

Olga in Paris

Why are there so few Ukrainian refugees in France?

ESI Background Paper
14 February 2023



[“Save Ukraine” in France](#)

4.9 million

Following Russia's brutal invasion in February 2022, millions of Ukrainian refugees left their country. By the end of December 2022, 4.9 million of them had applied for protection in the European Union and in other European democracies.

Applications for protection by Ukrainian refugees (24 January 2023)¹

Country	Applications	Pop (mil)	Percent
Czechia	482,618	10.52	4.59
Poland	1,563,386	37.65	4.15
Estonia	42,342	1.33	3.18
Lithuania	73,292	2.81	2.61
Latvia	45,085	1.88	2.40
Cyprus	20,603	0.9	2.28
Bulgaria	151,332	6.84	2.21
Slovakia	107,004	5.43	1.97
Ireland	71,819	5.06	1.42
Germany	1,021,667	83.24	1.23
Luxembourg	6,756	0.65	1.05
Austria	92,019	8.98	1.02
Switzerland	78,467	8.74	0.90
Finland	48,713	5.55	0.88
Norway	37,971	5.43	0.70
Denmark	37,523	5.87	0.64
Iceland	2,239	0.38	0.60
Romania	109,413	19.04	0.57
Belgium	65,979	11.63	0.57
Portugal	57,109	10.35	0.55
Croatia	20,377	3.88	0.53
Sweden	51,029	10.45	0.49
Netherlands	85,210	17.59	0.48
Slovenia	8,659	2.11	0.41
Hungary	33,603	9.69	0.35
Spain	161,012	47.43	0.34
Malta	1,541	0.52	0.30
Italy	169,306	58.98	0.29
UK	157,300	67.03	0.23
Greece	20,955	10.6	0.20
France	118,994	67.84	0.18
Total	4,943,323	528.4	0.94

On 4 March 2022, the EU ministers of interior activated the so-called Temporary Protection Directive, declaring that “the existence of a mass influx into the Union of displaced persons

¹ UNCHR, [Ukraine Refugee Situation Dashboard](#), accessed on 31 January 2023, Eurostat, [Population on 1 January](#), December 2022.

who have had to leave Ukraine as a consequence of an armed conflict is hereby established.” As a result, Ukrainian citizens and their family members could apply to be granted temporary protection without an asylum procedure. EU-member states committed themselves to offer them residency rights, access to the labour market, access to housing, social welfare assistance, medical or other assistance, and “means of subsistence.”²

This was a quick response to the largest refugee crisis in Europe since the 1940s. EU Member States adopted national legislation to grant temporary protection. Denmark, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland, though not bound by the EU temporary protection framework, introduced similar provisions.³

Temporary protection was granted for an initial period of one year.⁴ On 10 October 2022, Ylva Johansson, the European Commissioner for Home Affairs, announced after a meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Council that “the Temporary Protection Directive will continue to be in place at least until March 2024.”⁵

Where Ukrainians sought protection

Since early March 2022, almost 5 million Ukrainian refugees applied for temporary protection. Czechia and Poland received the highest number per capita: more than 4 percent of their population. Another six countries received applications amounting to 2 or more percent.

These eight countries accounted for 2.5 million of all applications. These are remarkable numbers: more Ukrainians applied for protection in the Czech Republic (11 million inhabitants) than in France, Italy and Spain combined (174 million inhabitants).

2 percent and above – Ukrainians and temporary protection (24 January 2023)⁶

Country	Applications	Pop (mil)	Percent
Czechia	482,618	10.5	4.6
Poland	1,563,386	37.7	4.2
Estonia	42,342	1.3	3.2
Lithuania	73,292	2.8	2.6
Latvia	45,085	1.9	2.4
Cyprus	20,603	0.9	2.3
Bulgaria	151,332	6.8	2.2
Slovakia	107,004	5.4	2.0
Total	2,485,662	67.3	

² European Commission, [Press release – Ukraine: Commission proposes temporary protection for people fleeing war in Ukraine and guidelines for border checks](#), 2 March 2022.

