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Policy Brief

NOVA ASYLUM POLICY LAB

THE RECEPTION OF DISPLACED PERSONS FROM UKRAINE IN PORTUGAL



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The reception of displaced persons from Ukraine in Portugal⁵

A Policy Brief from NOVA Asylum Policy Lab

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the invasion of Ukraine by the armed forces of the Russian Federation on 24 February 2022, Portugal was one of the first countries to activate the temporary protection regime for displaced persons from Ukraine, successively amended on the basis of the [Temporary Protection Directive](#), activated by the Council of European Union on 4 March 2022.⁶

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⁵ The responsibility for the contents and conclusions rests solely with the research team.

⁶ Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382 of 4 March 2022 establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine within the meaning of Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC, and





The Temporary Protection Directive is an emergency mechanism, activated in the case of a sudden increase in the flow of displaced persons from third countries, unable to return to their country of origin. Under the Council Implementing Decision for the case of Ukraine, temporary protection applies to persons residing in Ukraine before 24 February 2022, including Ukrainian nationals and their family members, as well as foreigners and stateless persons, provided that they had international protection or a permanent residence permit in Ukraine and could not safely and stably return to their country. In addition, States could include in the scope of temporary protection foreigners living in Ukraine with a temporary permit, provided that they were unable to return to their country safely and securely.

The Directive aims to ensure homogeneous access to a set of rights in all EU Member States. These rights include: a temporary residence permit, access to the labour market, healthcare, housing, social security, education for minors, and legal guardianship for unaccompanied minors. Temporary protection has a maximum duration of two years, but may exceptionally be extended to a third year, depending on the evolution of the military and infrastructural situation in Ukraine.

Unlike other types of international protection, temporary protection, as provided for in the European legislative act, is granted automatically to the citizens covered by the Council Decision activating the Directive. It is up to them to apply for residence in the country in which they have chosen to stay, and they may move within the EU territory for a maximum of ninety days.

Portugal, which had transposed the Directive in 2003, regulates the regime for granting temporary protection in cases of mass influxes of displaced persons from third countries who are unable to return to their country of origin in the short term, and establishes the procedures for implementing this regime, through the [Law No. 67/2003 of 23 August 2003](#). Under article 4, no. 3, of the Portuguese Law on Temporary Protection, the Portuguese State decided to grant temporary protection to

having the effect of introducing temporary protection, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022D0382&from=EN>





displaced persons from Ukraine through [Council of Ministers Resolution no. 29-A/2022 of March 1](#). This means that temporary protection in Portugal was activated three days before the activation by the Council of the European Union, granting automatic protection to the following categories of third country nationals:

- **National citizens of Ukraine** and their family members.
- Foreign citizens of other nationalities who could prove to be **relatives**, spouses or unmarried partners of citizens of Ukrainian nationality.

However, on March 11, in order to harmonize the Portuguese with the European action, automatic protection in Portugal was extended through the [Council of Ministers Resolution no. 29-D/2022](#), to the following categories of third country nationals:

- **National citizens of Ukraine.**
- **Foreign citizens** of other nationalities or stateless persons **benefiting from international protection** in Ukraine.
- **Foreign citizens** of other nationalities or stateless persons who **proved to be family members**, namely relatives, kin, spouse or unmarried partner of Ukrainian citizens or of foreign citizens who are beneficiaries of international protection in Ukraine.
- **Foreign citizens** of other nationalities or stateless persons who have **permanent residence** in Ukraine.
- **Foreign citizens** of other nationalities or stateless persons with **temporary residence** in Ukraine.
- **Foreign citizens** of other nationalities or stateless persons who were granted with a **long-stay visa** in Ukraine at the time of the Russian invasion.





It is worth mentioning that some criteria for temporary protection were changed on 28 December 2022⁷, through the [Council of Ministers Resolution no. 135/2022](#), in which:

- **Foreign citizens** of other nationalities who had **temporary residence** or a **long-term visa** in Ukraine as of 24 February 2022 **are no longer** considered as beneficiaries of temporary protection.
- Clarification is provided as to who are the **family members** of Ukrainian or other citizens enjoying international protection in Ukraine who may be considered for temporary protection, broadly following the provisions of the [Communication from the Commission on Operational guidelines for the implementation of Council implementing Decision 2022/382 establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine according to Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC, and having the effect of introducing temporary protection 2022/C 126 I/01](#). Thus, family members would include :
 - ✓ Spouses.
 - ✓ Couples who have been living in similar conditions to those of spouses for more than two years.
 - ✓ Minor children of the couple, of the citizen or of their spouse or unmarried partner, including those who are adopted.
 - ✓ Other close relatives who live together under the same roof and are totally or largely dependent on the citizens mentioned above.

