



## Statement on the arrival of refugees from Ukraine and the application of the Temporary Protection Directive

With a rapidly rising number of refugees fleeing Ukraine due to the war inflicted by the Russian regime's aggression, Europe is facing the greatest refugee movement since World War II.

**Our organisations represent Churches throughout Europe – Anglican, Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic – as well as Christian agencies particularly concerned with migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.** As Christian organisations, we are deeply committed to the inviolable dignity of the human person created in the image of God, as well as to the concepts of the common good, global solidarity and the promotion of a society that welcomes strangers and values freedom, security and justice in policy and practice.

Since the first day of the attacks in Kyiv, many of our members have responded to the exodus from Ukraine, setting up both small and large-scale support structures, opening the doors of parishes, private houses, or church institutions across Europe, and transferring large scale support to border countries and, where still possible, into Ukraine. **It is against this background that we would like to share what we consider important steps to be taken at policy and practice level to respond to the important and increasing needs of the affected population.**

We are moved and touched by the immediate generous support and solidarity rendered to Ukrainians by the overwhelming majority of Europeans, including our members, and EU Member States. However, we are concerned that the activities of volunteers and civil society organisations might be considered a replacement for the much needed support and coordination, which is and must remain a state responsibility.

We are also in strong support of the Council decision to activate the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) and to introduce operational guidelines for external border management to facilitate border crossings at the EU-Ukraine borders. We also welcome the mobilisation and flexibility of EU funding to be allocated towards the needs of Ukrainian refugees. It is also encouraging that EU Member States have taken a pragmatic approach to help the people concerned, for example, by allowing people to choose which EU Member State to go to. These practices and policies show that Europe can be a champion of refugee protection if it wants to.

**We appeal to state institutions and the EU to further develop and work on the following areas:**

- All persons leaving Ukraine in need of protection should be allowed to avail themselves of protection – irrespective of their origin, colour of skin, gender, orientation, ability, or residence status. In this respect, we call on EU Member States to implement temporary protection in the widest possible scope and to always take humanitarian considerations into account in their response; in particular we want to reiterate that, as underlined by the operational guidelines of 18 March 2022, the scope of the directive goes beyond the protection of Ukrainian citizens only and that the directive should be applied to all groups covered;
- The TPD should be implemented in a harmonised way and provide a secure residence status with all the rights and entitlements foreseen in the Directive for all those covered by its scope. The EU should provide financial and coordinative support to fulfil the rights that can be enjoyed under the TPD (employment, recognition of qualifications, healthcare, education, housing, etc);

- The TPD should be applied to all Ukrainians who were on EU territory before 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022 with a pending legal status application, and returns should be stopped in line with [UNHCR position on returns to Ukraine](#);
- The notion of close and dependent relatives in the TPD must be generously interpreted;
- In case neighbouring countries' capacities are stretched and they request support in the form of relocation, Member States should come forward in offering relocation placements and the European Commission should take a coordinating role in this process. Individual preferences and consent on the location should be taken into account (e.g. special ties, family unity);
- Self-distribution of refugees within EU Member States must be underpinned by support in order to protect vulnerable groups who face difficulty travelling (for example, people with disabilities). For those who have no networks in EU countries and are unaware of their rights or where to go, assistance in accessing transportation and services must be provided;
- The Solidarity Platform should be utilised to make relocation possible and implement responsibility sharing, as well as to coordinate disbursement of EU funds to where it is most needed;
- Capacity should be built up, especially in Member States that have not yet dealt with such a large number of people coming to their country, by swiftly and efficiently putting in place support and (national) coordination structures to allow for access to social benefits, employment, language classes and other rights to avoid the risk of exploitation, as stated in the TPD;
- Volunteer welcoming and private housing initiatives should be supported, while encouraging minimum standard setting, safeguarding and timely state provision of information on accessing rights and legal status and transition to permanent housing;
- While acknowledging the difficulty of ensuring reliable media coverage at the border of Ukraine, the European Union Institutions should ensure that alleged discrimination against people of colour or minority groups such as Roma when trying to enter the EU is investigated and addressed;
- Support systems for the most vulnerable should be activated and strengthened, such as (unaccompanied) minors, victims of trauma, as well as victims of human trafficking. The set-up of robust systems and practises should include the drafting, publication, and dissemination of protection and safeguarding policies and mechanisms, and the establishment of safe recruitment policies and practises for persons and organisations working with refugees;
- Special attention should be given to the needs of women to ensure that they are protected from human traffickers and gender-based violence during their journey and upon reception. Access to the labour market, gender-sensitive reception facilities, and financial assistance should be provided to prevent trafficking, exploitation, and recruitment into irregular work;
- Special attention should be given to the needs of children and unaccompanied minors to grant them access to guardians or equivalent specialised childcare staff, prevent placement in institutions, access to education, and ensure that safeguarding concerns are taken into consideration during the reception phase, including when done through private individuals;
- Funds that have been made available should be flexible in scope of utilisation, easily accessible for civil society and Member States, and should be prioritised to sustain pre-existing activities. Funding should also be allocated to support the Republic of Moldova to assist refugees;
- Scapegoating and hate speech against Russian and Russian speaking citizens in the EU should be acknowledged and denounced, whilst the Russian regime should be recognised and condemned as aggressors and instigators of the war;
- An ongoing commitment of protection to other groups of refugees and asylum seekers should be maintained by not neglecting, discriminating against, or diverting resources from them, particularly those stuck on the EU's border, and ambitious commitments to step up resettlement should be maintained.

Churches and Christian organisations stand ready to further support EU, national and local authorities in these efforts.