



## **NEW BEGINNINGS:**

# **SUPPORTING THE DIGNIFIED RELOCATION OF UKRAINIAN TEMPORARY PROTECTION HOLDERS TO STANDARD HOUSING**

Report on the Relocation of Ukrainian Temporary Protection Holders  
from Collective Accommodation Facilities to Standard Housing

April 2024

UNHCR and IOM



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## Executive Summary

Since the onset of the war in Ukraine, a series of legislative changes have taken place in Czechia to respond to the humanitarian needs of Ukrainian temporary protection holders. *Lex Ukraine VI.* entered into force on 1 January 2024 and introduced a number of changes to the assistance provided to Ukrainian temporary protection holders. One such change is a shortened period of cost-free accommodation for newly arrived temporary protection holders provided by the state. It will be reduced from 150 to 90 days, including for vulnerable persons. As a result, many residents of collective accommodation facilities may need to relocate to standard housing.<sup>1</sup> The legislative provision on housing will come into effect on 1 September.

Existing research indicates that temporary protection holders face multiple challenges when seeking to relocate to standard housing. Major challenges include financial hardship and the loss of community support. Other factors that have a direct impact on relocation prospects are the situation in the rental market, as well as employment opportunities and conditions.

Given the implications on housing introduced by *Lex Ukraine VI.*, and following a request by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, UNHCR and IOM undertook a 10-week assessment of the situation in collective accommodation facilities. The purpose of the assessment was threefold, namely to:

1. Consider and validate the reasons why residents of collective accommodation facilities continue residing in them instead of relocating to standard housing;
2. Identify solutions for relocations to standard housing;
3. Formulate recommendations for the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and other governmental bodies in Czechia to inform the design of social support and other assistance, which can facilitate the safe and dignified relocation of residents from collective accommodation facilities to standard housing.

The assessment followed a three-stage **methodology**. Primarily, a desk review of existing qualitative and quantitative data was conducted. This provided an understanding of the information that would require further validation and allowed for the identification of possible gaps in information. Thereafter, individual and group consultations were held with diverse stakeholders, including representatives of non-governmental organisations (hereinafter referred to also as “NGOs”), local government and regional government, as well as experts in social housing. Some of the key solutions to support the relocation of residents from collective accommodation to standard housing, as identified in the consultations, were discussed in focus group discussions with Ukrainian temporary protection holders who reside in collective accommodation facilities. The discussions provided an insight into their personal circumstances, and supported the identification of barriers for relocation, while also providing feedback on proposed solutions.

The information gathered provided a consistent picture of the situation. It pointed to both **structural and individual factors** that represent relevant considerations for relocations from collective accommodation facilities to standard housing.

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<sup>1</sup> Alternative options may also exist, including beginning to pay for accommodation if the owners and managers of the facilities will accept this option, or continue paying for accommodation if an individual was already paying for it before.

Among the structural factors, **institutional roles and responsibilities** of relevant governmental entities, including coordination between these entities, are not only important, but also require clarity and strengthening.

The provision of clear, understandable and **timely information** through formal and trustworthy sources was also found to be vital in supporting Ukrainian temporary protection holders to understand the upcoming changes and to be able to make informed decisions about their housing.

Another key finding was the need to maintain a **limited network of collective accommodation facilities** the conditions of which are regularly monitored, and which adhere to established standards of living conditions.

A noteworthy finding was the need to facilitate and ensure **access to social services and counselling** to provide adequate psychosocial, legal and other support to those who will be impacted by the upcoming changes.

The assessment also confirmed that the situation of the current **rental market** should not be disregarded when considering factors that impact the relocation of Ukrainian temporary protection holders to standard housing.

Finally, the assessment depicted concerns where financial support would be limited, as there is no adequate alternative in the **public welfare system** for most Ukrainian temporary protection holders. An alternative option would be essential to prevent debts, indecent work, social exclusion and homelessness for the most vulnerable temporary protection holders.

Among the individual factors the **psychological distress** of a relocation to standard housing was conveyed by some temporary protection holders. Many expressed reluctance to relocate, citing fatigue and fear of the unknown; some also appreciated their **current living conditions and community**, which they prefer over standard housing.

The **individual agency** of Ukrainian temporary protection holders to carry out a relocation to standard housing was found to be an important consideration and varied significantly based on income and employment status, Czech language skills, vulnerabilities related to disabilities, age, family size and support from government services or informal networks.

The dire **financial situation** of many temporary protection holders, including those engaging in low-paid work below their qualifications, was found to be a priority consideration.

The key **recommendations** directly respond to the main findings. First and foremost, they recognise the need to tailor assistance to three specific profiles of temporary protection holders, while considering that for most respondents, financial support alone would not be enough to realise a successful and sustainable relocation to standard housing. The three groups that would require tailored assistance are as follows:

1. Vulnerable residents facing multiple challenges;
2. Self-reliant residents with low-income or other less complex dependencies;
3. Residents who lack the motivation to relocate to standard housing or to integrate.

Upcoming legislative measures should be accompanied by **effective information campaigns** and led through the active and **coordinated role of relevant ministries**, including the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

Various **counselling and community-based support** programs for Ukrainian temporary protection holders affected by the housing changes have been recommended as important

interventions, combined with instruments and assistance tailored to specific situations and groups.

To address the financial barriers faced by residents of collective accommodation facilities, it is recommended that adjustments are made to the **humanitarian assistance** for Ukrainian temporary protection holders, and that **debt-mitigation measures** are adopted.

Finally, specific **incentives for property owners** to encourage leasing to Ukrainian temporary protection holders should be supported or introduced, particularly in regions that are not as affected by the housing crisis.

## Background

The sixth amendment to *Lex Ukraine* (i.e. *Lex Ukraine VI.*) entered into force on 1 January 2024. The legislation introduces a shortened period of cost-free accommodation for temporary protection holders provided by the state through collective accommodation facilities, effective 1 September 2024.<sup>2</sup> The period will be reduced from 150 to 90 days for newly arrived refugees and shall apply to all Ukrainian temporary protection holders, including vulnerable persons.<sup>3</sup> Following the entry into force of this provision, current residents of collective accommodation facilities benefiting from cost-free accommodation on account of their vulnerability status will be required to seek a new solution to housing. One option may be to begin paying for housing in collective accommodation facilities, provided that owners of the facilities will allow the continued residence of temporary protection holders who are not new arrivals.<sup>4</sup> An alternative option is relocation to standard housing.

According to IOM's previous research conducted in collective accommodation facilities in Plzeň and Karlovy Vary regions,<sup>5</sup> the primary obstacles faced by residents in collective accommodation facilities to relocate to standard housing are:

- The unavailability of rental housing;
- Lack of funds to cover rent (and deposits) at market price;
- Repeated rejection by property owners for various reasons related to both nationality and other factors, such as owners' general preference for long-term rentals.<sup>6</sup>

Since 2013, property prices in Czechia have seen a sharp increase and have risen disproportionately faster than household incomes, particularly in cities. As rental prices have increased, the private rental market has a limited supply of alternative housing options.<sup>7</sup> This has made it particularly challenging for temporary protection holders to find affordable housing while many low- and middle-income households have been "priced out" of cities or have resorted to living in substandard housing.<sup>8</sup>

Ukrainian temporary protection holders in Czechia often endure financial hardships, which also applies to those who work. Almost one-third of all Ukrainian temporary protection holders are unable to cover their daily expenses, including 6% of those who are employed.<sup>9</sup> Many struggle

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<sup>2</sup> The right to adequate housing is enshrined in Article 11(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966). Moreover, Sustainable Development Goal 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities has a 2030 target for states to "ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing".

<sup>3</sup> According to *Lex Ukraine V.* (add no. in the Coll.), vulnerable persons are children up to 18 years of age; full-time students in Czech universities up to 26 years of age; individuals older than 65 years of age; pregnant women; persons with disabilities; individuals caring for children under six years of age; and individuals caring for persons with disabilities.

<sup>4</sup> During focus group discussions with Ukrainian refugees, UNHCR and IOM also had the opportunity to speak with the owners and/or managers of some collective accommodation facilities. Some provided that they will allow the continued stay of current residents against payment after 1 September, while others explained that they will not.

<sup>5</sup> IOM, *Czechia - Needs and Plans of Ukrainian Refugees in Collective Accommodation Facilities in Pilsen and Karlovy Vary Regions (March - April 2023)*, Prague (July 2023) available at: <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/czechia-needs-and-plans-ukrainian-refugees-collective-accommodation-facilities-pilsen-and?close=true>; IOM, *Co přinese budoucnost? Výzkum zaměřený na uprchlíky v nouzovém hromadném ubytování v Karlovarském a Plzeňském kraji*, Prague (June 2023) available at: <https://czechia.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11681/files/documents/2023-06/iom-czechia-collac-vyzkumna-zprava-2023.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> IOM, *Accommodation and Financial Situation of Ukrainian Refugees*, Prague (January 2024) available at: <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/czechia-bydleni-financni-situace-uprchliku-z-ukrajiny-srpna-zari-2023?close=true>, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Housing Affordability in Cities in the Czech Republic*, available at: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/565306a0-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/565306a0-en>

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> IOM, *Accommodation and Financial Situation of Ukrainian Refugees*, p. 4.



with high rental costs, as financial issues are reported more often by those living in standard rental housing (83%) than by those who live in collective accommodation facilities (70%).<sup>10</sup> It is noteworthy that 26% of working Ukrainian temporary protection holders provided that they would not be able to pay an unexpected payment of CZK 13,600,<sup>11</sup> which is a lower amount than the average rental deposit. The latest PAQ Research focused on the housing of Ukrainian temporary protection holders has shown that 57% of Ukrainian temporary protection holders live below the effective poverty line, most of whom are families with children (especially single parents of two or more children) and elderly persons who have limited capacities to work. Interestingly, the proportion of those under the effective poverty line did not change in the second half of 2023, while financial support from the state significantly decreased and economic activity increased.<sup>12</sup>