As an overview, by 8 November 2022, of the 7.8 million people who left Ukraine, 4.7 million had registered as beneficiaries of temporary protection (or another similar type of protection) in EU member states, according to data released by [UNHCR](#). As of 3 October 2022, 52,875 citizens were registered in Portugal as beneficiaries of

⁷ See DE OLIVEIRA, Emellin e DE ANGELIS, Gabriele. *A proteção temporária em Portugal para não-Ucranianos deslocados: uma breve análise* [em linha]. APL Blog, janeiro 2023, DOI: [10.34619/1wid-mtmw](https://doi.org/10.34619/1wid-mtmw)





temporary protection. On 10 October, according to [Jornal de Notícias](#), Portugal had already granted:

[...] 53,126 temporary protections to Ukrainian citizens and foreigners residing in Ukraine, 31,362 of which to women and 21,764 to men, according to the Foreigners and Borders Service (SEF) [“(...) 53.126 , proteções temporárias a cidadãos ucranianos e a estrangeiros que residiam na Ucrânia, 31.362 dos quais a mulheres e 21.764 a homens, informou o Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras (SEF)]

This means that by the beginning of October 2022, Portugal had received about 1.13% of the displaced persons from Ukraine. Although this is, in comparative terms, a low percentage, this figure is higher than the percentage of refugee people received in Portugal in other migration waves. The [Migration Observatory \(OM\) asylum statistical report 2022](#) states that in 2020:

Portugal (...) received around 0.1% of the total number of refugees from the EU27 [Portugal [...] acolheu cerca de 0,1% do total dos refugiados da UE27].

Despite being relatively small, the inflows of displaced persons from Ukraine are nevertheless consistent, if compared with annual averages or with previous peaks of arrivals. By way of illustration, between 2015 and 2018, Portugal received approximately 1,500 refugees relocated from other EU Member States as a result of the so-called "refugee crisis" of 2015, originating mainly from the war in Syria and the influx of people coming from other countries across the maritime border in the Mediterranean.

Moreover, the influx of displaced persons from Ukraine, even if consistent, is not regular and predictable, contrary to the Portuguese experience with other types of flows, insofar as displaced persons from Ukraine can choose to reside in any Member State of the Union, without suffering the consequences of the application of the Dublin Regulation.





The following table summarises refugee arrivals in Portugal in recent years (data available until the end of 2021 – source OM⁸):

Mechanism of arrival	Period	Figures
Relocation	December 2015 - April 2018	1500
EU MS -Turkey Agreement	June 2016 - December 2017	142
Resettlement from Turkey and Egypt	2018 -	930
Voluntary relocation of unaccompanied minors	2020 -	199
Relocation under bilateral agreement between Portugal and Greece	2020 -	100
Relocation of humanitarian boats from Italy and Malta	July 2018 -	264
Humanitarian admission of citizens from Afghanistan	2021-	768
Requests for international protection lodged on Portuguese territory	2019 ⁹	1834
Ukraine, temporary protection	2022 (until October) ¹⁰	53126

