

[Deliverable D2.2]

Policy recommendations for improving the encounters and communication between SLBs and FDPs

***Evidence from 55 frontline workers, 73 Ukrainian FDPs, and 18 returnees to
Ukraine across six EU states***

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the aftermath of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, over 8 million Ukrainians have been forcibly displaced across the European Union under the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD, Council Directive 2001/55/EC). With the TPD set to expire in March 2027 (and potentially be prolonged to 2028), decisions about what comes next — for displaced persons, for the institutions that serve them, and for the frontline workers who carry out that work daily — are urgent.

These Policy Recommendations (PRs) present an integrated analysis of encounters between street-level bureaucrats (SLBs), civil society organizations (CSOs) and Ukrainian forcibly displaced people (FDPs) in six European Union states of the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) —Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Sweden. The PRs constitute Deliverable D2.2 within Work Package 2, which forms part of the Horizon Europe project Migration, Affective Geopolitics and European Democracy in Times of Military Conflicts (MAGnituDe).

The qualitative evidence analysed here draw from 17 focus groups with 55 frontline workers — including SLBs and CSOs working in labour market, housing and education — and 73 interviews with Ukrainian FDPs, conducted across Sweden, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Finland. It also draws on 18 interviews with Ukrainians who had previously been displaced to one of these six countries and subsequently returned to Ukraine. All empirical material has been collected and preliminary analysed by the national teams of the MAGnituDe between the Fall 2025 and Spring 2026.

The comprehensive analysis of all the national reports was conducted by UGOT and it reveals a central finding: a structural gap exists between the legal protection granted by the TPD and the quality of reception that Ukrainian FDPs actually experience — in terms of access to services, consistency of treatment, and dignity in everyday encounters. It is important to acknowledge an extraordinary commitment of individual FIWs, especially among CSOs, many of whom went far beyond their formal roles to support Ukrainian FDPs, particularly in the first year of displacement. However, a systematic observation across all countries studied suggests that positive outcomes were too often the product of individual dedication rather than institutional design, and varied considerably depending on the period of displacement, the types of support, and the specific organisations encountered. Other key findings point to that the quality of encounters and communication seems to depend on which individual a displaced person happens to encounter — and on that individual's opportunities or willingness to go beyond their mandate — rather than on consistent institutional design. Ukrainian FDPs describe positive outcomes in terms of 'luck', while frontline workers describe the use of extensive informal discretion to address shortcomings of the temporary protection and its national implementation. Frontline workers and CSOs across all six countries report signs of burnout and vicarious trauma, rooted in a moral strain — including situations where following the rules causes direct harm to the people they are serving — consequences that remain largely unaddressed by systemic policy and vary considerably by organisation rather than by country.

The majority of Ukrainian FDPs are highly educated and professionally experienced yet encounter labour market institutions that treat them as undifferentiated recipients of standard services: what frontline workers say and offer in these encounters — whether they ask, listen, and communicate a visible pathway forward — directly impact whether FDPs feel recognised or devalued. Displacement as family presents a particular challenge that policy frameworks have not anticipated: in several countries, frontline workers describe meeting parents leaning toward return while having to consider that their children have built lives, friendships, and educational trajectories in the host country — a tension that shapes every practical decision families make, and frontline workers are left to handle these concerns without sufficient support or guidance. Evidence from Ukrainians who have returned to Ukraine reinforces that displacement is not a linear journey

with a clear endpoint: return is often one phase in an ongoing trajectory, and the decision to go back is conditional and reversible. Finally, across all countries studied, the encounters with the receiving states are shaped not only by administrative rules but also by the affective dimensions of mass displacement. The war has generated emotions of solidarity, exhaustion, and personal connection among both frontline workers and displaced persons—dynamics that no institutional framework has yet adequately acknowledged or addressed.

This document presents 10 PRs, arranged from those most focused on direct encounters to those addressing the most fundamental structural issues. PRs 1–4 address the quality, content, and sustainability of encounters directly. PRs 5–8 address the infrastructure and context that shapes what encounters can achieve. PRs 9–10 address the structural preconditions — practical access alongside legal recognition, and urgent clarification of post-TPD legal status — without which encounter-level improvements cannot be sustained.