While the employment rate amongst Ukrainian temporary protection holders continues to increase with 72% being economically active in Czechia, leading to an increase in their income, the majority still work below their qualifications and very often in precarious conditions. Moreover, the prevalence of indecent working conditions has worsened.<sup>13</sup> 58% of Ukrainian temporary protection holders reported working in precarious conditions; most are new arrivals who have not been able to secure better employment or who attempted to maintain their humanitarian benefit,<sup>14</sup> or – significantly – those who reside in collective accommodation facilities.<sup>15</sup> The worst employment conditions across the country have been reported in Prague. The necessity to hold multiple jobs is most commonly encountered by women (37%) as opposed to men (16%). Employment through an agency or informal intermediary has been reported by 34% of Ukrainian temporary protection holders,<sup>16</sup> creating considerable space for exploitation with few legal protections. A lack of knowledge of the Czech language and limited access to preschool education constitute the main barriers to work.<sup>17</sup> It should also be noted that skills development in the Czech language has slowed down considerably amongst Ukrainian temporary protection holders in the second half of 2023.<sup>18</sup>

As of 3 April 2024, 24,834 Ukrainian temporary protection holders reside in collective accommodation facilities,<sup>19</sup> the vast majority of whom are women (72%). Almost half of the residents are of working age (46.2%), almost one quarter are children aged 6-15 (24.4%) and persons over the age of 65 constitute 10.7% of the resident population in collective accommodation facilities.<sup>20</sup> These figures indicate that the majority of the current population residing in collective accommodation facilities are those with limited capacities to work who were identified as vulnerable<sup>21</sup> in the context of changes stemming from *Lex Ukraine V*.

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> PAQ Research, *Integrace uprchlíků na trhu práce a v bydlení - 7. vlna výzkumu Hlas Ukrajinců - listopad 2023 (Integration of Refugees on the Job Market and in Housing - 7th Round of Research Voice of Ukrainians - November 2023)* (18 December 2023) available at <https://www.paqresearch.cz/post/prijmy-a-chudoba-uprchliku-podzim2023/>, p. 21 - 23.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>19</sup> Statistics of people assigned emergency accommodation in connection with the crisis in Ukraine, available at: <https://gis.humpo.cz/portal/apps/dashboards/00d687543fae4577bae15543bbdbb5c1>. According to the above PAQ Research report issued in December 2023, this represents roughly 16% of Ukrainian refugees in Czechia.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Based on its research, IOM has identified four categories of vulnerable persons who are most at risk in light of the legislative changes. For more details, please see the summary of key findings in the IOM report of July 2023.

UNHCR has noted that access to sustainable and affordable housing remains a challenge for Ukrainian temporary protection holders in the region.<sup>22</sup> In Czechia, existing data confirms that most Ukrainian temporary protection holders who entered the system of collective accommodation have faced barriers to relocating to standard housing thereafter. During the first months of the Ukraine situation, 75% of residents in collective accommodation facilities remained where they were while only 17% relocated to standard housing.<sup>23</sup> Following the promulgation of *Lex Ukraine V.*, relocation trends have accelerated. Employed persons have relocated from solidary households to standard housing at higher rates than those who are unemployed. The transition towards standard housing was also noted from collective accommodation facilities, albeit being less common. Many households without income-generating activities have remained in collective accommodation facilities (22%), as have households consisting of only one individual.<sup>24</sup>

The Member States shall ensure that persons enjoying temporary protection have access to suitable accommodation or, if necessary, receive the means to obtain housing.<sup>25</sup>

Against this backdrop, ahead of the upcoming legislative changes, and following the request by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, UNHCR and IOM undertook a 10-week joint assessment to examine the situation of Ukrainian temporary protection holders residing in collective accommodation facilities and the practical support needed to realise their relocation to standard housing.

The purpose of the assessment is threefold, namely to:

1. Consider and validate the reasons why residents of collective accommodation facilities continue residing in them instead of relocating to standard housing;
2. Identify solutions for relocations to standard housing;
3. Formulate recommendations for the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and other governmental bodies in Czechia to inform the design of social support and other assistance, which can facilitate the safe and dignified relocation of residents from collective accommodation facilities to standard housing.

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<sup>22</sup> UNHCR, *UNHCR warns worsening conditions and challenges facing vulnerable Ukrainian refugees in Europe*, (16 November 2023) available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/ua/en/65149-unhcr-warns-worsening-conditions-and-challenges-facing-vulnerable-ukrainian-refugees-in-europe.html>

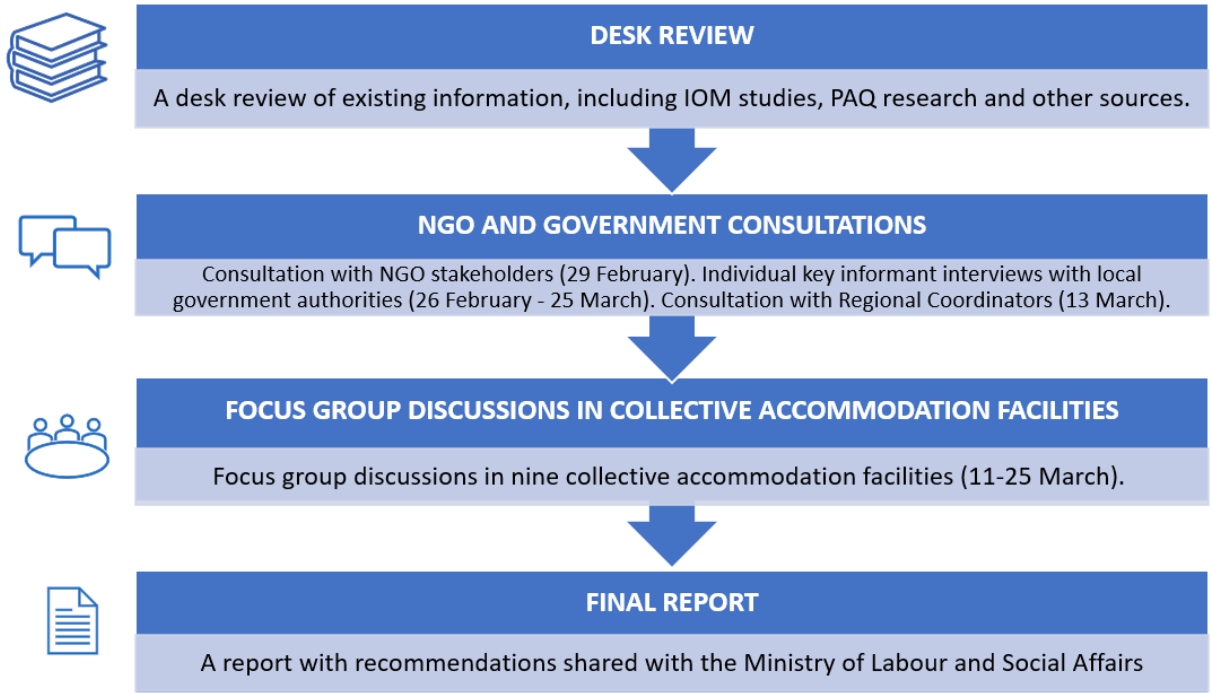
<sup>23</sup> PAQ Research, *Hlas Ukrajinců: Zkušenosti uprchlíků s bydlením v Česku a výhled do budoucna (Voice of Ukrainians: The Experience of Refugees with Housing in Czechia and a Future Outlook)* (2 August 2022) available in Czech at: [https://www.paqresearch.cz/content/files/2023/01/HlasUkrajincu\\_Bydleni\\_Zprava\\_PAQ-5.pdf](https://www.paqresearch.cz/content/files/2023/01/HlasUkrajincu_Bydleni_Zprava_PAQ-5.pdf), p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> PAQ Research, November 2023, p. 17 - 18.

<sup>25</sup> Art. 13(1) of the Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32001L0055>.

# Methodology

This report is based on a qualitative study conducted by UNHCR and IOM from March to April 2024. Semi-structured individual interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with representatives of non-governmental organisations as well as local, regional and central government representatives (hereinafter referred to as “key informants”) as well as with Ukrainian temporary protection holders residing in collective accommodation facilities. The data analysis was complemented by a desk review of existing resources. Information was collected anonymously and with the consent of the individual.