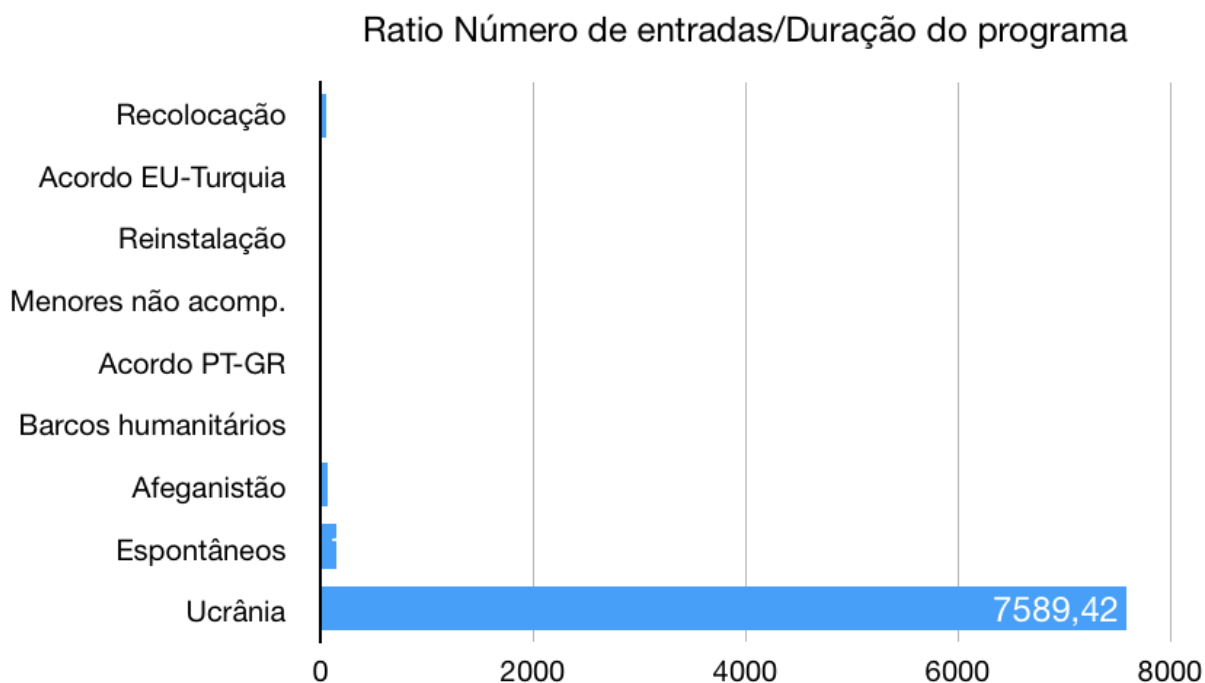
⁸ OM – Observatory of Migration [Observatório das Migrações]

⁹ The number decreased to 1002 in 2020 due to the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, and grew to 1537 in 2021, in which humanitarian admissions from Afghanistan are, however, included.

¹⁰ See “According to the Government, Portugal has received, as of 16 January 2023, 57.133 requests for Temporary Protection, corresponding to 107 nationalities [Segundo o Governo, Portugal recebeu, à data de 16 de janeiro, 57.133 pedidos de Proteção Temporária, correspondentes a 107 nacionalidades]” in: França, Ana. “Governo modifica Proteção Temporária para estrangeiros fugidos da Ucrânia: o que muda, quem tem de sair e as opções para quem quer ficar”, *Jornal Expresso*, 18 janeiro de 2023, available at: <https://expresso.pt/sociedade/migracoes/2023-01-18-Governo-modifica-Protecao-Temporaria-para-estrangeiros-fugidos-da-Ucrania-o-que-muda-quem-tem-de-sair-e-as-opcoes-para-quem-quer-ficar-10b33195>



The following graphic represents the proportion between the entries registered under the different entry mechanisms and the period in which they took place (in months), illustrating the quantitative impact of the latest wave compared to the previous ones:



2. Purpose of the policy brief, data collected and method

Considering the massive and sudden influx of displaced persons from Ukraine, this *policy brief* aims to analyse the functioning of the national reception system and its adjustment to the current situation of extraordinary access to the system. What are the major challenges encountered? How have the institutions in charge of managing the international protection system reacted? What innovations can be identified in relation to the management of previous flows? What about the standard procedure for reception in the context of international protection? What can we learn from the current management of flows? What improvements can be suggested for the present and for the future?

To answer these questions, **different types of data were collected**, namely:



- The experiences of displaced persons from Ukraine hosted in Portugal, through semi-structured interviews (3).
- The experience of civil society entities that collaborated in the reception of displaced persons from Ukraine, either by providing accompaniment and temporary housing upon arrival, or by providing information to the displaced persons, or by establishing bridges between public and civil society entities to facilitate access to services by the newly arrived (2 semi-structured interviews).
- The experience of representatives of public entities in charge of promoting, facilitating and coordinating the access of displaced persons to basic services under the Temporary Protection Directive (1 semi-structured interview).
- The experience of a Municipality in hosting displaced persons from Ukraine (participant observation at a meeting)
- The available documents on the modalities of reception and access to services (see the sources mentioned in the following paragraphs).
- Netnography (social networks, analysis of public publications).
- Informal conversations with interlocutors (four people, with and without temporary protection, in Lisbon and Porto).
- A participant observation, which took place in July 2022, of the demonstration that Ukrainian displaced persons and other citizens (including nationals) organised on Saturdays in Lisbon, in Rossio, to protest against the invasion of Ukraine.

For privacy reasons, none of our sources will be nominated or characterised in a recognisable way.

