



# **INTEGRATION OF PEOPLE FLEEING UKRAINE IN THE EU**

**NOTE TO EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

Lodewijk Asscher, Special Adviser for Ukraine, May 2023



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## Foreword

For more than a year, Ukraine has been resisting a ruthless, unprovoked and unjustified Russian war of aggression, that has destroyed countless lives, homes, and livelihoods of innocent civilians. Since the very first day of Russia's brutal invasion Europe has stood united and determined in its unwavering support to Ukraine and its people, offering humanitarian, economic, and military support. Throughout our continent, we have witnessed an outpouring of solidarity for those who have had to flee their homeland, often traumatised by the atrocities of the war.

Thanks to the swift activation of the Temporary Protection Directive, people from Ukraine have been supported in accessing medical care and finding housing and schools for their children. They have been given access to the labour market and social welfare assistance, to help them build a new life in the EU for as long as they need or want to stay.

In June 2022, I appointed Mr Lodewijk Asscher, former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Social Affairs and Employment of the Netherlands, as my special advisor to assist and coordinate efforts of the European Commission to promote social integration of Ukrainian refugees in terms of work, housing, education and healthcare in EU Member States.

I asked him to engage with public authorities, social partners and civil society initiatives and displaced people from Ukraine across Europe to get a better picture of the situation on the ground. Mr Asscher's report provides valuable insights into the nature of the challenges people fleeing the war in Ukraine are facing and identifies successful experiences and inspiring best practices.

Europe should take heart from the displays of resilience and solidarity described in this report. By building on the impressive efforts made to accommodate displaced people from Ukraine, Europe can further enhance the effectiveness of its integration policies. The findings and recommendations presented by Mr Asscher provide valuable food for thought for policy-makers and civil society alike, and I thank him for his dedication.

Slava Ukraini!



**Nicolas Schmit**  
Commissioner, Jobs and Social Rights



Dear Commissioners,

The College of Commissioners appointed me as Special Advisor for Ukraine in June 2022. My mandate ran until March 2023 and consisted of the following:

The Special Adviser for Ukraine is requested to provide direct assistance to Nicolas Schmit, European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights on:

- the identification of good practices and lessons learnt, in the reception and integration of people fleeing Ukraine;
- specific actions falling within the mandate of the Commissioner that address the challenges created by the Russian invasion of Ukraine to the EU labour markets and societies in the short, medium and longer term.

Because it touches upon integration and migration, this report is also relevant for the work of Ylva Johansson, European Commissioner for Home Affairs.

In this report, I summarise my main findings from four missions to frontline Member States, as well as numerous conversations with relevant stakeholders in Member States and at EU level. I also feel privileged to have had the opportunity to discuss with many Ukrainian people themselves, and to add their perspective. This report is meant to provide reflections to all those involved. Whenever possible, I have added references to other sources.

Based on my findings, this report also presents a set of recommendations to policymakers and stakeholders at EU, national, regional and local level.

*Disclaimer: in this short report, we refer to displaced people from Ukraine. Those include Ukrainian nationals, as well as other third-country nationals. “Refugees” should be understood as people who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another (here, EU) country. They may or may not be beneficiaries of the Temporary Protection Directive.*

## **I - 24 February 2022: the start of the Russian war in Europe...and of unprecedented solidarity**

1. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has presented Europe with an existential challenge: international principles and European values, such as sovereignty, democracy and the rule of law, are directly at stake. As the war has entered its second year, its outcome will determine our future. It is not only the weapons on the frontline that speak for justice and a perspective for the future, but also the way the European Union deals with the largest number of refugees from Europe since the Second World War. No country in the EU can afford to look away, because this time, we are the region where the conflict is taking place. Protecting the EU and the values it stands for requires a strong, collective effort. Those who tend to shirk responsibility for hosting asylum seekers and refugees by referring to “protection in the region” cannot look away now. Now, we are the region.