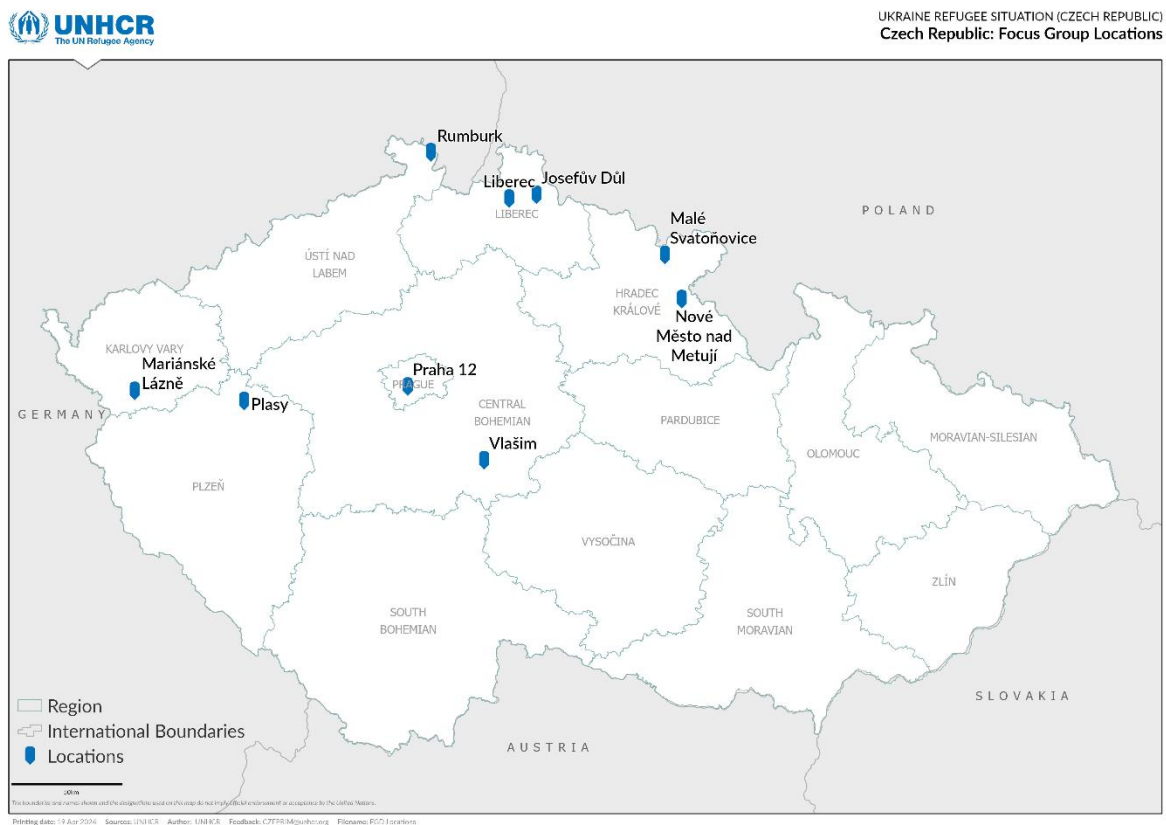
The desk review provided information on the overall situation of Ukrainian temporary protection holders in Czechia, with a focus on those residing in collective accommodation facilities.

Key informant interviews served to complement existing information with valuable insights based on their practical experiences with the provision of assistance to Ukrainian temporary protection holders in relocating to standard housing. During these interviews potential solutions to support relocation to standard housing were formulated, which later were presented to Ukrainian temporary protection holders residing in collective accommodation facilities. Focus group discussions were held with them to learn if and how their views are considered within the potential solutions, or if they prefer other solutions that better address their circumstances.<sup>26</sup> Following each focus group discussion the participants were provided with a voluntary survey to fill out anonymously. The results of the survey are illustrated in the infographics within this report.

<sup>26</sup> The proposed solutions included remaining in the collective accommodation facility, relocating to standard housing with government support and relocating to communal housing. The definitions of each of these solutions were left to be determined by each individual themselves. Respondents also had the opportunity to suggest other solutions.

The study identified four target groups of key informants to interview: *representatives of non-governmental organisations* who work with residents of collective accommodation facilities and could therefore contribute to the discourse with field experiences, good practices and recommendations for solutions to support relocation to standard housing;<sup>27</sup> *Regional Coordinators*<sup>28</sup> who spoke to the particular situations in their specific regions, highlighting the breadth and diversity of experiences of both Ukrainian temporary protection holders, but also the actors who have worked with them; *representatives of central and local government offices*; as well as *independent experts in the area of social housing*<sup>29</sup>.

In addition to the key informant interviews, nine focus groups discussions were held with 114 Ukrainian temporary protection holders<sup>30</sup> residing in collective accommodation facilities in seven regions across Czechia, namely: Central Bohemia, Hradec Králové, Karlovy Vary, Liberec, Plzeň, Prague City and Ústí nad Labem. The regions were selected on criteria allowing for variations in socio-economic indicators, the availability of employment opportunities, geographic remoteness, urban/peri-urban/rural settings, and historical marginalisation.



<sup>27</sup> The organisations that took part in the consultation were: the Association for Migration and Integration, Centre for Humanitarian Aid - Teplice, Diakonie West, Diakonie - Center for Humanitarian Aid, Organisation for Aid to Refugees, People in Need, Romodrom, Salvation Army and Slovo21 and Regional Coordinators for Adaptation and Integration of Ukrainian Temporary protection holders (hereinafter “Regional Coordinators”).

<sup>28</sup> Two written responses were received; a virtual meeting was also held with 10 coordinators. Coordinators from 12 regions participated in the consultations (the Coordinators from Plzeň and Královéhradecký regions did not participate).

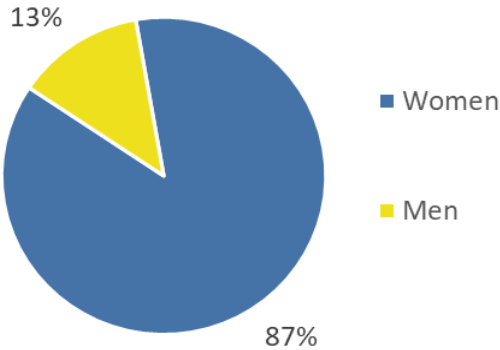
<sup>29</sup> These interviews again highlighted the unique situations across different localities and provided an opportunity to seek recommendations from those who have previously supported relocations to standard housing, those who will be involved in the design of social benefits to support transitions to standard housing, and those who represent some areas of the country hosting Ukrainian temporary protection residents in collective accommodation facilities.

<sup>30</sup> Focus groups were conducted by trained UNHCR and IOM staff.

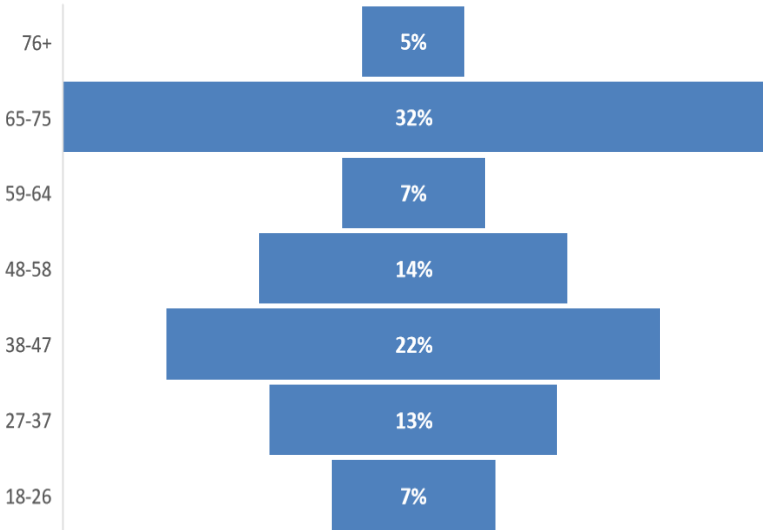
The specific accommodation facilities were selected based on the presence of vulnerable profiles of Ukrainian temporary protection holders. These were the following:

- Women and single mothers;
- Persons aged 60+;
- Persons with medical conditions/physical limitations who do not fall into the category of persons with disabilities and persons who fall into this category but do not have a ZTP card, and their caregivers;
- Persons with unstable and/or low incomes;
- Persons accommodated in remote localities.

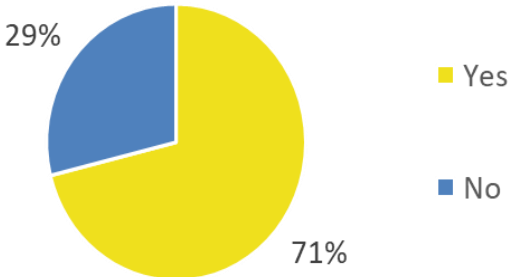
Respondents by sex



Respondents by age



Percentage of respondents who take care of either children or other family members or both



Number of months spent at facility:



Average: 15 months



Median: 18 months

## Main Findings

The study revealed that the reasons for the continued residence of Ukrainian temporary protection holders in collective accommodation facilities are influenced both by structural and individual factors on the side of temporary protection holders. As such, these two factors ought to be considered in the design of initiatives intended to support the relocation of temporary protection holders to standard housing. The findings, presented hereafter, are grouped around these two factors.

### I. Structural Factors

#### Institutional roles and responsibilities

During the stakeholder consultations, the issue of internal and external coordination of the Ukraine refugee response and associated humanitarian assistance and benefits at the level of central government institutions was closely discussed. Regarding external coordination, the Government Commissioner for Human Rights in the Office of the Government was designated as the main coordinator. The step was welcomed by stakeholders; however, they also expressed calls for the function to hold a clearer mandate and stronger capacities.

Regarding vertical outreach from the central to the local level of public governance, stakeholders stressed that the division of roles and responsibilities should be clear and should emanate from the central level. In addition, a robust methodological support system and procedural guidance from relevant ministries were considered to be missing.

*“It would be helpful to have dedicated persons in relevant units at each of the relevant ministries. These persons would serve as the main focal points we could rely on.”*

Consultation with the Regional Coordinators.

Internal coordination within ministries and their departments was perceived to be based on personal motivation rather than a systemic approach. Stakeholders agreed that mainstreaming integration and adaptation into existing services and into the departments that govern them is essential, similarly to ongoing processes at the regional level.

#### Information provision

Discussions with Ukrainian temporary protection holders have suggested that the lack of clear, timely and understandable information on the conditions of their stay may be on account of low levels of coordination among ministries, impeding the dissemination of information from the central level to the regional and municipal levels. In an operational environment characterised by relatively frequent changes in financial and housing assistance, Ukrainian temporary protection holders stressed that the main changes, their impact and referral mechanisms for assistance to relevant authorities should be communicated to those affected by the changes. Robust information campaigns coordinated jointly by concerned ministries were put forth as a key recommendation. This would allow Ukrainian temporary protection holders and their support networks to better prepare for new conditions and to take appropriate action. It would also enhance the level of trust by Ukrainian temporary protection holders

towards the authorities and reduce dependency on informal actors, such as managers of the facilities and community leaders. In one collective accommodation facility residents provided that they had received information about the upcoming changes to accommodation as per *Lex Ukraine VI.*, but subsequently came to the conclusion that this was misinformation. Official information campaigns would also serve to dispel misinformation, which can be created by the dissemination of information through unofficial sources, social media channels and by community members.

