

# FEEL PROJECT

## *Fostering Refugees Inclusion*



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# ***Introduction***

Following the Russo-Ukrainian war that began in February 2022, Europe faced a refugee crisis that put pressure on various sectors, including hospitality, the labor market, housing, and European educational systems.

The arrival of a significant flow of refugees from Ukraine, particularly minors, prompted European states to revise their educational systems with a particular emphasis on emergency adaptation. This led to the implementation of immediate measures to include Ukrainian students recognized as refugees in schools. However, Ukrainian refugees enjoy temporary protection status, which simplifies asylum procedures and guarantees them access to all social rights for a certain period. This can lead to inequalities among refugee students of different nationalities.

As highlighted in the WAY (Whole-school Approach for Youth with Migrant Background) project, of which FEEL is a continuation with a focus on Ukrainian refugees, schools play a fundamental role in the integration process of Ukrainian students. This responsibility primarily falls on teachers, who are called upon to manage the integration of Ukrainian students into the school context and to prevent forms of discrimination between native and refugee students as much as possible.

Given the extraordinary emergency situation, the FEEL project aims to achieve a series of concrete objectives and results. Firstly, it aimed to increase the support provided to teachers, school leaders, youth workers, and migrant associations to better manage the integration of refugees. This overall objective was relevant at both European and national levels as it involved partners in Belgium, Italy, the Czech Republic, and Greece. The project also aimed to facilitate the exchange of practices to promote the inclusion of refugees in participating organizations and local educational communities by identifying and sharing best practices.

To better understand the objectives and results of FEEL, it is necessary to digress on what the WAY project was, which was drafted and implemented shortly after the pandemic. The health emergency highlighted significant inequalities within the student population, focusing on the disparity in access to online education. Migrant students, in particular, faced additional challenges often related to the lack of resources such as personal computers at home.

This situation contributed to increased social exclusion, with the concrete risk of early school leaving and entry into precarious work. Education leaders, including educators and teachers, raised the issue of the lack of adequate training and tools.

It was particularly noted that the emphasis on acquiring intercultural skills, although important, was not sufficient in addressing the specific challenges that migrant students face daily.

In this context, WAY was inspired by the innovative approach promoted by the "Schools for Health in Europe Network Foundation" (SHE). This approach recognizes the interconnection between students' health and well-being and reflects an educational strategy in which all aspects of the school, including students, staff, parents, and the community, collaborate to promote a positive and inclusive learning environment.



## ***Way project***

WAY, through thorough research, produced a scientific article published in the journal "Health Promotion International" by Oxford University Press. This academic contribution consolidated the theoretical basis of the comprehensive approach to the education of students with a migrant background. Additionally, fundamental methodological guidelines were developed to train teachers, educators, and youth workers.

→ These guidelines offered a practical framework for adapting the comprehensive approach to the specific needs of students with a migrant background. The short-term training addressed to 60 teachers, educators, and youth workers represented a practical implementation of the guidelines, effectively spreading this new approach in the involved educational communities.

## PARTNERSHIPS

The partnership, composed of seven organizations from different parts of Europe, formed a strategic consortium that leveraged each organization's specific expertise, thus ensuring comprehensive coverage of the needs expressed by the different national realities.

**RESULTS:** The results achieved, such as the needs analysis report, the scientific article, and the methodological guidelines, demonstrated the consortium's commitment and the depth of the work carried out.

These results provided a tangible tool to address the challenges of social inclusion, promoting the well-being of migrant students and potentially contributing to reducing early school leaving. In conclusion, the WAY project aimed to promote a more inclusive European society by reducing inequalities in education and opening new opportunities for those from a migrant and low-income background. It is a significant step towards a shared vision of a Europe committed to a future where every citizen has access to quality education and equal opportunities.



## ● ● ● ***Returning to the FEEL project,***

The expected results included the development of a pedagogical support tool based on the holistic school approach and the creation of a best practices document that maps the experiences of refugee integration with particular attention to the Ukrainian situation. Moreover, the project envisaged the exchange of these resources at the European and local levels, involving 40 members of the participating organizations in an international workshop.

If we focus on the potential and functionality of the FEEL project's approach, we will realize that it had different aims and nature from other elaborated ones (I prefer elaborated). It is innovative, serving a comprehensive school approach to refugee integration, previously used only for non-refugee foreign-origin students.

This approach considered six components, including ***individual skills, the physical and social school environment, school policies, health and social services, and community links***. This project was also complementary to previous projects such as WAY, which focused on educating teachers to address challenges related to migrant-origin students, and LAB, which emphasized the importance of language in refugee integration.

In summary, the FEEL project aimed to respond to the needs of the involved educational communities by improving teachers' skills and sharing best practices to promote refugee inclusion. The main objective was to facilitate better management of refugee integration in a fair and non-discriminatory manner.



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The FEEL project, in its commitment to meeting the needs of the involved educational communities, aimed at a dual objective.



On the one hand, it focused its energies on improving teachers' skills, recognizing that a more prepared teaching staff is essential to address the challenges of refugee integration in schools



On the other hand, it actively promoted the sharing of best practices, recognizing that mutual learning and the dissemination of the most effective methodologies are crucial elements in fostering an inclusive environment.

Therefore, the project's primary goal was to facilitate more effective management of refugee integration within the involved educational communities. This implied not only a focus on teachers' skills but also concrete efforts to promote a school environment that is fair and free from discrimination.

***In a broader context, when examining the measures adopted by the European Union,*** clear convergences with the FEEL project's objectives emerge. The European Union itself has focused its attention on managing refugee integration, recognizing the need for policies that ensure equity and avoid discrimination. In this way, the FEEL project not only aligns with the European Union's directives but also contributes with concrete actions to pursue the same goals, emphasizing the importance of collaboration between local initiatives and broader policies.

