

Working towards dual intent integration of Ukrainian refugees

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Key messages

- As the displacement of Ukrainians in OECD countries is prolonged, additional integration support in host countries is needed for optimal outcomes, yet the nature and scope of support needed may not align with the usual integration practices as many refugees are expected to want to return to home when the situation permits.
- Considering the conflicting needs, adopting a dual intent approach could prepare for both indefinite stay as well as for possible return of refugees by deliberately seeking to minimise possible return barriers.
- In many OECD countries, this would differ from existing integration policies that focus on long-term residents and generally do not factor in the potential impact on the likelihood of return and reintegration and, instead, seek to promote settlement.
- Countries can implement dual intent by investing in the human capital of Ukrainian refugees, streamlining the recognition of skills and qualifications in the host country and Ukraine, offering Ukrainian language training in host countries, retaining and facilitating refugees' financial and digital ties with Ukraine, and ensuring remigration and mobility pathways.

Background

Amidst the ongoing devastation caused by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, more than 10 million Ukrainians have become either internally displaced or refugees abroad. By June 2023, there were around 4.9 million displaced Ukrainians in OECD countries. OECD countries have reacted to the

Ukrainian refugee crisis decisively from the start, coping with sudden and unexpected inflows of people seeking protection with unprecedented and overwhelming support (OECD, 2022^[1]).

As the war against Ukraine continues into its second year, host societies are looking for ways in which to better support displaced Ukrainians longer term, yet the nature and scope of support needed may not align with their usual integration practices as many Ukrainian refugees are expected to plan to return to home when the situation permits. Considering the high levels of uncertainty regarding future development and timing, dual intent integration approach would prepare for both indefinite stay as well as for possible return of refugees. Within the framework of dual intent integration, integration measures and activities are geared towards promoting socio-economic inclusion of Ukrainian refugees, allowing them to achieve self-sufficiency, rebuild their livelihoods and enhance their human capital for improved future prospects regardless of their location, while deliberately looking to minimise potential return barriers in both host countries and Ukraine.

Why is dual intent important in the case of Ukrainian refugees?

A central challenge for integration is the lack of clarity regarding the potential length of stay for displaced Ukrainians in host communities. Despite some returns to Ukraine already taking place, especially to Kyiv city and Western Ukraine, continued fighting and infrastructure damage in large parts of the country are dimming short-term return prospects for others. Consequently, for many Ukrainians, any return that will take place would happen only after a relatively long period of displacement, and future plans remain clouded in uncertainty. About a quarter of Ukrainian refugees are undecided whether to stay or return in host countries according to a FRA survey (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2023^[2]), having reached 43% according to an UNHCR's intentions survey in September 2022 (UNHCR, 2022^[3]).

Meanwhile, Ukrainian refugees have started to rebuild their lives in host communities and need integration support for optimal outcomes. The labour market inclusion of Ukrainian refugees, for instance, is already happening at a faster rate compared to other refugee groups, but skills mismatches are widespread, requiring host countries to consider introducing support measures to promote skill-appropriate employment of Ukrainian refugees rather than any gainful employment (OECD, 2023^[4]).

As almost a third of all Ukrainian arrivals are minors, host societies also need to consider offering targeted integration support to children to improve their future opportunities as youth with migrant parents generally have pronounced gaps vis-à-vis their peers with native-born parents in terms of education and labour market outcomes (OECD, 2021^[5]; OECD, 2023^[6]). The findings of the OECD's survey on "Ensuring that Ukrainian refugee students return permanently to schooling and training" indicate that language barriers and relatively low integration levels of Ukrainian families pose significant obstacles to accessing education, especially early childhood education and care (ECEC), in OECD countries (OECD, 2023^[7]).

Successful and speedy socio-economic inclusion of refugees can also bring benefits to Ukraine. New skills and work experience that refugees gain abroad can be brought back to support the recovery of Ukraine, especially considering that the high labour and skills needs of Ukraine during the reconstruction. Evidence also suggests that integration in the destination country supports reintegration when migrants decide to return (World Bank, 2017^[8]). The ability to work, access independent housing, and the freedom to develop social contacts while abroad have been identified as important factors in supporting the social and economic reintegration of returnees (Ruben, Van Houte and Davids, 2009^[9]).

Until actual return is possible, displaced Ukrainians can support the country through remittances. The National Bank of Poland found that 30% of surveyed refugees and 44% of those employed in the country sent monetary or in-kind contributions to Ukraine already last summer; by 2023, approximately 60% made remittances (Narodowy Bank Polski, 2022^[10]; 2023^[11]). Unsurprisingly, the levels of remittances were found

to be dependent on refugees' own financial situation, which, in turn, depends on their labour market participation in host countries.

