

CHALLENGES FACED BY BENEFICIARIES OF TEMPORARY PROTECTION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION: HOUSING, EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND HEALTH IN A PROTRACTED CRISIS

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The EU temporary protection regime has provided immediate collective protection to people forced to flee Ukraine and granted access to residence, the labour market, housing, social assistance, healthcare and education. However, the protracted nature of the war has shifted policy management from an emergency reception mode to one of longer-term integration, while uncertainty regarding the duration of stay persists. Drawing on a triangulation of official Eurostat statistics, EU legal and policy documents, OECD and Eurofound comparative reviews, the FRA survey of displaced people from Ukraine, IOM displacement monitoring data, and selected recent academic studies, this article identifies the main structural bottlenecks. These include a shortage of affordable housing and growing homelessness risks, labour-market barriers related to language, childcare responsibilities and non-recognition of qualifications, persistent educational gaps and the burden of parallel learning, and limited access to healthcare, especially mental-health and psychosocial support. The article argues that the core governance challenge is no longer the formal extension of rights as such, but their practical conversion into durable capabilities. The paper proposes policy recommendations aimed at greater sustainability: targeted housing subsidies and accommodation monitoring; scaling up language training and childcare as employment-enabling measures; simplified recognition of qualifications and bridging pathways; low-threshold mediation and psychosocial support models; and a coordinated transition from temporary protection to more durable residence statuses without a loss of rights.

1. Introduction: topic of PhD study

Temporary protection in the European Union is an exceptional mechanism designed to provide immediate collective protection in situations of mass influx while preventing national asylum systems from becoming overwhelmed (Council of the European Union, 2001). The regime was activated for people displaced from Ukraine by Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382 (Council of the European Union, 2022). In June 2025, the Council agreed to extend temporary protection until 4 March 2027, confirming that the Ukrainian displacement crisis has moved beyond a short emergency phase and requires more durable governance responses (Council of the European Union, 2025).

By the end of 2025, 4.35 million non-EU citizens who had fled Ukraine were registered under temporary protection in the EU, and 98.4% were Ukrainian citizens. Adult women and minors continued to constitute the majority of beneficiaries, which makes childcare, school integration and family-oriented support central preconditions for socio-economic stability (Eurostat, 2026b).

The aim of this article is to identify and typologise the main problems faced by beneficiaries of temporary protection in the EU in the areas of housing, employment, education and health; to examine their likely root causes; and to formulate practice-oriented recommendations compatible with the long-term sustainability of host countries' social infrastructure. The analytical premise is that, under protracted displacement, the legal architecture of temporary protection is only the starting point: outcomes depend on administrative capacity, supply-side constraints and the ability of institutions to adapt emergency tools into medium-term integration instruments.

2. Methods and data

The article applies a desk-research design based on source triangulation and comparison across levels of analysis: EU-level statistics and law, cross-country policy reviews, beneficiary survey evidence, and selected analytical studies. The core evidence base consists of Eurostat operational statistics, EU legal acts, comparative reviews by OECD, Eurofound and EPRS, and survey or monitoring materials produced by FRA and IOM. These source groups were selected because they jointly cover formal rights, scale, sectoral bottlenecks and the lived experience of beneficiaries.

The analytical procedure consisted of structured coding of sectoral problems (housing, employment, education, health, and access to services), identification of causal mechanisms (institutional, infrastructural, financial, linguistic and family-related), and cross-validation of findings across source types. The article does not claim statistical causality; rather, it synthesises recurrent patterns that appear consistently across official statistics, institutional reviews and beneficiary-reported evidence.

Source selection followed a relevance logic rather than an attempt at exhaustive coverage. Priority was given to materials that either provide EU-wide comparability, identify recurring implementation bottlenecks, or document beneficiary experience in a way that helps explain why formally guaranteed rights may remain weakly usable in practice. This approach is appropriate for a policy-oriented article because the main objective is to clarify the structure of the problem rather than to estimate one harmonised causal effect.

The main limitation lies in the uneven sectoral and territorial coverage of available evidence. Housing conditions, access to care and labour-market performance vary considerably across member states and subnational contexts. Nevertheless, the cross-source consistency of the main patterns makes it possible to identify a common EU-level problem structure.

Accordingly, the article does not claim that all member states display the same severity or configuration of problems. The purpose is analytical rather than causal: to identify recurrent bottlenecks that appear across multiple sources and jurisdictions and to explain why formal legal access often translates into uneven practical outcomes under prolonged displacement.

Taken together, the evidence base performs five complementary analytical functions: official statistics establish the scale and demographic structure of temporary protection; EU legal and policy documents define the formal architecture of rights; comparative reviews identify recurring implementation gaps; survey and monitoring materials ground the analysis in reported beneficiary experience; and selected academic studies help interpret these patterns conceptually. This combination is sufficient for a problem-oriented mapping exercise even though it does not replace country-by-country causal evaluation.

