

EMN Finland Conference 2024

Between integration and return: The future of Ukrainian beneficiaries of temporary protection in Europe and Finland

The conference of the European Migration Network (EMN) Finnish contact point discussed the future of Ukrainians in Finland and Europe from the perspective of the Temporary Protection Directive as well as integration and employment. As the war in Ukraine drags on, some Ukrainians are beginning to find new homes in EU countries. At the same time, Member States must take into account that some Ukrainians are likely to return to Ukraine after the war. The conference discussed the challenges of integration in a situation where a person fleeing the war finds themselves between two countries. The conference featured voices representing the public authorities, NGOs, Finnish and international researchers, and entrepreneurs. The conference was held on 27 November at Hotel Arthur in Helsinki. The event was attended in person by approximately 90 participants and watched remotely by about 240 people.

Opening of the conference: Head of EMN Finland Rafael Bärlund and Minister of Employment Arto Satonen

Head of EMN Finland Rafael Bärlund delivered a few words of welcome, noting that over 1,000 days had passed since the start of Russia's war of aggression. This means that some of the people who have fled the war have been between integration and return for an extended period of time, and there is a need for new perspectives on how to support them. Bärlund introduced the audience to the theme of the conference by noting that the conference would explain what temporary protection entails and discuss topics such as the integration and employment of Ukrainians in Finland and other EU countries. Bärlund also pointed out that the conference would address the question of what happens when temporary protection eventually ends.

The event was then opened by **Minister of Employment Arto Satonen**. He underscored the importance of finding a common European solution for Ukrainians after the end of temporary protection. Minister Satonen noted that Finland understands Ukraine's situation particularly well due to our own history. He also emphasised the importance of continued support for Ukraine for as long as necessary, because the future of Ukraine is also that of Europe.



The conference was opened by Minister of Employment Arto Satonen, who emphasised the importance of supporting Ukraine.

EU-level views on temporary protection and the situation of Ukrainians

Keynote address: Meltem İneli Ciğer, Suleyman Demirel University

The Future of Temporary Protection Beneficiaries in Finland and the EU

The keynote address for the conference was delivered by **Meltem İneli Ciğer**, Associate Professor of International Law at the Suleyman Demirel University in Turkey and a leading expert in temporary protection. In her remarks, İneli Ciğer, who holds a PhD from the University of Bristol, presented examples of temporary protection mechanisms elsewhere in the world and suggested ways to turn temporary protection for Ukrainians into a durable solution. As their name suggests, temporary protection mechanisms used around the world are temporary, and they carry many limitations. The United States, for instance, has *temporary protected status* for people who have been forced to flee natural disasters, for example. The Government of Türkiye, in turn, has provided temporary protection for Syrians fleeing the war.

In the EU, the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) had been in force for 20 years before it was activated for the first time in spring 2022. The mechanism is designed specifically to respond to the mass influx of persons seeking refuge. İneli Ciğer rightly questioned why temporary protection has not been used in the EU before. According to İneli Ciğer, temporary protection was the right move in the case of persons fleeing Russia's war of aggression, as it enabled immediate access to a legal status and certain fundamental rights in the Member States.

Temporary protection is intended to respond to acute crises, and it cannot be extended indefinitely. For those who have fled Ukraine, the status has already been extended beyond the original three-year limit, until 2026. İneli Ciğer noted that temporary protection must end in 2026. By then, EU Member States will need to find more permanent solutions to the situation. According to İneli Ciğer, this is in the best interests of both those who have fled Ukraine and the Member States.

There is a need for a controlled transition from temporary protection to more durable solutions while simultaneously providing support to those seeking to return to Ukraine when it is safe, as well as for those who wish to integrate fully into their host societies in the EU. İneli Ciğer presented four key arguments concerning the need for an exit strategy:

1. Temporary protection must end by March 2026, and a clear and comprehensive exit strategy must be put in place.
2. The exit strategy should include flexible, long-term, stable, and gender-sensitive solutions for Ukrainians.
3. A common European approach is needed for what comes next, including pathways to international protection or non-temporary residency.
4. Flexible solutions allowing circular migration and dignified voluntary return must be explored.