At the same time, it is important to consider the possibilities of family reunification in destination countries and longer term stay after the war ends. Even if many Ukrainians are currently unsure about their future plans, experiences with past large-scale displacement show that a significant share of displaced persons will stay in host countries, even if return becomes possible (OECD, 2016^[12]). Early integration support can improve outcomes for those Ukrainians who will remain abroad by minimising the risks of social exclusion, segregation, relative poverty, and dependence on social benefits.

Yet surveys continue to suggest that many Ukrainians are hoping to go home once the situation permits and their contribution will be also critical for the reconstruction of Ukraine. The fourth round of UNHCR intentions survey carried out between April and May 2023 found that 62% of Ukrainian refugees express a desire to return to Ukraine one day (UNHCR, 2023^[13]). Among the refugees hosted in countries neighbouring Ukraine the share reached 71%. Considering the continuously high return intentions, it is important to look for ways in which integration support is provided in a manner that would not undermine return potential longer term and that special attention would be paid to removing return barriers in both host and home countries.

Pursuing a dual intent integration approach could offer a pathway for balancing these conflicting needs and circumstances. It can also help to overcome what has been called a “waiting dilemma” (European Commission, 2023^[14]), whereupon different parties, including refugees themselves, are unwilling to invest in integration activities due to the expected immediate return of Ukrainian refugees.

Box 1. The Norwegian experience with refugees during the Yugoslav Wars

Temporary protection was employed as a policy instrument by several European countries in response to refugee movements resulting from the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s. Notably, Norway introduced temporary collective protection for the first time to address the situation of about 14 000 Bosnian refugees (Statistics Norway, 2017^[15]). While the premise of eventual return was seen as a fundamental principle of temporary protection yet challenges swiftly arose among countries when determining the conditions for the stay of these newcomers. The dilemma revolved around whether to “isolate” newly arrived “temporarily” displaced persons from refugees on a settlement trajectory and the host society, or to provide them access to standard integration programmes and settlement support (Brekke, 2001^[16]).

In 1993, the Danish Government adopted an isolation model for Bosnian refugees, citing its potential to ease the repatriation process both for Danish authorities and the refugees themselves (Brekke, Vedsted-Hansen and Thorburn Stern, 2020^[17]). Sweden, on the other hand, decided to grant them permanent residence permits and put them on a settlement track. Norway, however, pursued what was termed a “two-track race,” promoting both integration and repatriation (Haagensen, 1999^[18]). Bosnians were granted a full access to the labour market, education, social support, and standard integration programmes, while the government continued planning also for an organised return.

The significance of having received integration support became evident as the displacement of Bosnians extended beyond the initially anticipated duration. Despite the signing of the Dayton Accords and the cessation of the Bosnian War prior to the scheduled conclusion of temporary collective protection in Norway in 1996, the process of improvement and normalisation in Bosnia and Herzegovina was slow. Persistent concerns about potential internal conflicts and violence dissuaded numerous Bosnians from considering repatriation. Additionally, the Norwegian public rejected the premise of

coerced return. Consequently, in the autumn of 1996, the Norwegian Government made the decision to grant permanent residence to this group (Brekke, 2001^[16]).

Despite most Bosnian refugees staying and settling in Norway the same policy was applied again in 1999 related to the Kosovo^{*} War. This time, the situation in the home country improved quickly, and two-thirds of the refugees returned within a year (Brekke, Vedsted-Hansen and Thorburn Stern, 2020^[17]).

How can countries implement dual intent?

There are some isolated examples when similar approaches have been taken in the past. For instance, Norway tried to implement integration measures with a return perspective in mind with Bosnian refugees in the 1990s, characterised as a “two-track race” (Haagensen, 1999^[18]) (see Box 1). In most host countries, however, dual intent approaches would be new, differing from existing integration policies that do not generally factor in the potential impact on the likelihood of return and reintegration and, instead, seek to promote long-term settlement with limited support available to temporary arrivals. Concurrently, it should be noted that an increasing number of OECD countries, including Germany, New Zealand, and Spain, have been gradually expanding access to selected integration services, such as language training, for most arriving migrants, including asylum seekers and other temporary migrants (OECD, 2023^[19]).

In the context of the Ukrainian refugee crisis, there are five promising interconnected ways in which countries could implement dual intent.

First, host countries should **invest in human capital development** of Ukrainian refugees during their displacement. Alongside retaining and building upon the existing skills, preference should be given to skills, know-how and work experience in sectors that are essential for the reconstruction and recovery of Ukraine such as construction, engineering, energy, health, IT and supporting the green transition. Many of the same skills are in high demand also in current host countries, creating socio-economic opportunities for displaced Ukrainians regardless of their future location. Occupations typically entered through vocational education and training (VET), for instance, are in particularly high demand in host countries and will also be crucial for the reconstruction of Ukraine, making training in VET an investment with particularly high expected returns (OECD, 2022^[20]).

