



Situational Update

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Displaced Ukrainians with Disabilities Seeking Temporary Protection in Europe

Situational Update No 20 serves as an additional resource to the comprehensive report on [“Persons with Disabilities in Asylum and Reception System: A Comprehensive Overview”](#).

This update is based on the same methodology used in the main report by including desk research and summarising the findings of two surveys which were disseminated by the EUAA in August and September 2023. The surveys were completed by national authorities and other stakeholders, including civil society and non-governmental organisations, academia and international organisations.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine led to one of the largest displacements of people since World War II. Most people travelling from Ukraine towards EU+ countries were particularly vulnerable throughout their journey, including women, children, the elderly and persons with disabilities or serious medical conditions.

Based on a survey of families in neighbouring countries of Ukraine (including Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania and Slovakia), UNHCR found that one in five families interviewed (22%) had a family member with a specific need, disability or serious medical condition and they generally faced greater difficulties to meet their basic needs.¹



¹ UNHCR (April 2023). Acute needs of older Ukrainian refugees and those with disabilities must not be overlooked. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/acute-needs-older-ukrainian-refugees-and-those-disabilities-must-not-be-overlooked>



To better understand the flows of arrivals, the EUAA regularly [reported](#) since the beginning of the war in Ukraine on the number of displaced persons seeking temporary protection in Europe. The Agency published [analyses of developments, practical tools](#) and the results of a survey to inform about the state of play.

This Situational Update is an accompanying resource to “[Persons with Disabilities in Asylum and Reception System: A Comprehensive Overview](#)”, which looks at the situation for all applicants and beneficiaries of international protection in EU+ countries. The current report addresses whether disabled persons from Ukraine have been channelled and supported in a different way than asylum applicants and which specific activities and support services were in place to ensure their inclusion. It shares how local, regional and national levels faced the challenges associated with the high flow of arrivals and ensured adequate care for those who are particularly vulnerable.

Key findings

- ✓ A significant share of displaced families included at least one family member with disabilities or serious medical conditions.
- ✓ EU+ countries reported that the registration process or the medical assessment were key times in the process to identify vulnerabilities, including disabilities.
- ✓ Most EU+ countries do not collect data on persons with disabilities who have registered for temporary protection.
- ✓ 4 EU+ countries (Belgium, Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland) reported having received a number of children with disabilities who were evacuated from facilities in Ukraine.
- ✓ International organisations, civil society organisations and NGOs work closely with national authorities to help with identification and referral of beneficiaries of temporary protection with disabilities.
- ✓ It is important to put in place longer-term planning to ensure that special needs are sufficiently addressed and essential care is provided to disabled persons.





1.1. Identifying disabilities among displaced persons from Ukraine

Similarly to applicants for international protection, EU+ countries reported that the registration process or the medical assessment were key times in the process to identify vulnerabilities, including disabilities.

For example, in the **Netherlands**, displaced persons from Ukraine who registered with an (emergency) shelter location or HUB (centre that distributes displaced people to municipalities) had their medical background assessed.

Displaced persons from Ukraine are not channelled to the asylum procedure and not accommodated in the asylum reception system in **France**. For vulnerabilities, however, the procedure is quite similar as an interview with the Office for Immigration and Integration (OFII) takes place during the registration phase for temporary protection.

Almost all asylum applicants and displaced persons from Ukraine arrived in **Slovakia** without medical documentation. Identification and an assessment were generally undertaken in the Large Capacity Registration Centres or when the displaced person applies for financial or social aid or received material support and services. For this purpose, [Blue Dots Hubs](#) were established on the main railway stations, in the Large Capacity Registration Centre and by the organisations supporting displaced persons in order to provide information and support by trained caregivers. The assessment of vulnerabilities of people displaced from Ukraine who were accommodated in asylum facilities was carried out in a similar way as for applicants for international protection in reception facilities. However, a detailed initial medical examination and social profile for displaced persons was not carried out. Slovakia reported that one of the biggest challenges was the identification of people suffering from mental health conditions. The overall challenge was the lack of available medical specialists (including psychiatrists and pedopsychiatrists) and psychologists (including therapists).