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Examining the measures adopted by the European Union, we can observe how it has primarily focused its attention on these aspects:

**1. *Initial Reception and Protection:*** In this first phase, the European Union has sought to create a climate of collaboration among member states to provide adequate reception to arriving Ukrainian refugees. This initial form of reception includes the allocation of temporary housing, medical and psychological assistance, as well as legal and linguistic orientation services. Furthermore, the European Union has emphasized the essential collaboration with agencies like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to coordinate these initiatives that took place in the initial phase of reception procedures. The collaboration between the EU and UNHCR was characterized by several aspects:

- **Essentiality of Collaboration:** The text emphasizes that the collaboration between the EU and UNHCR was essential. This means that both organizations recognized the importance of working together to achieve common goals in managing refugee reception.
- **Coordination of Initiatives:** The EU and UNHCR collaborated to coordinate initiatives related to refugee reception. This coordination was necessary to ensure an effective and well-organized response in the initial phase of reception procedures.
- **Initial Phase of Reception Procedures:** The collaboration took place in the initial phase of reception procedures, suggesting that both institutions worked together to address the immediate challenges and needs of refugees, such as providing accommodation, medical assistance, and essential goods.

In summary, the collaboration between the European Union and UNHCR was fundamental to ensuring effective management of refugee reception in the initial phase of procedures, ensuring that initiatives were efficiently coordinated to meet the needs of refugees.

**2. *Facilitated Asylum Procedures:*** General asylum procedures in the European Union are usually regulated by established norms and processes to evaluate an individual's asylum request. These procedures involve several phases and checks aimed at assessing the validity of the request and determining if the individual meets the requirements for refugee status. However, in exceptional situations like the one resulting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the European Union has implemented facilitated asylum procedures. These procedures have been simplified specifically for Ukrainian refugees to accelerate the evaluation and granting of refugee status. The primary goal of these facilitated procedures is to provide rapid and immediate protection to those in danger.

Facilitated asylum procedures, therefore, imply an accelerated and simplified process compared to standard procedures. This could involve a reduction in the time required to evaluate the application and approve refugee status, allowing for a quicker response to humanitarian emergencies. This type of procedure is specifically adopted in response to crisis or humanitarian emergency situations, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

*In detail:*

## **a. General Asylum Procedures:**

- ***The general asylum procedures of the European Union follow the normal processes*** of applying for asylum, which include document acquisition and the submission of a formal application.
- Generally, ***the asylum seeker must go through several stages***, including interviews and thorough evaluations to establish eligibility for asylum.
- These procedures ***can take time*** due to the necessary documentation and verifications, which can lead to delays in granting refugee status.
- General asylum procedures ***are designed to ensure that applicants meet the requirements set by asylum laws*** and to prevent potential abuses of the system.

## b. Facilitated Asylum Procedures:

- Facilitated asylum procedures ***were implemented in response to the emergency*** caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- The primary objective of these procedures is ***to expedite the evaluation and granting of refugee status for Ukrainian citizens*** who are in immediate danger.
- ***Formalities and verifications have been simplified*** to ensure immediate protection for those in need, minimizing bureaucratic delays.
- These ***facilitated procedures were implemented specifically to address the ongoing crisis*** and ensure a quick and pragmatic approach to protecting Ukrainian refugees.

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**3. Assistance with Social and Economic Integration:** The European Union has implemented programs to support the social and economic integration of Ukrainian refugees. These programs include language courses, vocational training programs, and access to the labor market. The goal is to enable refugees to become self-sufficient and contribute to the host societies.

**4. Support for Education:** The European Union has also supported access to education for Ukrainian refugees, including children. This includes linguistic education programs and financial assistance to cover educational expenses.

**5. Family Reunification Programs:** The European Union has facilitated family reunification for Ukrainian refugees, allowing them to reunite with family members who remained in Ukraine or in other countries.

**6. Awareness and Anti-Discrimination Campaigns:** The European Union has promoted awareness and anti-discrimination campaigns towards Ukrainian refugees. This includes public campaigns and educational programs to promote tolerance and combat negative stereotypes.



The European Union has adopted specific policies and measures to facilitate the integration of Ukrainian refugees, recognizing their vulnerability and need for protection. These efforts reflect the EU's commitment to human rights and humanitarian assistance in crisis situations. However, integration is a complex process that requires time and joint efforts from governments, organizations, and local communities.



## ***INTRODUCTION TO THE FEEL PROJECT***

The FEEL (Foster Education for Empowering Refugees' Lives) project was an innovative initiative aimed at promoting refugee inclusion in the educational system. This project was articulated in four distinct work phases, each playing a fundamental role in achieving the overall objectives.



**1. Project Management:** This phase focused on the overall management of the FEEL project. It was crucial to constantly monitor the progress, quality, and achievement of planned activities. This was done through monthly online meetings that allowed us to evaluate what had been done and plan what was to be realized. The meetings involved the main partner and other partners to ensure effective collaboration. The team was composed of experts, including language teachers, researchers, and communication experts, who brought specific skills to the project.

**2. Promotion of Refugee Inclusion:** This phase aimed to promote the inclusion of refugees in the participating organizations and the local educational community. We worked on creating a pedagogical support tool based on the "Whole-School Approach" and a best practices document (BPD) for refugee integration. We involved teachers and members of youth organizations and migrant associations.

**3. *International and Local Workshops:*** In this phase, we organized international and local workshops to share the results of the FEEL project. The international workshop took place in the Czech Republic and involved 40 participants. This was followed by four local workshops, each with 15 participants, involving teachers, youth organization members, migrant association members, and researchers. These events were crucial to spreading best practices and promoting innovation in refugee inclusion.

**4. *Communication and Dissemination of Results:*** In this phase, we focused our efforts on communicating the results of the FEEL project. We have a dedicated project website and opened social media pages to disseminate information and engage a broad audience. We planned dissemination activities, including conferences and publications, and used indicators such as monthly website visits and the number of copies of results distributed and downloaded to measure the effectiveness of our communication.