As the lack of timely and clear information is closely linked to counselling, access to social workers and lawyers who provide these services is therefore essential. Stakeholders recommended a symbiotic approach to securing this access: (1) by maintaining sufficient counselling capacities, and (2) by enforcing the access of counsellors to all locations where Ukrainian temporary protection holders reside. Unpredictable and abrupt changes, insufficient time to inform, unclear information, and information that is not disseminated from the top (government) to the bottom (non-governmental organisations, municipalities, communities) were considered to be obstacles to the provision of clear, understandable and timely information.

### Conditions in collective accommodation facilities

With the vast majority of collective accommodation facilities being privately owned,<sup>31</sup> the quality and standard of housing are largely dependent on the owners and managers. Focus group discussions have confirmed that the living conditions in collective accommodation facilities vary considerably.

The possible regulation and control of conditions in collective accommodation facilities has been raised on many occasions. While Czech legislation enshrines basic hygienic and security standards, their effective enforcement in privately-owned premises was questioned by stakeholders during the consultations. It was stressed that in situations where the government provides any financial support to residents of the facilities or their owners, the government should view the arrangement as akin to a contract of business by outlining terms and enforcing them. It was suggested that the terms of the contract ought to include a set of standards for decent housing and the possibility of certified third parties, such as social workers, to access the common premises.

The Member States shall ensure that persons enjoying temporary protection have access to suitable accommodation or, if necessary, receive the means to obtain housing.<sup>32</sup>

Discussions during stakeholder consultations drew attention to the remote geographic location of some facilities. While it was acknowledged that during the emergency phase of the Ukrainian refugee response any provision of accommodation was welcomed, it was also pointed out that long-term stay in remote locations hinders access to services and prospects for integration. The residents of such facilities face social isolation, which makes their ability to learn the Czech language and to find employment with a view to relocate to standard housing challenging. Where vulnerable persons are concerned, it is all the more difficult and may result in high levels of dependency on informal networks and community leaders.

<sup>31</sup> Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, *Census of people from selected categories of the ETHOS 2022 classification – summary (Sčítání osob z vybraných kategorií klasifikace ETHOS 2022 – shrnutí)*, available at: [https://socialnibydleni.mpsv.cz/download/dokumenty/Shrnuti\\_Scitani\\_2022.pdf](https://socialnibydleni.mpsv.cz/download/dokumenty/Shrnuti_Scitani_2022.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> Art. 13(1) of the Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof.

In discussions on the situations of the most vulnerable temporary protection holders, concerns were raised over the lack of capacities in specialised residential social services, as serious medical conditions and other ailments require continuous care. The known cases of successful relocations of Ukrainian temporary protection holders have reportedly demanded the extraordinary personal efforts of a social worker.

### Access to social services and counselling

Access to social services and counselling remains a key component for integration, including the transition to standard housing. For many Ukrainian temporary protection holders, social counselling and information helplines are valuable in addressing their situations, including when seeking assistance to secure standard housing and low-budget solutions to the process of relocating.

Experts on social housing underlined the overall lack of experience of social workers in supporting the specific needs of temporary protection holders on the one hand and knowing how to successfully support the transition of persons to standard housing on the other hand. While service providers assisting temporary protection holders and non-governmental organisations should undertake training on the *Housing First* and *Housing Ready*<sup>33</sup> concepts, counselling providers should also be trained in working with temporary protection holders, many of whom are survivors of violence and trauma. Training should include strategies for overcoming language and cultural barriers in their work.

At the structural level, stakeholders underlined the need to ensure the flexibility of finances channelled to regional networks of registered providers of social services. These providers ensure long-term complex assistance to vulnerable clients with complex needs who are amongst those who face the most challenges in finding affordable housing.

In some cases, the low access of Ukrainian temporary protection holders to social services was reportedly on account of indecent work with long working hours making access to social services challenges, or due to strict rules established by the managers of some private facilities who deny access to visitors. Enhancing the network of field workers who can monitor the situation in collective accommodation facilities and adjust their counselling to cover indecent work and living conditions is considered by stakeholders to be a much-needed initiative.

### Rental market: oversaturation in some regions and reluctance of some homeowners to lease

Along with the rest of society, Ukrainian temporary protection holders continue to be confronted by the crisis in the rental market. The lack of affordable standard housing was pinpointed as a barrier to the successful transition from collective accommodation. The oversaturation of the rental market was seen to be a challenge in Prague, Plzeň, Brno and other cities with higher accessibility to services and employment. Despite concerted efforts, Ukrainian temporary protection holders often fail to succeed among the dozens of applicants for rent per unit, even in situations when they could afford the rent. The key importance of social networks in finding accommodation was stressed even by social workers who had experience with assisting Ukrainian temporary protection holders to find standard accommodation.

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<sup>33</sup> On the Housing First and Housing Ready approaches to housing, please consult [An introduction to Housing First - Housing First Europe](#) in English or [Housing First \(socialnibydeni.org\)](#) in Czech.



*“We participated in a re-housing project in Prague for almost a year. We only found standard housing for a few clients through acquaintances. Otherwise, you are competing with 30 other people, which means no chance for us.”*

NGO social worker, stakeholder consultations.

Focus group discussions also highlighted two main obstacles to successful relocations to standard housing: (1) a lack of financial means, and (2) a less favourable position in the highly competitive rental market. Ukrainian temporary protection holders are less competitive in the rental market due to the language barrier, lower levels of knowledge on local rights and obligations related to renting, and a higher reluctance of some homeowners to lease their homes to third-country nationals with uncertain or less stable legal statuses and/or employment situations.

In oversaturated cities and regions, simple financial incentives to homeowners were perceived by stakeholders as irrelevant and nonfunctional. More complex solutions, such as social rental agencies operated by municipalities, which offer multiple guarantees or the allocation of public housing to Ukrainian temporary protection holders with complex vulnerabilities, were considered feasible possibilities to enable more transfers to standard housing. However, due to their complexity, they are relatively time- and capacity-intensive in generating tangible results.

In regions that are less affected by the housing crisis, such as Silesia and North-West Bohemia, incentives for property owners combined with financial and counselling support for Ukrainian temporary protection holders were seen by stakeholders as useful and efficient tools to support transitions to standard housing.

### Access to social welfare benefits

Financial assistance to Ukrainian temporary protection holders has been established as a parallel system through *Lex Ukraine* and its amendments. Its cornerstones have been the accommodation allowance and the humanitarian benefit. The most significant changes to the system were introduced by *Lex Ukraine V*. It repealed the payment of the accommodation allowance to solidary households and limited direct payment to Ukrainian temporary protection holders under the humanitarian benefit to 150 days. After this period, the allowance is only provided to vulnerable Ukrainian temporary protection holders.<sup>34</sup> As a result, the number of Ukrainian households where at least one member of the household receives the humanitarian benefit reduced from 56% to 36%. This benefit continues to be received predominantly by households in which no member receives an income from employment.<sup>35</sup>

Other Ukrainian temporary protection holders, including those who have a family member in their household with disabilities that are not officially confirmed by a doctor in Ukraine or Czechia, are not eligible to apply for benefits within the Czech welfare system. As of 1 January 2024, the exception to this rule has been the “emergency immediate assistance” benefit (the Czech commonly used abbreviation is “MOP”) which is a lump sum that serves to overcome the risk of loss of housing due to unexpected expenses. While this lump sum can help many who would struggle to cover unexpected payments, the experiences shared through focus group discussions were unsatisfactory as most applications were reportedly rejected. This

<sup>34</sup> For more details on the changes, please consult IOM’s *Accommodation and Financial Situation of Ukrainian Refugees*, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> PAQ Research, November 2023, p. 22.

aligns with the findings of PAQ Research, which concluded that “*emergency immediate assistance was reported as a source of income by only 1% of households, which together with the large proportion of refugees suffering from income poverty may be a signal that benefits overall (humanitarian benefit/MOP) are not set optimally.*”<sup>36</sup>

During the consultations, stakeholders raised concerns over the fact that there is no adequate alternative for most Ukrainian temporary protection holders. An alternative would remedy the recent limitations to the current system of financial support and serve as a safety net against debts, indecent work, social exclusion and homelessness. In this sense, concerns were raised over the upcoming legislative changes that only continue to curb the existing financial support. On the other hand, the net positive impact of migration into Czechia was best evidenced by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs’ presentation depicting the balance of public income and expenditure related to Ukrainian temporary protection holders and highlighting the shift in 2023 to more public income over expenditure.<sup>37</sup>

## II. Individual Factors

### Psychological barriers and motivation

Discussions with Ukrainian temporary protection holders residing in collective accommodation facilities highlighted that residents are generally reluctant to change their living environments and prefer to remain in their current housing even where a new housing opportunity may be of better quality. Respondents underlined the psychological challenges that forced displacement has generated, and the hardships that the need to relocate against their will would generate. This was particularly the case amongst elderly respondents, who stressed their unwillingness to re-establish their communal ties, and re-acquire knowledge of local services and new surroundings once again. Relocation also demands a heavier psychological and physical toll on elderly persons, many of whom mentioned tiredness and poor physical mobility as barriers to transitioning to standard housing. This perspective was confirmed by non-governmental organisations and Regional Coordinators who have assisted temporary protection holders in their relocation efforts. Significantly, and in line with international legal obligations, it is crucial to ensure that any changes in domestic legislation, rights and benefits do not create a push-factor for returns to Ukraine until temporary protection holders can return home voluntarily and in safety and dignity.

