

*The Future of Temporary Protection Beneficiaries in Finland and the EU*¹

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Honourable guests, esteemed colleagues, distinguished European and Finnish legal professionals, and policymakers in the field of asylum and migration law,

It is an honour to be here today to deliver this keynote speech. I extend my heartfelt thanks to the European Migration Network Finland and personally thank Rafael and his team for this opportunity. Today, we gather to discuss one of the most pressing challenges in European asylum and migration law and policy: the future of temporary protection for millions of displaced Ukrainians in Europe.

I am Meltem Ineli Ciger, an academic and legal expert specialising in international and EU asylum law. My academic journey, which began with my PhD in 2011, has been dedicated to studying the legal frameworks governing temporary protection at international, EU, and national levels. I've studied the basis of temporary protection in international law and how it was adopted yet remained dormant in the EU for two decades.³ Together with Dr Sergio Carrera, we have edited a book titled “*EU Responses to the Large-scale Refugee Displacement from Ukraine*”⁴ which was 500 pages long and covered crucial issues relating to the application of the Temporary Protection Directive by the Member States, lessons drawn from various experiences and the issue of solidarity. Finally, I have published a paper for SIEPS ‘When Temporary Protection Ends: Longer-term Solutions for Refugees from Ukraine’⁵ discussing several policy options that can follow the termination of the Temporary Protection of Ukrainians in the Union.⁶

¹ This keynote was presented at the EMN Final Annual Conference on 27 November 2024, <<https://emn.fi/en/save-the-date-emn-finland-national-conference-27-11/>>. Please cite as: Meltem Ineli Ciger, *The Future of Temporary Protection Beneficiaries in Finland and the EU*, Keynote for the EMN Finland Annual Conference 2024, 27 November 2024, *hyperlink*.

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³ Meltem Ineli Ciger, *Temporary Protection in International Law and Practice* (Brill 2018).

⁴ Sergio Carrera and Meltem Ineli Ciger eds. *EU responses to the large-scale refugee displacement from Ukraine: An analysis on the temporary protection directive and its implications for the future EU asylum policy* (EUI 2023), <https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/75377/ASILE%252520E-%252520Book.pdf?sequence=7&isAllowed=y>.

⁵ Meltem Ineli Ciger, *When Temporary Protection Ends: longer-term solutions for refugees from Ukraine*, SIEPS European Policy Analysis September 2023:11epa, <https://www.sieps.se/globalassets/publikationer/2023/2023_11epa.pdf> .

⁶ For other studies discussing potential post-TPD scenarios cf. E. Guild, C.A. Groenendijk, *Temporary Protection and the Future of Ukrainians*: Mantu, S.A.; Zwaan, K.M.; Strik, M.H.A. (ed.), *The Temporary Protection Directive. Central Themes, Problem Issues and Implementation in Selected Member States*, pp. 105-116; Martin Wagner, *Extending temporary protection: It seems most viable, but is it?*, 4 March 2024, ICMPD, <<https://www.icmpd.org/blog/2024/extending-temporary-protection-it-seems-most-viable-but-is-it>> ; ICMPD Discussion Paper, *Responding to Displacement From Ukraine: Options to remain when EU temporary protection ends*, 2023, https://www.icmpd.org/file/download/59847/file/ICMPD%2520Discussion%2520Paper_Options%2520to%2520remain%2520when%2520EU%2520temporary%2520protection%2520ends.pdf . Katrien Luyten Members' Research Service, *When EU temporary protection for displaced people from Ukraine ends Possible scenarios*, European Parliamentary Research Service Briefing, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/762309/EPRS_BRI\(2024\)762309_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/762309/EPRS_BRI(2024)762309_EN.pdf) ; ECRE, *Transitioning out of the Temporary Protection Directive*, 2024, < https://ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/ECRE-Policy-Paper-13_Transitioning-Out-of-the-Temporary-Protection-Directive.pdf>.

My research allowed me to compare the EU's approach to temporary protection with other examples globally. I've studied how the US applied the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for various Latin American nationals who have fled civil war and natural disaster, how Türkiye has maintained a temporary protection regime for Syrians for over 13 years, and how several Latin American countries offer different forms of protection to Venezuelans. I've also examined South Africa's decision to end temporary protection for Zimbabweans, despite their deep integration into the host society after decades. These examples offer crucial insights into the challenges and opportunities presented by temporary protection regimes worldwide.