The FEEL project, born with the aim of responding to the needs of the involved educational communities and improving teachers' skills to promote refugee inclusion, operated in collaboration with a diverse partnership. This partnership actively involved key countries, including Italy, Belgium, Greece, and the Czech Republic, reflecting the shared understanding of educational and social needs in different contexts.

The primary goal of FEEL was to foster more effective management of refugee integration, ensuring equity and preventing discrimination. This commitment aligns with the European Union's policies, which, considering the rapid integration of immigrants, have promoted comprehensive action packages, including advanced language courses, vocational training, cultural orientation, and other measures aimed at facilitating the integration of individuals from different backgrounds, such as Ukrainians, into European society.

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Additionally, FEEL responded flexibly to emerging needs by adopting emergency measures similar to those implemented by European Union member states. This included the simplification of documentation requirements, focusing on the essentials for individual recognition, in line with policies adopted at a broader level.

FEEL's collaboration with key countries and synergy with the European Union's initiatives highlight the importance of a comprehensive and coordinated approach to addressing the challenges related to refugee integration.

In conclusion, the FEEL project represented a significant commitment to promoting refugee inclusion in education. Through careful management, the creation of innovative pedagogical tools, and international and local workshops, we aimed to make a positive impact on the lives of refugees and education in Europe.

# CHAPTER 1

The crisis in Ukraine, triggered by the Russian invasion and ongoing conflict, has led to a significant influx of refugees into the European Union. This has necessitated specific policies and initiatives to support the integration of Ukrainian refugees. Unlike the general immigration reception system, which typically involves gradual processes of selection, evaluation, and legal status assignment, the reception system adopted by the European Union for the Ukrainian population has been much faster and more satisfactory.

The European Union's integration policies are crucial in addressing the challenges and opportunities related to immigration and facilitating the integration of newcomers into its Member States. In the context of global migration dynamics, one of the most relevant recommendations adopted by the European Union is Recommendation 554 of 2022, which focuses specifically on the integration of Ukrainians, a group of immigrants of particular importance in the European landscape. This recommendation represents an essential reference point as it establishes a series of guidelines aimed at fostering the integration of Ukrainians, considering the circumstances and individual status of each immigrant.

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Data indicates that Ukraine is one of the main countries of origin of refugees in Europe since February 2020, mainly due to geopolitical events and conflicts in the region, and partly due to the high demand for family assistants in EU countries. This has led to a significant increase in the number of Ukrainians seeking asylum and opportunities in various European Union countries. In this context, EU Recommendation 554 of 2022 assumes strategic importance as it addresses the specific challenges related to the integration of this national group.

A key element to consider is the diversity of experiences and needs of Ukrainians in Europe. Ukrainians can arrive in the EU with different legal statuses, including refugees, asylum seekers, migrant workers, or students. Integration policies must therefore take into account this heterogeneity to ensure a targeted approach that respects the specific needs of each individual.



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***The general guidelines indicated by Recommendation 554 of 2022 include access to education, healthcare, the labor market, and civic participation.*** These elements are essential to ensure that Ukrainians can fully integrate into European societies while contributing to their economic and social development. The recommendation aims to promote equality, social cohesion, and inclusion, emphasizing the importance of combating discrimination and racism.

In conclusion, EU Recommendation 554 of 2022 represents a thoughtful and strategic response to the significant Ukrainian migration flow into the EU. Integration policies aim to ensure that Ukrainians, regardless of their status, can find opportunities and support to build a healthy and prosperous life in Europe. In an increasingly interconnected and diverse world, this recommendation is an example of how the EU addresses immigration challenges in a fair and progressive manner, while also promoting the enrichment of European societies through cultural diversity and the contributions of newcomers.

## ***Recommendation 554 of 2022***

*Recommendation 554 of 2022*[1], a fundamental document issued by the European Commission, provides specific guidelines and recommendations related to the reception and integration of refugees in Europe in response to the growing refugee crisis that has affected the continent in recent years. This document is based on a comprehensive and multidimensional approach to addressing the challenges associated with refugee reception and integration.

This recommendation was issued in response to the growing refugee crisis that affected Europe in previous years. The primary reason for its inception was the intention to address the challenges and complexities related to refugee reception and integration more effectively and equitably. Contributing factors to the issuance of this recommendation include:

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[1] Recommendation (EU) 2022/554 of the European Commission of April 5, 2022, concerning the recognition of qualifications of individuals fleeing following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

1. **Increase in Refugee Flow:** Europe has witnessed a significant increase in the flow of refugees from various parts of the world due to conflicts, persecutions, and humanitarian crises. This has placed considerable pressure on European countries to manage the reception and integration of a large number of people seeking protection.
2. **Diversity of Needs:** Refugees come from different cultures, backgrounds, and experiences and present a wide range of needs, including those related to education, health, work, and housing. The recommendation aims to provide a comprehensive approach to addressing these diverse needs.

Recommendation 554 of 2022 underscores the importance of respecting the human rights of refugees and promoting equality between host communities and refugees.



It is necessary to ensure that policies and practices align with these fundamental principles. Additionally, the issuance of this recommendation provides clear and shared guidelines for governments, organizations, and institutions involved in refugee reception and integration. This contributes to creating consistency in policies and actions at the European level.

In summary, Recommendation 554 of 2022 was issued to provide a reference framework and specific guidelines to help Europe more effectively address the complex refugee situation and promote reception and integration based on human rights and equality principles. This document offers specific guidance that can be useful for governments, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, and other stakeholders involved in refugee reception and integration.

Recommendation 554 of 2022 represents an important step forward in addressing the complex issue of refugee reception and integration in Europe, promoting equality, respect for human rights, and better coexistence between different communities. Specifically focusing on the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, the European Union's policies on Ukrainian integration may vary based on the status and specific circumstances of each individual, but there are general guidelines that the European Union and its Member States follow to promote the integration of immigrants, including Ukrainians.

