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2.2. Responding to the arrival of displaced persons from Ukraine

2.2. Responding to the arrival of persons fleeing the war in Ukraine

ukraine flag

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 created protection needs for millions of people who sought refuge in neighbouring European countries. The EU and its Member States provided immediate support, allocated significant resources and put in place the necessary structures and procedures to provide access to protection. The activation of the Temporary Protection Directive in March 2022 allowed for a systematic, uniform, predictable and easily-accessible solution. Over 4.3 million people forcibly displaced from Ukraine are currently beneficiaries of temporary protection in EU+ countries.

The key parameters of an orchestrated European response were sketched by the European Commission shortly after the Russian invasion through a 10-point action plan for Ukraine.[65]The Solidarity Platform has provided the space for the coordination of the operational and policy responses of key stakeholders, including the European Commission, Member States, Schengen Associated Countries, the European External Action Service (EEAS), the EUAA, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), Europol, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), UNHCR, Ukrainian and Moldovan authorities, and civil society organisations.[66]

The EU Migration Preparedness and Crisis Blueprint Network has served as the forum for the exchange of information to inform coherent migration management responses. Ukraine also joined the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, which has further streamlined the channelling of assistance to the country.[67]

To catalyse close coordination among international donors and financial organisations, in January 2023 the European Commission set up a Multi-Agency Donor Coordination Platform. The platform brings together officials from the EU, G7 countries, Ukraine, financial institutions (such as the European Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank) and other international donors to ensure that support is provided in a coherent, transparent and accountable manner. Overall, between February 2022 and December 2023, the EU, its Member States and its financial institutions made available EUR 40.6 billion to support Ukraine's economic, social and financial resilience. This support has taken the form of macro-financial assistance, budget support, emergency assistance, crisis response and humanitarian aid. The EU has also implemented military

assistance measures of around EUR 27 billion.[68]

To systematically address the devastating consequences of Russia's aggression on Ukraine's people, economy and infrastructure, in June 2023 the European Commission proposed the creation of a dedicated facility to support Ukraine's recovery, reconstruction and modernisation.[69]This is a medium-term financing instrument that will provide Ukraine with coherent, predictable and flexible support for the period 2024-2027.[70]The total amount foreseen for the facility is EUR 50 billion.[71]

In September 2023, following the European Commission's proposal, the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council agreed to extend temporary protection for people fleeing Russia's aggression against Ukraine from March 2024 to March 2025, thus offering stability and predictability to millions of beneficiaries.[72]Reaffirming the European long-term commitment to peace, security, stability and prosperity in the region, in December 2023, following a recommendation by the European Commission, the European Council decided to open accession negotiations with Ukraine.[73]In January 2024, a first meeting was held with Ukrainian authorities and the explanatory phase of the analytical examination of the EU acquis ('screening') started.

UNHCR launched a Regional Refugee Response Plan to offer a multi-sector response to cater to the needs of displaced Ukrainians and assist host countries. The strategic objectives of the Regional Refugee Response Plan for 2023 included:

- Ensuring refugees' access to protection and assistance on a non-discriminatory basis;
- Paving the way toward solutions and expanding access to social and economic opportunities to facilitate the social inclusion of refugees in host countries;
- Ensuring that refugees with specific needs continue to have access to targeted support and assistance; and
- Advancing social cohesion among refugee and host communities.[74]

UNHCR and its partners have provided diverse support, including immediate humanitarian assistance and material aid; legal, psychological and information support; identification and referral of people with vulnerabilities; capacity-building and training; vocational training, language courses and employment support; and contributions to recovery efforts in Ukraine.[75] UNHCR also operates multi-service protection centres in Ukraine which provide free legal aid to help people restore civil and property documentation, which is of essence in accessing social protection services.[76]UNHCR has also highlighted specific protection-related risks for displaced Ukrainians, including access to services for people with vulnerabilities;[77]human trafficking; and the disruption of education for displaced children and youth.[78]In June 2023, UNHCR updated its position on returns to Ukraine[79] and, in July 2023, elaborated its position on the voluntary return to Ukraine of refugee children without parental care, including unaccompanied children and children evacuated from care institutions in Ukraine.[80]

In October 2023, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) provided its updated recommendations to the EU and its Member States on the EU's response to displacement from Ukraine. ECRE's assessment was that the EU's response was largely positive; however, it identified areas where changes can be made to better support displaced people and to ensure that asylum systems continue to function.[81]

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