



# POLICY BRIEF

FEBRUARY 2024 #1

## The temporariness of the temporary protection for Ukrainian refugees: The Dutch case

By autumn 2023, about 5.9 million Ukrainian refugees had registered for protection in the EU due to the Russian invasion. Compared to earlier refugee flows, they are often not restrained to receding in so-called ‘refugee centres’ and are entitled to seek formal employment at a much earlier stage ([OECD, 2023](#)). They have ended up in various parts of Europe and elsewhere in the world through a ‘spontaneous process of dispersion.’ During this great displacement, not all Ukrainian refugees have ended up in ‘preferred locations,’ where opportunities are perceived easier to come by.

Because of the [temporary protection directive](#) (TPD), many Ukrainians were able to find employment faster than other refugees outside the EU, provided access to housing, living allowances, health care, language lessons, and other institutional services by their host countries. However, different localities have different processes of refugee settlement, as well as capacities and challenges. The following policy recommendations address the local challenges that follow from the arrival of Ukrainian refugees in rural, peripheral areas in the Netherlands.

### Policy recommendations

**1. Housing** for Ukrainians (and other newcomers) must slowly move from emergency and temporary to a more integrated part of local housing plans. Host municipalities, in coordination with regional and national authorities, and in consultation with the residents, could find a sustainable solution to provide

decent housing for newcomers, without displacing the local population.

**2. On employment** and other economic opportunities, matching of qualifications for Ukrainians in sectors that experience labour shortages can be organised strategically. Currently, it is only happening on an ad hoc level because of the temporary nature of their stay and based simply on supply-and-demand. A buddy system where a Ukrainian is paired with a long-term resident, or employee at the work floor to provide guidance, support, and training can be done. Moreover, reporting of labour abuses should be encouraged and supported. *Uitzendbureaus* (employment agencies) and other job-oriented organisations should do more to reach out to the group for jobs that are secure and non-exploitative, and for more information about working conditions. A work-advise initiative (like those given to status holders or refugees who are granted asylum) should be made available to the Ukrainians.

**3. Language** lessons must be continued in localities where Ukrainians are present, be formalised, and provide sufficient funding. Ukrainians (unlike other migrants and approved asylum seekers) are not required to take formal language lessons but the easy access to acquire language proficiency should be made available. To address the shortage of Dutch language teachers, one recommendation is to look at the pool of volunteers who already came from the education sector and provide them a few months of training and a certificate to teach. The language teaching certification can be more flexible in providing qualifications for people who are qualified to teach languages to newcomers.



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**4.** The role of municipalities, local support groups, and volunteers should be strengthened. New **forms of cooperation with networks** of willing localities are key factors that can help Ukrainian refugees to settle with ease. In this regard, welcoming initiatives should be permanently included in the budget where not all staff are volunteers. This support for institutions should only not come from the local government but also from the national and EU level. Additionally, the EU [Rural Pact](#), a framework of cooperation among stakeholders, should include issues of Ukrainian refugees in the rural EU.

**5.** There is a need for a more focused and targeted approach to ensure the socio-economic **emplacement of refugee women** (OECD, 2023). Welcoming spaces and initiatives can play a role in realising the full potential of Ukrainian women to thrive, especially in localities where support systems are lacking.

**6.** Temporary settlement and the **lack of long-term prospects** affect the refugees' plans and are counter-productive both for them and for host localities. Considering most of the Ukrainians have found jobs, put their children into schools, and learned the language (mostly on their own), their stay should be considered more permanent than previously expected. The prospect of returning to places where they lived (majority came from heavily devastated areas in Ukraine) is very low. Policies for Ukrainian settlement and inclusion should no longer be ad hoc but should move towards the direction of permanency. One strategy is to transition their temporary protection (now until 2025) to standard migration regulation like those available for labour migrants or students.

**7. Equal welcome** - The TPD template can be extended to asylum seekers from non-EU countries. The long and often bureaucratic procedures and uncertainty for obtaining a refugee status has been identified as a significant variable in psychological health complaints related to post-migration stress for non-EU asylum applicants (Laban, C.J. et al., 2018; Dupont, H.J. et al., 2005). Asylum applicants are only allowed to work after 6 months and they can only keep 25% of the salary (of which the maximum is € 246,00 per month); the rest is kept as contribution for their stay ([Rijksoverheid](#), 2024). They are also not getting formal language lessons at reception holding centres.