The Commission has recommended minimizing formalities for the recognition of professional qualifications. Many States have adopted simplified procedures to facilitate and accelerate the requirements related to the requested documents, such as Poland, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Moldova, and all the countries surrounding Ukraine. Others have preferred to apply a margin of discretion in receiving requests from people fleeing Ukraine, like Italy and Greece.

To facilitate integration procedures, the European Union has focused on several necessary points to facilitate procedures:

- **Fundamental Rights:** The European Union promotes the respect of fundamental rights for immigrants, including in an extreme urgency situation like that of Ukrainians, ensuring that they have access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and employment in a non-discriminatory manner. Equality of treatment is a fundamental principle.
- **Integration Programs:** Many EU countries, such as Italy, Belgium, Greece, and the Czech Republic, have specific integration programs for immigrants.

Regarding the rapid integration for which the European Union has carried out various action packages, advanced language courses, vocational training courses, cultural orientation, and other measures aimed at facilitating the integration of Ukrainians into European society have been planned. Thanks to the adoption of emergency procedures, the Member States of the European Union have waived documentation requirements, requesting only essential documents for individual recognition.

- **Work:** The European Union promotes fair access to the labor market, trying to ensure that Ukrainians have the opportunity to find work and contribute to European society. This includes the equivalence of qualifications acquired abroad and measures to combat workplace discrimination.
- **Access to Education:** The European Union has promoted access to education for Ukrainian citizens, including their children. This includes support for learning local languages and assistance in obtaining recognition of qualifications obtained abroad.
- **Cooperation between Countries:** The European Union promotes cooperation among Member States to exchange good practices in immigrant integration, including Ukrainians.

It is noteworthy that regarding the speed of procedures adopted by the EU, which must be respected and practiced in turn by Member States, the European Commission has encouraged the States themselves to use the electronic translation tool to speed up the recognition process of personal qualifications: the E-Translation server, which will be discussed in the second paragraph.

Nonetheless, it is important to reiterate that the primary responsibility for the integration of Ukrainians and other immigrants is at the national level. EU Member States can adopt specific policies and programs based on their needs and local circumstances.

Therefore, integration policies can vary significantly from one country to another.

The Directorate-General for External Affairs of the European Union has indeed published a report evaluating the European Commission Recommendation 554 of 2022 concerning the attribution of status and professional qualifications of individuals fleeing Ukraine.

## 1.1.1 Recognition and Regulation of Professions and Qualifications

The European Foundation Training has created a data collection center through which information on the professional qualifications of each Ukrainian citizen was obtained. Thanks to this, many Ukrainian citizens fleeing their country have been able to demonstrate their qualifications, and the European Commission, leveraging Directive 2001/55/EC, has encouraged Member States to ensure that all those who can demonstrate possession of qualifications can access jobs corresponding to their qualification level by relying on an efficient, rapid, and well-functioning recognition system.

The European Union has promoted the facilitation of integrating Ukrainian citizens into workplaces and schools. Member States have been called upon to adopt a number of measures to estimate the expected number of incoming professionals to ensure sufficient capacity to handle all recognition requests they would receive.



Specifically, regarding the recognition procedures of professions and qualifications, it is necessary to open a window on the set of actions adopted by countries such as Italy, Belgium, Greece, and the Czech Republic, which are the participating countries in the project.

***One of the most flexible countries regarding integration and compliance with the procedures set by the EU for Member States has been Belgium.***

In cases where Ukrainian citizens have had difficulty demonstrating all the required legislative documents, ***Belgium adopted a more permissive line compared to the integration and reception policies previously established by the Belgian government.*** Additionally, all Ukrainian citizens were exempt from paying any procedural fees related to the recognition of professions and qualifications.

In the **Czech Republic**, Law No. 66 of 2022 [2] was enacted, guaranteeing all individuals fleeing Ukraine the ability to document their education through a sworn statement within the first six months of obtaining temporary protection. After this period, those who fail to provide the necessary documents for recognizing their profession or qualification must be able to provide objective and/or subjective justifications.

**Italy**, on the other hand, has adopted a system of flexibility different from Belgium and the Czech Republic. Ukrainian citizens seeking asylum or the recognition of qualifications or professions are not required to pay any fees related to the procedure.

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*[2] Law 66 of 2022 enacted in the Czech Republic requires people fleeing Ukraine to document their education through a sworn statement within a certain period after obtaining temporary protection. This may aim to ensure that refugees have access to services and opportunities, including access to education. The sworn statement may be a way to confirm the previous education of people who had to flee their homeland due to conflicts or dangers.*

## **1.2 Innovative Policies: P.E.S. the use of Edebo (Unified State Electronic Database on Education) and E-Translation as Integration Tools**

The integration of Ukrainians in Europe after the Russian invasion of 2022 has been a complex task that required an organized and efficient response from European institutions. The implementation of the Preschool Education System (P.E.S.), the Unified State Electronic Database on Education (Edebo), and tools like E-Translation has proven to be a pragmatic and advanced response to address the situation. The creation of systems like P.E.S. and Edebo has contributed to improving efficiency in providing educational services to Ukrainian students. Centralizing data through Edebo has simplified registration and monitoring processes for students, facilitating access to education and making integration into the new European educational system smoother.

### **Accurate monitoring of students' educational paths**

through a centralized system like Edebo has been crucial for identifying and responding to the specific needs of each individual. This targeted approach has played a crucial role in ensuring personalized support, contributing to the effective integration of Ukrainian students.

### **Language barriers were successfully managed through the use of tools like E-Translation.**

Automated translation reduced communication challenges between Ukrainian students and educators, facilitating clearer and more inclusive communication within the educational environment.

The implementation of these centralized systems and tools suggests a commitment to sustainability and the ability to adapt to new challenges that emerged after the Russian invasion.

***The flexibility in quickly modifying educational systems to respond to the needs of Ukrainian students reflects a proactive and adaptable response to the complexities of post-invasion integration.***



Moreover, the adoption of these technologies has encouraged collaboration among different educational institutions and European countries.