Second, Ukraine and host countries need to work together to **streamline the recognition of skills and qualifications** on both sides. This supports skills-appropriate labour market entry in current host countries, especially considering the higher-than-average educational attainment levels of Ukrainian arrivals (OECD, 2023^[4]), but also prepares for the transfer of newly acquired skills and know-how upon return to Ukraine. There is evidence that recognition challenges are already a significant barrier for enrolling Ukrainians in tertiary education in host countries, but several countries, including France, Lithuania and Spain, have reported that concerns about the future recognition of diplomas upon return to Ukraine are stopping Ukrainian refugees from registering in VET programmes (OECD, 2023^[7]). There are some promising steps being taken in this sphere. In October 2022, Ukraine agreed in principle to recognise the education systems in five OECD countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and the Czech Republic) under simplified

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244/99 and the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on Kosovo’s declaration of independence.

procedures and ease the requirement for refugee children to repeat their schooling when they return home. This initiative aims to expedite the re-entry of children into the Ukrainian educational system.

Third, it is important to offer Ukrainian **language training in host countries for children and young adults** to ensure that they have the necessary language skills and cultural ties after a prolonged period of displacement to return and reintegrate successfully. Some OECD countries, including Austria, Belgium and Germany, have experience with teaching migrant children parents' native languages at school, but it is not widespread (OECD, 2021^[21]) and the evidence of the impact is mixed (OECD, 2017^[22]).

Fourth, host countries and Ukraine need to co-operate to **retain and facilitate refugees' financial ties with their home country**. Measures here may include easing small-scale investment flows, lowering costs of money transfers, but also addressing challenges related to compliance with tax obligations in both Ukraine and the host jurisdiction and resolving the situations of international double taxation, especially among refugees who are employed or self-employed and continue to work for Ukrainian companies remotely (Box 2). What is more important is for Ukraine to maintain digital ties with its citizens abroad and diaspora. The existing Ukraine's e-government infrastructure, including the Diia app, also offers a unique way for Ukraine to stay connected with their displaced communities abroad and could be possibly better leveraged by host countries in their engagement with Ukrainian refugees.

Box 2. International Tax Challenges and Dual Intent Integration considerations

The international tax challenges from large scale displacement of population arise especially in case of the refugees who continue being economically active either in their country of origin or derive income from other jurisdictions, where they placed their investments or savings. It is the interaction between the two or more tax systems that gives rise to tax compliance complexities and challenges. These challenges include on one side the risk of double taxation of the same income or capital and on the other side the risks of non-compliance, double non-taxation or even tax evasion. For dual intent integration purposes, it is desirable that the displaced population is provided the necessary assistance to adopt early on proper tax compliance attitude in the host countries. There may be however several challenges to this effect – such as language barrier, lack of awareness of the local tax rules – that tend to be complex even for local population. Furthermore, opening and maintaining the bank accounts in the different jurisdictions raises additional challenges to reporting the earnings or savings in the different jurisdictions. This challenge is partially addressed by Automatic Exchange of Information involving the bank account information – but even there – the large-scale displacement present unique challenges. Adopting good tax compliance habits and culture can facilitate better integration in the host jurisdiction, while it can also contribute towards positive effects on tax revenues in both the host jurisdiction and in the country of origin – upon potential future return. Equally, both the host country and country of origin should closely collaborate to ensure prevention of double taxation, so as not to discourage the economic activities, investments and voluntary compliance.

Fifth, further co-operation is needed by different affected parties to build a **legal framework for regular migration** to ensure remigration and mobility pathways for Ukrainians upon return. In 16 countries in Europe, travel to Ukraine is already now impacting refugees' access rights and assistance, consequently discouraging from any return visits (UNHCR, 2023^[23]). After the war, individual Ukrainians are likely to have conflicting aspirations, torn between a desire to support the recovery of Ukraine and to maintain ties to host societies where they have rebuilt their lives. Individuals can be expected to be less willing to return if they believe there is no possibility to remigrate. Impacted parties should start exploring possible options, including skills partnerships (see Box 3), for facilitating future mobility already now.

Box 3. Building skills for Ukrainians and offering regular pathways for labour mobility after return

The labour needs in Ukraine for reconstruction and recovery will be enormous, almost hitherto unseen, both in terms of numbers and skills. Just within the first year of Russia's war against Ukraine, more than 3 100 education institutions were damaged or destroyed with the Ukrainian authorities estimating the total damages in the field of education to be about USD 8.9 billion. These capacities need to be rebuilt within Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction plan. Until then, the ability to train and upskill workforce is limited, which, in turn, can slow recovery efforts.