**Lodewijk Asscher**  
Special Adviser for Ukraine



***No country in the EU can afford to look away, because this time, we are the region where the conflict is taking place***



2. It can be argued that the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) was the most important decision taken by the Council in March 2022 - upon a proposal from the Commission. It has provided a legal status and immediate protection, together with a harmonised set of rights, to over four million people. For all persons fleeing the war, the TPD has granted access to work, social welfare, medical care, access to education for children, as well as accommodation, in addition to the possibility to move freely - under certain conditions. One year on, it can be seen as a success story, as highlighted in the Commission's recent Communication<sup>1</sup>. The EU can be proud of how immediate, smooth and comprehensive its response has been.
3. As the war continues to rage at our borders, the current situation justifies renewed efforts. At the end of 2022, almost half of the beneficiaries of temporary protection (1.9 million out of 3.8 million) were hosted by Germany (1 004 965) and Poland (974 060), followed by Czechia, Italy, and Spain. The highest numbers of beneficiaries of temporary protection from Ukraine as a share of a country's population were observed in Estonia, Czechia, Poland, Lithuania and Bulgaria<sup>2</sup>.
4. The expected winter wave has not materialised to the extent that might have been expected, despite the Russian attacks on infrastructure that have made conditions on the ground difficult. After peaks of over 200 000 daily entries into the EU, the situation has now stabilised at around 240 000 entries per week, and slightly less exits per week (about 238 000 on average) due to cross-border movements.
5. The EU's success in providing safety and security is an important achievement. The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and its partners, whom I met in September 2022, said that in the first weeks of the war, at the height of the exodus, they had to deal with over 10.000 people a day arriving at Warsaw East Station. The NRC told me about the long queues that formed at the border posts. They described how desperation, confusion and panic were overcome by a collective response, that was as improvised as it was efficient. One could witness an unprecedented outpouring of solidarity from all sides.



***Unprecedented outpouring of solidarity from all sides***

6. **It is now clear that this will not be a short crisis.** Last Autumn, in 2022, I spoke at a conference organised by Clingendael - the Netherlands Institute of International Relations. The conference, with the title "We are the region" took place as Member States came to the conclusion that long-term strategies were needed - not a prolonged crisis mode. The EU response also shifted towards more long-term objectives. More than twelve months after the first Russian attack and after initial EU statements stressing the exceptional and temporary nature of hosting displaced people fleeing Ukraine, it has become clear that the war will

<sup>1</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Temporary protection for those fleeing Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine: one year on <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2023%3A140%3AFIN>

<sup>2</sup> Source: Eurostat [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Ukrainian\\_citizens\\_in\\_the\\_EU](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Ukrainian_citizens_in_the_EU)

continue for the foreseeable future, and that a large proportion of displaced people from Ukraine will not be able to return any time soon. This is all the more likely as the war has damaged significant parts of the country, pointing to a reconstruction effort that will take years, perhaps a decade.

7. Despite the inherent uncertainty, both the EU and individual Member States have started to invest in the long-term participation and integration of people fleeing Ukraine, for example through language training, adapting curricula, and setting up new or expanding existing services. Such actions have helped to address similar challenges regarding the social and labour market integration of displaced persons from Ukraine, and were at the centre of the October meeting of Employment and Social Affairs Ministers in Prague, in which I participated<sup>3</sup>. The conversation we started there was followed up by the March 2023 ministers' meeting. Coordination has also been enhanced through the European Network of Public Employment Services, whose leaders I met on 15 December 2023<sup>4</sup>. Their surveys<sup>5</sup> have highlighted language trainings, skills assessments, and the recognition of qualifications as major priorities. The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) has supported these efforts on the ground<sup>6</sup>.

## II - First set of conclusions

1. My first conclusion: The activation of the TPD has been a success story. Although it is too early to fully assess the outcome of the TPD, the high numbers of Ukrainians active in the labour market as well as the prolonged outpour of solidarity point to a successful investment in providing both safety and prospects for beneficiaries. It has not only provided protection, but also some stability for those coming to the EU. By alleviating the burden of the waiting process that has marked the lives of so many people fleeing, and thereby presenting a very different picture to host societies, it has helped to convince Europeans that refugees were not the problem – Putin's war was. But with the TPD set to last until March 2025 at the latest, a long-term perspective on integration requires us to think about what comes next.
2. A second conclusion concerns the frontline Member States. Many of them, without a strong tradition of hosting refugees, have exceeded expectations in many ways, building infrastructure and providing access to their social security systems, almost overnight. It started with accommodation. Soon after the large-capacity reception centres, accommodation solutions became more diversified – thanks mainly to host families. The challenge will be to make the transition to long-term sustainable solutions.
3. The third conclusion is that solidarity is alive and kicking in the EU. People have opened their homes and their hearts en masse. A year after the war began, support remains high. But we should not take it for granted. In some regions or social groups, the opposite is actually true. Other forces are at work here, feeding social discontent and populism. The Russian regime is very active on this virtual front of the war and Europe cannot afford to be naive. The challenge will be to also invest in sustainable solidarity, focusing on displaced persons from Ukraine as well as on their host communities.