**Sharing good practices**, including the implementation of effective systems, **has helped develop a common approach to addressing the unique challenges related to the integration of Ukrainians in Europe**, demonstrating the importance of solidarity and cooperation in managing complex situations like this.

Following the publication of Recommendation 2022/554, the European Commission collaborated with Ukrainian authorities to provide Member States with a series of resources to support Ukrainian citizens in obtaining recognition of their educational qualifications and skills quickly.

These tools include:

- a. **Access to the EDEBO** (Unified State Electronic Database on Education) database, which allows Ukrainian citizens to obtain useful information about their educational qualifications.
- b. **A link to activate the request for the issuance of the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR).**
- c. **A link to the state portal DIA to request a criminal record certificate.**
- d. **Access to the database of the European Training Foundation (ETF),** which provides information on people fleeing Ukraine who wish to work or study in the European Union.



Image: EDEBO platform

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If we delve further into the key points related to the various tools and resources made available by the European Commission in collaboration with Ukrainian authorities to support Ukrainian citizens in the process of recognizing their educational qualifications and skills, we will see that the EDEBO platform (Unified State Electronic Database on Education) stands out.

This database is an important tool that provides Ukrainian citizens with access to detailed information about their educational qualifications. This can be crucial when seeking recognition of their diplomas or certificates in one of the European Union Member States. The database contains data on educational institutions, study programs, and issued qualifications.

Alternating with this are P.E.S. services, i.e., public employment services. Thanks to the P.E.S. network, the EU has been able to determine and provide some recommendations to Member States to coordinate and guide employment services for Ukrainian refugees and displaced persons. However, it is necessary to digress: when was the P.E.S. network created? It was created following the joint decision of the EU Parliament and Council with the aim of strengthening the capacity, effectiveness, and efficiency of Public Employment Services.

Following the multitude of requests received in 2015 and 2016, the European Union identified four key aspects to consider:

- a) Language**
- b) Skills and qualifications**
- c) Partners**
- d) Instructions and Employers.**

The system, updated to 2022, also includes good practices concerning the temporary inclusion of displaced Ukrainians in the labor market. In this case, Public Employment Services play a central role: they help refugees and displaced persons find employment.

Regarding the adoption of the P.E.S. system by European Union Member States, Belgium is the only one implementing such provisions imposed by the EU. Belgium, in fact, taking into account that language training should be adopted by the individual's training itself, has adopted a new program to teach the Belgian language in the workplace. The goal is to align language skills with professional shortages. A group of Belgian language teachers is sent on a mission to the workplace by the company itself, and they are tasked with both visiting the workplace and teaching the language to Ukrainian refugees. Specific and detailed words of the language are taught so that the individual can then operate autonomously and independently.



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## 1.2.1 Temporary Protection Mechanism by European Union Member States

Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382 has a significant impact on the protection of third-country nationals who were legally in Ukraine before February 24, 2022, and who hold a permanent residence permit. Initially, temporary protection was only provided for Ukrainian citizens, but following the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, this form of protection extends to third-country nationals other than Ukraine who meet the established requirements.

In other words, this decision requires European Union Member States to apply temporary protection or adequate protection in accordance with national law not only to Ukrainian citizens but also to those who can prove they were legally resident in Ukraine before February 24, 2022, and hold a permanent residence permit. This extension of protection is particularly relevant for people fleeing due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

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The European Commission is actively encouraging Member States to respect this measure of recommendation and adopt the necessary actions to ensure that these individuals receive the required protection. The objective is to provide a safe and adequate refuge for those affected by extraordinary events and who meet the criteria established by Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382. This decision reflects the European Union's commitment to ensuring the protection of human rights and solidarity towards people in crisis and need. The Temporary Protection Mechanism is a crucial response to the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, which has caused a massive influx of people seeking refuge in both the European Union and the Republic of Moldova.

Implementing the directive on temporary protection aims primarily to alleviate pressure on national asylum systems and ensure refugees have uniform rights throughout the EU. These rights include the right to stay, access to the labor market and housing, medical assistance, social assistance, and access to education for minors.

Temporary protection represents an emergency mechanism that can be activated when there is a massive influx of displaced persons who cannot return to their home countries. This mechanism has been fundamental in providing immediate and collective protection to those in need.

***It is significant to note that almost 775,000[1] students have been enrolled in the school systems of 26 EU Member States and Schengen-associated countries,*** demonstrating the commitment to ensuring access to education even in emergency situations. Initially, the mechanism was activated for one year but was subsequently extended until March 4, 2024. Furthermore, on September 28, 2023, the Council agreed to further extend temporary protection until March 4, 2025, highlighting the continued commitment to offering assistance and protection to those in need in this challenging situation.

*1] The figure of 775,000 students is an important reference to the number of students who have benefited from Temporary Protection in the European Union and Schengen-associated countries in response to the massive influx of displaced persons caused by the Russian military aggression against Ukraine. These students have been enrolled in the school systems of 26 EU Member States and Schengen-associated countries. This figure is significant because it demonstrates the EU and associated countries' commitment to ensuring access to education even in emergency situations and the ability to adapt their school systems to accommodate a large number of displaced students. Access to education is a fundamental right, and ensuring that displaced minors can continue to receive adequate education is essential for their well-being and future. Additionally, this figure underscores the importance of Temporary Protection as an emergency mechanism that provides assistance and protection to those fleeing conflicts or dangerous situations in their home countries. Temporary Protection offers a temporary refuge, including essential services such as education, for those who cannot return to their home countries due to adverse circumstances.*

### **1.3. Financial and Economic Support from the EU and Member States Hosting Refugees from Ukraine**

In 2022, the European Union allocated 72 billion euros in macro-financial assistance to Ukraine, followed by an additional package of 18 billion euros for 2023 in December of the same year. This support aims to provide immediate financial assistance, cover financial needs, support the restoration of infrastructure, and contribute to sustainable post-conflict reconstruction.