Drawing from these national and regional cases, I co-authored a policy paper in April 2022⁷, just two months after the EU activated the Temporary Protection Directive for Ukrainians. At the time, I argued that the EU should begin thinking about what comes next and plan for different scenarios based on how the conflict might evolve. Sadly, this foresight has not yet been taken into account, and uncertainty about the future of Ukrainians in the EU remains.

As the need for clarity becomes even more pressing, today I will explore a critical question: What happens, and what should happen, when temporary protection ends?

According to the latest Eurostat data, 4.2 million Ukrainians currently benefit from temporary protection status across the European Union.⁸ This staggering number reflects the enduring impact of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which began on 24 February 2022. This invasion has triggered one of the largest displacement crises in modern European history, forcing millions, mostly women and children, to flee for their lives and seek safety within Member States, including Finland.

In response to this unprecedented humanitarian crisis and mass influx, the European Council took an equally unprecedented legal step on 4 March 2022 by activating the Temporary Protection Directive—a legal mechanism designed specifically to respond to the mass influx of persons seeking refuge. The Directive, which had been dormant for over two decades, was invoked for the first time in its history to offer immediate protection to those fleeing the war in Ukraine, including Ukrainian nationals, their family members, and third-country nationals and stateless persons who had international protection status in Ukraine. Through this action, Ukrainians were granted immediate access to residence permits, employment, education, and healthcare across the Union.

Activation of the Temporary Protection Directive in 2022 was the right move, it enabled immediate access to a legal status and a set of fundamental rights for those fleeing the invasion. Many have questioned, rightly so why this very practical protection framework has not been applied to those seeking refuge from conflict and violence before.

Temporary protection is not unique to the EU; it has been implemented in various global contexts in response to mass displacement. For instance, Türkiye has maintained a temporary protection regime for over 10 years for Syrians fleeing the civil war, granting them immediate access to basic rights without undergoing individual status determination. The United States has invoked a time-limited status called 'Temporary Protected Status (TPS)' which enables

⁷ S. Carrera, M. Ineli Ciger, L. Vosyliute, L. Brumat (2022). The EU grants temporary protection for people fleeing war in Ukraine. *CEPS Policy Insights*, < <https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-publications/eu-grants-temporary-protection-for-people-fleeing-war-in-ukraine/> >.

⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20241010-1>.

nationals of countries experiencing conflict, civil strife and natural disasters to stay in the US for a certain time. Similarly, several Latin American countries have provided temporary permits to Venezuelans displaced by political and economic crises. Many Member States have also applied various time-limited protection statuses for the protection of those fleeing conflict and ethnic cleansing from Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s. These policies share common aspects: they offer group-based protection, are time-limited, and safeguard individuals from refoulement until durable solutions, such as return or long-term integration, are available.

Typically, temporary protection regimes grant displaced individuals access to a minimum set of rights, including shelter, healthcare, and education, while limiting certain rights compared to full refugee status under the 1951 Refugee Convention. The EU's Temporary Protection Directive mirrors these global practices, emphasising rapid access to protection without individual asylum processing. Crucially, temporary protection schemes also prioritise immediate territorial access, ensuring that states can manage mass arrivals without overwhelming traditional asylum systems.

A notable feature of temporary protection in both the EU and other contexts is that it often applies to a broader category of displaced persons, not just refugees as narrowly defined. For example, under the EU's TPD, not only Ukrainian nationals but also stateless persons and third-country nationals who held legal status in Ukraine have been included.⁹ This reflects a broader approach to protection, acknowledging that displacement crises affect diverse populations, many of whom may not meet the narrow legal definitions of refugees but still require urgent protection.

While temporary protection regimes are flexible and allow states to offer immediate refuge during crises, they are inherently temporary. As such, they carry limitations. For instance, they do not guarantee permanent rights or full integration into host countries, as their primary goal is to address short-term humanitarian needs.

In the case of the EU, temporary protection must end by 2026, and Member States are already grappling with the need for longer-term solutions—whether through residency, asylum, or voluntary return programmes. In all cases, temporary protection seeks to balance the immediacy of protection with long-term planning to ensure stability and legal certainty for displaced persons.

The Council's decision to extend the temporary protection regime until 4 March 2026 recognises the protracted nature of the conflict and the ongoing protection needs of displaced Ukrainians. However, it is essential to emphasise that temporary protection, by design, is a temporary legal measure. It is an emergency tool aimed at preventing the collapse of traditional asylum systems under the strain of mass influx situations. It was never intended to be a long-term solution.

