



INTEGRATION **OF PEOPLE FROM UKRAINE**

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CIVIL
SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

INTRODUCTION

These recommendations are part of a policy paper prepared by five main NGOs with long standing experience and know-how in the area of the integration of foreigners in Slovakia and provision of humanitarian aid. Its main goal is to assist the State, municipalities and other actors in designing integration measures for persons with temporary protection from Ukraine. They are a synthesis of rich expertise and experience of working on integration both before and after the war in Ukraine, as well as previous research and analysis existing in Slovakia. They do not represent an exhaustive list of recommendations, and further reading is strongly suggested.

We hope that these recommendations will be an inspiration for all actors operating in Slovakia with the aim to assist persons with temporary protection on medium and long term basis. We believe that the measures proposed can serve as a good basis for integration measures of any foreigners living in Slovakia. It should not be forgotten that integration is not a new policy issue in Slovakia. Therefore, the measures intended for persons with temporary protection shall take into account previous experience while simultaneously design new systematic measures adapted on the needs and challenges of arriving persons, mostly women with children.

What we suggest is to strengthen the structure of coordination of integration, to involve NGOs and other actors, focus on gathering and analysis of data including needs of vulnerable persons and to set up main goals in the integration with regular evaluation. Communication, support to municipalities and NGOs, and specific measures in relation to employment, self-employment, social services, financial aid, housing, access to information and legal aid, health care, education, vocational and language trainings are urgently needed. Included are also specific measures in relation to the nature of temporary protection in Slovakia, humanitarian aid and other cross-cutting issues such as community interpretation.

Also, one has to bear in mind that Ukrainians have been living in Slovakia for many years and are very active in providing assistance to their compatriots. Their activities shall not be overlooked or belittled. Foreigners must remain active participants to their own lives, not helpless victims. Finally, we are convinced that many of the proposed measures represent an opportunity to improve the lives of many Slovak families and individuals who have been living on the brink of poverty.

LIST OF PROPOSED MEASURES IN SPECIFIC AREAS

1) *The need for a coordinated system of integration at national level and the role of the different actors*

- At national level, it is essential that integration instruments are centrally coordinated and national authorities provide sufficient support to other actors to implement integration measures.
- We consider it important to create a separate office dedicated to integration of foreigners and refugees, or at the very least a government representative for the integration.
- Existing integration policies should be revised or new ones adopted, both up-to-date and in view of the specific situation of people fleeing Ukraine.
- Integration policies should also have a clear evaluation mechanism, long-term planning and setting indicators for their implementation.
- We also recommend the extension of measures related to the integration of highly skilled migrants from the Recovery Plan to the integration of foreigners living in the Slovak Republic, including expatriates.
- Municipalities should receive financial, legislative and methodological support for developing integration policies at the local level.
- NGOs and other actors are very effective partners of the State or municipalities in designing and implementation of integration instruments. They should therefore receive adequate financial support from the state to fulfill their activities efficiently.
- A compensation mechanism should be established to reimburse expenses of the NGOs that have incurred and are incurring expenses to cope with the extraordinary situation related to the war in Ukraine.
- NGOs with expertise in the field of integration of

foreigners should be involved in working groups at the state level in relation to the arriving persons.

- NGOs and other actors need to be involved in crisis-planning. Also, there is a need to create a special humanitarian fund to cover expenses, if the situation deteriorates suddenly.

2) *Understanding the situation and needs - the importance of effective data collection*

- **In the short term**, it is important to set up a systematic collection of important data at the state level, evaluating it regularly to track trends and needs and then **distributing the data regularly to all relevant public administration actors**.
- In the area of data collection, it is important that data is also collected, evaluated and used at the local and regional level in order to effectively manage migration and integration.
- **In the medium and long term**, it is essential to collect and evaluate data not only in terms of the number of those who have received temporary refuge, but also with regard to the changing types of residency that people will gradually acquire if they remain in the Slovak Republic.
- For effective integration, it is also important to collect and evaluate data for vulnerable groups and groups (e.g. people with disabilities, women with small children, the LGBTI community, Roma, the elderly and others).
- It is also important to carry out specific **research and analysis of the needs of different groups of people**. Such research can and should be carried out by local governments or other actors active in the process of integration of foreigners.

3) *Communication*

- At the national level as well as at the municipality level, there is a need to design **a managed strategic communication** - towards foreigners, but also

towards the majority population. It should include active work with the media.