In response to the Russian invasion, the EU has played a key role through the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), supporting restoration projects and providing economic and technical assistance. Additionally, temporary measures for trade liberalization were adopted, and the EU allocated 733 million euros in humanitarian aid in 2023 to help civilians affected by the war in Ukraine. The "EU-Ukraine Solidarity Lanes" were established to facilitate agricultural trade, and overall, the EU and its Member States mobilized 262 billion euros to provide support in various sectors, but according to United Nations estimates, 176 million Ukrainians still need humanitarian assistance.

These financial and economic measures demonstrate the EU's commitment to supporting Ukraine during and after the conflict. However, integrating refugees is a complex process that requires time, resources, and coordinated efforts from governments, organizations, and local communities.

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# CHAPTER 2

## GOOD PRACTICES

### *The Case of Italy, Greece, Belgium, and the Czech Republic*

The Russian aggression against Ukraine has catalyzed an extraordinary response of solidarity among the member countries of the European Union, underscoring the crucial importance of international collaboration in times of crisis. In this context, Italy, Greece, the Czech Republic, and Belgium have demonstrated extraordinary commitment and active support, emerging as clear examples of European solidarity in action.

This section aims to analyze several practices that Italy, Greece, the Czech Republic, and Belgium adopted in the aftermath of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine to facilitate the integration of displaced Ukrainians.

Particularly, it deals with school-age displaced Ukrainians and their integration into the educational systems of the four countries mentioned above.

## **ITALY**

Before analysing Italy's best practices of integration, we should keep in mind that, according to the Italian law, all children and adolescents aged between 6-16 years old that are in Italy are obliged to take part in the National Education System. Therefore, this obligation also applies to children whose parents are asylum seekers or do not own a valid residency permit.

- ***MosaicoServizi***

The Italian cooperative il mosaico servizi – società cooperativa sociale, together with the centre Centro Come.te, specialized in the study and treatment of trauma in children and young adults, perfectly fits into the research of some of the best practices aimed at facing the Ukrainian emergency taking the school environment as a starting point. In particular, the Italian cooperative developed a project titled "School and Ukrainian Emergency - Resources and strategies for teachers, children and youth" ("Scuola ed Emergenza Ucraina – Risorse e strategie per insegnanti, bambini e ragazzi), which figures as an educational tool by a team of qualified psychologists and psychotherapists.

The objective of this initiative is to understand how to prevent stress reactions in children and adolescents following the dramatic war in Ukraine, wondering about the likely effects that the continuous exposure of children to a collective emergency might engender. In fact, among the most feared and common emotional reactions are the sense of uncertainty and feelings of helplessness in front of threatening and unpredictable events; indeed, exposure to traumatic events, albeit indirectly, can trigger various behavioural and emotional reactions (e.g. nervousness, irritability, anxiety, distress, insomnia, and hyperactivity). It appears clear, then, that Ukrainian children's mental health is at stake and needs to be protected: first of all, according to the experts working on this project, what they need is predictability. This educational tool aims to provide adults with some guidelines for communicating with children when dealing with such a difficult topic, and to help them with their need for predictability and safety. It includes an Italian as well as an Ukrainian version.

The project displays different dynamics that often take place in children victims of traumatizing war experiences, in terms of emotion, behaviours, thoughts and body: from rage, sadness, shame, embarrassment to impulsivity, isolation, detachment, hyper-surveillance, overthinking, headaches, stomach aches, eating and sleep disorders.



Besides, it outlines some suggested actions to put into practice at school: communicating in a reassuring manner with a calm and gentle tone of voice, creating a poster board with strategies shared by the whole class, teaching a shared “call for help” signal when the child feels they need a break, proposing ad hoc activities with other Ukrainian children in the school, creating spaces for relaxation and emotional decompression. On the other side, it proposes a series of actions to be avoided: loud and sudden noises (e.g. shouting), glaring lights, chronicles of war, close physical contact if children are not seeking it, sudden gestures.

- ***DRUZI – Save The Children Italia***

In the aftermath of the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the international organization Save The Children chose its Italian branch to develop a new project which added to the already consistent list of interventions in terms of protection and integration of children and families who fled their countries to escape wars.

In March 2022, Italy then becomes the theatre of a new project called “Druzi” (Ukrainian translation of “Friends”).

The main actors involved in the project are displaced Ukrainian girls, boys and adolescents aged 9 to 18, and volunteers belonging to the Italian community having Ukrainian language skills, working under the supervision of a team of educators and psychologists. Moreover, before being active participants of the project, volunteers had to undergo an educational training developed by Save The Children, aiming at improving their relational skills as well as providing them with psychological tools to deal with the fragile conditions of Ukrainian refugees.

Indeed, the project addresses to those young adults being stuck in “hotels” and centres designated for the collective reception of Ukrainian refugees, from where they can access the service after a brief informational interview.

The aim of the project is to boost integration through a personalized online educational support: the beneficiaries have the chance to establish a relationship with volunteers based in Italy who speak Ukrainian, and who will later on be their “guides” in discovering Italy and their hosting towns. They will also be supported throughout their educational path (many of them would continue attending their Ukrainian classes remotely), which will also include the teaching of basic Italian notions.

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Therefore, the project plays an important role in that it allows children and adolescents to express themselves in their own language in a protected context, expanding the network of relationships.

The strength of this project emerges in the testimony of Raffaella Milano, Italy-Europe Director of Save The Children: “We meet in Italy mostly broken families, mothers, or grandmothers, with their children who live the continuous anxiety about the fate of their companions and family members still in Ukraine.

It is crucial for these children to find spaces for relationships and socializing, and it is valuable to have the opportunity to engage with boys and girls who speak their language and can accompany them in their discovery of a country they do not know. I want to thank all the volunteers who made themselves available in a few hours, especially young people from the Italian Ukrainian community who, through joining this project, found a way to express their closeness and civic engagement. Indeed, this intervention is part of a large network of solidarity involving civil society, humanitarian organizations, in collaboration with institutions at every level. It is crucial now to make sure that, after a month from the beginning of the emergency, this network is given an organic structure, to ensure throughout the country adequate care for children and families for the duration of their stay in Italy”.