With the expiration of temporary protection looming, the key legal question now is: What comes next? As the war shows no signs of abating, the millions currently under protection in the EU face an uncertain future.

Should the Temporary Protection Directive be extended beyond 2026? Should displaced Ukrainians transition into long-term residency, international protection status, or other

⁹ Cf. Meltem Ineli Ciger, *Temporary Protection in International Law and Practice* (Brill 2018).

residency or supported return options? These are pressing questions that must be confronted today, both as legal practitioners and policymakers.

Thus far, the EU has provided displaced Ukrainians with essential rights and freedoms—rights that go beyond what is traditionally offered to asylum seekers. In particular, those under temporary protection have enjoyed freedom of movement across the Union, enabling them to rebuild their lives with relative autonomy. This is a testament to the flexibility and adaptability of the EU’s legal framework for temporary protection and the good practice of respecting the agency of displaced persons.

However, as we look ahead, it is critical to recognise that the Temporary Protection Directive cannot be extended indefinitely. By 4 March 2026, in my legal opinion, temporary protection must come to an end, and a new legal regime (so-called clear exit strategy) must take its place. This creates an urgent need for policymakers to consider durable solutions—solutions that will provide stability for 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 this context, my speech today will focus on exploring how the European Union and its Member States, such as Finland, can develop these solutions cooperatively. The task is to provide not just immediate protection but a sustainable and dignified future for those displaced by Russia’s full-scale invasion.

In today’s speech, I will present four key arguments:

1. Temporary Protection must end by March 2026, and a clear and comprehensive exit strategy must be put in place.¹⁰
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.

1. Temporary Protection must end by March 2026

As we look to the future of temporary protection in the European Union, we must address several pressing legal and policy challenges, particularly in light of the ongoing war in Ukraine. One of the most immediate concerns is the potential extension of the Temporary Protection Directive beyond its legal time limits, and the serious risks such an extension poses.

The Temporary Protection Directive, under Article 4, sets a clear legal limit on the duration of temporary protection, capping it at a maximum of three years. This boundary is vital to the nature of the Directive as an emergency measure, designed specifically for managing mass influx situations. I have consistently argued that extending temporary protection to 2026 departs from the legal framework established by the Directive itself. The Directive was never intended to function as a long-term solution, and any extension beyond this period introduces significant legal contradictions.

¹⁰ Cf. Meltem Ineli Ciger, Legal landmine: the risky proposition of extending the application of the EU Temporary Protection Directive beyond March 2025, < <https://eulawanalysis.blogspot.com/2024/05/legal-landmine-risky-proposition-of.html>> .

Despite this clear legal limitation, the Council has already adopted the decision to extend temporary protection to 2026. More alarmingly, recent developments suggest the possibility of extending temporary protection even further, potentially beyond 2026. While this idea may seem appealing in response to the protracted conflict in Ukraine, it raises serious legal and policy risks. Extending the temporary protection regime beyond the legally mandated timeframe challenges the very definition of "temporary" protection.

We must consider the broader legal implications of such an extension. The Temporary Protection Directive was designed to offer immediate, short-term refuge, but extending it indefinitely may be seen as conflicting with the 1951 Refugee Convention. A broad, and in my opinion, illegal interpretation of the Temporary Protection Directive allowing for indefinite extensions would violate the principle of proportionality, a cornerstone of EU and international law concerning derogations.

Proportionality dictates that temporary measures must be both necessary and proportional to the circumstances. Extending the temporary protection regime in the Union indefinitely undermines this principle, as it is no longer a response to an emergency but rather a sustained suspension of the traditional asylum process.

Additionally, the extension of the Temporary Protection Directive beyond 2026 introduces severe legal risks. It challenges the integrity of EU law, undermines the proportionality principle, and risks violating the 1951 Refugee Convention. The Temporary Protection Directive was never designed as a permanent solution, and prolonging it further may lead to legal challenges that the EU cannot afford to ignore.

In addition to the legal risks, the policy implications of extending temporary protection without a clear exit strategy are equally concerning.

Extending temporary protection beyond 2026 risks creating a protection vacuum, leaving millions of individuals especially children in legal limbo. This limbo has profound consequences for both the temporary protection beneficiaries and the Member States hosting them.