The recommendations are addressed to EU policymakers (DG Home, DG Employment), national ministries of migration and integration, municipal decision-makers and public sector institutions, and civil society funders.

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Abbreviations

Project Abbreviations

HUG	Help Ukraine Gothenburg-Sweden
UPF	Universidad Pompeu Fabra-Spain
LSMC	Lietuvos Socialiniu Mokslu Centras- Lithuania and Latvia
KKNU	V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University-Ukraine
UEF	Ita-Suomen Yliopisto-Finland
UG	Uniwersytet Gdanski- Poland
UGR	Universitaet Greifswald -Germany
ZAVOD APIS	Zavod Za Avtorsko Produkcijo Izobrazevanje Inovativnost In Sodelovanje- Slovenia
UGOT	University Of Gothenburg-Sweden

Other

TPD	Temporary Protection Directive (Council Directive 2001/55/EC)
FDP	Forcibly Displaced Person. The term “Ukrainian FDPs” refers to people who have fled to Europe because of Russia’s full-scale invasion in 2022.
FIW	Frontline workers is a common term for all workers at the frontline of public services, including street-level bureaucrats (SLBs), and civil society organisations (CSOs) working directly with Ukrainian FDPs.
SLB	Street-level bureaucrat, i.e., an employee at a state or municipal agency working directly with clients
CSO	Civil society organisation, in this report a civil society or other type of non-governmental organization working directly with affected groups. CSO can run their own independent projects or sign an agreement with the local municipality, delegating the delivery of social services to the non-governmental actors.
PRs	Policy Recommendations

1. Introduction

In the aftermath of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, over 8 million Ukrainians have been forcibly displaced across the states of the European Union. The EU Temporary Protection Directive (TPD, Council Directive 2001/55/EC), launched in March 2022, granted rapid and uniform formal protection — including residence rights, work permits, and access to basic social support — in a response that remains unique in the history of forced migration in Europe. While the TPD was implemented across all six countries of the Baltic Sea region studied in the MAGnituDe project — Sweden, Poland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania and Finland, the national frameworks governing FDPs' access to labour market, housing and education varied considerably in their scope, pace, and generosity (see European Commission, 2025 for a full account of the national legal frameworks). It is important to acknowledge an extraordinary commitment of individual FIWs and especially among CSOs, many of whom went far beyond their formal roles to support Ukrainian FDPs, particularly in the first year of displacement. However, a systematic observation across all countries studied is that positive outcomes were too often the product of individual dedication rather than institutional design, and varied considerably depending on the period of displacement, the types of support, and the specific organisations encountered.

The PRs, as a one of the WP2 deliverables, highlights the role of human encounters among Ukrainian FDPs, SLBs and CSOs in fostering trust in democratic institutions and processes among newly arrived migrants. MAGnituDe suggests that encounters between FDPs and receiving states represented by SLBs have a long-lasting impact on how migrants perceive their new states of residence and whether they trust state institutions enough to become engaged in democratic participation. Furthermore, the reception of Ukrainian FDPs in various countries has shown that SLBs had to adapt to a new legislation and policies, often with the assistance of the CSOs, who were the first to meet the immediate needs of people seeking protection. That is why we argue that encounters among FDPs, SLBs and CSOs are crucial for understanding the process of political participation among FDPs, since they are interpellated in these encounters foremost through their citizenship and nationality.

The PRs on improving encounters and communication among SLBs, CSOs and FDPs from Ukraine are grounded in a comprehensive analysis of empirical data across all studied countries. These qualitative data include evidence from 17 focus groups with 55 frontline workers (including SLBs and CSOs in housing, labour market, and education) and 73 qualitative interviews with Ukrainian FDPs, conducted in Sweden, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Finland between the Fall 2025 and Spring 2026. It also incorporates perspectives from 18 Ukrainian FDPs who had previously been displaced to one of these six countries and subsequently returned to Ukraine. After a brief outline of the key concepts and methodology, findings presented below include cross-cutting patterns that hold across majority of the countries studied, and country-specific findings, which are noted where relevant. PRs address EU policymakers (DG Home, DG Employment); national ministries of migration and integration; municipal decision-makers, public sector institutions and civil society funders.