- ***THE CARE OF WAR WOUNDS” (LA CURA DELLE FERITE DI GUERRA)***

This section on Italy’s best practices of integration will conclude with a brief overview of the experience of a local school, namely the G. Pascoli Comprehensive Institute located in Erice, Sicily. Specifically, the school developed a project titled La Cura delle Ferite di Guerra (“The Care of War Wounds”) addressing the inclusion of Ukrainian children in the educational environment of the institute itself.

The initiative sets two main goals: autonomy and participation in the social life. In order to achieve these goals, the Institute proposes a series of solutions that allow to achieve, through different means depending on the specific needs of the children, equal access to education and to its opportunities.

The term “care” suggests the idea of a real process of treatment (not only education) that needs to be achieved through in-school and extra-school integration and synergy between students, teachers and hosting families, focusing also on the reception and hospitality of the family households and on their ability to make the children feel welcomed and at ease.

Their task is to create a climate of affection, human warmth, and psychological support around the hosted children; the environment should be joyful and carefree and, during school hours, small group and workshop activities will be carried out where children can fit in without feeling inadequate.

So, the project certainly wants to offer Ukrainian children alternative and personalized educational paths but, before anything else, the educational goal will be that of inclusion and "care" of the student's emotionality, of his "war wounds."

The process proposed by the school is a long one, which articulates in-class and extra-class activities, and Ukrainian children will be given a customized special curriculum that will not take place exclusively within the target class group.

Children will also have the possibility to go to therapy thanks to group psychotherapy sessions run by age group. According to the creators of the project, these sessions are essential to begin to heal the "war wounds" and to allow children to talk to each other. Moreover, to facilitate and fasten their integration, children will be supported by mediators in learning Italian.

Finally, each child will be given a tablet on loan, with the account already working to access his/her Google G-Suite Classroom equipped with the Google translator app. The strength of this project lies in the fact that it tries to enhance all forms of expression through which the student can realize and develop his/her potential, giving equal dignity to all languages.

## **GREECE**

We will now continue our discussion on the best practices of integration of displaced people from Ukraine by providing insights into the Greek experience. Once again, it is important to notice that “Education is compulsory for all children in Greece, including refugees and asylum seekers, boys and girls, who are aged between 5 and 15 years old” (source: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees).

- ***METAdrasi***

METAdrasi is a Greek NGO founded in 2009 with the aim of facilitating the reception and integration of refugees and immigrants in Greece. Consistently with its main function, METAdrasi has stepped forward in the aftermath of the conflict, extending its support to the Ukrainian population migrating to Greece. Inspired by the deep belief that migration can lead to development, the NGO is active in many different areas that envision the upholding and protection of the fundamental human rights. Among these, the protection of unaccompanied and separated children and the education and integration of refugees and migrants fit into our analysis of best practices of integration.

Specifically, unaccompanied children get protection through interventions aiming at creating safe spaces in terms of accommodation facilities and independent living; similarly, integration in the Greek educational system is fostered through Greek language lessons, multilingual support guides, soft-skills laboratories, traineeship opportunities and work placement. As the result of its strong commitment to the cause, in 2019 METAdrasi was awarded the world's largest annual humanitarian prize, namely the Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize 2019, "for its innovative approach to welcoming refugees and protecting unaccompanied children" (source: METAdrasi's website).

Among the numerous projects developed by the NGO, "Entaxei" plays a central role in the process of integration of displaced Ukrainians; indeed, "Entaxei" is described as a multilingual support tool for Ukrainian and Russian children and teenagers who have been displaced in Greece but have no familiarity with the Country's language.

Its main objectives are to help its users in: understanding simple expressions and directions, introducing themselves, understanding basic vocabulary needed in school, asking questions, expressing requests on issues related to education, accommodation, transport, nutrition and health, and finally reading and understanding simple texts or filling out basic forms such as declarations. Moreover, included in the project are an illustrated vocabulary, a brief grammar guide and simple exercises.

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Besides, METAdrasi is a central player in the integration path of migrants and refugees also thanks to its extensive programme of interpretation in schools. Indeed, the NGO, through its certified interpreters, provides basic help in schools in order to facilitate and improve the communicative and interpersonal relationship between teachers, students and parents who do not speak Greek, thus fostering the integration of children in schools. The “Interpretation for Education” project, as stated in the NGO’s website, “operates within the framework of the programme All Children in Education, a UNICEF Greece initiative, co-founded by the European Commission and implemented by a number of partners, including METAdrasi”.



## • **MELISSA Network**

Melissa Network is a Greek organization founded in 2014 and committed to the protection of migrant and refugee women in Greece. Consistently with our research of best practices, Melissa Network recently started a new collaboration with The Hellenic Initiative (THI), a global non-profit organization focused on humanitarian help, entrepreneurship and economic development of Greece. Indeed, The Hellenic Initiative committed itself to the donation of \$120,000 for supporting Ukrainian families through its partners, among which both METAdrasi and Melissa figure, and it is also thanks to this collaboration that Melissa started playing an even more crucial role in addressing the needs of the Ukrainian population. Besides engaging to offer specific educational courses, mental support, childcare and parenting services to Ukrainians migrating to Greece, Melissa Network figures as a reference point for migrant women from all over the world who struggle to get their rights recognized and their skills empowered. The name “Melissa”, Greek word for bee, aims to convey the central idea of the migrant woman as a hard-working bee who migrates to share its story, bringing along skills and talents, dreams and ideas;

As stated in the organization website, women are “multipliers, integrators and agents of change in their own lives, in their families, in their societies, as well as in the society that hosts them”. The ultimate aim of the organization is, therefore, to provide a safe space for networking and capacity building, boosting advocacy and developing innovative integration programs for women and children.

