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From: Presidency
To: Strategic Committee on Immigration, Frontiers and Asylum (SCIFA)
Subject: Follow-up on Council recommendation on a coordinated approach to the transition out of temporary protection for displaced persons from Ukraine: Operationalisation of the pathways for return to Ukraine
- Discussion paper

Coordinated transition out of temporary protection

Although Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine continues unabated, Member States need to start discussing how to facilitate a coordinated response to ensure that going back home to Ukraine with a view to reintegrating takes place in an orderly and sustainable way. It is also necessary to have these discussions in a timely manner in order to avoid a situation where millions of displaced persons will find themselves without legal residence once temporary protection ends.

Such a coordinated approach is also important to provide beneficiaries of temporary protection (BoTP) certainty about their status and their rights and to reduce the number of applications for asylum and to discourage secondary movements between Member States.

On 16 September 2025, the Council adopted a Recommendation for a coordinated approach to the transition out of temporary protection for displaced persons from Ukraine.

The Presidency would like to focus the discussion on the development of dedicated voluntary return programmes, which should be of limited and fixed duration, whilst allowing for enough time to ensure that the capacity of Ukraine to reintegrate in a sustainable manner those displaced by the war is in place. In previous discussions, Member States have stressed the opportunity to rely on existing structures, as well as the support from the EU agencies, including Frontex' logistical support. At the same time, as the Recommendation states, Member States agree that these programmes should be carefully designed, comprehensive and well communicated. They must consider Ukraine's needs and capacity, the needs of displaced persons enjoying temporary protection in the Union, and the situation of those who stayed in Ukraine, in order to uphold social cohesion. In this regard, information provision to the Ukrainians intending to return and coordination with the Ukrainian authorities are key.

Unity Hubs, multipurpose information centres for both integration of displaced people in the host societies and for going back home to Ukraine, could play an important role. Coordination, monitoring and exchange of information among Member States and the Ukrainian authorities are of the utmost importance in this context. Member States have previously stressed the role of the Commission in facilitating coordination amongst Member States, as well as the coordination with the Ukrainian authorities.

Beneficiaries of temporary protection in EU+

In August 2025 there were 4.37 million of BoTPs in the European Union, and approximately 4.5 million in EU+. The countries with the most BoTPs were Germany (1 210 515), Poland (995 925) and Czechia (385 855).¹ The highest number of BoTPs per thousand persons was recorded in: Czechia (35.4), Poland (27.2) and Estonia (25.3).²

Approximately 394 500 decisions providing temporary protection were issued in the EU+ from January – August 2025. This number represents a 21% decrease compared to both the previous eight-month period and the period from January – August 2024. Most of decisions were issued in Germany, Poland and Czechia.

Since the beginning of September, several Member States reported significant increases in temporary protection requests by Ukrainian men aged 18-22. This follows a Ukrainian government decree that, since 28 August, no longer prohibits this group of Ukrainians in conscription age from leaving Ukraine.

According to EUAA operational data, between 1 January – 12 October 2025, Ukrainians lodged almost 21 000 asylum applications in the EU+ (+9% compared to the same period last year). almost eight in ten Ukrainian applications were lodged in France and Poland. The recognition rate for Ukrainian asylum seekers was 73% in the first six months of 2025, in line with 2024 and with some notable differences across EU+ countries.³

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr_asytpsm/default/table?lang=en
(consulted 13 October 2025)

² https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr_asytpspop/default/table?lang=en
(consulted 13 October 2025)

³ EUAA Ad hoc report. Situation in Ukraine and Displacement to the EU+: Trends, Drivers and Future prospects (5 September 2025)