*“I am 76, I am from Mariupol. My house is destroyed, I have nowhere to return, nowhere at all. Why not allow me to stay in free accommodation? I am old, I will probably live for another year or two, that’s it, it won’t be so expensive. I just want to finish my life with whatever dignity I’m left with”.*

Prague.

It is noteworthy that a significant proportion of Ukrainian temporary protection holders experience mental health challenges. According to UNHCR’s Multi-Sector Needs Assessment conducted in June - July 2023, 23% of Ukrainian temporary protection holders in Czechia

<sup>36</sup> PAQ Research, November 2023, p. 22.

<sup>37</sup> Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, *Current data on persons with temporary protection*, Prague (18 March 2024). The data was presented during the meeting of the Permanent Commission for Adaptation and Integration of Refugees from Ukraine.

experience mental health conditions, including anxiety, stress, sleep difficulties or depression to the extent that it affects their daily functioning.<sup>38</sup> Mental health conditions may also exacerbate the psychological challenges that some temporary protection holders may face when contemplating a relocation to standard housing.

Respondents across most of the facilities described the strong communal ties that they have formed with fellow residents. They explained how they support each other with daily tasks and find comfort in each other's company. Many respondents therefore expressed the desire to continue living in their current collective accommodation facilities to maintain these relationships. Some mothers specifically underscored the support they receive from fellow residents to care for their children, which enables some women to work. In another facility, elderly persons shared their desire to continue living in an environment with mixed ages, to be able to interact with diverse persons, and not exclusively elderly persons.

As the vast majority of residents in collective accommodation facilities are women, including women with children, a critical barrier to relocation was mentioned concerning schooling, friends, care facilities and support networks. Following forced displacement from Ukraine, mothers expressed their reluctance to subject their children to another relocation, in which children may face the hardship of losing their friends at school again. Respondents also highlighted the challenges they faced in accessing services upon their arrival in Czechia; those who currently enjoy access to medical services, including paediatricians and care for persons with serious medical conditions, are reluctant to seek out these services again.

Another identified psychological barrier to relocation into standard housing is the sense of temporality that some respondents feel. They consider their stay in Czechia to be a temporary arrangement and wish to return to their country of origin as soon as the situation allows. As such, these respondents expressed a lack of motivation to seek and invest in more sustainable solutions for themselves in Czechia.

A noteworthy source of motivation for relocation to standard housing was the prospect of independence. Some respondents mentioned their desire to create living conditions similar to what they had in Ukraine, to enjoy privacy and personal space, and to create opportunities for hobbies, peace and quiet.

## Current living environment

Respondents in some collective accommodation facilities highlighted the subpar living conditions in their facilities. Challenges mentioned include small and dense living quarters (e.g., one family of three generations living together in one room); unhygienic spaces; poor maintenance; a lack of legal protection without a lease agreement; an absence of price regulation; a lack of accessibility for persons with disabilities; as well as challenges with heating and mould. In facilities where poor living conditions were cited as a challenge, they were also highlighted as push-factors for relocation to standard housing, where conditions could potentially be better.

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<sup>38</sup> The data is in line with the prevalence of mental health conditions experienced by conflict-affected persons globally (22%). However, due to the prevailing stigma associated with disclosing mental health conditions within the Ukrainian community, it likely does not reveal the full extent of the issue. Moreover, the data was collected at the household level, which may also contribute to lower reporting rates.

Some respondents, on the other hand, expressed concern about the perceived lack of housing standards applicable to standard housing, which could lead to temporary protection holders relocating to housing with poor living conditions and/or high rental prices.

*“Here, the conditions are not bad. I'm afraid to move anywhere else because I think it could be worse there.”*

Vlašim, Central Bohemia

The proximity of collective accommodation facilities to services and amenities, as well as education, social services and employment opportunities, was stressed as an important consideration for potential relocation to standard housing. Residents in urban and peri-urban settings were satisfied with their access to services. Some mentioned receiving support in accessing services from a municipality, a Mayor and managers of the facilities. Respondents highlighted that they particularly value proximity and access to schools, medical services, nature and employment opportunities. Many also expressed the desire to remain close to the locality that they are already in, specifically to continue enjoying access to these opportunities.

### Access to information

During the focus group discussions, it became apparent that the level of information the Ukrainian temporary protection holders residing in collective accommodation facilities had on the upcoming legislative changes varied greatly. In some facilities, the residents had never heard about the changes until the focus group discussion. In another, as previously mentioned, the residents had initially heard about the changes and then classed it as misinformation.

Residents who lived in facilities within close reach of counselling services demonstrated a higher level of knowledge about *Lex Ukraine VI.*; they cited knowledge of the Ministry of the Interior's official website and Facebook page, where information concerning Ukrainian temporary protection holders is shared. Some respondents explained that they do not enjoy access to information because the managers of their facilities do not authorise social workers and counsellors to visit their facility, which would provide opportunities to gain information on their rights and obligations.

Throughout the focus group discussions, it was apparent that most residents of the collective accommodation facilities have limited independence and autonomy for finding information. Many respondents considered the managers of their facilities to be trusted sources of information. Other trusted sources included a municipality, a Mayor, non-governmental organisations – and those who had more information about *Lex Ukraine VI.* – social media platforms such as Telegram and Facebook.

*“First, you hear about something from somebody, then you seek it online.”*

Liberec.

The lack of timely, simple and coherent information on legislative changes, the functioning of the rental market and available support creates a barrier for residents to make informed and dignified decisions about their housing options. The reluctance of many Ukrainian temporary protection holders to acknowledge the upcoming changes to housing requires continuous counselling and the timely provision of information.

## Individual agency

Empowerment and individual agency to make decisions concerning one's own life is a vital consideration in the relocation of vulnerable temporary protection holders from collective accommodation facilities to standard housing. During focus group discussions it became evident that the level of agency between individuals was wide-ranging. Single mothers often spoke of feeling "stuck", and unable to engage in income-generating activities or Czech language courses due to their parenting roles and mentioned their dependence on their fellow residents to provide support with childcare. Elderly persons and persons with serious medical conditions also highlighted their lack of agency by providing that finding suitable employment at their age or with their conditions is challenging and that learning the Czech language at an elderly age is equally difficult.

Dependency on strenuous, low-income employment and on the respective employers was identified by non-governmental organisations and key government informants as a barrier to change. It was reported that even when informed, some Ukrainian temporary protection holders residing in collective accommodation facilities are reluctant to assert their rights to decent work as they fear losing their employment, and as a result, their source of income. Moreover, the risks of marginalisation and exploitation under unsafe and indecent working environments and conditions were highlighted by key informants and confirmed by some focus group discussion respondents. In such situations, the risk of dependency on indecent work and employers may also grow, making it challenging to execute major changes, such as, potentially, the relocation into new housing. Non-governmental organisations and government stakeholders stressed the necessity of public services and public support remaining accessible to vulnerable Ukrainian temporary protection holders to negate such risks.

Through focus group discussions, it was found that informal support systems and networks, such as those involving managers of collective accommodation facilities, community leaders and other actors play an empowering role for vulnerable Ukrainian temporary protection holders. Non-governmental organisations and government stakeholders, however, underscored the possible risks of long-term dependency on these networks. Some temporary protection holders mentioned that they would wish to remain in their current accommodation facilities due to the support they receive from the managers; while the support the managers provide is commendable and, often, vital, it may also result in the creation of a barrier for relocation to standard housing.

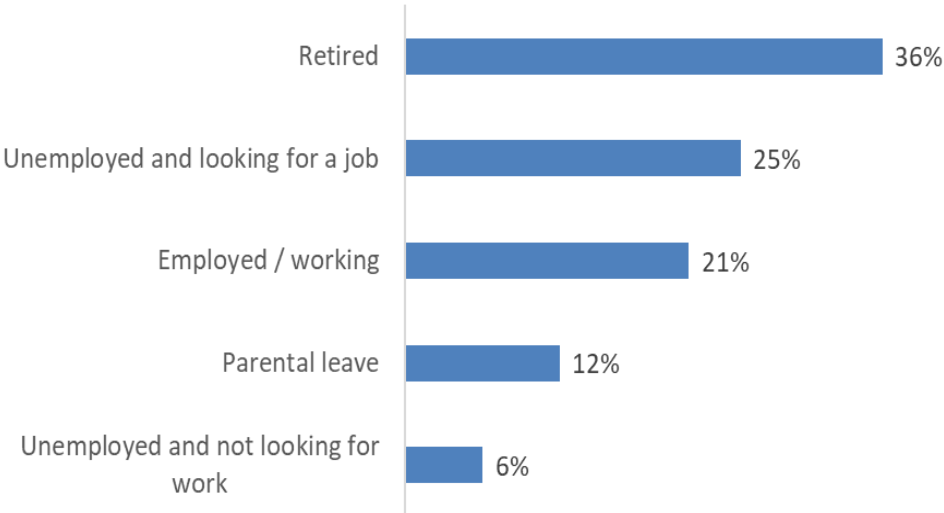
In geographically remote facilities where residents have not enjoyed many opportunities to interact with Czech nationals and to integrate into Czech society, some residents were not able to fathom what life outside of their current facility would look like. Without understanding how Czech systems work, they were not able to contemplate solutions for their relocation to standard housing; instead, they provided that they would leave it to the Czech government to decide their fate.