2. Key concepts and methodology

Among MAGnituDe's key concepts is the feminist concept of affective geopolitics (AG), which draws on the feminist understanding of (geo)politics as multi-scalar and pays a particular attention to how the scale of personal, intimate relations are shaped and shaping geopolitical tensions and divisions (Massaro & Williams 2013). Using this concept, the analysis can highlight how geopolitical narratives and imaginations shape everyday human encounters through which social, political, and cultural identities get constructed and contested. AG dedicates particular attention to the role of affect, emotions, and corporeality in doing geopolitics on a level of mundane interactions and practices (Gokariksel & Secor 2018; Waller-Carr 2020). The

relationship between the state and the migrants in focus of these PRs are mediated by the frontline workers, meaning all workers at the frontline of public services, including SLBs and CSOs working directly with Ukrainian FDPs. SLBs are civil servants who have direct contacts with FDPs in their capacity to carry out and/or enforce the actions required by a government's laws and public policies in areas ranging from safety and security to education and social services (e.g. police officers, border guards, social workers, migration office case workers, public school teachers). In majority of European societies, SLBs outreach is assisted by CSOs actors, or non-governmental organisations that provide social services, advocacy, and community support outside of state structures. CSOs range from large welfare associations to small volunteer-based organisations. Both SLBs and CSOs use discretion as a capacity to interpret and adapt policy rules when dealing with individual cases. Discretion is an inherent feature of street-level work — it enables flexibility and responsiveness but also carries the risk of arbitrariness and unequal treatment.

Methodologically, this deliverable is based on SensArticulate methods, encompassing elements of art-based, experiential, and embodied techniques for investigating sensitive issues in a traumatic context of the mass displacement due to the military conflict. Both during the focus groups with FIWs and the individual interviews with Ukrainian FDPs researchers registered, for instance, how the participants process and express their affective responses to traumatic events, how they interact with each other and with the researchers, in order to co-create meaningful representations that are not only intellectually profound, but also emotionally resonant. Such an approach is particularly effective in capturing the nuanced affective experiences of those living through but also working with people impacted by military conflicts. Using this methodology, required to ensure that all research activities are carried out with empathy and a deep understanding of the subjects involved. This involved creating environments where emotional safety is paramount, allowing for the safe exploration of affective dimensions in research.

PRs are based on the comprehensive analysis of data collected by each national team of MAGnituDe. First of all, the country specific evidence draws from 17 SensArticulate-based focus groups with SLBs and CSOs, focusing on everyday encounters among FIW and Ukrainian FDPs. The focus groups were conducted in Sweden, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Germany and Finland. Among the FIWs in these countries, there were job coaches, housing coordinators at the municipal level and from the NGO sector, social workers at schools, language teachers, integration coordinators, etc. Notably, a considerable proportion of the FIWs in Sweden, Germany, and Latvia were Ukrainians, either members of established diaspora communities or individuals who arrived in these countries following Russia's full-scale invasion. Focus groups aimed to reveal the affective dimension of the frontliners work, namely, how their personal perception of the war in Ukraine and their affective response to the invasion may influence their interactions with FDPs.

To assess the agency of FDPs in their communication with receiving states and the process of political identity construction through the encounters between FDPs, SLBs, and CSOs, MAGnituDe researchers in six BSR states conducted SensArticulate-based interviews with Ukrainian FDPs - 10 in each of the countries - Germany, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Sweden, and 5 in Poland. The KGNU research team in Ukraine conducted 18 interviews with FDPs who already returned to Ukraine. Among the 91 interview participants, 71 were women and 20 were men. Questions addressed to Ukrainian FDPs were about their migration trajectories and sense of being welcomed in the respective host countries, FDPs' perspectives on encounters with local bureaucracies, their opportunities at the labour market, housing and education, generational aspects of family displacement and orientation for the future. Importantly, the perspective of the returnees on encounters with the European states, other migrants, and host societies is important because it may show the perspective of people who didn't for any reason succeed in their integration. The understanding of factors leading to success or failures in integration of FDPs in European societies is among one of MAGnituDe's major objectives.