Extending temporary protection beyond 2026 would risk creating a *protection vacuum*, leaving people in legal limbo without long-term security. In addition to the fact that continued uncertainty and temporary solutions have many psychological effects, –particularly on children–, such a situation would also be contrary to the letter of the law, İneli Ciğer argued. Ending temporary protection without adequate planning would have consequences not only on Ukrainians but also EU Member States: without a clear common exit strategy, asylum applications lodged by Ukrainians could overcrowd national asylum systems.

İneli Ciğer presented concrete suggestions that Member States could consider adopting when temporary protection ends. For example, long-term residency status would guarantee Ukrainians the right to move freely and work in Member States. Another option could be to categorically grant group-based international protection to all beneficiaries of temporary protection. İneli Ciğer's third suggested option was to grant Ukrainians a flexible right of residence that would enable movement back and forth and support for voluntary return when the security situation allows it. According to İneli Ciğer, the most important objective is that displaced Ukrainians are not left in legal limbo after temporary protection ends, and that their rights are respected.



Associate Professor Meltem İneli Ciğer and Head of EMN Finland Rafael Bärlund.

Comment: Csilla Völgyi, European Commission

Temporary protection in the EU for people fleeing the war in Ukraine

Representing the European Commission's Directorate-General Migration & Home Affairs (DG HOME), **Csilla Völgyi** presented the 10-point plan [For stronger European coordination on welcoming people fleeing the war from Ukraine](#), which was published by the Commission on 28 March 2022. The Commission coordinates the plan and leads discussions between the Member States and other actors.

By November 2024, some 4.4 million people had been registered as beneficiaries of temporary protection in EU Member States. Germany, Poland and Czechia have the highest number of registrations. In addition, Ukrainians have lodged over 63 000 asylum applications in the EU. According to Völgyi, the key measures at the start of the war of aggression were the registration of people fleeing Ukraine, the exchange of information and providing accommodation. The Commission has focused particularly on the protection of children and the identification and prevention of trafficking in human beings and security threats. Völgyi noted that integration has emerged as a central issue as the war has dragged on. The common challenges encountered in different EU Member States have been related to housing, education and labour market integration. The EU Talent Pool online service has been helpful in the search for employment.

Völgyi said that the Commission is currently preparing a contingency plan for the potential arrival of more people fleeing the war in Ukraine. Support for Ukrainians remains at a high level in the EU. According to Völgyi, the Member States expect decisions from the Commission with regard to the funding of temporary protection and whether temporary protection status will be extended again. Temporary protection has already been extended until March 2026 with the idea that this gives Member States time to prepare for subsequent measures. Völgyi pointed out that many Member States have already considered transitioning to a different status, such as a residence permit for an employed person. However, the income requirements applied to work permits may constitute an obstacle to utilising the work permit pathway, especially in Northern Europe. In response to the suggestions presented by İneli Ciğer, Völgyi stated that an automatic change from temporary protection to long-term residency status, for example, is not currently in line with EU legislation. Similarly, safe voluntary return is not yet possible. Völgyi also emphasised the importance of a common exit strategy for the EU. If the Member States were to end up adopting very different solutions with regard to Ukrainians, the result could be an increase in internal migration within the EU.

Recent research results on temporary protection and the employment of Ukrainians

Presentation of EMN Study: *The application of the Temporary Protection Directive: Challenges and good practices in 2023*, Jutta Saastamoinen, EMN Finland

Senior Specialist Jutta Saastamoinen from EMN Finland presented the recent EMN Study [*The application of the Temporary Protection Directive: Challenges and good practices in 2023*](#). The study compared how services for beneficiaries of temporary protection had been organised in the 25 countries of the European Migration Network one year on from the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive. Saastamoinen noted that challenges related to accommodation and labour market integration were observed in many of the countries participating in the study. As regards education, challenges were observed in various countries due to language barriers and the limited capacity of schools to accommodate students. Several countries also highlighted the challenge that Ukrainian children often attended school at the same time in both the country of residence and Ukraine, which was seen as creating a high burden on the students in question.

According to the EMN study, obtaining legal status and registration is generally easy for beneficiaries of temporary protection, aside from certain challenges relating to access to documents, proving actual prior residence in Ukraine and whether the persons actually lived as a family previously. As Ukrainians fleeing the war have the right to visa-exempt travel within the EU for 90 days and the right to return to Ukraine without restrictions, it is difficult to assess the extent to which beneficiaries of temporary protection have moved out from the countries participating in the study.