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<sup>3</sup> Informal Meeting of Labour and Social Affairs Ministers (EPSCO) 13/10/2022

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.pesnetwork.eu/2023/01/25/this-pes-network-board-4/>

<sup>5</sup> Public Employment Services step up support to persons displaced from Ukraine - <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=10526&furtherNews=yes#navItem-1>

<sup>6</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/european-social-fund-plus/en/news/ukraine-new-cohesion-support>



## Solidarity is alive and kicking in the EU



### III – Integration efforts: reports from the ground

Looking at concrete examples of integration efforts across Europe, we can identify success factors and challenges:

#### 1. Housing

Housing through private solutions and hospitality has helped to provide initial accommodation, but cannot be a permanent solution.

Many people living in Europe, in particular in the frontline countries, have opened their homes to host displaced people from Ukraine. While cherishing this solidarity, the Commission and national administrations soon had to consider how to make this solidarity sustainable. The Commission's **Safe Homes** guidance compiles experience and practices of EU Member States, civil society, foundations and individuals involved in these efforts<sup>7</sup>. Through a EUR 5.5 million project managed by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the Safe Homes initiative will be tested in Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. Based on results, some practices could be replicated, namely when it comes to transition from private housing to long-term autonomous housing solutions.

The 'Safe Homes guidance' document consolidates the experience, guidance and good practices from the EU Member States, the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), regions, cities, civil society, foundations, entrepreneurs and individuals involved in these efforts. For instance:

- In **the Netherlands** the central government, in collaboration with the Association of Dutch Municipalities, the Red Cross, the Dutch Council for Refugees, the Salvation Army and TakeCareBnB has provided a Guide to Private Reception of Ukrainians.
- In **Luxembourg**, host families could contact a hotline managed by Caritas and the Red Cross with the support of the Ministry of Family, Integration and the Greater Region, to request information (available via both phone and email). The hotline was replaced in February 2023 by dedicated social worker assistance via a Red Cross general switchboard.
- The Luxembourg Red Cross can vouch for your tenant. You can also rent out your property directly to the Luxembourg Red Cross as part of a social rental scheme.
- In **Ireland**, the Red Cross together with other NGOs, UNHCR and Amnesty International, has developed an online platform to provide information and support to hosts.
- In Ireland, the Red Cross reviews the accommodation offered against a set of standards. Local authorities are also involved to ensure that the property meets the needs of the beneficiary.

<sup>7</sup> Safe Homes guidance, available at: [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/safe-homes-guidance\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/safe-homes-guidance_en)

Member States have developed websites to facilitate matching between hosts and beneficiaries and to better coordinate longer-term sustainable housing. I first heard about the **Stiprūs Kartu** (“Strong together”) platform<sup>8</sup> during my first country visit to Lithuania. Romania’s **Un Acoperiș** (“A roof”)<sup>9</sup>, France’s **parrainage réfugiés** (“refugee sponsorship”)<sup>10</sup>, as well as Belgium’s **Solidarité Ukraine** (Wallonia)<sup>11</sup> and **Be my guest** (Brussels)<sup>12</sup> have taken similar approaches. Financial compensation schemes have been set up for private accommodation providers (legal entities or households) or directly to persons fleeing Ukraine. Latvia granted the so-called “solidarity benefits” of up to EUR 300/month to households providing accommodation, while Poland decided to pay PLN 40 (ca. EUR 8) per day to individuals and legal entities. Romania introduced the “50/20 programme”, which provides homeowners RON 50 (ca. EUR 10) per person per day for accommodation and utilities and RON 20 per person per day for meals. Germany has supported private residents with rent subsidies, with amounts varying between municipalities.