One of the most frequently reported barriers to relocating to standard housing, as provided by focus group discussion respondents, was the absence of adequate Czech language proficiency. This makes it challenging to seek support, access services and gain employment, which in turn would enable the sustainable financing of a commercial lease. Some respondents provided that they lack access to the correct level of Czech language classes (B1 and B2 specifically), while others explained that language classes are often held at times when Ukrainian temporary protection holders are working in strenuous jobs with long hours; as such, they mentioned the provision of language classes on Sundays and in the evenings as one factor that may strengthen their individual agency and contribute towards the possibility to relocate to standard housing.

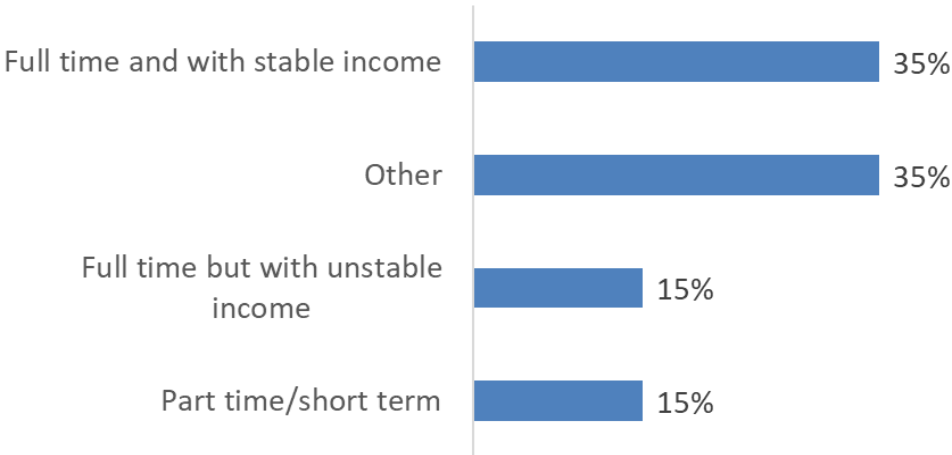
### Finances

In line with the findings of existing research, focus group discussions demonstrated that most Ukrainian temporary protection holders living in collective accommodation facilities, including those who are employed, face various financial obstacles to meet the common requirements of the rental market. They have little or no savings to cover the initial costs and to live under a sustainable financial arrangement. Respondents consistently highlighted the challenges of being able to produce a deposit to secure a home, the first month's rent as well as basic furniture, all at the same time. This challenge is exacerbated for Ukrainian temporary protection holders who are unemployed; this often includes vulnerable individuals such as elderly persons, single mothers, persons with serious medical conditions, persons with disabilities and their carers or persons living in remote areas.

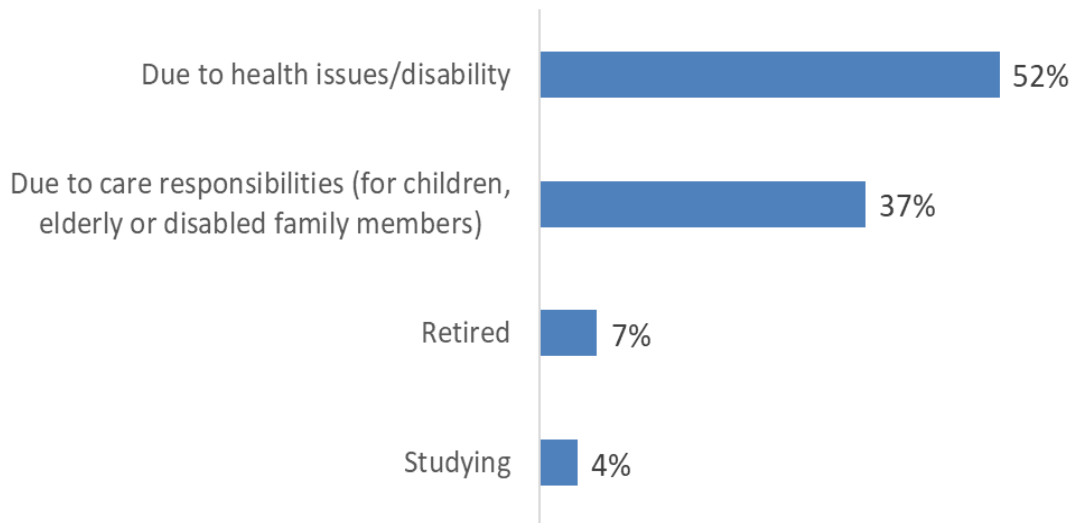
**Current employment status of respondents**



**For those who are working: nature of their work or contract**



### If you are unemployed and not looking for a job, why?



Despite many Ukrainian temporary protection holders having attained various levels of education and Czech language proficiency, a significant proportion of them are employed in low-income and low-skilled jobs that are not commensurate with their qualifications. Moreover, labour exploitation was mentioned as a particular challenge in Hradec Kralove and Prague.

*“It seems that hiring a Ukrainian is like leprosy. The agency pays little, and you must work 12 hours a day for six days.”*

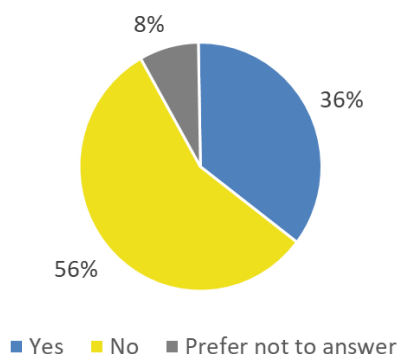
Prague.

Where cost-free counselling and assistance to secure accommodation is not available, residents of collective accommodation facilities often seek assistance through paid intermediaries, such as rental agencies, or community leaders, creating an additional financial burden. In some collective accommodation facilities, the provision of accommodation based on employment remains prevalent. In some cases, accommodation is either formally or informally linked to specific employment provided by agencies, or its location plays an important factor in the accessibility of the location of work. In both cases, relocation to standard housing may result in the loss of employment and financial means. It was also reported that some residents are not in a position to relocate out of collective accommodation facilities due to debt-dependency on employment agencies, accommodation providers or facility managers.

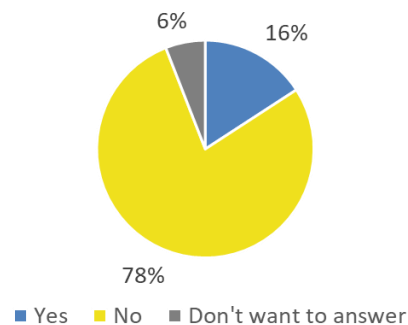
Most stakeholders underscored the urgent need to mitigate the risks of creating financial debts, debt-bondage and other forms of financial dependency and social exclusion for vulnerable refugee groups should they lose their current public financial support without appropriate alternatives in place.

Some temporary protection respondents over the age of 65 proposed the establishment of a website to find part-time work or one-off jobs for elderly persons. They explained that this would allow them to earn some income while positively contributing to their community. They also provided that the opportunity to engage in income-generating activities would boost their morale and have positive outcomes for their mental health.

Are you able to cover your daily expenses?



Would you be able to cover housing costs (incl. utilities bills) higher than 5,000 CZK/month?



Concerning solutions, many Ukrainian temporary protection holders expressed their desire to relocate to standard housing with government support, provided that they would continue to enjoy access to their employment and essential services. According to focus group discussion participants, financial support represents the form of support required to realise the transition to standard housing to cover the rental deposit and purchase of furniture. It is significant to note that out of 88 respondents, an overwhelming 86% noted additional finances as the most important factor needed to support their transition. Families with children, elderly persons and persons with disabilities were among the respondents who called attention to the need for financial support the most.

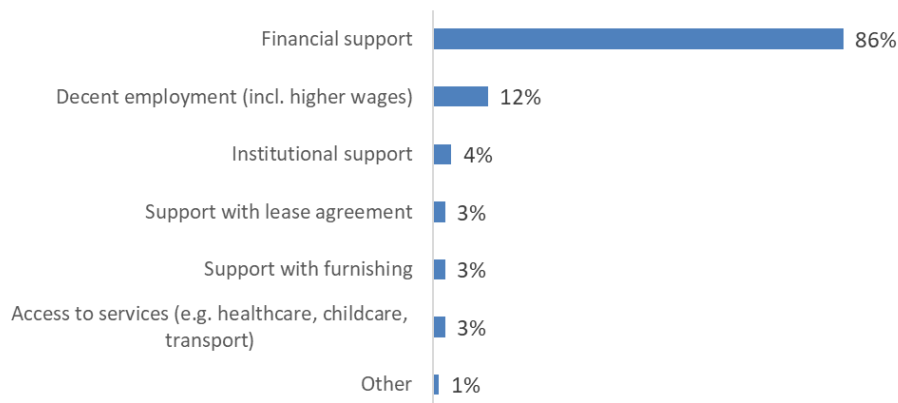
*“One solution could be a loan at 0% from the government to cover the initial instalment for the apartment and free individual legal support to check and explain the contract conditions.”*

Prague.

Overall, respondents provided that financial support alone would not be enough to realise a successful and sustainable relocation to standard housing and that it should be coupled with support in finding decent housing, in the administrative steps for renting a home, including assistance with the preparation of necessary documentation, and support in reviewing lease agreements to protect the rights of the lessee. The financial barriers to relocation are significant and omnipresent but should also be considered in the broader context of other needs.

### Support needed to be able to move

Note: multiple answers were possible





# Recommendations

## I. Systemic recommendations

### 1. Timely and efficient information campaigns

Timely and robust information campaigns on upcoming legislative changes deriving from the central level of government are essential for the integration prospects of Ukrainian temporary protection holders.