Presentation of EMN/OECD Inform: *Labour market integration of beneficiaries of temporary protection from Ukraine*, Ave Lauren, OECD

Migration Policy Expert Ave Lauren from the OECD presented an EMN/OECD Inform and other research results on the employment of Ukrainians in OECD countries. The employment rate of Ukrainians is relatively high compared to other forced migrants. According to Lauren, this underscores the importance of integration. However, the situation varies considerably from country to country. Of the countries participating in the EMN/OECD Inform, the highest employment rate was achieved in Lithuania, Estonia and the Netherlands. The employment rates have risen in most countries, but finding jobs that match the person's field and skills appears to be a common challenge. Regarding self-employment, the experiences vary from country to country, but support for entrepreneurship has been taken into account in several human capital development

projects. The most common measures to support labour market integration include immediate access to the job market, the recognition of skills and supporting language learning.

The "waiting dilemma", which refers to Ukrainians' constant sense of uncertainty due to the situation in their home country, poses a significant challenge to integration. With reference to this dilemma, Lauren recommended *dual intent integration* initiatives that combine integration measures with complementary measures to support voluntary return. One example of such an initiative is the *Skills Alliance for Ukraine* project, whose participants also include the Finnish National Agency for Education. The aim of the project is to train and upskill over 180,000 Ukrainians in the next three years to support the reconstruction of the country.

Lauren also highlighted the experiences of OECD countries outside Europe with regard to the labour market integration of Ukrainians fleeing the war. Canada, for example, has seen the arrival of a large number of Ukrainians who had previous ties to the country. Consequently, the employment rate among Ukrainians in Canada is high, with 59% being employed in the same sector in which they worked in Ukraine.

Comment: Arseniy Svynarenko, Finnish Youth Research Society

Sociologist and researcher Arseniy Svynarenko delivered a comment in which he highlighted three important perspectives concerning successful integration: it is important to work together with immigrants, success stories are often due to the internal solidarity of immigrant communities, and it is vital to help immigrants help themselves. Svynarenko also emphasised that uncertainty about the future affects the integration of Ukrainians in Finland. The war and constantly keeping an eye on related developments from Finland causes a lot of stress and a sense of uncertainty. In order for Ukrainians to make informed decisions about their future, they must be provided with sufficient information in a language they understand. According to Svynarenko, children in particular should be provided with information about the history and language of Ukraine.

According to research interviews conducted by Svynarenko, Ukrainians living in Finland have fairly high trust in the official media of Finland and the Finnish Government, and their digital skills are at a good level. Svynarenko also highlighted research results on the attitudes of Russians living in Finland towards Ukrainians and other minorities and pointed out that, even in Finland, not everyone welcomes Ukrainians to the country. Svynarenko's comment and the two preceding speeches stimulated discussion on topics such as the role of interpreters, entrepreneurship and challenges to integration.



The conference was attended in person at Hotel Arthur by about 90 people.

Speech by the Finnish Immigration Service and a presentation of the Government's action plan

Reception of Ukrainians and moving to municipalities, Elina Nurmi, Reception Services Department, Finnish Immigration Service

Elina Nurmi, Director of the Reception Services Department of the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri), spoke about the reception system for Ukrainians and the current situation concerning the transition to having a municipality of residence. Approximately 70,000 Ukrainians have arrived in Finland since the start of the war. In November 2024, approximately 23,000 of them were registered in the reception system. Of these, almost 10,000 could move to a municipality if they so wished. Approximately 27,300 persons, or 76% of the Ukrainian beneficiaries of temporary protection in Finland, had moved to a municipality after March 2023.

The Finnish Immigration Service hopes that more Ukrainians would move from the reception system to a municipality. Beneficiaries of temporary protection can apply for a municipality of residence after staying in Finland for one year. The delay in becoming a resident of a municipality is currently 2.7 months from the date on which the right to a municipality of residence is established. According to Nurmi, the challenges involved include the availability of housing and the tighter limits set by the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kela) for what is considered a reasonable rent. Ukrainians may also be concerned that moving to a municipality means that they are left without the support and services offered by the reception system.

