



**3rd meeting of the Permanent group on Immigration and Integration (IMI):  
"The protection and integration of Ukrainian refugees, 9 months on: how well is it going?"  
Monday, 21 November 2022**

**Event Report**

*"Our actions towards Ukrainian refugees must not be an exception. They can be our blueprint for going forward."*

-President Ursula von der Leyen, European Commission, State of the European Union 2022

**Event Summary**

This was an event full of excellent panellists and topical debate. Some of the key take-aways of the event were:

- A number of challenges were raised regarding the protection and integration of refugees. On the protection side, there is the concerning amount of unaccompanied minors, it has been difficult to identify and verify their care-givers and therefore formalise their protection. Many are at risk of being trafficked or abused. Also, it must be recognised the distinct needs for persons with disabilities.
- Housing remains a key challenge. Accommodation is available privately through personal connections, NGOs, social housing or in some cases in reception centres. There are housing shortages, as well as sustainability issues around private housing.
- Regarding integration: there are still considerable language barriers, difficulties in recognising qualifications and a possible mismatch of skills. As a result, refugees tend to do low-skilled work, which is more precarious and makes them more vulnerable to exploitation. Also, available and affordable child care remains critical to full integration.
- There are silver linings such as the impressive solidarity shown among Member States at all levels in handling the crisis. The issue of migrant integration can stoke divergent political views but we've seen collaboration, between Member States, and at the national, local and regional levels.
- There have been plenty of integration measures, with some Member States going beyond the standards of the Temporary Protection Directive. There has been a rapid roll-out of education measures for schools to welcome children. Extra care has been taken in order to preserve the emotional well-being of children.
- The role of diaspora and networks are critical in rapidly responding to the crisis and easing integration. There is already a large Ukrainian diaspora so the pressure on social or government housing is not as high as it could be.
- Uncertainties remain: how long will the war last? Millions of refugees want to and are returning to Ukraine. More displacement from Ukraine is expected in the winter months. In Poland, it is estimated that a 1/3 of refugees will remain. Bearing this uncertainty in mind, do Member States want to invest in the long-term?
- How is the protection and integration going? Public attitudes are relatively welcoming of Ukrainian refugees, fatigue has not set in. The EU and Member States are better prepared



this time round to deal with the mass influx of refugees. How we are treating Ukrainians should be the blueprint for all refugees and the future will attest to this. Once the crisis has abated, let's reflect on what went right, what went wrong, and the lessons learned.

### **Objectives of the event**

Nine months on from when the war began, it is useful to reflect on how well the protection and integration process is going. The event is important as it aspires to give a holistic overview of the state of things today.

The event is spread over four panels. The morning focusses on the progress of protection, by giving the institutional perspective (the first panel) and then the view from the ground (the second panel), namely the pressures that bordering Member States are experiencing.

The afternoon shifts to the progress of integration in Member States: the facts and figures of integration in terms of employment, education and housing (the third panel); and then how well integration is going from the viewpoint of social partners, civil society and think tanks (the final panel).

Each panel comprises of distinguish experts from the EU institutions, EU agencies, international organisations, social partners, civil society organisations and think tanks.

### **Panel I: The protection of Ukrainian refugees: the institutional perspective**

- **Cecilia VERKLEIJ**, Deputy Head of Unit, Asylum, DG Migration and Home Affairs, European Commission
- **Nataša CHMELÍČKOVÁ**, Chair, Asylum Working Party, Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU, and Head of Unit for Asylum Legislation at the Czech Ministry of Interior
- **Lucie VERACHTEN**, Political Administrator, DG Justice and Home Affairs, General Secretariat of the Council
- **Giuseppe VARACALLI**, member of the Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs, Committee of the Regions

This panel looked at how the EU, Member States (MS) and regional authorities reacted in the immediate aftermath of the invasion of Ukraine: how well they anticipated and prepared for the influx of refugees and how they are keeping the flows of refugees under surveillance.