³ EU Agency for Asylum, [Situational update no 15: EU+ countries continue to address the protection needs of displaced persons from Ukraine](#), 21 April 2022.

⁴ [Council Implementing Decision \(EU\) 2022/382, European Council](#), 4 March 2022, item (21).

⁵ Delegation of the European Union to Ukraine, [Press remarks by Commissioners Johansson and Schmit on the launch of the EU Talent Pool and strengthened support to provide certainty for those fleeing Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine](#), 10 October 2022.

⁶ UNCHR, [Ukraine Refugee Situation Dashboard](#), accessed on 31 January 2023, Eurostat, [Population on 1 January](#), December 2022.

*Between 1 and 2 percent – Ukrainians and temporary protection (24 January 2023)*⁷

Country	Applications	Pop (mil)	Percent
Ireland	71,819	5.06	1.4
Germany	1,021,667	83.24	1.2
Luxembourg	6,756	0.65	1.1
Austria	92,019	8.98	1.0
Total	1,192,261	97.93	

1.2 million applications were submitted in four countries: Ireland, Germany, Luxembourg, and Austria. These four received applications equivalent to 1 to 2 percent of their population.

*Below 1 percent – Ukrainians and temporary protection (24 January 2023)*⁸

Country	Applications	Pop (mil)	Percent
Switzerland	78,467	8.7	0.9
Finland	48,713	5.6	0.9
Norway	37,971	5.4	0.7
Denmark	37,523	5.9	0.6
Iceland	2,239	0.4	0.6
Romania	109,413	19.0	0.6
Belgium	65,979	11.6	0.6
Portugal	57,109	10.4	0.6
Croatia	20,377	3.9	0.5
Sweden	51,029	10.5	0.5
Netherlands	85,210	17.6	0.5
Slovenia	8,659	2.1	0.4
Hungary	33,603	9.7	0.4
Spain	161,012	47.4	0.3
Malta	1,541	0.5	0.3
Italy	169,306	59.0	0.3
UK	157,300	67.0	0.2
Greece	20,955	10.6	0.2
France	118,994	67.8	0.2
Total	1,265,400	363.1	

More Ukrainians applied for protection in Bulgaria (with a population of 7 million) than in France (population 68 million).

What explains this uneven distribution of temporary protection applications?

⁷ UNCHR, [Ukraine Refugee Situation Dashboard](#), accessed on 31 January 2023, Eurostat, [Population on 1 January](#), December 2022.

⁸ UNCHR, [Ukraine Refugee Situation Dashboard](#), accessed on 31 January 2023, Eurostat, [Population on 1 January](#), December 2022.

One obvious factor is geographical proximity. Many Ukrainians preferred to stay close to their country. The number of Ukrainians in Poland and Slovakia alone is 1.7 million. This is more than a third of the total number of temporary protection applications.

Proximity matters, but it is not everything. Two neighbours of Ukraine – Hungary and Romania – have received far fewer applications: Hungary (with a population of 10 million) received fewer than Latvia (with a population of 2 million).

Where Ukrainians went in Europe, 24 January 2023 (ESI)



Language clearly matters. Among the top 8 countries are four where a Slavic language is spoken: Czechia, Poland, Bulgaria, Slovakia. Another three (the Baltic states) contain a significant number of Russian speakers.⁹ These seven countries account for 2.5 million applications, more than half the total. The only outlier among the top 8 is Cyprus.

Geography and language are givens. A third factor, however, *is* a matter of political decisions: the support offered to Ukrainian refugees and private households which are prepared to host them. It is this third factor that explains some striking numbers. And it is this that can be influenced by political decision makers.

⁹ “In Lithuania, Russian-speakers make up 15 percent of the entire population; in Latvia 34 percent; and in Estonia the number might be as high as 30 percent.” Agnia Grigas, [“Compatriot Games: Russian-Speaking Minorities in the Baltic States”](#), *World Politics Review*, 21 October 2014.