Return intentions

The intention to visit Ukraine has been declining, with only 16% of participants in an EUAA survey expressing the desire to visit Ukraine in the period August 2024 – July 2025, as opposed to 35 % of participants expressing that intention in the February – July 2023 period. Furthermore, when it comes to return intentions, only 14% were determined to return, with further 13% leaning towards returning. While in 2023, 5% were determined not to return, that percentage grew substantially to 20% by 2025. The same trend can be observed in the share of BoTPs leaning towards not returning, rising from 12% in 2023 to 22% in 2025. Groups particularly less likely to return according to their intentions are: men, young persons, persons not accompanied by a partner and persons employed in the host country. Family and friend reunification, resumption of pre-war lives and helping the reconstruction of the country are the main factors for wanting to return, amongst those inclined to do so, while factors discouraging returns are security and economic situation in Ukraine and better opportunities in host countries.⁴

Cessation of hostilities would clearly be a major factor that would encourage returns but would in itself be insufficient as other barriers to return would remain. While higher labour market participation and better integration are signs of success from the perspective of both the host country and the BoTPs, they are also likely to decrease the willingness to return. BoTPs who were employed or sought work appeared less likely to return than BoTPs who did not participate in the labour market.⁵ More than half of BoTPs consider better opportunities for themselves and their family members in the host country as reasons for not returning. The weight of these factors could increase with time, assuming that the BoTPs continue to integrate and increasingly participate in the labour market. On the other hand, increased economic opportunities in Ukraine could prove to be an important incentive for returns. Conversely, BoTPs with clear intentions to return may be less inclined to participate in the labour market.

⁴ EUAA Ad hoc report. Situation in Ukraine and Displacement to the EU+: Trends, Drivers and Future prospects (5 September 2025

⁵ IOM Returning Home from Abroad: Trends, Drivers and Reintegration Challenges among Ukrainian Returnees from Abroad. July 2025.

Dedicated voluntary return programmes: ensuring sustainable returns

To ensure voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable returns, voluntary return programmes have to take a holistic approach, from information provision to infrastructure and services ensuring social cohesion and economic development. The returns have to be planned taking into account the actual situation on the ground so that returns follow the local needs and capacity to welcome and integrate returnees. Therefore, any such programme should prioritise support for reintegration, for which Union funding will be available in Ukraine, instead of individual packages.

As stated above, a great number of BoTPs are residing in Member States bordering or being close to Ukraine. This makes it likely that many BoTPs would return to Ukraine of their own accord without organised travel arrangements. While this might suggest that complex and rigid return programmes might not be necessary, the voluntary return programme would have to offer comprehensive information provision to provide clarity on the rights of participants and the situation on the ground. In this context, Unity Hubs and other information platforms, along with coordination facilitated by the Commission (including the Special Envoy for Ukrainians in the EU) with the Ukrainian authorities could play an important role. Moreover, Member States are encouraged in the Recommendation to incorporate the knowledge, capacities and networks offered by international organisations when setting up the Unity Hubs. In cases where organised departures would be needed, Frontex could assist Member States with logistical support within the limits of its mandate. Member States may also consider how to rely on existing structures for return.

In order for the returns to be sustainable and to promote social cohesion, the entire community should benefit from the return programmes, including internally displaced persons and veterans. The programmes would have to rely on reconstruction in terms of housing, infrastructure and basic services to ensure sufficient and gradual reintegration. Given that one of the motivations to return of displaced Ukrainians is to help in the recovery of the country, their inclusion in those efforts could be promoted, which would also aid their integration and social cohesion. Voluntary return

programmes could also include vocational training, internships, and promote recognition of skills and education that BoTPs gained in the EU. A solid economic foundation would have to be laid to promote sustainable returns, for which an engagement over several years would be needed. The Ukraine Facility could be instrumental for this purpose. Returns would ideally be paired with developing regional economies and their needs. For these objectives to be achieved and resources allocated successfully, coordination with Ukrainian authorities and adequate monitoring by the Union and international organisations will be needed. In this context, the fact that Ukraine is a candidate country for accession to the EU could act as an important stimulus for reform and modernisation.