Prolonging temporary protection without transitioning beneficiaries to more durable solutions—such as permanent residency or international protection status—leaves individuals trapped in a state of uncertainty. Many have already faced severe trauma due to displacement and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Without a clear plan for the future, individuals cannot fully integrate into their host countries, nor can they plan for a potential return to Ukraine, should conditions there improve.

This uncertainty also has significant psychological effects, particularly on children, who require stable education and social structures to thrive. Prolonged displacement also impacts the ability of individuals to access stable employment, housing, and social mobility, deepening inequalities and limiting their potential to build a better future.

Beyond the individual impacts, the ongoing demands of temporary protection place immense pressure on the social systems of Member States. Especially Member States hosting large numbers of Ukrainians are already facing significant strains on their healthcare, education, housing, and employment services. Extending temporary protection without addressing these strains could lead to political and social tensions.

One of the most serious practical consequences of extending temporary protection without a clear long-term plan is the potential overcrowding of national asylum systems. If temporary protection is allowed to expire without a structured alternative, millions of displaced persons could overwhelm national asylum systems, straining the capacity of Member States to process asylum claims effectively. In a worst-case scenario, this could lead to the collapse of a number of national asylum systems.

In light of these challenges, EU policymakers and national authorities must begin planning now for what comes after March 2026. The risks of extending temporary protection without a clear transition plan are simply too high—from legal conflicts and resource burdens to the well-being of displaced persons.

A durable, long-term solution must be found—one that balances the protection of individuals fleeing conflict with the sustainable management of Member States’ resources and legal obligations.

2. What can constitute a flexible and long-term solution following the termination of temporary protection?

As we approach the expiration of the Temporary Protection Directive in 2026, it is imperative to consider long-term solutions that ensure security and stability for the millions of displaced Ukrainians.

We all know that when and how the Russian full-scale invasion ends will be decisive in what happens next, whether a safe and durable return in dignity will be available for the majority of Ukrainians in the EU or Finland.

The question we face is: *What happens when temporary protection ends?* I will outline three pathways that may offer durable protection while addressing the complex legal, social, and economic challenges attached to each option, namely: transitioning of Ukrainians into the EU
1-long-term residency,
2-group-based transition to international protection status, and
3-more flexible approaches that promote voluntary return and circular migration.

Option 1: Long-Term Residency

One of the most straightforward and promising pathways is transitioning to long-term resident status under the EU Long-Term Residents Directive (LTR Directive). The Long-Term Residents Directive provides a clear legal framework that could be adapted for Ukrainians once they meet the required criteria. The Directive requires third-country nationals to have resided legally in an EU Member State for an uninterrupted five-year period. In addition to residence, applicants must demonstrate a stable and regular source of income, health insurance, and, where applicable, compliance with integration measures.

Key Benefits include security and stability: LTR status grants a permanent residence permit, which provides greater security than temporary protection. With this, Ukrainians can fully integrate into their host societies, access social services, and build stable lives. This also means Member States are not required to provide all services reserved for international and temporary protection beneficiaries.

- Access to Rights: Long-term residents enjoy equal treatment with nationals in employment, education, social security, and recognition of qualifications. This helps

foster a sense of belonging and allows for deeper integration into host communities, while also reducing the need for Member States to provide continuous social assistance.

- **Freedom of Movement:** Like temporary protection beneficiaries, long-term residents can move freely within the EU, making it easier for them to seek employment across borders or maintain family ties between Member States.

Challenges: Of course, there are also challenges: There will be significant barriers to obtaining long-term residency for Ukrainians. Currently, time spent under temporary protection does not count toward the required five-year period, meaning temporary protection beneficiaries are excluded from this status. While there have been proposals to amend the Directive to address this gap, as of November 2025, the amendment has not been accepted. Even if the Directive is amended, income requirements could still present significant hurdles, especially for displaced persons, many of whom are women and caregivers who may not have access to formal employment opportunities.

Women, in particular, are often responsible for caregiving, which limits their ability to participate fully in the workforce. This could make them ineligible for long-term resident status under the current rules. Moreover, the five-year residency requirement will be fulfilled for many Ukrainians by March 2027.

Moreover, even if the EU Long-Term Residents Directive is amended to include time spent on temporary protection as part of the required five years, this criterion will not be fulfilled for many Ukrainians by March 2026 but it can be fulfilled by March 2027.