To make the welcome more equal to other refugees, it is recommended that they be allowed to work the moment they file their applications similar to Ukrainian refugees, increase how much they can keep from their salary and be given an option to find housing outside reception centers. Jobs for refugees can also be mixed with more skills training and language courses. This would improve their chances of being more independent and productive. They do not lose productive months or years while waiting for the results of their application.

## Background information



Based on empirical research in depopulating peripheral municipalities of Het Hogeland and Pekela (Netherlands), this policy brief is a result



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of an investigation into the opportunities and challenges for Ukrainians, specifically those who have receded rural and not the urban areas. The data collected involved interviews with Ukrainian refugees, long-term residents, volunteers, teachers, social workers, and government officials, and review of documentary sources and media reports.

## Spontaneous dispersal

The statistics suggest that Ukrainian refugees often navigate to urban places (but not necessarily in capital cities) and to places where there is already an existing diaspora. In the Netherlands, before 2022, people of Ukrainian origin were mostly living in and around Amsterdam, The Hague and Rotterdam, and other cities like Eindhoven, Groningen, Maastricht and Enschede. Statistics suggest that the number of Ukrainians is increasing. From approximately 85,000 in November 2022, it is up to around [146,000](#) at the end of 2023 (UNHCR, 2024).

On the other hand, it is also interesting to see the presence of Ukrainian refugees in smaller villages and places that are experiencing depopulation like Het Hogeland and Pekela in the Netherlands. The data gathered reveal that Ukrainians have ended in small localities partly due to housing scarcity in urban areas and to spread the burden and responsibility of those hosting the reception of this group. This offers an opportunity to discuss the increasingly important role of smaller municipalities in refugee settlement.

## Employment/economic opportunities

Most of the adult Ukrainian refugees have higher-than-average level of education compared to other refugee groups and their labour participation is higher (OECD, 2023). Early job uptakes in peripheral Netherlands, which is also reflected nationally (see [CBS, 2024](#)), are on low-skilled jobs such as factory work, cleaning, home care, supermarket jobs and seasonal work

because these are the ones available locally and immediately that also don't require language skills. Ukrainians are also expected to take low-skilled jobs and to fill the gaps in sectors where there is labour shortage.

Their early labour situation appears to be dependent on job availability not on skills or education because of, among others, language, mismatch of skills, and recognition of qualification certificates. Additionally, because of the desperation or eagerness to get any job available, many fall into exploitative labour conditions ([Fairwork, 2023](#)). Others are also victimised, mostly on social media, by middlemen posing as recruiters and asking for fees in exchange for a job.

## Access to housing

Because of scarcity of housing in general, many Ukrainians still live with host families or government-sponsored accommodations such as converted empty buildings, hotels, and tourist boats - usually a family stays in one room, with a common kitchen and receiving area for all residents. A few have been helped by host localities to live in independent houses or rent on their own but high rental fees are prohibitive, and the temporary nature of their stay makes property owners extra careful in renting out places.

## Access to language lessons

Municipalities are left to arrange and allocate funds for language courses. During the emergency phase, there were ad hoc community-level Dutch lessons for Ukrainians initiated by local organisations and volunteers. Lessons were offered once or twice a week, usually in the evening to accommodate those who were working, but many locations have since stopped because there was no allocated budget for their lessons and a lack of language teachers. Some colleges found creative ways to offer language courses for Ukrainians, for example from an excess budget for post-COVID training, but the



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waiting list is long. Others who want to continue formal language courses pay on their own. Professionals and highly educated are the highest takers of formal language courses as part of their strategy to have better options.

## Access to other institutional services

Ukrainian refugees receive housing support, monthly food, and clothing allowance of around 270 euro a month per adult (family of 1-2 persons), a transport card within the region (not all), health insurance, and other institutional services offered by their host localities and organisations. The allowance is stopped, except for minors, once a family member gets a job.

Welcoming initiatives and volunteers are very much involved with language lessons, activities for the families and children, preparing accommodations, and other practical assistance like translations. For example, welcoming initiatives (some are partly supported by the local governments) work in coordination with the municipal job centre, regional schools, cooperatives, and other employers to help residents and newcomers (including Ukrainians) acquire skills and opportunities. Other community-led initiatives function as socio-cultural mediators and provide safe and common space for both long-term residents and newcomers.

## Mostly women

Ukrainian women, who came with children and without their partners (due to mobilisation in Ukraine for men between 18-60), must juggle their responsibilities between keeping a job, taking care of the children and elderly in a foreign country. There is a lack of childcare options available for them so challenges can become overwhelming. Some Ukrainian mothers end up choosing to return or move to places where they can get adequate support. In this research, it is also noticed that an increasing number of men are

joining their families to avoid being drafted in the military.

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