The **method** we follow is reflexive-recursive. Based on the documentary study, in the first phase we conducted interviews and participatory observations, and in the second phase we sent our findings to the interviewees to gather further information and feedback, on the basis of which we drafted the final report. ¹¹

¹¹ It is understood that the responsibility for the contents and conclusions rests exclusively with the team.





The information thus collected was compared with data from the project on "The reception of refugees in Portugal" (PTDC/FER-ETC/30368/2017), during which the paths of reception of refugees in Portugal were analysed, in several aspects, and differentiated by the channel of arrival (relocation, resettlement, spontaneous, humanitarian boats).

3. The issue of housing

The criteria for the integration of displaced persons from Ukraine are those already valid for refugees in previous waves and consist in the obligation, on the part of public institutions, to provide access to accommodation and other basic services, such as health, education, vocational training and the labour market, as well as to provide Portuguese language courses as a tool for social integration.

As anticipated, contrary to previous flows of applicants for international protection in Portugal, the flow of displaced persons from Ukraine is neither programmable nor strictly predictable, and displaced persons have the right to freely choose the EU country in which they wish to reside, without the risk of being taken charge of or taken back, on the basis of the Dublin Regulation.

In previous years, the fulfilment of the international obligations that the Government of Portugal voluntarily assumed depended a great deal on the effective reception capacity, i.e. on the availability of civil society entities and City Councils to provide accommodation and monitoring. We know, from previous experience and based on available data, that such capacity is limited. It is not surprising, in this sense, that the other obligations assumed have not been fully met.¹²

In the case of "spontaneous" asylum seekers, refugees who spontaneously present themselves (or are identified) at the border and request asylum in Portugal, several

¹² See, in this regard, the summary contained in Catarina Reis Oliveira, Applicants and Beneficiaries of International Protection in Portugal. Asylum Statistics Report 2022, OM, <https://www.om.acm.gov.pt/publicacoes-om/colecao-imigracao-em-numeros/relatorios-asilo>





issues were identified concerning accommodation, related to [overcrowding](#) in the existing housing solutions offered to them.¹³

As in the last waves of forced migration, **housing** continues to be one of the main issues of reception. As a way to overcome this issue, the method chosen in Portugal foresees three phases of intervention:

Phase 1: **Emergency** - This involves finding a provisional accommodation solution, namely in a reception centre.

Phase 2: **Temporary home** - including shared accommodation, which can be provided by civil society entities (through specific projects).

Phase 3: **Collaboration** - between Municipalities (CMs) and the Institute for Housing and Urban Rehabilitation, I. P (IHRU) to find a more stable long-term solution.

According to the model implemented by public institutions, finding accommodation implies a triangulation between the **High Commission for Migrations (ACM)**, which has the information on new arrivals, the **Municipal Councils (CMs)**, which maintain the vacancies in public accommodation, and the **Institute of Housing and Urban Rehabilitation, I. P (IHRU)**. This triangulation is made effective through the *1st Right and Gateway programmes* (PT: *1.º Direito e Porta de Entrada*), which aim to finance housing opportunities through protocols with the Municipalities. The programmes were amended in October 2022 in response to the needs that emerged in relation to the migratory movement of displaced persons from Ukraine.¹⁴

Housing represents the biggest challenge that public institutions, and especially the ACM, as the coordinating entity, have to face. We can say that the flow management

¹³ See “Covid-19: Increase in asylum applications forces accommodation outside reception centres [Covid-19: Aumento de pedidos de asilo obriga a alojamento fora de centros de acolhimento]”, disponível em: <https://expresso.pt/sociedade/coronavirus/2020-04-22-Covid-19-Aumento-de-pedidos-de-asilo-obriga-a-alojamento-fora-de-centros-de-acolhimento>

¹⁴ See Decree-Law no. 74/2022, from 24 October, available at: <https://dre.pt/dre/detalhe/decreto-lei/74-2022-202552707>





by public institutions consists largely in the search for housing solutions. To quote a source of this report: "I feel like I'm working on Booking.com".

Clearly, this is not the only mechanism provided to displaced persons from Ukraine to find accommodation, but it is, in the words of one of our sources, "the only one that allows for an active participation of public institutions".

Other mechanisms are finding a house through the spontaneous mobilization of civil society entities or individuals, finding accommodation in the real estate market directly, or using one's own network of contacts with individuals, especially with members of the Ukrainian community previously resident in Portugal.