The identification stage in **Slovenia** occurs either during the medical check at arrival at the reception centre or during the registration for temporary protection when displaced persons with disabilities speak with an official. If recognised as vulnerable, disabled persons from Ukraine have access to specific support services, such as psychosocial care (psychologists and psychotherapists on demand), interpreters for sign language, special accommodation, etc. Social workers in reception facilities can also identify vulnerabilities.

In **Switzerland**, all refugees, applicants for international protection and persons from Ukraine applying for temporary protection have basic insurance and the opportunity for an initial medical consultation where disabilities are assessed. If necessary, the person is referred to a doctor to obtain adequate treatment and services. Some Swiss cantons have special programmes with long-term assistance services, for example for displaced persons with visual and hearing impairments.

The procedure to register for temporary protection status in **Greece** is brief, and thus, a specific mechanism for identification of vulnerabilities and the assessment of special needs is not in place. However, even prior to receiving temporary protection, displaced persons from





Ukraine have access to medical and nursing care in all public hospitals, nursing homes, municipal clinics, primary healthcare facilities, and Rehabilitation and Social Care Units, which can prescribe medicine, and perform therapeutic operations and diagnostic examinations. Displaced persons simply need to present their passport or the service note from the police which was given upon arrival in Greece.

People registering for temporary protection in **Sweden** can inform the SMA about any special needs, even though a specific identification mechanism for disabilities is not in place and the SMA does not ask directly about disabilities or health issues. Much of the procedure to register for temporary protection does not require the physical presence of the person: the registration form can be submitted digitally, physical meetings are not needed during the processing of an application (unless a specific case requires a meeting) and the determination process for a residence permit is fast and does not require the presence of the person. Biometrics, however, must be done in person at a SMA office, but there is no guarantee that potential disabilities or vulnerabilities are detected at this stage. If any indication of a vulnerability is detected, the SMA follows the procedures of internal written instructions on in-person, follow-up meetings and documenting the vulnerability. New instructions for operational staff have been implemented and additional instructions are being developed to improve the practices regarding assisted or adapted accommodation.

In **Denmark**, while a special identification or assessment mechanism for displaced persons from Ukraine does not exist, the process is the same as for asylum applicants. During registration, the disabled person should inform the Danish Immigration Service of any disabilities and the information is noted on the applicant's file in the electronic case-handling system. Applicants and displaced persons do not have to provide any specific information about their disability.

The European Commission and national authorities voiced concerns about the possibility of higher risks of human trafficking along the migratory routes from Ukraine due to the profiles of the people seeking protection. Monitoring border crossing points and targeted awareness-raising campaigns were among the measures taken by EU+ countries to identify potential victims and to provide information on resources available to them.



1.2. Reception of displaced persons from Ukraine with disabilities

Different arrangements were in place across EU+ countries for the reception and accommodation of displaced persons from Ukraine.

In **Greece**, there were no specific provisions for vulnerable persons – including disabled persons. Beneficiaries of temporary protection can apply for long-term accommodation [electronically](#) and be allocated to the Accommodation Facilities of Serres (North Greece) and Elefsina (South Greece). Project HELIOS, implemented by IOM Greece in collaboration with the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, supports beneficiaries towards independent accommodation in apartments by contributing to rental and move-in costs and networking





with apartment owners. Beneficiaries of temporary protection obtain a social security number (AMKA) and have free access to public healthcare services, including medical and nursing care in all public hospitals, nursing homes, municipal clinics, primary healthcare facilities and diagnostic examinations. A dedicated [telephone helpline](#) offers free mental health support and care by Ukrainian mental health professionals.

Fedasil in **Belgium** assists persons from Ukraine in finding accommodation if they have no independent solution to stay in Belgium. Fedasil conducts a preliminary screening of special needs, including disabilities. In contrast to applicants for international protection, persons displaced from Ukraine are entitled to all support measures like Belgians with a disability. Ukrainians have to follow the same procedure as Belgians to obtain government support.

The care for displaced persons from Ukraine with disabilities is decentralised to municipalities in the **Netherlands**. Municipalities follow the Social Support Act (WMO) to provide care to displaced individuals with disabilities and the Long-Term Care Act ([WLZ](#)) for persons requiring long-term care or with a special care background. The RMO (Regulation for Medical Care for Displaced People from Ukraine) reimburses certain aids for displaced individuals from Ukraine with disabilities.

