs involved

242k

Views gained

1.1M

Appeared in recommendations



## SOCIAL MEDIA CARDS

A series of educational carousels designed to increase awareness about online threats among refugees. Comprising seven sets with a total of 35 story cards, each translated into English, Ukrainian, and Russian, the cards can be easily used in Facebook or Instagram ads. This approach can increase reach and impact of disseminating online safety knowledge to a diverse audience.

Using the materials, UNHCR Hungary ran a social media campaign for two months on Facebook and Instagram.

**57k**

Viewers  
reached

**277k**

Appeared in  
News Feed

In August 2023, the UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe also used the materials in its Europe-wide Stay Safe campaign.

**13**

Countries  
included

**5M+**

Viewers  
reached

## SOCIAL MEDIA VIDEOS

A collection of five 40-second videos, tailored to be used across Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram. The videos were designed to present online schemes that specifically target and exploit Ukrainian refugees. Through real-world examples, the videos illustrate the potential threats, and equip refugees with the necessary knowledge to safeguard against them.

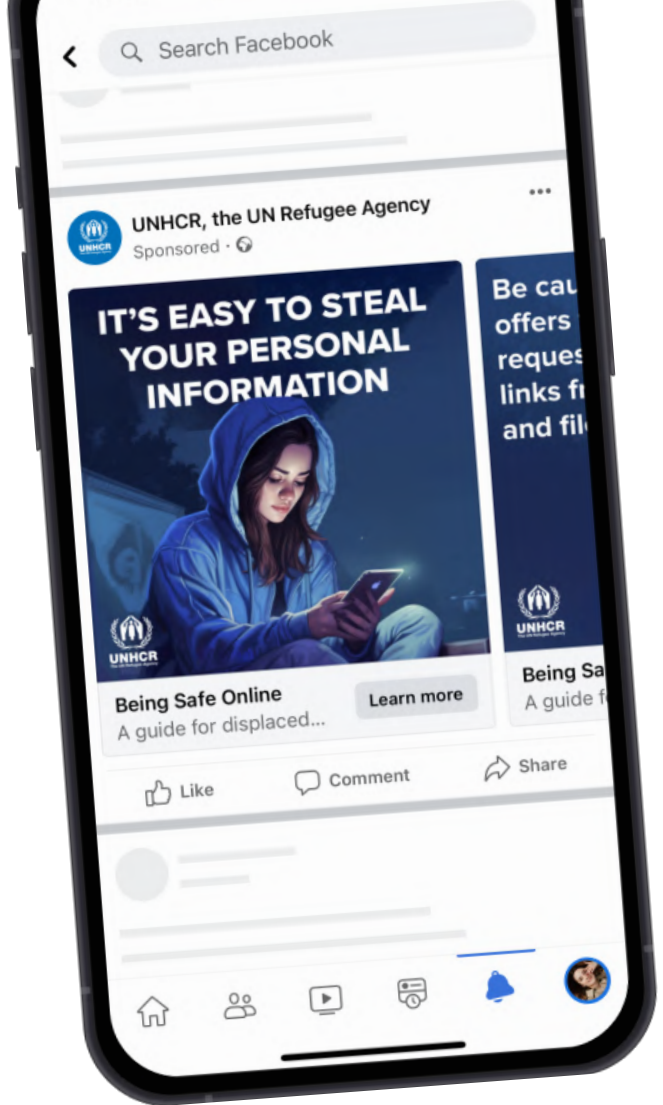
With translations available in both English and Ukrainian, these videos stand as tools to both educate and empower refugees.

**31k**

Viewers  
reached

**747k**

Appeared in  
News Feed



## EDUCATIONAL BOOKLETS

Comprehensive guides designed separately for adults and youth, totalling 36 pages of crucial information on all aspects of online safety. These booklets offer practical tips, real-life examples, and extensive visual materials to engage and educate refugees about digital security and responsible online behaviour.

During participatory feedback discussions both adults and youth rated the booklets positively, praising readability, language, visual appeal, and engagement.

The booklets were endorsed by the Internet Hotline online advisory and help service of the National Media and Infocommunications Authority of Hungary.

**3500**

Copies printed

**2**

Versions developed

**3**

Languages translated

**20**

Distribution locations in Hungary



## INTERACTIVE WORKSHOPS

The workshops are one-hour sessions tailored separately for refugee boys, girls, and adults. The workshops look into the most pressing topics of online safety with interactive tasks and hands-on examples. With the lead of expert facilitators, the workshops offer a safe space for refugees to discuss their past experiences and build essential skills to protect themselves online.

**6**

Workshops conducted

**50+**

Participants trained

**10**

More organisations interested in hosting



FROM 2024 

# SUPPORTING EXPANSION AND IMPLEMENTATION AT NEW LOCATIONS

Starting 2024, the project will **support additional UNHCR offices in using the developed educational and awareness-raising materials**, starting in Slovakia, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic. The expansion aims to replicate the project's success in Hungary, by adapting the materials to local contexts, building local capacities, engaging with local stakeholders, and community administrators.