EU funding has also been instrumental. Under Cohesion policy, additional liquidity was provided, amounting to EUR 13.6 billion, and more than EUR 1 billion were reprogrammed to address the situation. Home affairs funds and emergency assistance funding also contributed significantly<sup>13</sup>.

In Czechia, an ESF+ call for proposals aims to improve access to social housing for displaced Ukrainians<sup>14</sup>, while Bulgaria decided to retroactively cover the cost of hotel accommodation (including meals) between February and May 2022. In Poland, the arrival of numerous people from Ukraine triggered immediate change in legal provisions, thus allowing access to EU-funded food aid<sup>15</sup>.

Investments made under cohesion policy programmes to address migration challenges amount to EUR 1.097 billion (as of May 2023):

EUR 685 million under the 2014-2020 European Social Fund (ESF)

EUR 2.2 million under the Fund for European Aid to the most Deprived (FEAD)

EUR 410 million under ERDF 18 out of 27 Member States have amended their ESF 2014-2020 programmes, either by adding a new priority to support people fleeing Ukraine, or by including explicit additional under existing priorities - BE, BG, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LV, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SK

## 2. Employment service

Employment and counselling services have undergone major changes. Many PES offer a simplified registration or pre-screening for displaced people from Ukraine, such as the Belgian VDAB (Flanders), Bulgaria, Czechia, Spain, Poland, Portugal and Romania.

Dedicated employment agencies or info points, both temporary and longer-term ones, have been set up, combining a range of support services. In Warsaw, the Labour Office on **Grochowska Street**<sup>16</sup> soon

<sup>8</sup> <https://stipruskartu.lt>

<sup>9</sup> [www.unacoperis.ro](http://www.unacoperis.ro)

<sup>10</sup> <https://parrainage.refugies.info>

<sup>11</sup> [https://lampspw.wallonie.be/dgo4/site\\_logement/site/ukraine](https://lampspw.wallonie.be/dgo4/site_logement/site/ukraine)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.bemyguest.brussels/s/?language=fr>

<sup>13</sup> See above-mentioned communication on Temporary protection (...) one year on

<sup>14</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/czech-republic-european-social-fund-support-social-housing-those-displaced-ukraine\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/czech-republic-european-social-fund-support-social-housing-those-displaced-ukraine_en)

<sup>15</sup> This was done under the Polish FEAD programme - European Fund for Aid to the most Deprived. <https://ec.europa.eu/european-social-fund-plus/en/news/ukraine-final-adoption-care>

<sup>16</sup> <https://warszawa.praca.gov.pl/>

became dedicated to helping people fleeing Ukraine. All materials were translated, Ukrainians were recruited to help others, and a meeting room was set up to matching sessions between employers and jobseekers. Still in Poland, the European Social Fund (ESF) helped to set up regional **Integration Centres for Migrants**, offering integration and language courses, initial support in finding a job and recognition of the diplomas all in one place<sup>17</sup>.

There, as in many other cases, success depends largely on the cooperation between employment services, municipalities, social services, migration authorities and NGOs. For example, the **Danish PES** participates in a Partnership for Ukrainians in jobs with the social partners and regional and national governments.

Other good practices include informal **networking and 'buddy' systems**, for example in Lithuania, to speed up access to the labour market. **Peer-to-peer support**, word of mouth, and an active role of local communities, help newcomers to develop their own networks and become independent.

### 3. Skills

Feedback from national authorities and anecdotal evidence suggests that many Ukrainians have found work quickly in their host Member State, however often below – or very different from – their qualification and skills level. This underutilisation of skills is especially the case for women<sup>18</sup>.

Another interesting phenomenon, not necessarily linked to an underutilisation of skills but rather a sign of changing work patterns, lies in the fact that women have started taking up jobs traditionally perceived as “male”, e.g. operating forklift trucks or cranes in shipyards.

Part of the answer lies in ensuring that skills and qualifications can be easily understood and valued in the host country, and that individuals get support and guidance to move into jobs that correspond to their skills sets. In Bulgaria, for example, the **'Solidarity'** project helped Tatiana find a job as an accountant, in line with her qualifications<sup>19</sup>.