Olga and the French option

Imagine a Ukrainian mother and her 13-year-old son, crossing the EU border this winter in search of temporary protection. Let us call them Olga and Serhii. Olga's husband remains behind, like most Ukrainian men. Her family has no acquaintances in the EU and has spent most savings in the past year of the war. Like many Ukrainians, Olga speaks Ukrainian, Russian, and some English.

So where might Olga go? She learns that both Poland and the Czechia, though they welcomed many of her compatriots, are finding it hard to accommodate more refugees. She reads that in Germany some Ukrainians are being housed in former airports. She understands that in Austria some tents have been put up to accommodate refugees. She hears that Ireland is very welcoming, but that there are serious problems with accommodation there for newly arriving Ukrainian refugees.

Then Olga reads about France and its president, who recently agreed to deliver light tanks to Ukraine, the first time that Western-designed tanks are provided to the Ukrainian armed forces.¹⁰ In early January, the Ukrainian president tweeted that he

“... agreed with Emmanuel Macron on further cooperation to significantly strengthen Ukraine air defence and other defence capabilities ... Thank you friend! Your leadership brings our victory closer.”¹¹

She also learns that France has one of the lowest per capita numbers of Ukrainian refugees in Europe. Might this be a good place to find protection for a few months? How to find out?

Olga types “Україна біженці Франція” (Ukraine refugees France) into *google*. This takes her to a French government site in Ukrainian, which promises “all useful information for displaced people in Ukraine”:

<https://www.gouvernement.fr/info-ukraine/accueil-des-refugies-version-ukrainienne>¹²

The text starts:

“You have arrived from Ukraine, welcome to France.

The French population, the State, local authorities, and associations are fully mobilised to welcome and support you. This portal aims to provide you with the information you need for your stay in France and to access your rights.”

It continues:

“You arrive in France and are looking for a reception point. Go to the nearest prefecture, or to one of the first reception centres throughout the country, which are open to receive you:

[The list of first reception centres](#)

¹⁰ France24.com, “[Macron promises 'first Western tanks' for Ukraine](#)”, 4 January 2023.

¹¹ Wolodymyr Selenskyj, [Twitter](#), 4 January 2023.

¹² [gouvernement.fr](#), [біженці](#) (refugees), accessed on 31 January 2023 (exists also in French: [La crise en Ukraine – Accueil des réfugiés](#)).

The prefecture is the authority charged by the French State with organising reception, official registration, access to rights and accommodation in the territories. It is therefore at the prefecture that you should carry out all your administrative procedures.”

The hyperlink takes her to a map of France with the offices of the prefectures:



She checks the links on the map around Paris.

The prefecture in Nanterre: it leads to a site only in French.

The prefecture in Bobigny: the link leads nowhere.


The prefecture in Creteil: it leads to another site only in French. However, here there is a section with a Ukrainian flag, which takes her to another website (again only in French): [Situation en Ukraine : accueil des déplacés ukrainiens](#)

There Olga sees this:

Toutes les informations à destination des ressortissants Ukrainiens souhaitant accéder au territoire français et/ou y séjourner sont accessibles aux liens suivants [\[FR\]](#) [\[EN\]](#) [\[UK\]](#)

Retrouvez l'ensemble des informations sur la situation en Ukraine [sur le site du ministère de l'Intérieur](#) .

Livret d'accueil en France pour les déplacés d'Ukraine:

> **Livret d'accueil-MI - V2 - format : PDF**  - 2,14 Mb

Olga first clicks the [EN] and [UK] buttons: they lead nowhere. Then she clicks on the link [sur le site du ministère de l'Intérieur](#). This takes her to a site of the Ministry of Interior, focused on the situation in Ukraine. It is, again, only in French:

<https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/actualites/dossiers/situation-en-ukraine>

This even includes information of the French presidency of the European Council (which ended in June 2022).

With the help of Google translate, Olga spots the link to a “Welcome booklet in France for displaced persons from Ukraine”. She clicks on it and opens the PDF. This leads to a 56 page bi-lingual booklet, which promises to answer her questions. Finally!