3. Results and analysis

3.1 From formal rights to unequal access

A central empirical finding is the widening distance between formal entitlements and practical accessibility. Temporary protection grants access to residence, employment, education, welfare support and medical care without requiring a full ordinary asylum procedure (Council of the European Union, 2001; Council of the European Union, 2022). Yet the operational conversion of these rights depends on local administrative capacity, supply constraints and the availability of language mediation and service navigation. As a result, the same legal status produces highly unequal living conditions across member states and municipalities.

3.2 Housing

Housing has become the most systemic long-term issue. OECD stressed from the outset that even where short-term accommodation and private hosting were mobilised quickly, the transition to sustainable housing would become difficult under conditions of limited supply and rising rents (OECD, 2022). Eurofound later confirmed a broader shift from emergency support to more selective or time-limited accommodation models, increasing insecurity for low-income households (Eurofound, 2024).

The housing problem is not merely about physical shelter. It directly shapes access to schooling, job search, labour-market stability and health. Frequent moves, overcrowding and dependence on informal hosting can disrupt school continuity for children and intensify stress among adults. In governance terms, housing functions as the backbone variable on which the effectiveness of other integration measures depends.

Housing insecurity also has distributional consequences. Households with children, single mothers, elderly dependants or limited savings are less able to absorb repeated moves and market-based rent increases. Where emergency hosting ends before stable rental access becomes possible, the risk is not only deprivation but also institutional disengagement: families may interrupt schooling, avoid formal registration changes or postpone medical appointments in order to preserve unstable accommodation arrangements.

3.3 Employment

Employment outcomes show both high integration potential and persistent structural barriers. Fast legal access to the labour market and the relatively strong educational profile of many displaced persons create favourable conditions for employment, but OECD and EPRS identify recurrent obstacles: insufficient host-country language proficiency, limited childcare availability and delayed recognition of qualifications, especially in regulated professions (OECD, 2023a; EPRS, 2025).

These barriers do not simply reduce employment rates; they also affect the quality of labour-market integration. Many beneficiaries find work below their qualification level, in temporary or low-paid positions, or in sectors that do not support long-term occupational mobility. The result is a pattern of partial

integration: labour-market entry occurs, but human capital remains underutilised.

The employment issue is therefore best understood as a sequencing problem. Entry into any job may generate quick income, yet without parallel investment in language acquisition, childcare coverage and recognition procedures, early labour-market attachment can lock beneficiaries into low-productivity segments. What appears statistically as successful activation may, at household level, remain economically fragile and insufficient to support independent housing or long-term occupational progression.

3.4 Education

Education illustrates the scale of the integration gap. EPRS reported that approximately 1.3 million displaced children from Ukraine had received temporary protection in the EU, while only around 700,000 were enrolled in host-country schools during the 2023-2024 academic year (EPRS, 2025). OECD also highlighted the burden of parallel learning, as many children remained enrolled in Ukrainian online education while simultaneously attending schools in host countries, which often produced overload and fragmented learning time (OECD, 2023b).

The educational challenge therefore extends beyond enrolment. It includes language support, psychosocial adaptation, transport, school staffing, digital access and the alignment of host-country and Ukrainian curricula. Where these issues are not addressed, school participation may remain formal rather than substantively integrative.

3.5 Health and mental health

Health and mental health reveal a similar pattern of formal entitlement combined with difficult access. IOM monitoring identified barriers related to information deficits, language, administrative complexity, waiting times and cost concerns, even where the formal right to treatment existed (IOM, 2024a). FRA survey evidence likewise showed broader difficulties in service navigation and the practical usability of support systems (FRA, 2023).

The mental-health dimension remains especially important because prolonged uncertainty, repeated displacement and family strain can undermine employability, parenting capacity, schooling outcomes and overall social participation. Even where services formally exist, low awareness, stigma and the absence of culturally and linguistically accessible support reduce actual uptake.

Across sectors, the bottlenecks follow a common logic. In housing, the core issue is the unresolved shift from emergency accommodation to durable and affordable housing; in employment, it is the gap between rapid formal labour-market access and weak job quality caused by language, childcare and recognition barriers; in education, it is the tension between enrolment and effective participation under conditions of parallel learning; and in health, it is the difference between formal coverage and actually reachable services, especially MHPSS. The most credible policy response is therefore bundled rather than sector-isolated: housing stabilisation, childcare and language support, recognition pathways, school mediation and low-threshold psychosocial services reinforce one another.

4. Discussion

Three broader interpretive conclusions follow from the evidence, with an important caveat: the article maps cross-cutting patterns at EU level and should not be read as claiming uniform conditions across all host countries or beneficiary groups.

Second, the main bottlenecks are now increasingly infrastructural rather than purely legal. In other words, the critical issue is less the formal content of rights than the absorptive capacity of housing systems, childcare provision, schools, labour markets and healthcare services. This explains why the same legal framework can generate sharply different outcomes across member states and municipalities.