The Commission and the European Training Foundation, together with Member States, have completed a **comparison of the Ukrainian and European Qualifications Framework** to help this understanding. Member States are also called upon<sup>20</sup> to speed up the qualifications recognition for people who want to take up work in regulated professions which include nurses, general practitioners and – depending on the Member State – teachers and educational staff.

The EU **Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals**<sup>21</sup> is now available in Ukrainian. Services assisting people in their integration process, such as public employment services or NGOs, use the tool in an interview situation to produce a profile of an individual's skills and experience as a basis for personalised advice on further steps, e.g. a referral to recognition of diplomas, skills validation, further training or employment support services. The tool is being used in countries such as Italy, Poland, Spain, Germany, the Netherlands and Austria. Dutch organisation **Vluchtelingenwerk** completed a job coaching project using the Tool to support 300 Ukrainians to work in the second half of 2022. In France, **Philia** – an

<sup>17</sup> Fleeing Ukrainians rebuild their lives in Poland - <https://ec.europa.eu/european-social-fund-plus/en/projects/fleeing-ukrainians-rebuild-their-lives-poland>

<sup>18</sup> Video - Ukrainians have the right to work in Europe - but how difficult is it to find a job? <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-227932>

<sup>19</sup> Ukrainian refugees find work in Bulgaria - <https://ec.europa.eu/european-social-fund-plus/en/projects/ukrainian-refugees-find-work-bulgaria>

<sup>20</sup> C(2022)2319 COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION on the recognition of qualifications for people fleeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine

<sup>21</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/migrantskills/#/>

organisation that supports asylum seekers and migrants to find employment, among other things - piloted the Tool to support Ukrainian women into the labour market.

The **European Partnership for Integration**, spearheaded by Commissioners Johansson and Schmit, brings together the Commission and European social and economic partners to improve employment opportunities for refugees and other migrants, as well as prevent labour exploitation<sup>22</sup>.

In October 2022, the Commission and the European Labour Authority set up the **EU Talent Pool Pilot**. This pilot project consists in an EU-wide platform to facilitate the matching of displaced people from Ukraine with suitable jobs through the EURES Portal<sup>23</sup>. Interestingly, a vetting procedure embedded in EURES mitigates the risks of labour exploitation. The lessons learnt from the Pilot will feed into the development of a wider EU Talent Pool for all third-country nationals, to be presented by the Commission by the end of 2023.

#### 4. Co-creation

An active role for refugees themselves has been key in many initiatives. The concept of “user involvement” (and more specifically in this case the involvement of people fleeing Ukraine) in the design of housing, social and employment solutions has long been praised for its contribution to improving the quality, targeting and uptake of various services. Rather than being offered to them, services can be co-created based on actual needs and empowerment processes. I saw this first-hand at **the old bus station on Botova Street in Bratislava**, which has been transformed into an integrated centre. There, people from Ukraine are helping others, by becoming – or pursuing their careers as – community interpreters, service providers, carers or legal advisers. Finland has welcomed more than 45.000 people from Ukraine in 2022 – that is more than in 2015-2016. There, in addition to other services, Mental Health Finland held a crisis helpline and organised training for its staff workers and volunteers, many of whom being from Ukraine themselves<sup>24</sup>. The training focused on the mental health of both displaced and local people. In Germany, a two-day training course was established for volunteers and professionals to help them deal psychologically stressed and traumatised children and families, while training them in self-care and avoiding burnout<sup>25</sup>.

In Latvia, Ukrainian medical personnel and teachers were allowed to work immediately upon arrival, with priority given to the Ukrainian community. Estonia established the **Freedom School** for Ukrainian children and youth fleeing the war, with a school team of 73 persons, 29 of whom are teachers and support specialists from Ukraine. The Netherlands is working to help Ukrainian psychologists rapidly find work as basic psychologists, coaches or trainers, to help displaced Ukrainians. Active involvement lies at the core of recent developments among some public employment services, e.g. in Belgium (Wallonia) where any jobseeker registered with FOREM can try out several jobs before deciding on a training or employment.