Displaced persons from Ukraine have the same reception conditions as all other asylum seekers in **Norway**, including the same rights to healthcare, non-healthcare services and reception facilities. An exemption is anyone who is evacuated from Ukraine to Norway through the Medevac programme under the EU Civil Protection Mechanism and have a “fast-track” registration procedure to be transported directly to a hospital, in most cases. The health services provided by the hospitals are free for Medevac patients. This means that they do not have to pay a deductible (approximately EUR 200) to the hospitals. When the Medevac patients finish the hospital treatment, they have the same rights and obligations as other refugees.

In **Slovakia**, the same reception conditions and legal provisions apply to applicants with disabilities and beneficiaries of temporary protection living in asylum facilities. The Humanitarian Centre in Gabčíkovo, which received Ukrainians with temporary protection, has wheelchair access to the premises, the rooms, the dining room, corridors and common sanitary facilities. In general, if the health status does not allow the applicant to move to the dining room, the meals are brought to their room. However, in some areas, temporary protection gives more advantages to persons with disabilities than refugee status, such as access to the labour market, financial support and a greater range of health treatments beyond emergency healthcare. The number of spaces available in specialised social care facilities was adjusted for people displaced from Ukraine. Since more funds were allocated to international organisations and NGOs for the support of displaced persons from Ukraine, more services were made available, such as social aid support and services from the national social system. International organisations carried out their own screenings of vulnerabilities and special needs, and provided either financial or material support, practical arrangement support (for people with disabilities), services (such as rehabilitation and transport) and helplines for information and psychological support. Additionally, legal, psychological and social counselling together with interpretation were available in the Large Capacity Registration Centres:





Access to interpretation, accommodation in a reception facility and health services are the same for beneficiaries of temporary protection with disabilities as for an applicant for international protection in **Slovenia**. Beneficiaries receive a financial allowance or pocket money (depending on where they stay).

In **Switzerland**, both asylum seekers with disabilities and displaced persons from Ukraine with disabilities have basic insurance and receive means and benefits to ensure activities of daily living (e.g. glasses, hearing aid, walker, wheelchair, etc.), taking into account the urgency, procedural status and social assistance regulations of the canton.

Sweden's housing of displaced persons from Ukraine is seldom provided by the SMA, but in most cases provided by the municipalities or through private accommodation. The webpage of the SMA provides information on [healthcare](#).

1.3. Disabled children from Ukraine in reception



Four countries which responded to the survey (**Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland**) received particularly vulnerable persons from Ukraine, namely children with disabilities who were evacuated from facilities.

Five Ukrainian orphanages were included in municipal shelter locations in the **Netherlands**. The group comprises vulnerable orphaned children, many of whom have intellectual or physical disabilities. There is no registration of children with disabilities, whether they are unaccompanied minors or traveling with families. Children with disabilities have access to the regular healthcare system in the Netherlands.

Switzerland referred the children with disabilities who were evacuated from Ukrainian facilities directly to hospitals where they received treatment and care.

For minors under institutional care, the **Swedish** Migration Agency (SMA) contacts the Swedish Social Services to secure for the wellbeing of the disabled child. Early on in the process, the SMA focus on the determination of whether the children are unaccompanied minors or under the responsibility of a legally-appointed guardian (a physical person or a judicial entity as an institution) since different procedures may apply. The child's access to healthcare is not affected by nationality, residence permit, disability or if accompanied by a parent or a legal guardian.





1.4. Data on displaced people from Ukraine with disabilities

In the context of displaced persons from Ukraine, there is a lack of data collection on persons with disabilities. In fact, most Member States do not collect data on persons with disabilities who have registered for temporary protection. Denmark, Greece and Slovakia² include some information on disabilities in the individual files of those who have registered for temporary protection, but it is not possible to extract this information. In the Netherlands, displaced individuals with disabilities who are registered under the Temporary Protection Directive are registered at the municipal level, which is decentralised. Therefore, there is no central register or aggregated data for this group.