It is clear that there were lessons learned from the large influx of refugees in 2015 as a result of the civil war in Syria. To manage the large inflows of refugees from Ukraine into the EU and to express the EU's solidarity with Ukraine, the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) was triggered on this occasion, one week after the invasion, and unanimously by MS. The issue of migration tends to be divergent amongst Member States, but with Ukraine this was not the case.

The EU and MS were better prepared to deal with the large flows of refugees, lessons were learned from 2015. In order to manage the migratory movements, the EU has a toolbox at hand to include: the solidarity platform and the migration preparedness and crisis blueprint, as well as the ICPR roundtables. It is likely that the TPD will be extended until March 2024 and there is even the possibility to extend it until March 2025, but we must wait and see how the war evolves.

The panel focussed on how Czechia is managing the protection of Ukrainian refugees. It is one of the main countries receiving refugees. At the outset of the war, it created a package of legislation to be able to fully implement the TPD. Czechia provides a one-stop-shop of services to refugees,



including access to health and social care. One of the challenges encountered by Czechia in managing this situation is the inability to sufficiently verify unaccompanied minors (UAMs) and identify their care-givers or legal guardians. This concerning issue, plus difficulties in data collection and exchange, were issues that were raised several times throughout the day.

Finally, regional and local authorities have been at the frontline in assisting refugees; they were the first ones to welcome and host the refugees and send aid to Ukraine. The mobilisation for Ukraine should not mean that we lose sight of the plight of refugees worldwide, especially as the spotlight might not be on them.

### **Panel II: The view from the ground: the challenges and strains facing refugees**

- **Justyna SEGEŠ FRELAK and Caitlin KATSIAFICAS**, Senior Policy Adviser and Policy Analyst, International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)
- **Gabriela ALEXANDRESCU**, Executive President, Save the Children, Romania
- **Maria PAPAIOANNOU and Thomas JEZEQUEL**, Information and Analysis Officer and Reception Officer, European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA)

The panel focussed on the current stresses and strains on the systems of bordering MS. The focus was in particular on Poland and Romania. It's clear that the pace and scope of the displacement is quite unprecedented, particularly because of the composition of refugees (namely vulnerable groups such as women, children and the elderly).

In Poland, one the main challenges is accounting for and verifying the number of UAMs. To date 600 000 minors have registered for TPD in Poland, of which a sizeable number of them are unaccompanied. These UAMs are at risk of being trafficked and abused. About 10% of minors have experienced some kind of disability or have suffered some sort of violence. Poland has also become home to many Ukrainian orphans and there are legal and institutional challenges surrounding this too. Identifying and verifying care-givers or legal guardians is complex and arranging care for UAMs needs to be managed. When it comes to jobs, there are more than 400 000 active Ukrainians in the labour market in Poland, however with low-skilled labour available, many are forced to accept poor employment conditions below minimum wage.

In Romania, more than 2 800 000 refugees have entered Romania, around 90 000 remain in the country, of which 45% are children. The top three challenges faced by Ukrainian refugees are: timely and affordable access to health care; full-time and secure employment, and access to school or childcare for children. Save the Children Romania provide a number of services and holistic support to refugees: from help in finding housing to counselling. Education policy in Romania is very open to refugees but barriers have to be overcome, such as language, recognition of education levels and the preference of parents for their children to remain connected to the Ukrainian school system.

The EU Agency for Asylum (EUAA) has a range of information and analytical tools to monitor the implementation of the TPD (which are referenced below). Regarding reception facilities across the EU, reception authorities were very often asked to play a role in hosting displaced persons, but they were not in the lead in terms of support to displaced persons from Ukraine; other organisations and actors were more active. With the vital role of networks and the diaspora, most people sought accommodation privately.

Finally, networks play a role in assisting refugees. There is a significant Ukrainian diaspora in the EU. At the end of 2020, over 1.3 million Ukrainian nationals had work permits in EU. Poland, Italy,



Czechia, Spain and Germany have the largest number of diaspora. Diaspora are critical to refugees for aid, to help find employment and accommodation. Local networks and the quality of networks have their role to play in ensuring good relations with the local community and helping refugees find a sustainable future.