More recently, a Ukrainian living in Czechia for several years has become the manager of a hostel in the Modřany area in Prague. In this building saved from demolition and now hosting over 100 people, she will help connect residents and staff<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/joint-statement-european-commission-and-economic-and-social-partners-renewal-european-partnership\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/joint-statement-european-commission-and-economic-and-social-partners-renewal-european-partnership_en)

<sup>23</sup> [https://eures.ec.europa.eu/eu-talent-pool-pilot\\_en](https://eures.ec.europa.eu/eu-talent-pool-pilot_en)

<sup>24</sup> Кількість відповідей на дзвінки до Кризової лінії MIELI ру була вдвічі більше, ніж до пандемії - MIELI

<sup>25</sup> Save the Children Germany - Project: Training for psychosocial support of refugee children and families. <https://www.savethechildren.de/informieren/einsatzorte/deutschland/ukraine-hilfe-deutschland-1/psychosoziale-unterstuetzung-gefluechteter-kinder-und-familien>

<sup>26</sup> The project is implemented by Caritas - <https://praha.charita.cz/pomahame-stovce-uprchliku-v-ubytovne-v-praze-modranech/>

Civil society, volunteers and communities have risen to the challenge of helping people fleeing Ukraine. In Germany, Caritas has reported on numerous examples of ‘social cafés’ and other gatherings between people from Ukraine and people who had to flee several years ago. Having experienced loss and exile years earlier, those people fleeing Syria, Iraq or Afghanistan have felt the need to help also.

In Czechia, in the border region with Germany, the National Volunteer Association has been managing two “**clubs**” for displaced people from Ukraine<sup>27</sup>. The first is for those who are sure they want to stay. It offers language courses and training, as well as exchanges with local people. The second club focuses on the Ukrainian language, for those who are unsure – or still too affected to think about it. Moves between clubs are of course frequent, but it shows how to cater for the longing for the motherland, and at the same time create the conditions for smooth integration into a new community.

**In Germany**, Child Friendly Spaces (CFS)<sup>28</sup> supports existing structures, such as a temporary shelter in Frankfurt. Located in a hostile neighbourhood near the train station, the shelter now allows children to play, socialise and learn, while being protected from physical harm and psychosocial distress. Since March 2022, CFS have provided direct support to 315 children each month, and indirectly helped 3 800 others (through counselling provided by other operators for instance). Staff has reported positive outcomes for children, e.g. relaxed attitude notably towards situations of conflict.

#### **IV - Challenges remain to ensure lasting success of integration efforts**

1. It is clear that much of the successful work on the ground has been done by NGOs and local administrations. Their practical approach, combined with their networks, has enabled them to waste no time in providing immediate support to those in need. Unfortunately, reports from the ground point to a lack of sustainable funding, including from the EU, directed at those organisations and public authorities.
2. The integration process is difficult to monitor, for instance because of a lack of clear national and European overview of the actual labour market status of TP beneficiaries. Registration rates with the public employment services vary significantly across Member States. Numbers of employed TP beneficiaries are not systematically available and lack reliability when they are.
3. Meanwhile, what we might call “**solidarity fatigue**” is beginning to set in in some Member States. The cost of living crisis has hit low and medium income families in host societies and created a context in which Russian propaganda could be more successful. Underlying problems in these countries such as a lack of affordable housing or scarce childcare capacity have been exacerbated as a result. The lack of direct funding has also put an enormous pressure on sometimes fragile organisations as well as volunteers. Feedback from the ground tends to point to a low level of access to funding, from the EU in particular. Large communication efforts at EU level do not reach the local level and this may become a problem in the future, creating or exacerbating a lack of trust in financial support coming from the EU. Cohesion policy funding has responded to this by introducing an innovative feature in its Flexible Assistance to Territories. Called FAST-CARE, it includes a ring-fencing of 30% of the expenditure on people fleeing Ukraine for local authorities and civil society organisations.
4. Groups in vulnerable situations, especially people with disabilities, unaccompanied minors and Roma - require more support than can currently be given by frontline Member States. Civil society

<sup>27</sup> For instance, in the Ústí Region: <https://dobrovolnictvi-usteckykraj.cz/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.savethechildren.de/schutz-und-spielraeume/>. Video from CFS in Frankfurt: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3BvRWEBPJT8>

organisations have occasionally reported difficulties for persons with disabilities to access support, e.g. difficulties in obtaining recognition of disability certificates, which act as a gateway to support services in the host country.