On 11 April 2022, the EUAA – in partnership with the OECD – launched the Surveys with Arriving Migrants from Ukraine (SAM-UKR).³ From 9 April to 31 October 2023, the second wave of the SAM-UKR survey gathered some 4,880 responses. Respondents were predominantly female (79%), aged 18 to 44 years and of Ukrainian citizenship (98%), who were living in Ukraine before the onset of the war. While the survey does not explore the topic of disability directly, two related questions enquired whether the respondents had dependent adult persons with them (e.g. elderly, persons with disabilities, serious health conditions, etc.) and, if so, how many accompanied them. Some 732 respondents (15%) confirmed having dependent adults with them, sometimes more than one person. Overall, respondents identified 941 cases of vulnerable people, either elderly, disabled or suffering serious health conditions, for whom they were responsible for and who were currently living in the EU.^{4 5}

The survey also offered respondents the possibility to write freely about their experiences both in Ukraine, during their journey or in the EU. Out of close to 1,600 testimonies, some 170 included references to vulnerable persons – around 100 specifically mentioned individuals with disabilities or special needs, some 60 mentioned elderly people and 10 talked about pregnant women.

Some testimonies described the situation of people with disabilities who fled from Ukraine and were currently in the EU, indicating their disability and the challenges they were facing in accessing adequate medical care and other needs. Some testimonials refer to children with disabilities, the difficulties of their journey and the challenges encountered in adapting to a new country in terms of finding and accessing the necessary specialised care. Various testimonials depict a range of disabilities encompassing psychological, cognitive and physical disabilities. These included individuals using wheelchairs, those with diverse locomotor challenges, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, autism, visual or hearing impairments,

² In Slovakia, this applies only to displaced persons with temporary protection who are accommodated in state asylum facilities.

³ Joint EUAA, IOM and OECD Report (2022). Forced displacement from and within Ukraine: Profiles, experiences and aspirations of affected population, 28 October 2022, [Joint Report: Forced Displacement from and within Ukraine \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁴ European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) (2022), Surveys of Arriving Migrant from Ukraine: Thematic Factsheet-Issue 2, 9 October 2022, [Surveys of Arriving Migrants from Ukraine: Thematic Factsheet - Issue 2, October 2023](#)

⁵ European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) (2022), Surveys of Arriving Migrant from Ukraine: Thematic Factsheet, 14 June 2023, [Surveys of Arriving Migrants from Ukraine - Thematic Factsheet, June 2023](#)



intellectual disabilities, serious health conditions such as cancer and other chronic diseases, as well as psychological and mental health conditions. Some accounts delve into both physical and mental health conditions arising from the war, such as the loss of limbs, symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or other coping mechanisms that require medical support.



1.5. Roles and activities of various stakeholders in providing support services

International organisations, civil society organisations and NGOs collaborate with national authorities to help identify and refer disabled beneficiaries of temporary protection and provide services. Various stakeholders participated in the general EUAA survey on applicants for international protection with disabilities, which also addressed the reception and care of disabled persons fleeing the war in Ukraine.⁶

The **German** Red Cross acts as a federal contact point for displaced persons from Ukraine with disabilities and care needs. As the federal contact point (*Bundeskontaktstelle* - BKS⁷), the main task is to identify the support needs of newly-arriving refugees (primarily larger groups) before their actual arrival in reception in order to arrange suitable offers for inpatient care or assistance for integration upon arrival. In addition, the BKS serves as contact point for information requests about healthcare in Germany.

Accem supports the adjustment of material reception conditions for beneficiaries of temporary protection with disabilities in **Spain**, adapting the reception places to the needs of disabled people, encouraging the establishment of contracts with specific services for persons with disabilities and coordinating with external support services.

