

Stakeholder Meeting

Perspectives of Ukrainian Displaced Persons in Austria and Europe

Summary and Main Take-Aways

The following recommendations emerged as the most urgent issues to support the long-term integration of Ukrainian displaced persons in Austria.

- *Long-term residence prospects for temporarily displaced Ukrainians.* Despite the EU-level extension of temporary protection for another year, this status cannot serve as a permanent solution. Thus, there is a need to establish mechanisms that allow temporarily displaced Ukrainians to transition quickly and smoothly to a more permanent residence status without excessive bureaucracy. Additionally, it is crucial to consider that the high-income threshold required for transitioning to another residence permit restricts access for many displaced individuals, particularly single mothers.
- *Stimulating the integration of temporarily displaced Ukrainians into the labor market.* In regions where registration with the employment service is mandatory (Upper Austria, Vienna), the number of registered Ukrainian job seekers is increasing. However, approximately 15,000–20,000 employable Ukrainians are still not registered with the AMS (Public Employment Service). To address this issue, two possible actions were identified: 1) Providing access to full social rights, including housing, childcare, and social support (Sozialhilfe/Mindestsicherung) for temporarily displaced persons, whose receipt is linked to AMS registration. 2) Introducing a mandatory registration requirement for displaced persons with the employment service, while simultaneously offering better information on employment opportunities.
- *Support for vulnerable groups among displaced Ukrainians.* Full (labor market) integration may be impossible for certain groups, particularly individuals facing psychological issues, such as those who have fled the war or have family members still in Ukraine, or persons with disabilities and the elderly. Therefore, programs are needed not only to support their integration but also to comprehensively address these specific needs.
- *Interaction between locals and temporarily displaced Ukrainians.* It is essential to support projects and encourage initiatives that promote mutual exchange, help Ukrainians understand Austrian perspectives, and foster a sense of community.
- *Ensuring equal opportunities for all forced migrants.* Forced migrants living in Vienna and in rural areas should have equal opportunities, particularly for recognition of qualifications. The responsible organizations provide assistance in rural areas as much as possible; however, it is currently impossible to meet the needs of everyone requiring these services.
- *Potential issues with passport extensions for young Ukrainian men.* Young Ukrainian men who have finished school or other educational institutions in Austria could successfully integrate. However, under Ukrainian law, they are required to complete military service. Issues

regarding their citizenship, obtaining Ukrainian passports, and protection—particularly if they do not wish to return to Ukraine—remain unresolved.

- *Access to comprehensive social rights, not just benefits.* A gradual transition out of the Grundversorgung system to Sozialhilfe/Mindestsicherung, which refugees enjoy, is essential to provide equal access.
- *Challenges of reintegration.* Some Ukrainians may wish to return after the war, while others, as historical experience and new data suggests, may prefer to remain in Austria. The need for measures to support Ukrainians' labor market integration was highlighted, while also considering their future reintegration into Ukraine for post-war reconstruction.
- *A large group of single parents among displaced Ukrainians.* Mothers who care for children alone experience various anxieties, such as separation anxiety, concerns about work, education, social status and housing. This requires a comprehensive approach and opportunities for part-time employment that would allow them to make a living.
- *Language learning in combination with professional courses.* Taking into account that many Ukrainian professionals are looking for opportunities to learn new professions, as they often can't immediately return to their original fields, programs are to be developed that combine language acquisition and vocational training, particularly in fields like pedagogy, health care and accounting. Studies show that this approach can yield high success rates and could be an effective short-term solution for faster labor market integration by merging language learning with professional education.
- *Changes in the recognition of regulated professions, particularly in health and education.* Despite the European Commission's recommendations to simplify and reduce bureaucratic barriers in Austria, the legal process for having degrees obtained abroad recognized remains highly bureaucratic. The recognition process still requires a one-to-one subject comparison. This issue should be addressed by the next Austrian government, aiming to change the legal framework so that recognition procedures for Ukrainians, as well as third-country nationals, align with EU recognition standards, where only essential differences between qualifications need to be addressed.
- *Financing of language courses for nostrification.* Program funded by AMS exist for Vienna, but are lacking in other federal states of Austria. Financing of language courses for nostrification is an important issue.
- *Career guidance for youth.* While initiatives on career guidance and training for youth have been implemented, they could be expanded and elevated to flagship projects by the new government.
- *Common standards in integration across Austria.* Currently, this responsibility lies with the different provinces, but establishing unified standards is crucial. This would not only address demographic challenges but also create a win-win situation, fostering effective integration measures across Austria.