Possible Solutions:

If the Long-Term Residents Directive is amended to include time spent under temporary protection as part of the required criteria, and if temporary protection is extended until 2027 or Ukrainians are allowed to stay legally in the EU until March 2027 through other statuses or residency pathways, a fast-track process for Ukrainians to determine their eligibility for the LTR status might provide a flexible and durable solution.

To ensure inclusivity, the EU must adopt gender-sensitive policies that recognise the different experiences of women especially single adults with children during displacement. It is important to recognise many Ukrainian women have care responsibilities which may preclude them from being eligible for the LTR status since they may lack stable income or insurance.

Thus, special demographic and gender-related aspects of the Ukrainians in the EU should be taken into account if the long-term resident status is chosen as the preferred solution for integration. Without these adjustments, many who need it most will be excluded from long-term resident status.

Option 2: Group-Based Transition to International Protection Status

Another potential pathway is to grant group-based international protection to displaced Ukrainians. This would involve recognising them as refugees or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection status without requiring individual assessments and individual status determination.

Once temporary protection ends, Member States must process all international protection applications lodged by Ukrainians. In case the conflict does not end by the time temporary protection is terminated, this will pose a great burden on the asylum systems of Member States, and many national asylum systems will be overwhelmed.

Group-based protection and status determination allow for accelerated asylum decision-making, bypassing the need for millions of individual assessments. This would help ease the administrative burden on Member States especially those such as Germany and Poland that host a considerable number of Ukrainian temporary protection beneficiaries as well as those Member States already facing backlogs in their asylum systems. Group-based recognition prevents national asylum systems from becoming overwhelmed. Moreover, by recognising the shared experiences of those fleeing the full-scale invasion, this approach provides a more humane and streamlined process and a European common approach to protection.

Challenges: However, this option is not without legal complexities. Article 8 of the new Qualification Regulation which will enter into force in 2026 requires individual assessments of protection needs, including the possibility of living in safe areas within Ukraine, namely, the availability of an ‘internal protection alternative’. Therefore, granting international protection on a group basis could conflict with the requirement to assess the availability of internal flight alternatives, which emphasises individualised assessments.

Mitigating these challenges: The EU could adopt a flexible approach where Member States have the option to offer group-based protection and accelerated asylum determination for Ukrainians while still allowing for individual assessments where necessary. This would create a more cohesive response while respecting the legal obligations of Member States under the EU asylum *acquis*.

Option 3: Circular Migration supported by voluntary return assistance

The third pathway is the development of well-supported voluntary return programs and the facilitation of circular migration. While forced returns remain contrary to international and EU law as long as the full-scale Russian invasion continues, in my opinion, voluntary return remains an option and a right for those who wish to return to Ukraine.

The possibility of such a return depends on Ukraine’s capacity to accept and reintegrate returnees, especially given the ongoing attacks on its critical infrastructure like energy sources. On the ground, electricity, heating and housing capacity, inter alia, will remain among key criteria for Ukrainians to decide whether to stay in the EU or return to Ukraine.

Key Benefits: Voluntary return programs should always prioritise safety and dignity, ensuring Ukraine is stable enough to receive returnees without risking their safety and security.

These programs should include financial and logistical support, as well as reintegration services such as housing, education, and healthcare to help individuals rebuild their lives back in Ukraine. It is crucial that before any voluntary return, Ukrainians receive up-to-date information on their country and region of origin and they are allowed to return back to the EU if they wish so. Moreover, similar to assisted voluntary programmes implemented in the context of the return of Bosnians and Kosovars from Member States to their homes in the 1990s, host states can help rebuild Ukraine’s crucial infrastructure such as energy plants, houses, schools’ farms and help Ukraine employ the returnees in these processes.¹¹

Circular Migration: For those who wish to temporarily return to Ukraine but retain ties to the EU, residency permits or legal statuses that support and encourage circular migration such as

¹¹ For good practices on voluntary return programmes following a mass influx situation. Cf. Meltem Ineli Ciger, *Temporary Protection in International Law and Practice* (Brill 2018) pp. 239-243.

the proposed reconstruction permit by Mr. Asscher in his report to the European Commission in 2023¹² or an adapted and improved version of this proposal may offer a flexible solution. Yet, it is crucial to make sure such a new EU permit category and its legal basis are clearly established in EU law.

Circular migration would allow Ukrainians to return home for specific periods while retaining the right to re-enter the EU if they find it necessary. This model could be particularly beneficial for those who wish to contribute to Ukraine's reconstruction efforts while maintaining the security and stability they have found in the EU.