It is recommended that information campaigns begin through one trusted website at the national level, which provides up-to-date information. This is already the case for many information campaigns, and the continuation of this practice is encouraged. The information should then be disseminated by Regional Coordinators and other designated focal points of the main providers of integration services, including local authorities, non-governmental organisations, homeowners and managers of collective accommodation facilities. These entities, in turn, would further disseminate the information to temporary protection holders in languages and formats that are accessible, clear and understandable. The streamlining of information campaigns in this manner would ensure that the accuracy of information is maintained, which in turn would serve to generate trust by the consumers of the information – namely, Ukrainian temporary protection holders residing in collective accommodation facilities.

### 2. Role of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

It is recommended that in line with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs' [Strategy on Social Inclusion 2021-2030](#), all relevant sections, departments and units, especially those working on the agendas of social benefits, social work, social housing and social services cooperate closely. Moreover, the European Funds and International Cooperation Section ought to coordinate their programs aimed at measures supporting the relocation of Ukrainian temporary protection holders to standard housing with their counterparts at the Department for Asylum and Migration Policy at the Ministry of the Interior.

The Section of Social Insurance and Non-Insurance Benefits of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs should play a pivotal role in tailoring targeted financial support to vulnerable Ukrainian temporary protection holders and their caretakers, as per recommendation no. 3 below.

Other relevant departments and units working on social work, social housing and social services should methodically lead relocations and the prevention of homelessness, subscribing to the principles and tools described in the Strategy on Social Inclusion 2021-2030 (predominantly chapters 1.4 and 4.6).

### 3. Financial assistance<sup>39</sup>

It is recommended that the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs begins taking steps towards the unification of the Czech welfare system with the support system established by *Lex Ukraine*

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<sup>39</sup> Financial assistance is also recommended by Habitat for Humanity in the context of the Ukrainian crisis response: Habitat for Humanity, *Long-term housing solutions for Ukrainian refugees in Poland, Germany, Hungary, Romania*

and its amendments. The inclusion of Ukrainian temporary protection holders into the mainstream system ought to begin as soon as possible targeting the most vulnerable temporary protection holders first. Prioritisation of the most vulnerable persons may serve to prevent negative consequences such as homelessness and debt-bondage when it comes to relocations to standard housing. It should be considered that a unified welfare system may be more widely accepted by Czech nationals, as it would negate the perceived notion of benefits being conferred exclusively to Ukrainian temporary protection holders.

It is recommended that the first step to be taken is the adjustment of the humanitarian allowance for Ukrainian temporary protection holders (*HuD*). The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs could opt for one or several of the following measures:

- a) **Deduction of only 50-70% of income from entitlement to *HuD*.** Stakeholders stressed that the design of *HuD*, specifically the deduction of income from the entitlement to *HuD*, pushes many temporary protection holders into the informal sectors of the labour market. To mitigate this, it is recommended that only a part of the income (50-70%) should be deducted from the entitlement to *HuD*, which would reduce the risk of temporary protection holders falling into poverty whilst also motivating them to pursue formal employment opportunities.<sup>40</sup>
- b) **Increased *HuD* for vulnerable groups after September 2024.** As the system of cost-free accommodation will be limited to 90 days after arrival from September 2024, thousands of temporary protection holders who are categorised as falling into vulnerable groups will be required to pay for accommodation. To systematically mitigate the risks of homelessness, negative coping mechanisms and other serious risks, vulnerable groups (as they should remain defined by the legal framework) should be supported through increased *HuD*. It should be designed in a manner that would allow vulnerable temporary protection holders to cover the real costs of rental units.
- c) **Possibility to apply for selected social benefits.** It is recommended that the possibility of applying for selected social benefits, primarily within the State Social Care pillar of the public welfare system, be extended to temporary protection holders. The definition of vulnerable groups does not cover all temporary protection holders in need of financial assistance. Therefore, raising eligible housing costs (*započítateľné náklady na bydlení*) only for vulnerable groups will not cover all temporary protection holders in need. It is recommended that social benefits include, at a minimum, a financial contribution for care (*příspěvek na péči*) and a financial contribution for persons with disabilities. An alternative avenue to achieve a similar impact could be to improve the availability of emergency material assistance (*MOP*).<sup>41</sup>

#### 4. Mitigating debts

To respond to the changes in the application of the vulnerability criteria in *Lex Ukraine V*. that led to an increase in the number of temporary protection holders falling into debt only to be

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and Slovakia: Policy Brief, (February 2023), available at:

[https://www.habitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/Policy%20Brief\\_Long%20term%20housing%20solutions%20for%20Ukrainian%20refugees\\_February%202023.pdf](https://www.habitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/Policy%20Brief_Long%20term%20housing%20solutions%20for%20Ukrainian%20refugees_February%202023.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> PAQ Research, *Práci v Česku už mají dvě třetiny uprchlíků. Většina stále pracuje pod kvalifikací*, (9 August 2023).

<sup>41</sup> We are aware of a relatively wide scope of *MOP*. Nevertheless, in practice it has not proved to be an efficient tool to address financial distress of most Ukrainian temporary protection holders (see also Access to Social Welfare Benefits above and Recommendation no. 4 below).

able to cover accommodation and living costs, the government should stand ready to assist in resolving their financial difficulties in a system that was designed by the state. To this end, it is recommended to:

- Develop, and through relevant EU funding financially support, instruments that contribute to the prevention and mitigation of debts related to housing.
- Cooperate with social endowment funds or programs for guaranteed housing established by municipalities and non-governmental organisations.<sup>42</sup>
- Provide a genuine option to be awarded the “emergency immediate assistance” (*MOP*) allowance. This includes raising awareness about the possibility of using *MOP* to cover costs relating to housing, and the harmonisation of the practice of granting *MOP* across the Labour Offices.

## **5. Limited network of collective accommodation facilities for new arrivals, the most vulnerable and temporary residents**

To respond to the specific needs of new arrivals, the most vulnerable temporary protection holders and temporary residents, it is recommended that the government continue to maintain a network of emergency collective shelters, ideally either publicly owned or contracted by municipalities with private property owners. These facilities would be operated outside the provisions of Act No. 108/2006 Coll. on social services, as amended (hereinafter Social Services Act), and would provide accommodation to:

- New refugee arrivals;
- The most vulnerable temporary protection holders who are in urgent need of housing without specific care;
- Temporary protection holders in emergency situations due to loss of work, debt or debt-bondage, or other serious circumstances;
- Persons with low motivation and/or agency, coupled with other factors (such as a lack of Czech language skills, health factors, old age, etc.) that make relocation exceptionally challenging.

To ensure the adequacy of the facilities, it is recommended to establish and enforce minimum standards and rules of stay in collective accommodation facilities. The minimum standard could be a part of contracts with private or public owners or designed as a set of conditions for implementing subsidised housing projects.

The location of the facility should be considered within the standards. Facilities in remote areas with poor transport accessibility should not be included in this network due to the likelihood of their generating low integration potential for their residents.

For the most vulnerable Ukrainian temporary protection holders with specific care needs, residential social facilities governed by the Social Services Act should be available; their capacities should be enhanced so that they can absorb also Ukrainians and their staff methodologically guided on how to work with foreign nationals.

At the level of municipalities and their social departments, it is recommended to maintain and update information on the network of collective accommodation facilities and their capacities.

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<sup>42</sup> Social Foundation of the City of Prague is an example of such a fund, operating Housing Support Programme or Support in a Difficult Situation Programme: <https://www.socialnifond.praha.eu/>.

Finally, the government could consider opening up relevant EU funding for methodological, logistical and financial support at regional and municipal levels for public governance, particularly social departments. The target group of grant programs designed for the Ukrainian response should at a minimum be 50% Ukrainian temporary protection holders. Similarly, target groups for other grant programs should be tailored to include Ukrainian temporary protection holders.

## **6. Counselling and social work in the field**

At the municipal level, it is recommended to conduct regular mapping of temporary protection holders who are in need of assistance with housing after September 2024.

The government is encouraged to provide financial support to maintain the network of field workers and multidisciplinary teams who monitor and assist the most vulnerable temporary protection holders. Their work can serve to collect data on their whereabouts and needs. The field workers could conduct regular visits, build trust and support the identification of housing solutions. It is recommended that this measure cover counselling outside of social services, as established by Social Services Act, with the exception of holistic case management where needed.

Enhancing access to psychosocial counselling providers is a necessary intervention to respond to the prevalence of mental health conditions in Ukrainian communities. This would support overcoming the psychological barriers of relocating to standard housing as well as the general mental health conditions experienced by many temporary protection holders in Czechia, as evidenced by our research.

It is recommended that the support to field workers be channelled through regional or municipal networks. In this regard, the Regional Coordinators proved to be efficient in gathering information from regions and sharing it at the national level. As such, they should be further utilised and supported in the coordination of social and integration work within regions.

## **7. Community-based support work**

Concerning community-based support, it is recommended that the government establish programs to capacitate those temporary protection holders who require only targeted support, including psychosocial, material and financial. This could be, for example, through the silver economy, community groups and centres, or other initiatives.

The government could consider developing, and through relevant EU funding financially supporting, a community sponsorship program for Ukrainian temporary protection holders.<sup>43</sup> This measure could be particularly beneficial to new temporary protection arrivals who have a limited period of 90 days to establish themselves on the job and rental markets before they are required to begin paying for accommodation. UNHCR can provide technical support and guidance on the establishment of community sponsorship programs.

For young temporary protection holders, peer programs with Czech students operated through non-governmental organisations, schools and universities could be advanced to enhance social networks to mitigate the losses to community networks where temporary protection

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<sup>43</sup> More information can be found on the dedicated UNHCR website - UNHCR, *Community Sponsorship*, available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/community-sponsorship>.

holders, including children and adolescents, are compelled to relocate. Moreover, the government could also consider the establishment of housing programs supporting cohabitation under relevant EU funding.