3. What the Evidence Shows

The MAGnituDe project takes as its starting point that Russia's war against Ukraine is reshaping the Baltic Sea region not only through military and political aggression but also through the affective dimensions of mass displacement. FIWs across all studied countries describe their initial reactions to the invasion of 24 February 2022 in strikingly similar terms: shock, disbelief, fear and an immediate, overwhelming impulse to act, based on solidarity and empathy with Ukraine. This reaction was not experienced as a distant geopolitical event but as a personal and moral rupture that demanded a response. In all countries, participants describe adjusting ordinary professional routines, volunteering spontaneously, and mobilizing networks — often before any institutional framework existed to support them. The analysis also shows that over time, tensions and a sense of fatigue subsequently take over when the immediate crisis caused by the war turns into the everyday struggle of providing decent services to millions of people seeking help. The PRs focus on these concrete everyday encounters between Ukrainian forcibly displaced persons and the institutions of host societies, providing public services through frontline workers.

The central finding in the analysis of data across six countries and among the returnees to Ukraine is a structural gap between the legal protection stipulated by the TPD and access to rights and services in practice. This structural gap produces institutional deficiencies—such as poor inter-institutional coordination, limited proactive information on changing entitlements, and insufficient psychological support for frontline workers—that affect not only administrative processes, but also how displaced persons experience host states and how frontline workers experience their work. With the TPD set to expire in March 2027, with a looming chance to be prolonged to 2028, the urgency of addressing these gaps is acute.

Six cross-cutting themes emerge from the data. Together, they reveal a reception system that consistently places the burden of bridging institutional deficiencies on individuals — both the frontline workers who implement policy and the displaced persons who navigate it.

3.1 The encounter gap: inconsistent treatment and the role of civil society

Across all six countries and among the returnees, the quality of encounters and communication experiences is perceived to be shaped not primarily by institutional design but by which individual they happen to encounter. FDPs describe positive outcomes in terms of 'luck' and meeting 'the right person'. SLBs in their turn describe exercising wide informal discretion — bending rules, finding workarounds, going beyond their mandate. These are two perspectives on the same structural failure: when the institutional design of reception systems is inadequate, individuals absorb the consequences, and outcomes become unpredictable and unequal.

Discretion inherent in SLBs' work is not problematic per se — in many cases it is the mechanism through which FDPs receive genuinely responsive treatment. The problem is that positive outcomes depend on the goodwill and judgement of individual workers rather than on consistent institutional frameworks. This problem is reflected in the interviews with Ukrainian FDPs across all six countries, who emphasise that while 'bureaucracy works as a machine', in some cases, rule-based practices are experienced not as fair but as impersonal or insufficiently responsive to individual circumstances.

Likewise, for returnees, the institutional effectiveness of receiving states can produce subjective feelings of dependence and alienation. They described their everyday life being structured through a standard set of mandatory procedures (registration, documents, insurance, employment), perceived as a sequence of institutional measures, requiring constant monitoring and engagement. Dependence on intermediaries (volunteers, NGOs, diaspora) came to play a key role, especially in the context of language barriers. This reinforces the feeling of asymmetry and vulnerability. Thus, institutional embeddedness is not the same

as social integration. On the contrary, frequent interaction with bureaucratic structures can reinforce feelings of distance and dependence.

Among FDPs in the six studied countries, CSOs are evaluated more positively than the state institutions, reflecting their greater relational flexibility and personal investment. For instance, in Sweden and in Germany, CSOs went well beyond their intended supplementary role, stepping in to provide services — language courses, housing navigation, psychological support, employment guidance — that state systems were unable or unwilling to deliver during the critical early period. This arrangement is structurally fragile: it depends on organisational commitment and informal networks rather than stable funding or formal mandate.