Before she reads the booklet, Olga returns to the site of the prefecture in Creteil, where she found a link to another PDF. She gets to this:


Vous êtes Ukrainien



ACCUEIL EN FRANCE POUR LES DÉPLACÉS D'UKRAINE

Vous arrivez dans le Val de Marne

Vous arrivez dans le Val de Marne :

> Accueil déplacés Ukrainiens - informations - Val de Marne - FR-UK - vdef -
format : PDF  - 0,19 Mb

Although the text leading to this PDF is all in French, Olga guesses, rightly, that this might be useful. The PDF link gets her to a short bilingual (French/Ukrainian) leaflet specifically for Ukrainians who arrive in this prefecture. She reads:

[RECEPTION IN FRANCE FOR DISPLACED PERSONS FROM UKRAINE](#)
[You are arriving in the Val de Marne](#)

This document is short. It provides very basic information only:

- an address for first reception (and an email address of the French Red Cross)

- the address of the prefecture for applying for temporary protection

However, to understand what awaits Ukrainian refugees beyond first reception, to find out whether it is a good idea for her to go to France in the first place, Olga turns back to the bilingual booklet. She reads the summary and table of content:

[WELCOME BOOKLET IN FRANCE
FOR DISPLACED PERSONS FROM UKRAINE¹³](#)

You are arriving from Ukraine
Applying for temporary protection in France
Finding your family
Call for witnesses
European enquiry
Allowance
Banking
Housing
Health
Are you from a war zone?
Covid-19
Disability / loss of autonomy
Work
Transport
Driving licence
Children / schooling
Students
French language training
Culture
Pets
Prevention messages
Useful links / contacts
Everyday words

Early in the booklet she finds a link to another French government site in Ukrainian: Ласкаво просимо до Франції, which means [Welcome in France](#). However, the information she gets there is also found in the booklet, to which she returns.

Here is what Olga learns from the booklet:

- Olga and her son qualify to apply for temporary protection.
- French institutions are interested in evidence about war-crimes committed in Ukraine. However, there is no information or link about where to turn in such a case.
- There *is* a link to a survey by the EU Asylum Agency, to be filled in online: https://tellusyourstorysurvey.eu/index_lp.php
- Under the heading “Allowances” in France there is *one* paragraph (and no links):

¹³ French government, [Livret d'accueil en France pour les déplacés d'Ukraine](#), Version 2, April 2022.

“The issuance of the ‘temporary protection’ will allow you to benefit from financial assistance, *the amount of which will be calculated according to your family composition and financial resources*. It takes the form of an ADA card which will allow you to make payments by card ... An appointment with the French Immigration Office will be given to you by the prefecture to collect it.”

How *much* help she and her son might receive in France is not explained. Nor is there an explanation of what an ADA card is. Olga makes a note to find out more about this later.

- Information on opening a bank account:

“To open a bank account, you must go to the bank of your choice. At the counter, you will have to fill in an application form to open an account.”

- There is also information on “Accommodation”, though the information provided leaves Olga confused:

“Step 1: Initial emergency reception centre on arrival

Accommodation for one or two nights on arrival in France, including for people in transit, near the main arrival points (train stations, airports, etc.)

Type of accommodation: hotel, gym, etc.

Emergency humanitarian care.

Step 2: Ad hoc accommodation for beneficiaries of temporary protection

Transitional accommodation, up to several months ...

Type of accommodation: collective accommodation (e.g. holiday centre).

Social support by an association, based on an agreement with the state.

Step 3: Access to housing

Housing for a minimum of three months, allowing integration into a new environment

... Citizen [private] accommodation, in a supervised form, may be used as a back-up.

Rental intermediation by approved associations, both in social housing as well as private housing. Social support by an association.”

There is no other information on costs of, or social assistance for, rent. There are no links.

- Information on health care: Ukrainian refugees with a residence permit are fully covered.
- Information on employment: Olga is allowed to work in France.
- Information on schooling for her son, and for language courses for her:

“Several online offers to learn French and to learn more about the values and functioning of French society are available free of charge. To find out more, go to: <https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/news/files/situation-in-ukraine/online-training-offers-for-learning-french-and>.”

The hyperlink here simply takes her to the main page of the Ministry of the Interior.