To support the self-reliance and individual agency of temporary protection holders, it is recommended that the government continue to invest in Czech language courses and vocational training programs or employment services. Importantly, the government may wish to engage temporary protection holders experienced in providing psychosocial support in Ukraine through targeted training and certification so that they could deliver such services.

The training activities should take place in times and localities suitable to Ukrainian temporary protection holders, with the quality and the correct level regularly checked. It is recommended that temporary protection holders are meaningfully consulted in their design to ensure that they are fit for purpose. The delivery of training activities could be arranged and operated by municipalities and financed by relevant EU funding.

## **8. Instruments to assist Ukrainian temporary protection holders with relocation**

It is recommended that instruments are developed to assist temporary protection holders in overcoming the main barriers faced in transitioning from collective accommodation facilities to standard housing. To this end, the government could consider the following measures:

- Develop an information package in the Ukrainian language on non-governmental organisations, municipalities and other service providers providing counselling on the rental market, relocation and housing, ideally through local Contact Points for Housing,<sup>44</sup> where applicable.
- Provide financial and methodological support to the establishment of Contact Points for Housing, which provide counselling to Ukrainian temporary protection holders in the scope of their services.
- Provide donations or interest-free loans by municipalities or non-government organisations and distribute to Ukrainian temporary protection holders with low-incomes for relocation to standard housing. This financial support could be particularly beneficial in the payment of the rental deposit and first month's rent and covering expenditures related to transportation and the purchase of furniture.

*“We need help with making a rental agreement. Often, they don't return the deposit due to poorly conditioned contracts - this is a problem. It would be good if Czechs could vouch for us that we are trustworthy people to rent to.”*

Vlašim, Central Bohemia.

<sup>44</sup> *Kontaktní místo pro bydlení*, established, for example, in several districts of Prague and Brno. Information about the scope of services and an overview of projects operating them is available on the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs' website dedicated to social housing: [https://socialnibydeni.mpsv.cz/socialni-bydeni/temata/kontakt-ni-mista-pro-bydeni#:~:text=Kontaktn%C3%AD%20m%C3%ADsto%20pro%20bydlen%C3%AD%20\(KMB,tedy%20vylou%C4%8Den%C3%AD%20ze%20standardn%C3%ADho%20bydlen%C3%AD\).](https://socialnibydeni.mpsv.cz/socialni-bydeni/temata/kontakt-ni-mista-pro-bydeni#:~:text=Kontaktn%C3%AD%20m%C3%ADsto%20pro%20bydlen%C3%AD%20(KMB,tedy%20vylou%C4%8Den%C3%AD%20ze%20standardn%C3%ADho%20bydlen%C3%AD).)

## 9. Incentives to motivate private property owners

The successful relocation of Ukrainian temporary protection holders to standard housing will require the engagement of homeowners. As such, it is recommended to develop guarantees to motivate property owners to lease their apartments to Ukrainian temporary protection holders. The focus should primarily be on regions where the rental market is not oversaturated. The guarantees should encompass a set of standards and rules for the property owners to protect the rights of Ukrainian temporary protection holders.

The guarantees should go hand-in-hand with debt-prevention measures and could include:

- Programs of so-called guaranteed housing<sup>45</sup> operated by municipalities or non-governmental organisations to optimise the housing search for Ukrainian temporary protection holders. Non-governmental organisations or municipalities would support and serve as an intermediary and the guarantor for the payment of debts on rent for up to three months.
- Establishing formal cooperation between municipalities or non-governmental organisations with real estate agents in commercial rental agencies. The cooperation would focus on the segment of Ukrainian temporary protection holders and provide tailored assistance to them in their housing search.
- Providing financial support to existing social rental agencies<sup>46</sup> for them to extend their activities to support Ukrainian temporary protection holders.

## II. Recommendations for specific groups

In addition to the overarching barrier of finances, which is experienced by the vast majority of Ukrainian temporary protection holders residing in collective accommodation facilities, three categories of temporary protection holders were identified according to their situations and needs. The specificities of each of these groups ought to be considered in the design of social support.

### 1. Vulnerable residents facing multiple challenges

*“For my family it’s very bad that the notion of “vulnerable groups” was omitted and that I would need to pay for the accommodation. I would like the government to help.”*

Liberec.

<sup>45</sup> Guaranteed housing is based on the use of the private rental housing segment for social purposes. In exchange for guaranteeing financial or other remedies of risks, the private property owner agrees to the conditions of the system operator, typically a non-governmental organisation or municipality. For more details, consult e.g. [Vytvoření systému dostupného bydlení – Agentura pro sociální začlenování \(socialni-zaclenovani.cz\)](#).

<sup>46</sup> Social rental agencies as one form of “guaranteed housing” can be operated by municipalities, NGOs or as CSR sections of commercial rental agencies. The main and most complex rental agency was established by the City of Prague in 2021. For the scope of their services, please consult: <https://najemniagentura.praha.eu/>. Social rental agencies are also recommended by Habitat for Humanity in the context of the Ukrainian crisis response: Habitat for Humanity, *Long-term housing solutions for Ukrainian refugees in Poland, Germany, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia*: Policy Brief, (February 2023).

This group includes single parents of young children, elderly temporary protection holders, temporary protection holders with disabilities and their carers, those with serious medical conditions and/or chronic diseases, temporary protection holders with moderate to severe mental health conditions, and those with little to no knowledge of the Czech language. The intersecting nature of the challenges prevents persons in this category from becoming economically self-reliant. This is a group that requires continuous and tailored support.

A strategy for the support of individuals within this group could consist of:

- Financial assistance: Holistic access to the welfare system should not only assist in securing rental housing but could also support in maintaining it (see also recommendation no. 3 above).
- Case management services: This includes assigning social workers or counsellors to assist individuals by providing information, supporting the housing search, assisting with budgeting, and supporting administrative tasks and access to other support services (see also recommendation no. 6 above).
- Residential social facilities: Enhancing capacities for most vulnerable Ukrainian temporary protection holders with the need of specific and/or 24/7 care.
- Interpreter services: Ensuring access to interpretation for individuals who may require language assistance when navigating the rental housing market, accessing support services, or communicating with property owners and employers.
- Job training and employment services: Offer job training programs, vocational courses, and employment services to help individuals secure legal employment. This can include resume-building, interview preparation and job placement assistance. (See also recommendation no. 7 above).
- Czech language training: Offer classes tailored to the needs of individuals (see also recommendation no. 7 above).
- Legal assistance: Provide access to legal assistance for tenants facing eviction or discrimination. Support in the drafting and review of contracts to protect the rights of the lessee should also be provided. This assistance could be in the form of partnerships with non-governmental organisations.
- Financial literacy workshops: Offer workshops on financial literacy to assist individuals in managing their finances effectively, budgeting for rent and other expenses, and building savings for future housing stability.
- Community-based support: Consideration should be given to the social ties residents have established in the collective accommodation facilities. Establishing community support services, such as childcare assistance, support groups or food assistance could contribute to supporting successful relocations (see also recommendation no. 7).

## **2. Self-reliant residents with low-income or other less complex dependencies**

*“My wife works; I have a disability but also want to work. The main challenge [to relocate] is the absence of first-hand support during the move. Any kind of housing would do for the first 3-5 months. Then, I will not need support at all. We will be able to pay it on our own, and pay taxes equally just as Czechs.”*

*Plasy, Plzeň.*

This group comprises persons who are capable and strongly willing to work but face language barriers or lack of information. Persons in this group require some support through counselling and targeted programs, mainly at the beginning of their transition to standard housing. With the initial support, they should be able to become self-reliant.

A strategy for the support of individuals within this group could consist of:

- Financial assistance: Access to the welfare system and financial incentives mainly at the beginning of their relocation to standard housing (see also recommendations no. 3 and 8 above).
- Information sessions on housing options: Organise information sessions on available housing options, rental procedures, and tenants' rights. Provide guidance on how to search for housing, understand lease agreements, and navigate the rental market effectively (see also recommendation no. 8).
- Czech language training: Offer classes tailored to the needs of individuals (see also recommendation no. 7).
- Employment assistance programs: Offer employment assistance programs that accommodate individuals with limited language proficiency. This can include job readiness training, resume-building workshops, and job placement services tailored to the skills and qualifications (see also recommendation no. 7).
- Community engagement: Facilitate opportunities for community engagement and social integration to help individuals build networks and support systems in their new environments. This can include participation in community events, volunteering or cultural exchange programs (see also recommendation no. 7).
- Peer support groups: Establish peer support groups or buddy systems where individuals can connect with others who have successfully navigated similar challenges (see also recommendation no. 7).

### **3. Residents who lack the motivation to relocate to standard housing or to integrate**

*“We should respect the specific situations of every individual and leave them the possibility to choose. There are refugees who only wait to come back home once the war is over. But we should not leave them behind and keep the current support that works well for them once and as long as they are here.”*

Consultation with the Regional Coordinators

This group includes persons who:

- a. Consider their stay in Czechia as temporary and therefore do not wish to relocate as this could be a physical, health-related and financial burden without long-term dividends;
- b. Do not wish to relocate. They may have created strong social ties within the community and leaving would mean a loss of security and a support system.

A strategy for the support of individuals within this group could consist of:

- Information provision and counselling: Provide detailed information about the benefits of transitioning to standard housing, including the potential for improved living



conditions, increased privacy, and long-term stability. Highlight available support services, such as language assistance, employment assistance and legal aid to alleviate concerns about the relocation process (see also recommendations no. 1 and 6 above).

- Ensuring decent living conditions in collective accommodation facilities: Implement and enforce minimum standards for living conditions in collective facilities to ensure that residents have access to safe, clean and dignified housing (see also recommendation no. 5).
- Financial assistance: Access to the welfare system and financial incentives (see also recommendation no. 3).

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