3.2. Discretion and empathy at the personal costs of frontline work

The exercise of discretion and empathy are the primary professional resources of FIWs across all six countries. They are also their primary professional risks. Frontline workers describe extending themselves well beyond their formal role — giving out personal phone numbers, working outside contracted hours, using their own money and networks, absorbing the distress of FDPs who had no other point of contact in their host societies. These are not singular individual struggles: they are predictable outcomes of institutional frameworks that assign moral responsibility to frontline workers for decisions made at higher levels of governance. These personal examples witness an investment, filling the space left by institutional absence and reflect the exercise of professional judgement and a sense of moral responsibility that formal role definitions fail to accommodate.

The consequences are well-documented across the data: signs of burnout and vicarious trauma are reported in focus groups in all six countries. Participants' experiences vary considerably depending on the organisation rather than the country: in some cases, training in trauma-informed practice was offered belatedly — typically only after workers themselves raised the need, and often too late to prevent burnout — with workers describing having to navigate the emotional weight of traumatic client encounters without preparation or support. In other cases, structured peer support, weekly check-ins, and access to psychologist sessions have been developed proactively — demonstrating that wellbeing cultures of this kind are achievable. But where they exist, they depend on organisational initiative rather than systemic policy, and they remain the exception rather than the rule.

A further dimension is the tension between professional neutrality and personal engagement. In all six countries, frontline workers describe being pulled beyond their formal role by a sense of moral obligation — rooted partly in professional ethics and partly, for many workers with personal or family connections to Ukraine, in the direct emotional proximity to the crisis — that institutional frameworks do not accommodate. This tension is not unique to frontline work with Ukrainian FDPs, but the specific context of the war — the scale of displacement, the political salience of solidarity, and the fact that many workers actively chose this work because of solidarity with Ukraine — heightens it in ways that routine casework does not. This tension plays out differently depending on context. In Sweden, some CSO workers describe allowing residents to cook in shared facilities despite formal prohibitions, or continuing to respond to client calls outside contracted hours, because they experienced the rules as poorly calibrated to the urgency of the need. In Lithuania and Finland, frontline workers describe consciously stepping back from direct problem-solving — encouraging FDPs to navigate systems independently rather than doing it for them — as both a professional strategy for sustainable practice and a way of maintaining workable boundaries. In Poland, some frontliners describe having come to accept the blurring of professional and private life as a feature, not a problem, of their work. In none of the countries has this tension been resolved at the institutional level.

3.3 Organisational support: the gap between policy intent and frontline reality

FIWs across six countries describe repeated situations in which they are required to implement rules they consider unjust, communicate decisions that they think may harm clients, or choose between competing obligations — without institutional support for navigating these dilemmas. These are not isolated incidents of poor judgment: they are predictable outcomes of governance systems that delegate decision-making

authority to frontline workers — placing them in direct contact with individuals whose needs often cannot be adequately met within the rules they are required to apply — without providing the guidance, resources, or accountability structures needed to navigate the ethical tensions this creates.

Country-specific examples illustrate the range and seriousness of these dilemmas. In Sweden, FDPs who received a personal identification number simultaneously lost housing entitlement from the Migration Authority — a policy change communicated only through the Authority’s website, leaving frontline workers to manage the consequences. In Germany, *Jobcentre* placement officers made individualised decisions about access to job coaching, retraining, and employment support without accountability to the coaches themselves — creating structural arbitrariness in the most consequential domain. In Latvia, from 1 January 2026, legal amendments introduced a regulation whereby crossing the border with Russia or Belarus, or travelling to temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories, results in the revocation of temporary protection status. For some FDPs — particularly those from occupied territories for whom this may be the only route to visit family still in Ukraine — frontline workers experience applying this regulation as a direct conflict with their mandate to support vulnerable people. In Lithuania, frontline workers describe the moral stress of working with highly vulnerable FDPs — including cancer patients requiring specialist care — in a context of shrinking state resources that limit what they can offer. In Poland, the sudden withdrawal of state support left frontliners without guidance on how to respond to the acute anxiety of Ukrainian FDPs, who had been living in suspended temporality and were now confronting an uncertain future without the institutional infrastructure they had depended on.