### **Panel III: The integration of Ukrainian refugees in education, housing and employment: facts and figures**

- **Giuliana BENEDETTO**, Policy Officer, Legal pathways and Integration, DG Migration and Home Affairs, European Commission
- **Ramona DAVID CRAESCU**, Department Coordinator, Department for VET and Skills, CEDEFOP
- **Maria CANTERO**, Research Support Officer, Working life Unit, Eurofound
- **Sogol NOORANI**, Education and Policy Systems Analyst, Eurydice, EACEA

The four main domains in which the European Commission is acting to help integrate refugees from Ukraine are: education, employment, health and housing. Regarding education, they are proposing and advancing support for schools and other educational facilities through EU funding and learning initiatives. To boost employment, they are advancing with proposals to recognise skills and have launched the Talent Pool Pilot for displaced persons from Ukraine. To help ease housing pressures, they launched the Safe Homes initiative.

The Skills-OVATE online tool, developed by CEDEFOP, can illustrate how employers in MS have reacted to the influx of refugees by indicating what type of jobs are available for refugees, who is hiring and the skill set required. Although job vacancies seeking highly qualified refugees remains high, there has been a decrease in this, whilst the demand for low-skilled jobs has increased. Even though Ukrainian refugees hold a higher skill set than previously settled Ukrainians, their skills still may not necessary match the skills demanded. There are also problems with recognising qualifications and proficiency in the national/local language.

Referring to Eurofound's EU Policy Watch database, 185 measures were recorded as supporting refugees from Ukraine in the EU, with priorities in housing, education, healthcare and social protection. What is noticeable is that many of these measures draw directly from the TPD and some MS have commendably gone beyond the TPD standard and have provided access to services (such as healthcare) to refugees akin to their nationals.

Finally, the EACEA's report on supporting refugee learners from Ukraine was issued to assist European countries in preparation for this school year. It covers primary and secondary education in 37 European school systems. There are differences across MS with regards to how many children from Ukraine have been enrolled in school compared to the total number of them present in each country. Education systems in general have reacted rapidly with policies and measures to help schools welcome children from Ukraine. Most countries prefer to integrate Ukrainian learners into regular classes and offer extra language support, whereas a few MS decided to integrate children in separate classes.

### **Panel IV: The integration of Ukrainian refugees in education, housing and employment: the perspective from social partners, civil society and think tanks**

- **Robert PLUMMER**, Senior Adviser, BusinessEurope
- **Magdalena CHOJNOWSKA**, International Affairs lead, International Department, All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions (OPZZ)



- **Robert RANSON**, Senior Policy and Advocacy Officer, Social Platform

- **Jasmijn SLOOTJES**, Senior Policy Analyst, Migration Policy Institute (MPI) Europe

This panel focussed on the how uncertainty of how the war will evolve in Ukraine can affect the EU labour market, and of course in the overall integration of refugees. When it comes to labour market integration, one of the big unknowns is the duration of stay of refugees, and this therefore effects the type of support that can be given at national level. There are uncertainties around the level of education of refugees: although the level is considered generally higher than average refugees, there are quite significant skills gaps. With regards to the nature of such qualifications or degrees, they don't necessarily correspond to identified shortages.

Language, which is an issue that came up several times during this event, is a big barrier. Ukrainians are considered generally good in German and English, but they encounter language difficulties in other MS. In Poland, it was highlighted that there are significant language barriers, which means that Ukrainians are more likely to take lower paid jobs and work on precarious contracts, making them more vulnerable to exploitation and poor working conditions.

Other issues raised were: the better the reception and integration conditions, the better the integration. Access to affordable and available childcare, an issue that also came up several times, is key as most refugees are women. There are also difficulties in accessing EU funding to support integration, as many CSOs find it hard to access funds as applying for them can be quite burdensome.