Child protection and the provision of childcare and education have been a top priority, as many children arriving from Ukraine are without their parents or with guardians, including children with disabilities. Around 69 % of the displaced children were under 13 and 0.5 % were unaccompanied minors<sup>29</sup>. Despite improvements, challenges remain in registering children with national child protection services and providing community and family-based support, while avoiding institutionalisation. Here again, EU funding has stepped in, such as in the Rome region (Lazio) where 10 children with cancer were evacuated from Kiev and Lviv hospitals with their relatives<sup>30</sup>.

The risk of labour exploitation and trafficking was also highlighted several times during my mission. Undeclared, informal and unprotected work existed before the war and continues to be a concern.

5. There are also examples of integration being held up by what we might call a **“waiting dilemma”**. People who fled tend to keep an eye on their home country and want to return as soon as it is safe, making it difficult to decide to start learning a new language, to embark on more serious training or education programmes, or to integrate children into the education system of the host country.

This dilemma also discourages companies (especially SMEs) from investing in training and upskilling because they do not know how long people will stay.

6. Political risks, disinformation and populism are threatening democracy. We should be aware that the Putin regime has a huge interest in influencing public opinion on displaced persons from Ukraine. The discourse on migration refugees can be weaponised to sow division within the EU. Indeed, Member States have indicated that they have seen an increase in disinformation operations targeting this issue.

Combined with the rhetoric around ‘social tourism’ or ‘benefit tourism’, this could pose a threat and hinder integration. Fortunately, feedback from the field shows that this remains marginal, and that public support remains high. Just recently in Estonia, the far-right EKRE party, which campaigned against support for displaced people from Ukraine and against Ukraine itself, was defeated in favour of the Reform Party of Prime Minister Kallas. Not only did her party lose no seats, it even gained an extra three seats.

## IV – Recommendations

1. Provide clarity on what will happen after the TPD. It is clear that even after a second extension of the TPD many displaced persons from Ukraine are unlikely to be able to return home safely. This will create uncertainty and could exacerbate the waiting dilemma described above. It could also lead to divisions within the EU as Member States may be tempted to adopt different approaches. We should reassure displaced persons from Ukraine living in the EU about their status after the Temporary Protection Directive expires. To this end, I would call for a joint

<sup>29</sup> COM(2023) 140 final

<sup>30</sup> Lazio builds a caring society for Ukrainians – supported by the ESF | European Social Fund Plus (europa.eu) <https://ec.europa.eu/european-social-fund-plus/en/news/lazio-and-esf-for-ukrainians>

commitment with the Ukrainian government to extend the TPD for the expected duration of the reconstruction of Ukraine, possibly ten years. A joint statement between the Ukrainian Government and the European Commission could announce a Reconstruction Permit, to be launched after the second extension of the TPD.

To ensure success in the long run, Member States must adopt long-term integration strategies, in coordination with the Ukrainian government, which is understandably concerned about the prospect of missing out on so many families who will be needed to rebuild the country once the war is over. This would be the continuation of a strong Ukraine-EU relationship, established long before the war. By providing choice and options to people from Ukraine in the EU, one creates the right conditions for reconstruction later on.

2. Monitor the implementation of the TPD and make it the model of integration policy for future groups of protected refugees and third-country nationals, focusing on four success factors:

- providing all third-country nationals with a clear status;
- giving them immediate access to the labour market;
- connecting them to the host society;
- and involving local and regional authorities (including in rural areas), NGOs (including migrants and refugee associations), as well as social and economic partners in integration efforts.

This can be accompanied by avoiding applying double standards, thus widening the gap between Ukrainians and other refugee groups. Member States could consider adopting a single set of measures, in relation to access to the labour market, child, social and health care (including benefits), as well accommodation - its location (close to potential workplaces - and quality (small, family-based rather than larger facilities).

At this moment, in some Member States double standards are noticeable in the treatment of groups of refugees. Even though this can be explained based on different legal statuses, Member States should pay attention to unfair differences.