According to Nurmi, personal counselling is the most effective way to support the transition to a municipality. Nurmi mentioned the Finnish Immigration Service's MOVE project, which offers personal counselling to people moving to a municipality in their own language. Reception centres, in turn, help with the search for housing and the move to a municipality. Nurmi also encouraged municipalities and NGOs to support Ukrainians in becoming a resident of a municipality. As a resident of a municipality, they have the right to decide where and how they live. They also gain access to the same rights and services as other permanent residents of Finland.

Action Plan to Help People Who Have Fled Ukraine 2024–2027, Susanna Piepponen, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment

In a speech by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, **Senior Specialist Susanna Piepponen** presented the Government's [*Action Plan to Help People Who Have Fled Ukraine 2024–2027*](#). The action plan, which was drawn up in cooperation between the Government and several other public authorities, addresses a number of themes that are relevant to people who have fled Ukraine, including employment, competence development, moving to municipalities, housing, promoting integration and inclusion, promoting health and wellbeing, preventing work-related exploitation, and communication by the authorities. On the topic of employment promotion measures, Piepponen highlighted cooperation with employers; competence development; placing emphasis on industries with labour shortages, such as seasonal work; the dissemination of information; and providing an advisory service for jobseeking in the applicants' own language. As an example of a concrete measure, Piepponen mentioned EUR 1.5 million in funding for training in the trade, logistics, accommodation and catering sector, and entrepreneurship training.

Piepponen also mentioned an application process for discretionary government grants under the Action Plan for Referral of Refugees to Municipalities and Integration Support, which supports the dissemination of information on referral to municipalities. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment also stresses the importance of the exchange of information between different authorities, language-aware teaching and addressing the shortage of qualified teachers of Finnish/Swedish as a second language. Cooperation with NGOs and meeting places are also important for improving attachment to Finnish society and promoting a

sense of belonging. With regard to health and wellbeing, Piepponen highlighted measures such as ensuring the availability of services, addressing the stigma associated with mental health problems and providing support in people's own language. In addition, Piepponen spoke about the importance of tackling work-related exploitation and the dissemination of basic information in their own language to support the integration of Ukrainians.

Comment: Tanja Mustonen, Ukrainian Association in Finland

The action plan and the presentations delivered over the course of the morning were commented on by **Tanja Mustonen, Lead Coordinator** of Ukraine Help Centers from the Ukrainian Association in Finland. Vallila Help Center in Helsinki and Lippulaiva Help Center in Espoo work in cooperation with Finnish NGOs and public authorities. The centres provide information, networking opportunities and assistance to Ukrainians.

Mustonen noted that people who have fled Ukraine need increasing support with regard to public services, humanitarian aid and psycho-emotional support. When a person becomes a resident of a municipality, there are various official matters they need to manage. This requires digital skills and information on how municipalities operate. Many people have questions about the services of the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kela), for example. Ukraine Help Centers offer a wide range of information and support in Ukrainian.

According to Mustonen, Ukrainians work hard to learn Finnish and find opportunities for further training and education. They are very active in searching for work in Finland. Many of them learn a new profession when they realise that they cannot find work in their field. However, it is challenging to combine integration training and employment. The lack of a common language at work is another challenge. Mustonen also noted that some employers are guilty of labour law violations, as the employees are not fully aware of the rules of working life and their rights. Mustonen mentioned construction, cleaning and restaurants as high-risk industries.

Panel discussion: *The integration and employment of Ukrainians in Finland*

The conference ended with a panel discussion on how Ukrainians' transition to permanent residency in EU Member States should be promoted while simultaneously enabling return to Ukraine after the war for those who wish to return. The panelists were **Arseniy Svyrenko**, CEO **Ruslana Kuisma** from RVK Palvelut Oy, **Susanna Piepponen** and Account Manager **Olga Silfver** from Employment Espoo. The moderator was Editor **Anniina Luotonen** from Yle.

The panel discussion covered topics such as Finnish language learning and language requirements in the labour market, as well as the benefits of becoming a resident of a municipality. Piepponen noted that language proficiency is currently the biggest barrier to the employment of Ukrainians. The slow process of recognising academic qualifications is also a source of difficulties, especially with regard to university degrees. Kuisma pointed out that, in the case of many Ukrainians, their heart is still in Ukraine and they do not feel a need to learn Finnish because they plan to return to their home country. Kuisma also mentioned that not everyone has the time or energy to learn the language while working at the same time. She suggested that the Finnish Government should support language learning at workplaces. Piepponen echoed the view that combining language learning with work would be useful, as job-specific vocabulary is easier to learn at the workplace. According to Piepponen, recruitment events that facilitate face-to-face meetings between employers and jobseekers have been an effective avenue to finding work.