The panel highlighted the realities of policy-making in these times. Given that many refugees want to return home, MS ponder whether it is worth investing in them in the long-run. Policy-makers are driving blind, there are challenges surrounding data collection and information on the ground, but this data and information should still try to reach policy-makers so as to make the most informed decisions. All of this is happening in a time of profound confusion and stress: we are still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, we are facing an energy crisis, high inflation, housing shortages and strained public services. Inevitably, these stressors affect integration.

At the same time, there are silver linings: we have seen a significant degree in collaboration and coordination - horizontally and vertically – between cities, regions, and governments. Oftentimes we see opposition in politics, but this crisis has brought about cooperation. Another positive is a more flexible and individualised approach to integration, such as more flexible language requirements and the use of digital innovation as a more cost effective way to provide access to refugees. As with the COVID-19 pandemic, the crisis has also increased awareness of gender-based violence and childcare obligations.

Finally, so much of the valuable work that is done during a crisis gets lost once the crisis has abated. Once this crisis is off the political agenda, we need to really reflect on what we have done, what we have learnt, what works and use all this intelligence to build a resilience system.

### **Key resources and references**

- Presentations posted on the [event](#) page.
- On the Temporary Protection Directive: DG HOME provides information on the [TPD](#), including on the [solidarity platform](#) and the [migration preparedness and crisis blueprint](#). The Council provides information on the [ICPR](#) (Integrated Political Crisis Response).
- The Committee of the Regions [study](#) on EU cities and regions welcoming Ukrainian refugees: a mapping of multilevel coordination.





- The ICMPD projects: [KOMPLEKS](#) focuses on the protection of vulnerable groups including persons with disabilities in Poland, whilst [TRAFIG](#) looks at developing solutions for protracted displacement situations.
- Save the Children have documented the experiences and wellbeing of children fleeing Ukraine: “[This is my Life, and I Don’t Want to Waste a Year of it](#)”
- The EU Agency for Asylum (EUAA) produces a number of tools to monitor how the protection of Ukrainian refugees is going: [WhoisWho](#) map provides how the implementation of the TPD is going; a joint [report](#) on forced displacement (the profiles, experiences, and aspirations of affected populations); [situational updates and analysis](#) on the Ukraine crisis.
- With regards to reception conditions, the EUAA published two notable publications: on [private accommodation](#) for displaced persons from Ukraine and a [guide](#) to relevant national and regional stakeholders when designing and building new reception centres, based on containers.
- The [Talent Pool Pilot](#), an European Commission to help Ukrainians find jobs suited to their skills, and the [Safe Homes initiative](#), is targeted guidance regarding the organisation of private housing.
- CEDEFOP's [Skills-OVATE](#).
- Eurofound's [EU Policy Watch](#).
- The EACEA reports on supporting refugee learners from Ukraine in [schools](#) in Europe and supporting refugee learners from Ukraine in [higher education](#) in Europe.
- MPI Europe have published on the [innovations in immigrant integration policymaking](#) and a broader [policy brief](#) about fostering more evidence-informed migrant integration policymaking.

### **Background of the IMI group**

The Immigration and Integration (IMI) group is made up of 15 member of the EESC, the group comprises of 5 members from Group I (employers); Group II (workers) and Group III (civil society organisations).

The group aims to support the EESC's work on migration and asylum by: promoting the development of a common European immigration and integration policy based on the principles of fundamental rights and solidarity, with strong involvement of the civil society; preparing the EESC's contribution to the European Migration Forum (EMF); and to make more concretely the EESC's role as a facilitator between organised civil society and the EU institutions in the area of migration policy and migrant integration.

The group tends to organise three meetings a year. For the final meeting of 2022, it was envisaged that a one-day public event highlighting the progress regarding the protection and integration of Ukrainian refugees would be a timely and important reminder of the atrocities of the Russian aggression, and the solidarity shown by the EU towards Ukraine.

Gemma Amran (gemma.amran@eesc.europa.eu)  
Policy officer  
Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship  
European Economic and Social Committee