These options provide complementary pathways for managing the expiration of the Temporary Protection regime in the Union. Long-term residency can offer stability for those looking to settle and group-based international protection can address immediate protection needs, and lighten the burden on national asylum systems whereas, the promotion of voluntary return and circular migration provides flexibility for those wishing to maintain ties with both Ukraine and the EU.

A coordinated approach is needed to ensure displaced persons are not left in legal limbo, and that sustainable solutions are in place by 2026. The EU must ensure that legal certainty, integration opportunities, and human rights protections remain at the forefront of the conversation.

One of the most critical components of long-term integration for displaced populations is access to employment. Successful integration into the labour market not only provides displaced persons with economic independence but also contributes to the host country's economy by eliminating the need for constant social assistance.

Several EU Member States have adopted good practices in facilitating access to labour markets for Ukrainians, creating successful models that have accelerated their integration.

- **Good Practices in Economic Integration:**

A standout strategy includes simplifying labour market access through digital administrative procedures. This reduces bureaucracy and opens opportunities faster. As noted in the 2024 EMN-OECD Inform¹³, as will be discussed further by colleagues today, initiatives such as the Temporary Protection Directive and the EU Skills Profile Tool have been vital in supporting integration efforts. However, challenges persist, particularly around skills and job mismatches.

Despite many temporary protection beneficiaries holding higher education degrees, many are employed in low-skilled jobs due to delayed qualification recognition, language barriers, and caregiving responsibilities. For example, a large percentage of highly qualified women face additional barriers when re-entering the labour market.

¹² Lodewijk Asscher, Special Adviser for Ukraine, May 2023, Integration of People Fleeing Ukraine in the EU Note To European Commission,

¹³ European Migration Network (EMN), 'Labour market integration of beneficiaries of temporary protection from Ukraine: Joint EMN-OECD inform', < https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/topics/policy-issues/migration/OECD-EMN%20Inform_%20Labour-market-integration-of-beneficiaries-of-temporary-protection-from-Ukraine.pdf>.

Effective measures have focused on granting immediate labour market access, language acquisition, and skills recognition programs. In some countries, fast-tracking the recognition of qualifications for sectors like healthcare and IT has allowed Ukrainians to contribute to the host Member States' national labour market and economy more quickly.

Pilot programs in various Member States have been highly successful. Government representatives periodically meet with Ukrainian beneficiaries to help them navigate the job market and overcome barriers. Additionally, sectors facing labour shortages—such as healthcare, construction, and IT—have actively recruited Ukrainians. This initiative has benefited both displaced individuals and local economies.

Beyond employment, social and educational inclusion is crucial. Many displaced individuals, especially families, are integrating their children into local schools after years of remote education that was based in Ukraine. This enrolment allows children to form friendships, build stability, and integrate further into society.

While economic integration remains a priority, targeted support—from language courses to qualification recognition—can address current challenges like skills mismatches and barriers for women. Member States have demonstrated that by simplifying labour market access, we can ensure that displaced individuals not only survive but thrive, benefiting both themselves and their host communities.

Looking to the future, the EU must focus on strategies that provide both immediate support and long-term stability for Ukrainians. I have three concrete recommendations to ensure this:

First, the priority is ensuring that the EU adopts a common stance on post-Temporary Protection regime solutions. This is crucial to avoid the fragmentation of policies across Member States, which could lead to secondary movements—where displaced persons move from one Member State to another in search of better protection, legal status, rights or opportunities. A cohesive EU policy would prevent inconsistencies that could undermine the overall success of the protection regime. A unified approach would also support the equitable distribution of responsibility and resources among Member States, reducing pressure on those countries hosting the largest numbers of displaced persons.

Second, it is essential to adopt gender-sensitive policies. The EU must recognise the challenges faced by women and children, who make up a significant portion of the displaced population. Many women, due to caregiving roles, may not meet income or employment requirements for long-term residency. Gender-sensitive policies should account for this, lowering income thresholds or allowing women to demonstrate their contributions through caregiving roles. Similarly, policies should ensure that children have access to education and healthcare, regardless of their parents' employment and legal status.

Third, fostering economic partnerships is crucial. The EU should explore economic partnerships that encourage remittances, investments, and business ventures between displaced Ukrainians and their home country. As Ukraine hopefully will begin its post-war reconstruction once the full-scale invasion ends, displaced individuals in the EU could play a key role in supporting this recovery, both financially and through business activities. Circular migration would allow people to move freely between Ukraine and the EU, supporting Ukraine's reconstruction while maintaining security and legal rights in Europe.