The panelists discussed the integration and employment of Ukrainians in Finland.

Piepponen highlighted the efforts by the authorities to expedite the transition to municipal residency for Ukrainians, and stressed the significance of municipal residency from the perspective of integration and inclusion. Silfver pointed out that life in the reception system is restrictive to personal freedom and Finnish municipalities are doing a lot to promote the wellbeing of Ukrainians, as it is also in the municipalities' interest. However, it was mentioned during the discussion that the situation in terms of access to services may actually be better in the reception system due to the current problems related to the capacity of service production in the wellbeing services counties (*hyvinvointialueet* in Finnish).

As the war in Ukraine drags on, Ukrainian families become increasingly attached to Finnish society. Consequently, they perceive returning home as more difficult, and the number of people planning to stay in Finland is likely to grow. In the panel discussion, the service capacity issues in mental health services in Finland were highlighted in connection with this. Piepponen noted that when Ukrainian war veterans begin to arrive in Finland, they will bear the trauma caused by the war. Silfver noted that the war in Ukraine differs from previous wars in the sense that brutal and traumatising content can be accessed via social media. Silfver further pointed out that, in Finland, there is already an understanding of the trauma that war causes for people: increased substance abuse and domestic violence are to be expected.

The war has a significant impact on Ukrainian parents' ability to cope, and it also affects the wellbeing of their children. Piepponen highlighted the fact that many beneficiaries of temporary protection are single mothers. Children, in turn, experience a burden from having to attend school both in Finland and remotely in Ukraine. Silfver noted that the aim of such arrangements is to ensure that the child has a future in Ukraine. Svyrenko suggested that municipalities could organise Ukrainian language and culture instruction for Ukrainians. Piepponen mentioned that negotiations have been held regarding that possibility. Silfver pointed out that the generation of the children who have fled the war is also a special generation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some children of primary school age have never attended school in normal circumstances.

It was mentioned in the discussion that many Ukrainians keep a close eye on the situation in their home country and are still waiting for the opportunity to return, which reduces their motivation for integration. However, people's views concerning the options of returning to Ukraine or staying in Finland are affected by many factors, including employment, children's wellbeing and Ukrainians' attitudes towards those who left the country. Svyrenko stressed that the potential return of Ukrainians should be driven by motivation rather than force. He also noted that the outcome of the war will have a significant impact on people's willingness to return. Silfver pointed out that certain groups of people, such as people with serious illnesses and parents of children with disabilities, are clearly more willing than on average to stay in Finland. Svyrenko mentioned that, for young people, social media helps maintain contacts with Ukraine.

At the end of the panel discussion, questions from the audience were taken on topics such as temporary protection status and work-related exploitation. Piepponen emphasised the importance of projects concerning work-related exploitation and cooperation with the authorities. She also expressed a concern that the actual prevalence of exploitation is much higher than the number of reported incidents. Silfver said that the persons concerned are not always willing to report exploitation because they are worried about their child or their housing, for example. According to Kuisma, using an interpreter would be advisable in unclear cases to avoid misunderstandings. With regard to temporary protection, Piepponen noted that the decision on what happens after temporary protection ends needs to be made as soon as possible. Svyrenenko emphasised the importance of informing Ukrainians about any developments. Silfver pointed out that some Ukrainians have already been issued a residence permit on the grounds of employment and have thus moved on from the uncertainty involved with temporary protection.

Closing words, Rafael Bärlund, Head of EMN Finland

To conclude the event, Bärlund remarked that it is clear that a common EU-level solution for what comes after temporary protection is needed. The Government's action plan to help people who have fled Ukraine to Finland is a welcome step forward. Implementing the plan in practice requires close cooperation between the authorities and between NGOs and municipalities. Bärlund noted that the future is still uncertain for Ukraine and those who have fled the country, but he hoped that the conference had successfully highlighted perspectives that will help people move on from the limbo between integration and return.