



RECEPTION AND CARE OF UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN FRANCE BY THE FRENCH STATE IN 2022

Flash Audit

February 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An immediate response from the public authorities

Ever since the war broke out in Ukraine late February 2022, France has taken in just under 115,000 people, mainly women and children. As soon as the Council of the European Union implemented its decision on 4 March 2022 to introduce temporary protection for Ukrainian refugees for the first time, the public authorities in France sprang into action in response to initial estimates that 100,000 people could seek refuge in the country. A crisis task force was set up on 9 March to ensure a coordinated government-wide response. The various prefectures took immediate on-the-ground action while associations and local authorities engaged with the cause to provide appropriate conditions for receiving the first influx of Ukrainian nationals.

During the first three months, arrivals were concentrated in the metropolitan areas and border territories of eastern France, where more than 80,000 people were taken in. In the main cities, reception centres were sometimes set up in the most unexpected formats, including a hall in the Paris exhibition centre, a 1,600-capacity ferry in Marseille, and one of the many sites opened by central government services, local authorities and associations. These venues were instrumental in delivering a truly concerted response and an initial shelter for the refugees arriving in the country.

Massive and specific solutions for accommodating and housing refugees

Accommodation has mainly been focused in the metropolitan areas and has represented a major challenge for these tension-fraught areas, since they are already overwhelmed by the need to support and shelter other vulnerable groups. Nevertheless, over 87,000 places have been created, nearly 60,000 of which were still active by the end of 2022. Collective accommodation (emergency reception, hotels or similar) that is directly financed by the State represented one third of the country's response, with a unit cost that is almost double the cost of the facilities offered to traditional asylum seekers. This cost was due to the urgent need to provide shelter and the uncertainty surrounding the duration of the conflict. Driven by the unprecedented number of French people rallying to the cause, host families have played an essential role and accounted for over 40% of the accommodation solutions. Several aspects of this new scheme, such as supervision, support and sustainability, require greater clarification, but the decree of 17 November 2022 on compensation for hosts fails to provide a clear answer.

Finally, although proposals for permanent accommodation have been moving forward since the autumn, putting those proposals into action is still an uphill struggle due to lingering doubts about the duration of the conflict and refugees' own economic situation.

Extended access to rights

Temporary protection status, which implies short-term "asylum" without any desire for long-term settlement, grants additional rights to beneficiaries in comparison to asylum seekers under ordinary law, especially in terms of family benefits, housing, healthcare, education and access to employment. As such, the key to an effective reception system lies in the speed at which residence permits are issued, which are a prerequisite for entitlement to those rights. The initiative of setting up refugee reception centres, which have since become real hubs in the main cities, has met this need. By December 2022, some 85,000 residence permits were

active, and 45,000 asylum seeker allowances had been paid. At the same time, some 10,599 households were receiving family or housing benefits, healthcare cover¹ had been granted to 107,000 people, and 19,000 children were still in school.

Issues relating to the enduring conflict

By the end of 2022, the influx of displaced persons from Ukraine to France was still growing at a rate of 2,000 to 4,000 refugees per month. Enabling these people to continue living in France at a time when the conflict shows no signs of letting up combined with the prospect of seeing a new wave of refugees enter the country caused by an escalation in the conflict raises a number of question marks about the sustainability of the current arrangements for taking in refugees, along with the implication that changes need to be made.

Questions hang over the human and financial capacity to provide long-term care and support. The conditions for ending temporary protection status also need to be defined, bearing in mind that this EU measure can last from one to three years.

There are currently no guarantees that host family accommodation and the ability to maintain compensation for accommodation providers can be stabilised. At the same time, the issue of easing housing and accommodation restrictions in metropolitan areas, particularly Paris, has been high on the agenda since the summer of 2022. This situation calls for refugee facilities to be distributed more evenly across the country, which the State is endeavouring to promote for displaced persons. Increased support for employment will be needed to improve access to housing.

In terms of the financial cost, the State released a €400 million credit package when the crisis broke out, but the costs of providing accommodation and asylum seeker allowances alone have exceeded this amount, with expenditure representing €482 million by late November 2022. In total, all the aid schemes are expected to reach between €621 million and €634 million over the whole of 2022. The Court of Accounts did not carry out an audit into the management and compliance of these appropriations during the course of this investigation.

As such, the failure to incorporate appropriations into the 2023 Budget Act will deprive all stakeholders of the visibility that they need to organise their means for action going forward.

¹ As of 30 September 2022.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Anticipate and clarify the conditions for ending care and support for beneficiaries of temporary protection (Prime Minister).
2. Ensure greater oversight of the refugee hosting scheme where funding is provided by the State (Prime Minister).
3. Increase visibility of the funding arrangements in the budget to support Ukrainian refugees for 2023 and make provisions for the necessary appropriations (Prime Minister).