Specifically, the organization focuses on seven activities to build a stronger community and facilitate integration for women and girls:

- 1) **Literacy support** (language classes at different levels)
- 2) **Psycho-social support** (counselling, referrals, etc.)
- 3) **Information** (sessions and trainings on legal, social, labour rights, reproductive health, gender based violence, etc.)
- 4) **Advocacy support** (social media, public speaking, creative writings, etc.)
- 5) **Art & Creativity** (cooperative training, leadership training, sewing, cooking, etc.)
- 6) **Skills & Capacity Building** (photography, visual arts, music, poetry, etc.)
- 7) **Self/Community-care** (stress management, breathing and meditation techniques, mindfulness, yoga, etc.)

Women's voices and stories are truly powerful when talking about the support they received by Melissa Network. Therefore, the most suitable way to conclude this brief overview on the Greek experience is through the voice of one of them:

*"She's the new life.  
She is the greatest She.  
What do I describe?  
She gives birth to women who can live.  
She brings them to life and takes care of them.  
She is full of emotions.  
She carries the smell of the Lilly.  
She makes you feel like a lost child who finds her mother".*

*Asma, 30, Syria  
(Poetry workshop with A.E. Stallings)*

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## ***BELGIUM AND THE CZECH REPUBLIC***

***The unprecedented solidarity response of the Czech Republic and Belgium to the Ukrainian crisis underscores the central role of European collaboration in times of challenge.*** These countries, through their active and multilateral engagement, embody the essence of European solidarity, demonstrating that when nations collaborate, they can address and overcome the most challenging issues.

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## CZECH REPUBLIC

The active involvement of the Czech Republic in the Ukrainian crisis highlights a longstanding commitment to peace and European solidarity. From the beginning of the Russian aggression, the country adopted a series of coordinated actions to address the crisis, demonstrating strong leadership and internal cohesion.

The Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs played a crucial role in coordinating efforts, highlighting the country's willingness to actively participate in resolving the crisis. Providing substantial financial assistance in critical sectors has helped mitigate the immediate impacts of Russian aggression, demonstrating European solidarity. The Czech Republic has shown tangible commitment to addressing the humanitarian crisis resulting from the conflict. The allocation of considerable resources to the construction of modular housing, sophisticated tents, and evacuation vehicles has addressed not only the immediate housing crisis in Ukraine but also underscored the country's willingness to contribute to post-conflict reconstruction.

This holistic approach to crisis management reflects the Czech Republic's awareness of the importance of addressing both the immediate and long-term needs of the affected population. Another crucial aspect of Czech aid has been support for the medical sector. The purchase of equipment and medical supplies has strengthened hospital capacities and supported battlefield medical units. This intervention has significantly improved the management of medical emergencies, highlighting the Czech Republic's awareness of the importance of ensuring adequate access to medical care even in conflict situations.

The Czech Republic has addressed immediate energy needs by providing heaters and repairing damaged energy infrastructures. This commitment to ensuring acceptable living conditions even in conflict situations underscores the country's sensitivity to the fundamental needs of the affected population. Furthermore, extending its commitment beyond Ukrainian borders, the Czech Republic has provided aid to refugees in Moldova, demonstrating regional solidarity. The financial and material support provided through international organizations has further strengthened the country's global commitment, highlighting its active participation in the international community to address humanitarian challenges.

In conclusion, the Czech Republic's involvement in the Ukrainian crisis represents an example of longstanding, multilateral, and compassionate commitment to peace and European solidarity, highlighting its leadership and constructive contribution to managing international crises.

## ***BELGIUM***

Belgium initially faced organizational challenges in welcoming the significant influx of Ukrainian refugees, yet it demonstrated a readiness to adapt and improve emergency management. The first weeks saw some degree of chaos and disorganization in refugee reception management, but Belgium responded promptly by opening a better-equipped registration center in Brussels. This strategic move indicates adaptability and a willingness to improve response to the displaced population's needs, demonstrating a commitment to addressing and overcoming initial challenges.

Citizen involvement has been a key element in supporting refugee reception. The mobilization of civil society played a crucial role in providing support and solidarity to the displaced, showing significant social cohesion and collective commitment to addressing the humanitarian crisis. The Belgian government recognized the importance of this participation and ensured that all possible resources were made available to the displaced, highlighting a collaborative approach between the government and civil society in managing the emergency.

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A key element of Belgian involvement was the opening of a registration center in Brussels. This initiative was fundamental in improving the organization and management of refugee reception, providing a central point for registration and resource allocation.

Belgium's adaptability and prompt response to initial challenges indicate resilient and improvement-oriented governance in managing humanitarian emergencies.

Direct testimonies from Ukrainian refugees represent an important humanitarian aspect of the situation. They reveal a deep desire to return to normal life and overcome the difficulties faced during the conflict. The EU registration and temporary protection offer concrete opportunities for reintegration into Belgian society.

Thus, Belgium not only addresses the immediate needs of the displaced but also seeks to ensure long-term prospects, working to effectively integrate refugees into the community.

***In conclusion, Belgium overcame initial challenges in welcoming Ukrainian refugees through rapid adaptability and better organization.*** Active citizen involvement, collaboration between government and civil society, and initiatives to ensure long-term prospects for refugees reflect a comprehensive and humanitarian approach to managing the crisis.



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# CONCLUSIONS:EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY IN ACTION

The response of Italy, Greece, the Czech Republic, and Belgium to the Ukrainian crisis represents a tangible example of the potential of European solidarity in times of difficulty. The four countries have shown significant commitment through distinct approaches, highlighting the flexibility and diversity of responses within the European Union. Through the collective action of member countries, Europe can cultivate an environment of support and cooperation. European solidarity, embodied by these concrete responses to the Ukrainian crisis, not only addresses the most urgent challenges but also contributes to building a future of peace and stability in the region. The diversity of approaches among member countries underscores the richness and adaptability of the union, indicating that solidarity can manifest in multiple ways, but its collective impact is crucial to overcoming global challenges.

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