– Information on “culture”:

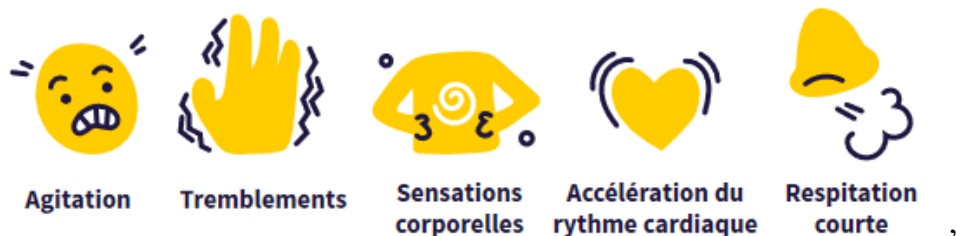
“On the website of the Ministry of Culture, you will find all the cultural activities organised on the national territory in favour of Ukraine. <https://www.culture.gouv.fr/Aides-demarches/Dispositifs-specifiques/Ukraine-the-world-of-culture-mobilizes>”

This goes to a site which is, once again, only in French.

Reading through the whole leaflet, Olga does not get any sense of *how* she might live in France, what social support she and her son might get, and how they might be able to rent a place to live. Instead, there are sections in the leaflet that leave her puzzled.

One is an 11-page section on “the effects of war on me and my surroundings”.¹⁴ Olga learns:

“Intense emotional reactions are common. The stress and anxiety experienced can cause unusual manifestations:



Olga is given eight tips to recover:

- “inform your loved ones”
- “eat well and stay hydrated”
- “sleep enough”
- “encourage reassuring routines, mutual aid and solidarity”
- “avoid prolonged contact with the media or social networks”
- “avoid harmful substances” (alcohol and drugs)
- “chose a health professional over self-medication”
- “consult professionals in case of need”



5. Éviter le contact prolongé avec les médias ou les réseaux sociaux

Les médias ou réseaux sociaux peuvent montrer des images, donner des informations difficiles à supporter. Tenez-vous informé brièvement de la situation (par ex. 1-2 fois par jour) et limitez le temps passé sur les écrans.



6. Éviter les substances nocives

La prise d'alcool et de drogues est extrêmement nocive et peut renforcer les symptômes.

Advice: avoid social media and alcohol

¹⁴ French government, [Livret d'accueil en France pour les déplacés d'Ukraine](#), Version 2, April 2022, pp. 18-28.

Secondly, the brochure offers “200 useful phrases, questions and expressions translated from French to Ukrainian”. These include the following:

“My name is Henri Goursau; what is your name?”
 “I am French.”
 “Could you direct me to the Marriott hotel?”
 “Is there a guided tour?”

Thirdly, on page 50, Olga finds a list with “useful contacts.” The first contact includes a phone number and a link to a “Coordination Committee for Aide to Ukraine”.

Olga calls three times at different hours. Nobody ever answers. The link leads to the Ukrainian embassy in Paris.¹⁵

Of course, everything would be much easier if Olga spoke French or understood the French welfare state. Then she could visit the French public service website www.service-public.fr. Alternatively, she is more likely to try to contact Ukrainians already in France via social media. There are different groups linking Ukrainian refugees in France.¹⁶ Either way she might then find out more about one of the most important questions for her: could she and her son afford to live in France?

She would learn that, though granted protection, Ukrainians are not in the same position as other recognised refugees in France. This means she will get significantly less social support than a recognised Syrian or Afghan refugee.

What Olga and her son will receive in France is € 306 in social support. For a single person, the allowance is € 204 per month (€ 6.80/day), for two persons it is € 306 per month (€ 10.20/day).¹⁷

In addition, Olga can apply for € 222 in rent support, if she has not been provided with free housing of any kind.¹⁸ This money would be provided by the French Office of Immigration and Integration (OFII).¹⁹

France: Social support per month

Benefit	EUR
Mother	204.00
Child	102.00
Subtotal	306.00
Housing	222.00
Total	528.00

¹⁵ Embassy of Ukraine in Paris, [J'ai besoin d'aide](#), accessed on 31 January 2023.