3.4 The cost of institutional blindness to individual skills and qualifications

Encounters between frontline workers and Ukrainian FDPs are shaped not only by institutional rules but also by the individuals behind the FDP status — their professional background, qualifications, and prior working and life experience. Across all data, a recurring source of tension in these encounters is the discrepancy between the highly educated and professionally experienced profile of most Ukrainian FDPs and the standardised, often demeaning treatment they receive, particularly from labour market institutions. Frontline workers in Germany witness moral distress of being required to offer cleaning or warehouse work to architects, lawyers, or engineers. In Sweden, frontline workers describe ethical unease linked to institutional demands to push Ukrainian FDPs into any available job, as the minimal daily allowance provided under the TPD leaves them financially unable to wait for employment that matches their qualifications. In Latvia and Poland, frontline workers navigate the frustration of clients, whose qualifications are formally unrecognised despite clear professional competence.

What is important is that this discrepancy is not primarily a labour market problem — it is a problem emerging from the encounter itself. The moment a *Jobcentre* officer in Germany for instance offers an inappropriate job, or a caseworker fails to ask about prior qualifications, or a consultant assumes a client’s credentials do not transfer, is decisive for the Ukrainian FDP’s trust in the entire reception system. Frontline workers who exercise discretion effectively — by listening, engaging, and advocating — can partially compensate for these shortcomings. But they cannot substitute for qualification recognition systems, affordable requalification pathways, or adequate time and resources to conduct individualised consultations. The encounter is the point at which systemic failures become personal.

A further dimension of institutional blindness is that professional devaluation becomes most acute when no visible pathway forward exists. Ukrainian FDPs, who accept jobs below their qualifications, yet can envision a clear route upward—through language acquisition, retraining, or recognition of qualifications—do not describe feeling devalued in their encounters with frontline workers. This suggests that what frontline workers communicate and offer during these encounters matters greatly: conveying a credible path forward is itself a form of dignified treatment.

3.5 Encounter with families with children: a policy gap at the heart of frontline work

A dimension that surfaces consistently in frontline workers' accounts — and that is almost entirely absent from the policy frameworks within which they operate — is the intergenerational dynamics within the families they encounter. In Sweden, Germany and Poland, frontline workers report on meeting families, in which parents remain oriented toward return to Ukraine, while their children have built lives, friendships, language proficiency, and educational trajectories in the host country. These are not abstract future dilemmas: they shape what Ukrainian families are willing to invest in, what they ask frontline workers for, and how they respond to institutional decisions.

FIWs encounter this tension without tools to address it. There are no policy frameworks for the parent who wants to plan for return but whose child is unwilling to consider it; no guidance for the housing worker managing a family, whose situation has changed fundamentally since their initial placement; no training for the employment counsellor, whose client's decisions are shaped by a teenager's school friendships as much as by labour market opportunities. The encounter becomes a space in which workers absorb the complexity of situations that policy has not anticipated and cannot resolve.

Evidence from Ukrainians who have returned reinforces this observation: return is rarely the final endpoint that policy frameworks imply. Many returnees describe children who struggled to re-integrate in Ukraine, who lost their sense of belonging, and a pattern of repeated mobility in which return is only one phase rather than a concluding one. FIWs in receiving countries who understand this — who treat the question of future plans as genuinely open rather than assuming eventual return or permanent settlement — are better placed to provide support that is useful. Building this understanding into professional training and encounter frameworks is a practical step that requires policy intent, not only individual goodwill.

3.6 Temporary protection, permanent uncertainty: consequences of legal uncertainty of the post-TPD status

The approaching end of TPD in March 2027, which currently is discussed to be extended to 2028, functions as a structural shadow across every domain of reception in all six countries. The effects of uncertainty caused by protracted displacement are deeply tangible. Ukrainian FDPs describe being unable to fully commit to language learning because they do not know whether they will be allowed to stay; employers hesitate to offer permanent contracts for the same reason; and frontline workers report being unable to support long-term planning while legal status itself remains unresolved. Across all six countries, most Ukrainian FDPs express a desire to remain where they are—not only as a matter of preference, but because, for many families with integrated children, meaningful return has become both practically and psychologically difficult.