The Platform for Families of Children with Disabilities (*Platforma rodín detí so zdravotným znevýhodnením*) in **Slovakia** published an [interactive map](#) with information on the services that Ukrainian children with disabilities and their families can access. This includes information on healthcare and psychological support, education, financial aid, sports and leisure activities. The information is published in Slovak, Ukrainian and English.⁸

⁶ European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) (2023). EUAA Survey – Applicants for international protection with disabilities. https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/EUAA_applicants_with_disabilities_survey

⁷ The Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS) and the Federal Ministry of Health (BMG) have crafted a concept for a point of contact ("*Bundeskontaktstelle*") for refugees fleeing from Ukraine with disabilities or care needs. The German Red Cross, as a partner with relevant expertise and the necessary networks, was put in charge of the project. More information <https://drk-wohlfahrt.de/bundeskontaktstelle/>

⁸ Platforma rodín detí so zdravotným znevýhodnením | Platform of families of children with disabilities, Mapa podpory pre deti so zdravotným znevýhodnením z Ukrajiny [Map of support for children with disabilities from Ukraine], 4 July 2023.



The Association for Legal Intervention (*Stowarzyszenia Interwencji Prawnej*) in **Poland** published a "Guide for people with disabilities who came to Poland in connection with the war in Ukraine". The guide provides information on procedures related to the regularisation of stay in Poland, disability certificates and benefits for persons with disabilities.⁹

UNHCR has worked on increasing support to persons with disabilities who fled Ukraine by working with the European Disability Forum and jointly publishing a report on <https://www.edf-feph.org/publications/ensuring-the-protection-of-persons-with-disabilities-fleeing-from-ukraine/>. The organisation has also supported with the identification of disabilities in beneficiaries of temporary protection and made information and accommodation accessible to them.

An OECD report found that measures vary across countries to integrate disabled children from Ukraine in educational systems, but generally the measures apply to all children enrolled in school, regardless of their status. The report refers to the example of **Romania**, where legislative and administrative measures were adapted to ensure access for disabled children with special education needs to kindergartens and schools under the same conditions as Romanian children.¹⁰

Finally, a report by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) looks at measures taken to ensure access to housing, education, employment and healthcare for displaced persons from Ukraine. It also presents the challenges in local authorities across 12 EU Member States when providing support, including to persons with special needs and disabilities.¹¹

Conclusions

There was a significant share of persons with disabilities or serious medical conditions among displaced families from Ukraine. The EUAA's survey results illustrate that either the registration procedure or the medical assessment were key times in the process to identify vulnerabilities, including disabilities, of displaced persons from Ukraine.

International organisations, civil society organisations and NGOs continue to work closely with national, regional and local authorities to help with identification and referral of disabled beneficiaries of temporary protection. Specific activities and support services played a pivotal role in ensuring their inclusion into the host country.

Yet, as with applicants for international protection, most EU+ countries do not collect data on applicants for temporary protection who have disabilities. The lack of official data limits our understanding of the magnitude of the situation.

Concerns by civil society organisations were raised that the new Pact on Migration and Asylum does not specifically refer to asylum seekers with disabilities or the Commission for

⁹ Association for Legal Intervention | Stowarzyszenia Interwencji Prawnej, Informator dla osób z niepełnosprawnością, które przybyły do Polski w związku z wojną na Ukrainie [Guide for people with disabilities who came to Poland in connection with the war in Ukraine], 27 June 2023.

¹⁰ OECD, Education at a Glance 2023: OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/e13bef63-en>

¹¹ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) (2023). Fleeing Ukraine: Implementing temporary protection at local levels. <https://fra.europa.eu/en/print/pdf/node/44839>





the Rights of Persons with Disability as such.¹² The new pact foresees and refers to tools to manage situations of displaced persons from third countries in exceptional situations of armed conflicts, which include the early identification of special needs and relocation procedures for all vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities.^{13, 14}

Many uncertainties still remain for disabled Ukrainians with temporary protection. Planning longer-term solutions will be essential, especially once the Temporary Protection Directive expires, in order to ensure that the special needs are sufficiently addressed and essential care is provided to disabled persons.

¹² European Disability Forum, Migration & refugees with disabilities. Accessed 15 December 2023. <https://www.edf-feph.org/migration-and-refugees-with-disabilities/#:~:text=In%20September%202020%2C%20the%20European.and%20asylum%20seekers%20with%20disabilities>.

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¹³ European Commission. Temporary Protection. Accessed on 13 December 2023. https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/common-european-asylum-system/temporary-protection_en

¹⁴ European Commission. Flexibility and resilience. Accessed on 13 December 2023. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/new-pact-migration-and-asylum/flexibility-and-resilience_en





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