Conclusion

In conclusion, an incomprehensive, forward-looking and clear European approach is required to manage the transition beyond temporary protection for Ukrainians displaced by the war.

The success of the Temporary Protection Directive should now serve as a foundation for sustainable, long-term solutions that balance integration in host countries with the possibility of voluntary return.

A well-planned approach must incorporate both flexibility and stability, ensuring that displaced populations can contribute meaningfully to their host societies while being empowered to return home if and when conditions permit.

To achieve this, I propose a holistic approach that includes the following six key elements:

1. As we transition from temporary protection, the EU should adopt flexible residency models that allow beneficiaries to move freely between Ukraine and the host Member States. This would empower displaced persons to contribute to Ukraine's reconstruction efforts while maintaining their security and rights within the EU. Such models would also foster circular migration, which is vital for rebuilding Ukraine's infrastructure and economy without severing the ties Ukrainians have built in Europe. I argue that a common European approach and a group transition to a protection or better yet a stable and flexible residency status must be preferred to keep the benefits of the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive which provided effective and immediate protection and rights on a group basis. As opposed to individual status determination or eligibility for different kinds of migration pathways, the group-based transition will lighten the administrative workload of Member States such as Finland and save resources.
2. Once the peace is in place, the establishment of well-supported voluntary return programs is essential for those wishing to go back. These programs must be coordinated with the Ukrainian government to ensure safety and dignity in the return process. Support could include financial and logistical assistance—such as covering transportation costs and offering reintegration services that provide initial aid in housing, education, and healthcare. Such mechanisms would enable families to rebuild their lives in Ukraine with dignity and confidence.
3. Another essential element is the creation of a circular migration system. This model would allow Ukrainians the flexibility to return to Ukraine temporarily while retaining the option to re-enter the EU if conditions worsen or if they need to maintain ties for work or family reasons. Such a system would help preserve the legal status and security of displaced persons while enabling them to move between regions according to their needs.
4. Establishing student exchange programs between Ukraine and the EU could create cross-border educational opportunities that benefit both societies. These exchanges would promote educational growth for Ukrainian students while strengthening ties between the next generation of Ukrainian and EU citizens. It would also help Ukraine's youth develop the skills necessary for the country's post-war recovery.

5. As I mentioned earlier, all residency and economic inclusion policies must be gender-sensitive. We need to ensure that income and employment requirements for residency options do not disproportionately impact women, especially single parents, who may have been unable to enter the formal workforce due to caregiving roles during displacement.
6. Lastly, the EU must strengthen economic ties with Ukraine. Encouraging displaced Ukrainians to actively participate in Ukraine's post-war recovery through remittances and investments, would benefit both regions. Such cooperation would ensure that Ukrainians in Europe are able to contribute reconstruction of their homeland while maintaining their rights and stability in the EU.

As I conclude, I want to reiterate the critical juncture we find ourselves at: the Temporary Protection Directive, a cornerstone of the EU's response to mass displacement, has proven its value in providing immediate protection and rights to millions of displaced Ukrainians. However, its temporary nature demands that we now look beyond the immediate and plan for the future with urgency and foresight.

The potential solutions I have discussed today—flexible and long-term residency options, group-based transition to international protection as well as voluntary return programs, circular migration systems, and economic and gender-sensitive policies—are not just pathways for managing the end of temporary protection; they are also opportunities to redefine how the Union, respond to mass displacement. These strategies require a coordinated European approach that ensures legal certainty, upholds human rights, and balances integration with the possibility of return.

The collective challenge is to ensure that displaced Ukrainians are not left in legal limbo when temporary protection ends in 2026. This requires action now—planning exit strategies, fostering cooperation between Member States, and empowering displaced individuals to rebuild their lives, whether in Europe or back in Ukraine.

It is my hope that the lessons we've learned from the Temporary Protection Directive's activation will serve as a foundation for creating a fair, humane, and sustainable response to future displacement crises.

In closing, I urge all of us—policymakers, legal professionals, academics, and advocates—to work together to ensure that the transition beyond temporary protection is not just a bureaucratic process but a chance to uphold the dignity, rights, and future of those displaced by Russia's full-scale invasion.

Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to engaging with you all during the discussions that will follow today.