- **At municipality level**, it is essential to focus on: awareness-raising of the public, systematic cooperation with the public media and initiating wider discussions on the benefits as well as the negative impacts or addressing concerns of citizens regarding the integration of foreigners.
- **At national level**, it is important to proactively communicate the reasons **why people from Ukraine are helped by the state** and that without systemic measures, for the local communities that host refugees, the situation is unsustainable in the long term. At the same time, it is important to communicate well any misinformation and also collect, use and **communicate data and facts**.
- At the national level, it is also important **to recall the contribution to society** not only from humanitarian but also economic aspects and also that the discussion and review of some systemic measures, for example in the field of social affairs, will also bring benefits to Slovaks who belong to vulnerable and low-income groups.
- In the long term, there is a need to **raise public awareness on issues of migration, the importance of integration and diversity**. It is also important to promote positive framing of the issue in the media and in visual portrayals to ensure human dignity of the persons depicted.

4) Provision of information

- **Ensure effective distribution of important information to people arriving from Ukraine already at the entry to the territory of the Slovak Republic** (in the form of text message and information leaflets/brochures),
- **Strengthen the dissemination of information at the places where a large number of people from Ukraine pass through** (Foreign Police Department, large capacity centers, employment offices, etc.), however, it is not enough to have leaflets/

brochures available at these places, but it is necessary for people to receive them directly from the worker with whom they come into contact,

- **Improve the awareness of foreigners living in the Slovak Republic about hate crimes, reasons for discrimination and violence against women and girls,**
- **Strengthen telephone and mail hotlines for people from Ukraine and ensure their sustainability** - sustainability of telephone and mail hotlines is crucial not only for the initial stages of integration, but also in its later stages, when they need to deal with various particular situations related to their gradual integration,
- **Establishment of contact centers at local level for people from Ukraine and other foreigners** under the jurisdiction of municipalities, which would serve to facilitate the first moments of integration, but also as support in its later stages,
- **Support the creation of information packages at the municipality level** with important information on the functioning of the municipalities and other local authorities and institutions, on the rights and obligations of residents, including websites, leaflets and other information campaigns; in several language versions.

5) Education

- In the field of education, there is a need to clarify the situation regarding compulsory schooling and **ensuring the right of all children to education**, and the enrolment and admission of children to schools.
- **Adequate capacity** needs to be ensured in different types of schools, in particular to address the lack of capacity in kindergartens and nurseries for all children, including children from Ukraine, in order to avoid increasing tensions among the population.

- It is important to ensure **quality language education** to balance language differences and to create an effective system of Slovak as a second language education both for children from Ukraine and for all children of foreigners attending Slovak schools in general.
- At the same time, from the point of view of the effective inclusion of children, we consider it important that schools and founders make every effort to create mixed classes to **prevent segregation of Ukrainian children**.
- At the same time, schools need to be provided with effective financial and methodological support for the inclusion of children (methodological materials, intercultural training for teachers, provision of adaptation courses) - in this context, we propose strong support for the establishment and funding of **school support teams**.
- Specifically, in the case of people fleeing war, it is also very important to **provide psychological support for children**, which must be appropriately chosen in the light of their current life situation.

6) Housing

- **Use emergency housing only for the necessary period of time** as it does not create the conditions for integration. Emergency housing needs to be linked to support services to ensure the transition of people from Ukraine to more stable forms of housing,
- **Short-term housing solutions** - to be used only to bridge the initial period after arrival in Slovakia. It is necessary to use all available accommodation facilities of the state, regional and local governments, but potentially also privately owned. For this type of accommodation, it is necessary to improve the system of continuous mapping and updating of available capacities and also to provide integration support services to find more stable forms of housing,
- **Medium and long-term housing solutions** - in

this area, it is necessary to create opportunities for transforming facilities such as open-air schools to emergency accommodation for medium or long-term housing; make the state financial support for accommodation more flexible and evaluate the amount of it so it is more accurate with regards to real market prices; introduce a system of support for the gradual disconnection of people from Ukraine from state aid; to introduce an allowance to cover the costs associated with the change of housing (deposit, first rent, real estate agency commission, purchase of necessary equipment); to accelerate the reconstruction/remodelling and adaptation of potentially habitable buildings.

7) Social services and social care

- As part of integration policies and measures, it is important to set up a comprehensive system of social services and assistance for people fleeing Ukraine, but also for foreigners in general, to reflect the needs of **vulnerable groups**.
- We also recommend systematically collect data on the **situation of vulnerable groups** so that social services and social counselling can be adequately tailored to their needs.
- At the same time, it is very important to systematise and support the **social counselling system**. It will be necessary to increase the number of staff in the existing social services and to support their further training so that they are able to provide effective counselling also to people fleeing Ukraine or to foreigners in general who have specific needs in this area as well.
- We recommend strongly supporting the system of **community centres and low-threshold facilities**, which have long proven to be the most effective tools for integration.
- We consider it important to include **community interpreting** in the social services system. Interpreting in different languages should also be introduced as a social service in the Social Services Act.