In all countries studied, FIWs describe a specific professional anxiety: they want to communicate clear post-TPD alternatives — work visa, student visa, permanent residence — but these pathways are not yet legally defined or accessible to their clients. Moreover, the ongoing withdrawal of state support has created acute uncertainty among FDPs, who had been living in suspended temporality without planning for the future, and who now face an uncertain horizon with fewer institutional resources than before. The TPD's approaching end is not only a legal transition: it is an emotional and relational reality that pervades every professional encounter.

4. Policy Recommendations

The following ten recommendations are grounded on extensive qualitative evidence across all six countries as well as interviews among returnees in Ukraine. They are ordered from those most focused on direct encounters to those addressing the most fundamental structural issues. PRs 1–4 address the quality, content, and sustainability of encounters directly. PRs 5–8 address the infrastructure and context that shapes what encounters can achieve. PRs 9–10 address the structural preconditions — practical access alongside legal recognition, and urgent clarification of post-TPD legal status — without which encounter-level improvements cannot be sustained.

Recommendation 1: Establish consistent service standards to reduce dependence on individual discretion

Discretion is currently the primary mechanism through which Ukrainian FDPs receive responsive treatment — and the primary source of inequality in reception outcomes. Receiving EU states should establish clear and enforceable service standards for frontline encounters across housing, employment, and education, including consistent information provision, defined response times, multilingual communication, and access to individual review in consequential decision-making processes. The goal is not to eliminate discretion — which will always be necessary in complex individual cases — but to ensure that the floor of dignified treatment is institutional, not personal.

Target: National Governments · Municipalities · Public Organisations

Recommendation 2: Train frontline workers as trauma-aware agents of democratic inclusion

Frontline workers are often the first — and sometimes the only — sustained point of contact between Ukrainian FDPs and the institutions in the receiving states. Their interactions shape not only practical outcomes, but also how displaced persons perceive and trust democratic institutions. Thus the receiving EU states should invest in training that equips frontline workers with two complementary capacities: first, sensitivity to trauma and mental health needs among FDPs, including the recognition that capacity for language learning, employment engagement, and administrative participation may be severely limited in the early stages of displacement and cannot be assumed; and second, understanding of their own role as representatives of democratic values and state legitimacy in encounters with people whose trust in institutions has often been profoundly shaken. Both dimensions should be reflected in service design across housing, labour market, and education — for instance, by building flexibility into language learning timelines and by ensuring that referral pathways to psychological support are integrated into standard casework protocols.

Target: National Governments · Public Organisations · Education Institutions · CSOs

Recommendation 3: Mandate proactive well-being support for frontline workers

Trauma-informed training, clinical supervision, and structured peer exchange must be mandatory features of any SLB or CSO role, involving regular contact with Ukrainian or other FDPs — made available before crisis emerges, not only in response to burnout. This applies equally to permanent and non-permanent staff, and to civil society workers cooperating with formal institutions or funded by grants. The data shows considerable

variation across organisations within the same country: where proactive support cultures exist, they produce better outcomes for both workers and clients; where the approach is reactive — with support offered only after burnout has occurred — the costs are visible in staff turnover, deteriorating service quality, and emotional exhaustion. Making proactive support systemic rather than dependent on individual organisations is a policy choice, not a technical limitation.

Target: National Governments · Public Organisations · Employers · Funders

Recommendation 4: Modernise bureaucratic communication and improve information accessibility

Reliance on institutional websites, paper letters, and FAQ pages as the primary channels for communicating changes in rules and regulations to Ukrainian FDPs' entitlements is inadequate and, in several documented cases, harmful. The receiving EU states should invest in proactive, multilingual, digital communication with persons seeking protection — including direct notification of changes in status and entitlements — and equip frontline workers to communicate major regulatory changes directly and in accessible formats. Germany's paper-based, letter-driven model — particularly alienating given Ukraine's highly developed Diia digital infrastructure — illustrates what is at stake when bureaucratic culture fails to adapt to the needs of its users.

