



## **Navigating Uncertainty: What is the Future for Displaced Children and Youth from Ukraine in the EU after March 2025?**

As the second anniversary of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine draws near, the EU has decisions to take on the uncertain future of protection for the millions of people displaced from Ukraine on its territory. Missing Children Europe is concerned that time is running out for the development of durable solutions which can ensure the protection of children's rights and futures.

### **Urgent need to provide solutions**

In March 2025, the Temporary Protection status, which currently provides protection for citizens from Ukraine in EU member states, will expire, and the current text of the Directive does not allow further extension.<sup>1</sup> So far there has been no indication of how EU decisionmakers envision to safeguard Ukrainians on EU territory after that date. They have been busy finalising the lengthy and tumultuous process of asylum reform in the EU, known as Pact for Migration and Asylum<sup>2</sup>. While there is a lot of pressure to conclude negotiations on the Pact before the end of the 2019-2024 institutional cycle, it is also imperative for EU policy makers to promptly initiate work on a scenario for the future of temporary protection beneficiaries, compliant with fundamental rights and the best interests of the child.

This matter is urgent for a number of reasons:

- **Legislative changes at EU level require time.**

Firstly, considering how long it takes to conclude decisions at the EU level, particularly on matters related to migration, one year represents a tight deadline. The unanimous and rapid decision to activate the Temporary Protection Directive in March 2022 and extend it for a maximum of three years until March 2025 was unprecedented. However, following the Pact negotiations there is less eagerness and increased fatigue.

- **EU elections 2024**

The upcoming election, and subsequent changes in cabinets will disrupt the flow of decision-making processes, affecting the time required to reach a consensus on whichever scenarios are under consideration. As a result, current institutional actors must provide viable solutions that future decisionmakers can build on.

- **Reducing uncertainty for people displaced from Ukraine.**

<sup>1</sup> [Implementing decision - 2022/382 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [New Pact on Migration and Asylum - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)





Last but not least, displaced people from Ukraine, currently staying in the EU under the Temporary Protection Directive, have no certainty on what will happen to their right to reside in the EU one year from now, making it difficult to plan for their future.

### **Temporary, unstable residence status and its implications for children**

Children constitute nearly half of all refugees from Ukraine in the EU.<sup>3</sup> The consistent reality for many of them has been a life in uncertainty, as temporarily displaced persons.

Children and young people face unique challenges due to said uncertainty. If children and their parents lose temporary protection status, will they have to return, would it be safe, and what impact will losing this status in the middle of the school year have on their education? Can they enrol in higher education as temporary protection beneficiaries, or, should they seek to apply for a student-based permit, given the possibility of losing their status? Different residency permits require different conditions to be met, and application deadlines may demand taking decisions under uncertainty. The risk is that the gaps and unclarity may cause individuals to become undocumented.

For the past two years the Temporary Protection Directive has served as a crucial support system for people fleeing the war in Ukraine, granting them residency status with almost immediate access to social benefits and the labour market, in stark contrast to the conventional asylum process.

Unfortunately, while there is still no end in sight to the conflict, this period of 'temporariness' has persisted well beyond the initially anticipated temporal boundaries. EU policymakers can contribute to improving the well-being of those affected by the consequences of this war by providing more long-term certainty.

### **Risk of going missing**

Some of the displaced children and young people have witnessed the atrocities of war. For many of them, domestic instability and their parents' struggles with the situation in their native country have severely impacted their mental health. Amongst other factors, these could push youngsters into going missing, increasing the risk of exploitation, particularly in a foreign setting. Having to navigate the complexities of their immigration status may exacerbate their mental health and provides an additional risk. Research suggests that children in migration are at higher risk of going missing when they face uncertainty about their legal status in the host country.<sup>4</sup> It is our responsibility to avoid all of these risks.

<sup>3</sup> [365 days of war and displacement for Ukraine's children | UNICEF Europe and Central Asia](#)

<sup>4</sup> Sigona, N., Chase, E., Humphris, R. (2017) 'Understanding causes and consequences of going 'missing', Becoming Adult Brief no. 6, London: UCL





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Ukrainian displaced children in the EU are caught in the crosscurrents of political rhetoric and policy debates, with their futures hanging precariously in the balance as decisions made by distant policymakers impact their lives.

### **Best interests of the child**

It is Missing Children Europe's strong view that these policies must prioritise the best interests of the child, in accordance with the international conventions and human rights framework.

We know that the reality on the ground often falls short of these lofty ideals, as bureaucratic and systemic hurdles hinder access to essential services and opportunities for children and young people in displacement.

It is therefore essential to take into account the voices of these children and young people regarding their future, whether they choose to return to Ukraine or pursue an education or other life activities within the EU.

**Missing Children Europe urges EU policymakers to promptly engage in constructive dialogue regarding the future of protection for individuals displaced from Ukraine after March 2025 and to provide durable solutions on the EU level, paying specific attention to the children and young people's needs and vulnerabilities.**

