Please cite as: EUAA, '2.2. Responding to the arrival of persons fleeing the war in Ukraine' in *Asylum Report 2023*, Mai 2023.

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ukraine flag

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 spurred waves of outward mobility by people seeking refuge in neighbouring countries. Within a few weeks, millions of people fleeing Ukraine arrived in the EU through Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. The impact of the war had a profound effect in shaping migration and asylum and naturally occupied a central place in protection-related policymaking at national and EU levels throughout the year.

In response to pressing protection needs, EU+ countries and EU institutions needed to provide quick, yet systematic, solutions. In the immediate aftermath of the invasion, EU+ countries – especially countries at the external border – implemented a number of measures rapidly: they activated emergency situation protocols and preparedness plans; simplified entry procedures; established task forces and coordination mechanisms to provide emergency accommodation and aid; introduced temporary protection schemes; provided tailored information through information points, dedicated phone lines, leaflets and websites; provided specialised psychological counselling and support; extended the period of legal stay/visas for special reasons; paused the processing of applications for international protection by Ukrainian nationals, pending the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive; suspended returns to Ukraine; and, when applicable, removed Ukraine from the list of safe countries of origin.111

Reflecting the EU's commitment to show full solidarity with Ukraine, on 4 March 2022 the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council unanimously adopted a Council implementing decision to activate the Temporary Protection Directive and established temporary protection for displaced people fleeing the war in Ukraine.112 Based on Article 3(2) of the Council decision, the European Commission established the Solidarity Platform to accompany the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive. It became the hub of coordinated EU response, chaired by the European Commission and bringing together Member States, Schengen Associated Countries, the European External Action Service (EEAS), the EUAA, Frontex, Europol, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), UNHCR, and involving Ukrainian and Moldovan authorities.113 The EU Migration Preparedness and Crisis Blueprint Network114 was identified as the most appropriate means for administrative cooperation among Member States and strengthened the foundation for a coherent EU response.115

To coordinate a strong, common European response in addressing the needs of people fleeing the war, the European Commission developed a 10-point action plan with measures to be taken by the European Commission, EU agencies and Member States.116 In addition, the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) 117 was activated, through which Member States can request resources to attend to the needs of the displaced persons fleeing Ukraine and receive co-financing to deliver such assistance. The UCPM was used to channel assistance inside Ukraine too, in what has been its largest operation to date.118 Financial support was provided throughout the year from various EU sources, such as the Cohesion Policy Fund, the European Social Fund, the European Regional Development Fund and Home Affairs Fund.119 EU agencies, including the EUAA, Frontex and Europol, played a crucial role in providing operational support and guidance directly to Member States.

Responding to the internal security risks resulting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the EU and Moldovan authorities launched the Support Hub for Internal Security and Border Management in Moldova120 to catalyse cooperation among EU agencies, Member States and Moldova, including in the areas of firearm trafficking, drug trafficking and trafficking in human beings.121 A key action in May 2022 was the development of a dedicated Common Anti-Trafficking Plan to address the risks of trafficking in human beings and potential victims among those fleeing Ukraine.122

Following the Council decision in March 2022, EU countries proceeded with the application of the Council implementing decision by introducing relevant procedural and reception arrangements, organising information campaigns and granting access to rights for persons fleeing Ukraine. The activation of the Temporary Protection Directive allowed for a clear legal status for persons fleeing the war in Ukraine and systematic access to associated rights, including suitable accommodation or means to obtain housing, access to the education system for persons under 18 years, social welfare and means of subsistance, medical care, employed or self-emlpoyed activities, and educational opportunities for adults through vocational training and practical workplace experience.123 As of February 2023, approximately 4 million people from Ukraine had received temporary protection in the EU.124 In line with the provisions of the Temporary Protection Directive, temporary protection was extended for a further year, until March 2024, thus providing stability and predictability to millions of people.

The UN launched a Humanitarian Flash Appeal for immediate funding to help people inside Ukraine and those seeking protection abroad.125 A Regional Refugee Response Plan was also launched to bring together the UN, NGOs and other relevant partners to support host country governments in ensuring safe access to the territory for persons fleeing from Ukraine.126

Since the beginning of the war, UNHCR provided assistance by undertaking a variety of actions, including delivering core relief items; scaling up of reception structures; providing legal, psychological and information support at reception places; and launching a multi-purpose cash assistance programme to support those who need it the most.127,128,129,130

UNHCR also highlighted the increased protection-related risks that individuals with vulnerabilities faced and called for measures to quickly identify, mitigate and respond to risks of gender-based violence, exploitation, abuse and the trafficking of women and girls.131 Together

with UNICEF, UNHCR urged all neighbouring and impacted countries to ensure the immediate identification and registration of unaccompanied children, access to national child protection systems and temporary foster or other forms of community-based care under the critical protection of a government system.132

The orchestrated response to provide protection showed that such effectiveness is possible. Thus, for example, UNHCR recommended that EU Member States build upon the experiences and apply them in the asylum procedure to the benefit of other groups of third-country nationals who are in need of protection.133

icon displaying a computer with the homepage of who is who in international protection platform

For a detailed overview of actions taken by EU+ countries in providing temporary protection to people fleeing Ukraine, see the EUAA's Providing Temporary Protection to Displaced Persons from Ukraine: A Year in Review.

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