- *Projects about accountability for international crimes.* Several projects support the survivors, primarily by advancing accountability for crimes under international law and seeking justice for individuals who survived the Russian aggression. The essence of the project lies in providing targeted legal consultations, as well as psychosocial and medical support to the victims. To achieve these goals, there is cooperation with Ukrainian civil society and Ukrainian stakeholders in Ukraine, as well as an additional aim to initiate investigations in Austria. However, more support is needed in this direction from the government.

The Professional Integration HUB

The Professional Integration HUB is a program for Ukrainian professionals residing in Austria, which offers a variety of professional development and community-building events. They involve Austrian organizations and speakers to enhance the professional competencies of Ukrainians, foster a community of Ukrainian professionals, and facilitate their integration into Austrian professional environments. Thus, the program supports not only those who secured internships but also short-listed candidates. It also offers an intensive German course aimed at improving communication and business-level German proficiency. The first round was supported by ÖIF, while the second round is funded through private donations. Currently, the community includes approximately 150 members. The program is evolving and its format is being adjusted to involve as many Ukrainian professionals and Austrian organizations as possible, while also addressing the new challenges Ukrainian professionals face.

The selection of participants involves negotiations with potential hosting organizations. After these negotiations, the hosting organizations decide on the vacancy and the division or department where they need support and can offer internships. Once the vacancy is confirmed, an open call is announced. Applicants apply for specific vacancies based on their qualifications. The HUB team conducts a technical review according to the organization's requirements and performs initial interviews. Afterward, the hosting organizations receive a shortlist of the most relevant candidates and proceed to conduct their interviews to choose the participants they want to move forward with. The internship duration is three months, with participants expected to come to work either daily or part-time, and each intern is assigned a supervisor within the team. Internships are paid by ERSTE Foundation, but some organizations hired participants directly and provided salaries. In general, the hosting organization is responsible for ensuring the participant gains real experience and is involved in actual projects. They must handle onboarding, assign tasks, and provide supervision throughout the internship. At the end of internships, interviews are conducted with the hosting organization to gather their feedback and impressions, as well as with the participants to understand how useful the experience was. Therefore, the responsibility lies with both parties: the participant and the organization providing the internship.

Although Ukrainians cannot work directly in ministries, some organizations, like the Ministry of Culture, have extended internship contracts. Even in cases where internships were not continued or

interns did not receive long-term contracts, they still gained valuable experience that can be mentioned on their CVs and contribute to Ukraine's reconstruction efforts. Ministries value professionals who can bridge connections between Austria and Ukraine. For instance, the Ministry of Education in Austria worked with Ukraine's Ministry of Education to address issues concerning Ukrainian children.

Finally, **three key barriers to sustainable employment** for highly qualified Ukrainians were highlighted:

Access to information. Much has been done by participant organizations at this stage, such as information provided by AMS, Wirtschaftskammer and Start Wien. However, employment information specific to highly qualified professionals is limited. Many Ukrainian professionals, such as IT designers, could work as self-employed, but the legal framework remains unclear, particularly regarding taxation. Additionally, consulting services in Austria are prohibitively expensive for many.

Limited range of job listings for highly educated professionals. A participant shared her experience with AMS, where, despite her qualifications in management, project management, and language skills, she struggled to find suitable positions in the application form of AMS and how she received only one job offer—working in a small plant wrapping frozen fish. As possible solutions, consultations to temporarily displaced Ukrainians should be provided in their native language, fostering network cooperation between organizations to align programs.

Too few internship opportunities. Internships are extremely important for temporarily displaced Ukrainians, as they allow them to integrate into the Austrian professional environment, gain valuable experience and the opportunity for further employment. One of the most promising areas for internships for displaced Ukrainians is in the business sector, as it has many English-speaking departments and potentially higher opportunities for future employment. In particular, it would be beneficial if Austrian companies that are already operating or planning to operate in Ukraine were involved. However, the Austrian business sector is still not actively involved in internship programs for Ukrainians. The organizations that are partners of the Professional Integration HUB program primarily belong to the NGO sector, the philanthropic sector, and public administration. To widen the circle, information about the program should be spread to involve companies and create joint information updates.

We thank all participants for their valuable contributions to the discussion and invite them to spread the information about the Professional Integration HUB in their networks.