Commission proposal to an EU coordinated approach and its main principles

The Commission is currently developing a concrete concept for such a programme, which will be discussed in detail at the **Solidarity Platform Ukraine meeting on 5 November 2025**, where the Commission will present the concept and seek Member States' views.

To anticipate the discussion, the Commission's concept is entitled **Voluntary Return and Recovery Programme**. The name of the programme was deliberately expanded from 'Voluntary Return' to 'Voluntary Return and Recovery' for two reasons 1) to distinguish from voluntary return within the meaning of the Return Directive; and 2) to reflect its dual purpose: not only facilitating safe and voluntary returns but actively contributing to the recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine. This framing underlines the shared EU–Ukraine vision that "Ukrainians are the future of Europe", placing return within the broader context of rebuilding a democratic, resilient and socially cohesive Ukraine.

The programme seeks to provide a common and sustainable scheme for persons enjoying temporary protection eventually returning to Ukraine. In this sense, it intends to also relieve pressure on the Member States' asylum and reception systems by offering a cost-effective, low-administrative framework for voluntary return, co-financed through existing EU financial instruments.

The programme would provide a modest EU-funded lump sum to cover travel/moving costs from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), coupled with support to communities in Ukraine through EU supported programmes and projects.

The main principles of the Commission concept include:

- **No individualised Member State reintegration cash:** No individual envelopes for reintegration to be provided (such as in AVR programmes), but Member States may provide a modest and standardised lump sum for travel/moving expenses from their AMIF programme.
- **Community first:** EU support to recovery and reconstruction, including developing community services, contribute to building capacity in communities to welcome and reintegrate people returning. Strengthening existing employment services, skills development and early childhood and care services and other social services, benefitting returnees, IDPs, veterans and population at large reinforces social cohesion.
- **Dual responsibility and ownership:** EU and Member States mobilise funding, technical assistance, and private partnerships, while Ukraine retains the ultimate ownership for reintegration and design at oblast/local level.
- **Information provision:** Member State authorities to disseminate information on the Voluntary Return and Recovery Programme. Unity Hubs (existing consular networks, ICMPD Ukrainian Consultation Centres, and Refugee Coordination Forum partners, and other available information platforms) would provide trusted information, counselling and referrals, to allow Ukrainians to make informed decisions about their return, in full knowledge of the facts. Unity Hubs would also host private-sector outreach (job fairs, skills-matching). Digital platforms (Ukraine is Home, Ukraine's planned digital platform), and respective call centres would be also leveraged.

- **Minimal administrative burden for Member States:** enrolment with national authority responsible for Temporary Protection registration, one-off lump sum to reduce administrative burden, de-activation in the Temporary Protection Platform.
- **Gradual/phased approach, readiness/capacity-based scaling:** Large-scale returns only where (at oblast level) capacity is confirmed or after investments raise capacity.
- **Protection of vulnerable groups:** Reintegration support should prioritise vulnerable persons, including those with special housing needs, psychosocial challenges, or disabilities, as well as veterans and the elderly. Scaling up local resilience and social cohesion initiatives should remain a priority.

Based on the above, the SCIFA delegates are invited to reflect on the three following questions:

1. How could a relatively flexible voluntary return programme be developed while also ensuring a sufficient level of coordination and consistency? Do you consider robust information provision as a sufficient element for such a programme? What role should the Commission play in facilitating coordination amongst Member States as well as with the Ukrainian authorities?
2. Would you agree with the main principles of the Commission concept of Voluntary Return and Recovery Programme as outlined above to benefit entire communities, including internally displaced persons and veterans, and thus bring about sustainable returns and social cohesion? How do you see the foreseen incentive structure, would it be sufficient to encourage returns?
3. What are your experiences as regards information provision to BoTPs in general through your national authorities and how do you envisage the role of Unity Hubs and other information platforms in this framework?
4. How do you envisage the role of the Commission (and of the Special Envoy) in coordination with Ukrainian authorities to implement the above-mentioned objectives?