One form of recovery support OECD countries can provide to Ukraine is in vocational training for subsequent use of regular migration channels to exercise and develop skills. Russia's war against Ukraine has led to the disruption of its education systems. Stronger training, more closely aligned with European and national skills frameworks, would expand the skills base in Ukraine and increase opportunities for Ukrainians in OECD countries and in Ukraine.

Potential benefits are particularly high in Vocational Education and Training (VET) (OECD, 2022^[20]). Ukraine has traditionally strong VET provision at upper secondary level, and young Ukrainians have interests in occupations commonly entered through VET (industry, agriculture, and construction). Prior to Russia's invasion, Ukraine was in the process of strengthening its VET system, including through the introduction of dual apprenticeship-type programmes. There is a need to rebuild these capacities, including the reintegration of returnees to its VET system that will require recognition and validation of foreign VET qualifications.

Skills Mobility Partnerships (SMPs) are a tool to promote a suitable approach to skilled migration and mobility with the idea of building skills both for the benefit of countries of origin and destination (OECD, 2018^[24]; EMN/OECD, 2022^[25]). They vary in form, modality, and type of stakeholder engagement, but usually include five components: formalised state co-operation, multi-stakeholder involvement, training, skills recognition, and mobility. For origin countries SMPs increase the potential pool of skills, while destination countries gain facilitated access to skills in demand. For migrants, on the other hand, SMPs enable to acquire and market new skills. The New Pact on Migration and Asylum (2020) emphasises the importance of creating new legal pathways in the context of labour migration and skills matching to address labour shortages. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (2018) has also put forward the idea to build Global Skills Partnerships to strengthen training capacities and foster skills development of workers in countries of origin and migrants in destination countries transferable/relevant to labour markets of all participating countries.

What are the conditions for success?

The relative newness of dual intent integration approach, coupled with the unprecedented scale and scope of this refugee crisis and the expectation of the origin country for their return, presents different challenges for implementation. Notably, this approach requires unprecedented levels of co-operation between host countries and Ukraine to develop and implement relevant and appropriate measures. Integration policies are generally the domain of host countries and international co-operation here tends to take the form of exchanging good practices rather than developing shared measures with a country of origin. This entails establishing co-operation channels and relationships which are not currently in place. Ukraine, however, has showcased high levels of willingness to co-operate and has a vested interest in ensuring that as many

displaced Ukrainians would like to return once the war is over. Moreover, numerous platforms for close multilateral co-operation in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine are already operational, while others are being established.

Another challenge will be maintaining public support for such measures. Integration support to migrants and refugees is generally offered on grounds of promoting long-term social cohesion and such investments are expected to be recouped through taxes. These considerations, however, are less relevant in the case of Ukrainians who will choose to return. Moreover, dual intent approach will likely come with additional costs beyond those associated with the regular upkeep of integration activities and measures aimed at other migrants and refugees. Such investments into Ukrainian refugees, however, should be viewed and framed as an important part of supporting the recovery of Ukraine. Considering the expected high cost of reconstruction and anticipated labour needs, OECD countries who have committed to supporting the recovery of Ukraine can start doing this through human capital investments in Ukrainian refugees today.

What is the outlook?

OECD countries reacted to the Ukrainian refugee crisis quickly and decisively, which has in many places led to better-than-average early integration outcomes for Ukrainian refugees compared to previous refugee arrivals. However, there is mounting evidence that this experience is not uniform, with some displaced Ukrainians, including many minors, facing difficulties in their integration process. As we grapple with a prolonged displacement scenario, this issue is growing in significance. Meanwhile, supporting the repatriation of displaced Ukrainians when the security situation permits is deemed crucial for Ukraine's recovery. Consequently, host country governments are confronted with the challenge of striking a balance between providing adequate integration support and avoiding the unintentional creation of obstacles to return. Instead, it is important to actively work towards removing these obstacles. Adopting a dual intent approach in integration policies could be a viable strategy for finding the right equilibrium, thus creating optimal conditions for displaced Ukrainians to rebuild their lives while preserving pathways for both those who choose to remain and those who wish to return.

What are the key considerations for policy makers?

- Host countries need to plan for both possible stay and repatriation of Ukrainian refugees. This requires assessing the suitability of their existing integration policies. Most integration approaches do not consider the potential impact on the likelihood of return and reintegration and, instead, seek to promote solely long-term settlement.
- Dual intent approach to integration requires close co-operation with the Ukrainian authorities to develop and implement relevant and appropriate measures. While different from usual practices in the field of integration, there are existing and emerging co-operation platforms that can facilitate such co-operation.

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