3. Guarantee a place at the table of policy discussions for cities and NGOs. Too often, they regret not being part of the discussions, even though they are the first ones to be affected by policy changes. In this context, existing platforms for exchange could be redesigned or expanded to include the perspective of NGOs and local authorities more systematically. Their expertise on the ground is remarkable. Such platforms include the **Ukraine Solidarity Platform** and the **European Integration Network** (EIN).
4. **Tackle the waiting dilemma** by helping refugees to find more suitable jobs and by helping their children to integrate better e.g. by increasing their enrolment in local schools. This also

makes economic sense, as many people working below their level is a considerable waste of talent. This requires planning and accompanying changes in the labour market, through upskilling and reskilling.

More specifically:

- Provide additional incentives to register with the Public Employment Services and to take up active labour market measures, combined with language training. Benchmark the results through the PES Network to strengthen capacity where needed.
  - For children: Member States should make sure to include displaced children from Ukraine in their education systems. Although education is a right, it is not always possible to attend a local school. Some children follow the Ukrainian curriculum online or in Sunday schools, sometimes in addition to attending a local school in person. While recognising the legitimate desire of the Ukrainian government to help preserve Ukrainian identity in children, Member States should to their utmost best to enable those children to also participate fully in local schools.
5. **“Use2023”**. Behind this catchphrase is a call for EU Member States to act here and now and use this year, 2023, to fund and carry out upskilling, language training and higher education. The EU labour market could benefit enormously from better systems for recognising and matching skills.
  6. Make the most of existing EU funding programmes for 2021-2027, especially under the European Social Fund Plus (EUR 99.3 billion) and the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (EUR 10.2 billion) to support the integration of displaced people from Ukraine into European Member States. One suggestion stemming from numerous exchanges on the ground, would be to find ways to promote direct, or at least, facilitated funding to local and regional authorities as well as NGOs. In this respect, I advise the Commission should carefully assess FAST-CARE and its promising provision allocating some funding – via national authorities – to local authorities and NGOs<sup>31</sup>. These have helped with, if not carried out entirely, integration efforts. Such additional funding opportunities, direct or not, could also be integrated into future policies and instruments, e.g. post-2027 EU funds.

More specifically, maximising EU funds could be threefold:

- Stepping up mutual learning exchanges between ESF+ and other managing authorities through a Community of practice<sup>32</sup>. This will allow funding authorities and other ESF+ stakeholders to discuss the integration of third-country nationals and exchange good practices for the current funding period (2021-2027).
- Working with Member States to better disseminate and communicate about funding opportunities under the ESF/ESF+ as well as other funds such as AMIF and the Recovery and Resilience Facility. Too often, stakeholders miss out on opportunities to support the

<sup>31</sup> This significant move of Cohesion policy towards more direct support needs to be counterbalanced by its limited scope, as it applies to 30% of the funding targeted at addressing migratory challenges, thus not to the overall allocation.

<sup>32</sup> To be launched in the second quarter of 2023.

integration of third-country nationals. For instance, Poland has increased support for this group by allocating separate resources in its ESF+ programmes – a novelty for this country and potential that is too little known by stakeholders.

➤ When planning for the next programming period (after 2027), seriously considering a scheme that would make it easier for cities and NGOs to access funding (eg. through dedicated funding or simplified procedures for smaller organisations).

7. Work with the European Labour Authority (ELA), within its limited mandate in relation to third-country nationals, to help people fleeing the war in Ukraine access decent and relevant jobs and ensure their protection from exploitation and undeclared work. The ELA is notably responsible for the European Platform tackling undeclared work<sup>33</sup>, and for coordinating inspections in the Member States.
8. Tackle solidarity fatigue with a concerted effort to support Member States in addressing the cost-of-living and housing crisis, in order to avoid the risk of tensions between local and regional authorities and host societies or the perception of double standards. This can be done by ensuring that recent Commission initiatives in this area (such as the Just Transition Fund, the Social Climate Fund (recently agreed), SAFE (for energy), CARE and FAST-CARE) trickle down to the local level, and are both understandable and transparent to people in the EU.

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<sup>33</sup> <https://www.ela.europa.eu/en/undeclared-work>



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