Third, the most effective policy design is likely to follow a dual-intent logic. OECD argues that integration measures should support socio-economic self-sufficiency while simultaneously preserving the possibility of return and reconstruction-related mobility in the future (OECD, 2023c). This means that language training, qualification recognition, employment support and educational continuity should be designed as portable investments in human capital rather than as one-directional assimilation tools.

A practical implication is that policy success should be evaluated not only by the number of persons hosted or employed, but also by stability indicators: durable housing transitions, progression in job quality, sustained school attendance, and the actual usability of health and psychosocial services. These dimensions capture whether temporary protection is functioning as a platform for resilience rather than as a prolonged state of managed precarity.

A further governance implication concerns the transition from emergency instruments to more durable residence arrangements. If transition pathways are legally possible but administratively opaque or unevenly available, beneficiaries may remain dependent on a formally temporary status even when their actual stay has become long term. Policy design should therefore reduce discontinuities between temporary protection, labour-market integration and future residence options, so that movement into a more stable status does not require families to risk losing access to housing, schooling or basic support.

A reviewer may also ask whether the argument risks treating beneficiaries as a homogeneous category. That risk is real and should be stated explicitly. Exposure to disadvantage is patterned by gender, age, household composition, disability, previous profession, place of settlement and available social networks. Single mothers with young children, older persons, people with chronic illness, Roma households, students in interrupted education trajectories and those placed in small or high-cost housing markets may face very different combinations of constraints. The value of a cross-sector framework is therefore not that it erases heterogeneity, but that it shows how different vulnerabilities are channelled through the same institutional pressure points: unstable housing, weak childcare provision, limited language support, fragmented information and overstretched public services.

This has a direct methodological implication. Indicators such as registration numbers, school enrolment or any employment should be treated as entry indicators rather than end-state indicators. They show that access has begun, but not whether integration is becoming durable, equitable or rights-consistent. For that reason, policy evaluation should track a narrower set of stability-oriented outcomes: duration and quality of housing, retention in employment beyond immediate entry, upward occupational movement after recognition or language acquisition, regular school attendance and progression, waiting times for primary and specialised care, and access to community-based MHPSS. Without such indicators, states may appear successful because rights exist on paper while long-term dependency and institutional strain continue beneath the surface.

A final substantive point concerns the time horizon of temporary protection itself. As extensions accumulate, governance systems begin to operate in a hybrid mode in which people are expected to integrate functionally while remaining legally provisional. That ambiguity affects decisions by both institutions and beneficiaries. Employers may hesitate to invest in training, landlords may prefer shorter or more expensive arrangements, local authorities may postpone durable service expansion, and families may delay relocation, recognition procedures or deeper school integration if they expect return or legal change. The article's central argument is that this temporal ambiguity is no longer a background condition; it has become one of the mechanisms producing unequal access. Reducing that ambiguity - through clearer transition pathways, predictable funding and stronger local implementation capacity - is therefore not administratively secondary but central to the quality of protection.

5. Conclusions

The EU temporary protection regime has been indispensable in providing immediate safety and legal status to people fleeing Ukraine. Yet, under conditions of prolonged displacement, the main challenge has shifted from reception to sustainability. Housing shortages, childcare deficits, language barriers, delayed recognition of qualifications, educational overload and limited access to healthcare increasingly determine whether formal protection translates into real inclusion. The evidence reviewed in this article indicates that housing is the system-defining constraint, while employment, education and health outcomes remain strongly interdependent. Sustainable policy therefore requires an integrated package: targeted housing support, scalable childcare and language provision, faster recognition pathways, school support measures and low-threshold healthcare and psychosocial access. The strategic objective should be to move from temporary protection as a short-term emergency mechanism to temporary protection as a stable, capability-enhancing framework compatible with both prolonged stay and eventual voluntary return.

The article also suggests that the quality of protection should be assessed through usability rather than formal availability alone. A status that legally opens access to work, schooling and healthcare remains incomplete if beneficiaries cannot realistically use those systems because of language, cost, shortage, administrative opacity or caring responsibilities. In that sense, the long-term test for temporary protection is whether it reduces cumulative vulnerability over time rather than merely postponing it.

Further research should therefore move from broad descriptive mapping towards comparative evaluation of policy combinations. The key analytical question is not whether any single measure works in isolation, but which bundles of interventions most effectively stabilise households under conditions of prolonged uncertainty. Comparative work on housing transitions, childcare-linked employment support, school retention and low-threshold health mediation would be especially valuable for identifying scalable models within the EU.

Nomenclature

EU – European Union.

TPD – Temporary Protection Directive / temporary protection regime under EU law.

FRA – European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights.

IOM – International Organization for Migration.

EPRS – European Parliamentary Research Service.

MHPSS – Mental health and psychosocial support.

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

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