This expansion is expected to contribute to the broader digital protection efforts of UNHCR, align with its recently introduced Digital Transformation Strategy, and continue advocating for the adoption of safe digital practices for displaced people.

## UNDERSTANDING AND PROTECTING ONLINE REFUGEE COMMUNITIES USING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

UNHCR Hungary is also launching a new innovation project, with the support of the Innovation Services' Digital Innovation fund.

After recognising the challenges in keeping up with the growing activity in public online refugee communities, the project will explore the potential application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to more effectively comprehend the needs and obstacles faced by refugees through their online interactions.

This exploration will emphasise the importance of implementing AI in a safe, inclusive, and ethical manner, considering the unique risks associated with using AI in this context, such as privacy concerns, potential biases in AI algorithms, and the importance of cultural sensitivity.

Directly involving 150 refugees and potentially impacting up to 11,000 more, this initiative represents a critical advancement in addressing the evolving digital aspects of protection efforts.

The integration of AI is expected to significantly improve digital engagement with refugee communities, leading to more timely and effective interventions, while the project will seek to establish guidelines and best practices for the use of AI in humanitarian contexts, ensuring that the technology is used responsibly and does not inadvertently harm the very individuals it seeks to assist.





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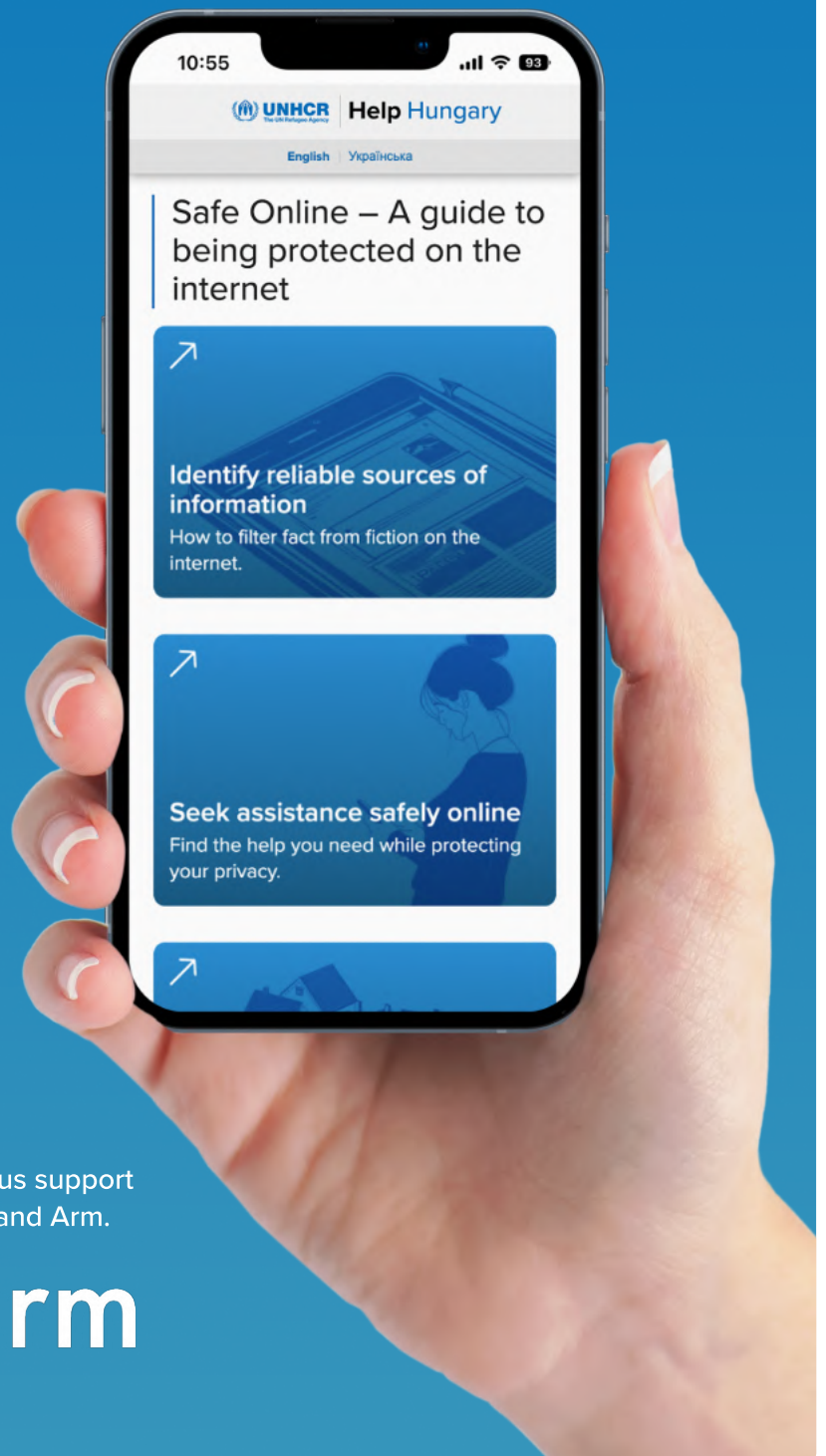
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