- We propose that the profession of **cultural mediator/intercultural worker** should be institutionalized so that it is included in the catalogue of the National System of Occupations and the National System of Qualifications.

8) Employment

- We propose to **maximize the use of the potential**, skills and qualifications of people from Ukraine, to propose measures to prevent precarious work and to protect against discrimination and violations of the principle of equal treatment.
- In the short term, we propose to **simplify the process of recognition of qualifications** and expand nostrification capacities, standardize and speed up the examination process for proving a profession, allow for proof of competence through employers, and abolish fees for recognition of qualifications.
- We propose to **allow expatriates to do business** and to remove legislative and technical barriers that prevent them from doing so.
- We propose to **ensure the availability of playgroups and pre-school education** for Ukrainian children during their parents' working hours, but taking into account the availability of these opportunities also for children of parents who live in Slovakia for a long time, in order to avoid friction points.
- We also propose to **significantly strengthen language education for adults** through free language education paid for by municipalities or the state, as well as to promote language education at the employer's premises, whether online or in a face-to-face format.
- We recommend **strengthening the capacity of the Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family** to provide **labor and legal advice and information seminars on labour rights** for people from Ukraine and measures to prevent labour exploitation.

9) Health care

The following areas need to be addressed in the area of health care:

- **access to health care for vulnerable groups of people from Ukraine** - people with disabilities or serious illnesses,
- **long-term care for people who depend on the help of others** (people with severe disabilities, the elderly) in both institutional and deinstitutionalised care,
- **availability of addiction substitution treatment and supportive treatment for people living with HIV,**
- **psychological care for people from Ukraine**, many of whom are traumatised, **and specifically for women who have experienced sexual violence,**
- **systematic awareness-raising of doctors** about the specificities of health care provision for people from Ukraine, to prevent them from being turned away because of fears that procedures will not be reimbursed, etc.
- **lack of capacity of clinics to accept new patients** - create opportunities for opening new clinics in localities where they would be used.

10) Community work

- In the process of implementing activities, identifying problems and their solutions, as well as setting policies, it is recommended to **involve foreign and Ukrainian communities by removing barriers** or introducing measures (e.g. foreigners' platforms, intercultural workers) that facilitate the **interpretation of perspectives.**
- We suggest **simplifying the process of establishing community centres** and reducing the formal requirements for establishing them.

- **In the medium and long term**, we recommend **setting up a system of systematic financial support for organizations at the national and local level, either for formalized organizations** or for emerging initiatives that come from active citizens or foreigners.
- We also propose to allocate **public community space** in facilities that accommodate more foreigners (e.g. in Gabčíkovo accommodation facilities).
- We propose a **sensitive and respectful understanding of integration** in relation to living heritage conservation, which includes mapping living heritage conservation needs, taking them into account and facilitating access to ongoing practice.

11) *Specific aspects of the provision of temporary refuge*

- We propose to urgently **map the situation of third-country nationals** who have entered the country from Ukraine and do not qualify for temporary refuge, identify their needs and adopt solutions.
- We propose to prepare an **intensive information campaign for third-country nationals** who have entered Slovakia from Ukraine.
- We propose to **address the situation of stateless persons** and persons that have relevant reasons to be granted asylum.
- We propose to introduce a **new type of temporary residence** - the temporary residence of an expatriate, which will allow people from Ukraine better stability.
- We propose to include **expatriates in the public health insurance system**.
- We propose to **support LGBTI male and female refugees**.

- We propose to **provide legal assistance for LGBTI male and female expatriates** through the capacities of the Legal Aid Centre and NGOs, including financial support
- We propose to implement intensive measures to combat human trafficking and protect minors

12) *Humanitarian assistance*

- We propose to **reform the system of Support in Material need** (Material Need Benefits and Protection Allowance) so that the Material Need Benefit **corresponds to at least the amount of the minimal living level**. Such a reform would be equally beneficial for people in Slovakia living at risk of poverty or social exclusion, who in 2020 accounted for almost 15% of the total population of the Slovak Republic.
- In the area of food security, we propose that, as far as possible, people from Ukraine should be allowed to buy food and **prepare their own meals**.
- If this is not possible, we recommend to mediate the **provision of food through a catering service**. If such a service is not available for the maximum amount of 7 EUR, a **maximum price per food unit should be clearly set to avoid potential abuse**.
- When addressing food deprivation, we suggest that **food and basic material assistance should be provided** on the basis of clear criteria through **standard mechanisms and actors that have been providing it for a long time** (such as OP FEAD). At the same time, we suggest that, in the long term, priority should be given to working with the increase of the Material Need Benefit as a direct disbursement of food or basic material assistance.

Note: All of the above mentioned measures can be maintained in later phases as integration services for a wider group of foreigners arriving in Slovakia.

**Recommendations from civil society organisations
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