¹⁶ For instance: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/831486084320961>.

¹⁷ Article [D553-8,9,10](#) du CESEDA and [Annexe 8](#) last modified on 31 May 2018.

¹⁸ Article [D553-10](#) du CESEDA and [Annex 8](#) last modified in May 2021, which says “Un montant journalier additionnel de 7,40 euros est versé en application des dispositions des articles D. 553-8 et D. 553-9 à chaque demandeur d'asile adulte ayant accepté l'offre de prise en charge, qui a manifesté un besoin d'hébergement et n'a pas accès gratuitement à un hébergement ou un logement à quelque titre que ce soit.”

¹⁹ Service public, [En quoi consiste l'allocation pour demandeur d'asile \(ADA\)?](#), 21 April 2021.

Of course, Olga is likely to try to find a job. If she succeeds at this, she might earn up to € 1,024.80 per month without losing her social benefits.²⁰ But as she does not yet speak French, she cannot count on this. It might take some time before she finds employment. Until then, she would depend on social support. The average rent per square meter in France is between € 14 and € 35. If she would find accommodation for € 20 per square meter, she could rent a room of 11 square metres. If she is lucky enough to find anything to rent at all.

Olga hears from friends that a pilot project was launched by the French government in late 2022, providing private individuals hosting refugees from Ukraine € 150 per month in support.²¹ It has not been decided yet, however, whether this support will continue in 2023.

Then Olga talks to Ukrainian refugees in Germany. The contrast is stark. In Germany, she learns, Olga and her son Serhii would receive monthly social support of € 850.²² In addition, she would get rental and heating cost support, up to € 740 if she rents an apartment of 65 m² (this includes € 122 costs for heating, the maximum amount; it depends on the heating system used.).²³

Germany: Social support per month

Benefit	EUR
Mother	502.00
Child	348.00
Subtotal	850.00
Housing	618.54
Heating	122.20
Total	1,590.74

This is three times the amount she would receive in France.

How likely is it that Olga – and other Ukrainians who might arrive in the European Union in the coming months – will take a train and head to France, rather than stay somewhere on the East side of the Rhine? We know that it is not likely.

From July 2022 to end January 2023 the number of Ukrainians who applied for temporary protection in France increased from 92.000 to 119.000. During the same time, the number in Germany went from 670,000 to 1,022,000.²⁴

In 6 months, 27,000 Ukrainian refugees arrived in France, 352,000 in Germany.

PS: For more on the ESI proposal of Thank you payments for private hosts across the EU, including France, to support private empathy leading to more European solidarity, see this: <https://www.esiweb.org/proposals/thank-you-payments-hosting-ukrainian-families>.

²⁰ This corresponds to the active solidarity income (*revenu de solidarité active*, RSA) which provides a minimum level of income for people without resources. It varies according to the composition of the household. Service public, [En quoi consiste l'allocation pour demandeur d'asile \(ADA\)?](#), 21 April 2021.

²¹ Ministry of ecological transition and territorial cohesion of the French Republic, [Aide financière pour l'hébergement citoyen des déplacés d'Ukraine](#), 5 October 2022; *Le Monde*, ["Réfugiés ukrainiens en France : l'Etat va verser 150 euros par mois aux familles d'accueil"](#), 5 October 2022.

²² *Jobcenter Berlin*, ["Regelsätze Bürgergeld, gültig seit 1.1.2023"](#), accessed on 9 February 2023.

²³ Senatsverwaltung für Integration, Arbeit, und Soziales, ["Übernahme von Miet- und Heizkosten – Informationen für Ukraine-Geflüchtete"](#), Access 9 February 2023. Two persons rent a 65 m² apartment. They receive € 515,45 plus 20 percent supplement for homeless people, in total 618,54. Plus heating costs up to 122,20, depending on the heating system and the size of the building of the apartment.

²⁴ UNCHR, [Ukraine Refugee Situation Dashboard](#), accessed on 30 July and on 31 January 2023.