Target: National Governments · Public Institutions

Recommendation 5: Fund civil society as essential infrastructure, not emergency improvisation

Civil society organisations are evaluated more positively than state institutions by FDPs in every country studied, and in Sweden and Germany they went well beyond their intended supplementary role to provide services that state systems were unable or unwilling to deliver. This arrangement is unsustainable: CSOs require stable, multi-year funding commensurate with their structural role not short-term project grants that reward delivery over institutional learning. Formal coordination mechanisms between CSOs and state institutions should become a permanent component of reception infrastructure, rather than being improvised through personal relationships and informal networks

Target: EU Commission · National Governments · Municipalities

Recommendation 6: Design differentiated, needs-based support pathways

Ukrainian FDPs are not a homogeneous group: their needs differ depending on time of arrival, educational background, professional experience, trauma exposure, language proficiency, family situation, and future orientations. Reception systems that treat Ukrainian FDPs as a homogeneous group create systematic mismatches between the support provided and their actual needs. Differentiated pathways should account for FDPs with clear professional routes as distinct from those needing more intensive guidance; for families with well-integrated children as distinct from those oriented toward return; and for those who have been in the host country for several years, whose needs are now qualitatively different from those of recent arrivals.

Target: National Governments · Municipalities · CSOs

Recommendation 7: Accelerate and subsidise qualification recognition

Professional devaluation is most acute when there is no visible pathway upward. The receiving states should streamline qualification recognition procedures, cap the costs of diploma validation, and develop accelerated requalification programmes in the labour shortage sectors — particularly in healthcare, education, and engineering. The evidence shows that Ukrainian FDPs working below their qualification level do not experience this devaluation as permanent when they can envision a clear path to advancement. Finland's

model of free access to education for immigrants of all ages, and Sweden's Express Svenska placement pilot, are evidence-based templates that should be evaluated for scaling.

Target: National Governments · Education Institutions

Recommendation 8: Develop policy frameworks that support non-linear mobility

Displacement is not a binary choice between staying and returning. Evidence from Ukrainian FDPs in the six host countries and from returnees to Ukraine shows that departure and return are phases in ongoing trajectories, not final decisions. Many families continue to be mobile between Ukraine and host countries, and the return does not necessarily mean the end of displacement. Policy frameworks should enable transnational pathways — preserving rights and entitlements during periods of return or re-migration — rather than treating mobility as a breach of condition for protection. Recognising pendulum mobility as a legitimate and foreseeable strategy is a precondition for designing reception systems that match how displacement is actually lived.

Target: EU Commission · Member States

Recommendation 9: Guarantee immediate practical access alongside formal legal recognition

Future reception frameworks must ensure that formal legal protection is accompanied by immediate access to language learning, employment services, housing pathways, and healthcare. The pattern documented across all countries studied — rapid legal access combined with delayed or inconsistent practical access, with personal networks functioning as the primary equaliser — must be treated as a political and policy failure, not an operational inevitability. Particular attention is needed for FDPs, who arrive without prior networks in the host country, who face dramatically worse outcomes in every domain studied.

Target: EU Commission · National Governments

Recommendation 10: Decide on and communicate post-TPD legal status urgently, ahead of March 2027

The European Commission and member states should urgently clarify post-TPD pathways — through residence permits, work visas, student visas, or other mechanisms — and communicate these clearly and proactively to both Ukrainian FDPs and frontline workers. Uncertainty is itself a policy cost: it undermines integration investment, employer commitment, and mental health among both FDPs and the frontline workers and places an unmanageable burden on frontline workers who are expected to advise clients on futures that policy has left undefined. A clear decision reached in 2026 would be far more beneficial—for integration outcomes, FDP wellbeing, and host-country institutions—than the same decision made under crisis conditions in March 2027.

Target: EU Commission · Member States

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