In the initial phase of the invasion and the massive displacement of people from Ukraine, there was a remarkable mobilization of both civil society organizations and private individuals. There were several offers of accommodation - some of which free of charge - from private individuals to displaced persons from Ukraine, either in their own (permanent home) or in a second home. At the time of writing this report, no data was available to allow us to assess quantitatively this type of accommodation.

Such accommodation was, however, usually temporary: the common expectation was that it would not exceed 2-3 months, especially when it took place in houses intended, for example, for tourist accommodation. Because of the distance from urban centres, such solutions might not be adequate in terms of access to services or assistance and accompaniment of the new arrivals, despite the constant support from civil society entities.

In this case, the difficulties that already occurred with the wave of applicants for international protection in the context of relocations in 2015 were repeated: there are testimonies about individuals who largely underestimated the challenge of hosting displaced persons, whose practical needs are associated with psychological fragility. In such cases, reception often gives rise to conflicts and "misunderstandings" between those being received and those being received.





To illustrate: One Ukrainian family interviewed contacted volunteers on the internet who served as mediators between the family and private individuals who offered to host them. The family ended up feeling isolated because they lived in a village, far from urban centres and with little public transport. The guests did not speak English, and the accommodation conditions, in the family's opinion, were not decent. The lack of preparation of the volunteers to act as mediators contributed to worsening relations between the family and the guests, who were also unprepared to receive war displaced persons, and after a month the family left the accommodation.

Both conflicts and the temporary nature of the first accommodation solutions lead to displaced persons having to look for another solution in the very first weeks - or months - of their stay.

The loss of the first housing solution represents another challenge for newcomers, especially for those who had already successfully started the process of social and labour inclusion, as the loss of the first home may imply a move away from the place in which they had already started to create social relationships and find job opportunities.

Several factors make it difficult to find more stable housing solutions: the price of rents and the requirements imposed by landlords.

Landlords usually require the appointment of a guarantor, which is difficult for displaced persons to obtain. It is also common for landlords to ask for a minimum duration of the contract: in the words of one of our sources, "two years seems to be a fairly common term". The same source emphasises that "landlords mistrust the State". This makes it difficult, in their assessment, for the IHRU to intervene.

To illustrate: One family interviewed said they were unable to rent a dwelling in Lisbon because they lacked a guarantor and did not have the funds to pay 12 months' rent in advance, as requested by the landlord. The family spent a lot of money on hotels and Airbnb in Lisbon before being temporarily hosted by a family whose friend agreed to rent them a house in another part of the country. However, the house was located in a rural area, with little public





transport, and the family had failed to establish social relations with the neighbourhood, so they were looking to change accommodation.

The Ukrainian community in Portugal, present in the territory since the 1990s and demographically significant,¹⁵ is one of the resources most drawn upon by the displaced in the search for housing solutions. In numerous cases, such solutions involve sharing a house with relatives and friends, whether these are other displaced persons or relatives or friends from the pre-existing community. As a result, there is a situation of overcrowded housing, with a consequent increase in stress and tension within families. There are cases in which housing difficulties have led to the departure of displaced persons to other European countries, in a similar way to the so-called "secondary movements" of applicants and beneficiaries of international protection from other waves.

To illustrate: One interviewed family moved to Poland because they could not find decent housing and were dissatisfied with the urban infrastructure and the social environment where they lived. It was apparently easier to find accommodation in Krakow, where they also managed to find a kindergarten for their daughter.

It is important to stress that the issue of housing does not affect all people arriving from Ukraine in the same way. For example, finding accommodation for displaced persons from Ukraine who are from Asian or African countries remains more problematic than for those who are originally from Ukraine. Displaced persons from these countries are the most likely to stay for extended times in reception centres. There have been reports of municipalities and individuals refusing to provide accommodation to displaced persons from Ukraine because they do not fulfil the phenotype of what is expected to be "an IDP in Ukraine", i.e. a Ukrainian national.

¹⁵ According to the [SEF Statistical Report 2021](#) (relating to 2020 data), nationals of Ukraine constitute the seventh largest immigrant group in Portugal, with 25,802 registered residents (3.9% of the resident foreign population).





4. Trafficking in human beings and risk prevention

Despite [warnings](#) about the risk of **human trafficking networks** taking advantage of the massive influx of IDPs for, inter alia, sexual or labour exploitation, there were insufficient records on this risk for further quantitative analysis. Still, none of our sources mentioned this as a prominent problem in the management of flows.

This can be explained by the [attention](#) paid to the eventuality of trafficking from the early days of the conflict; the extensive information available to new arrivals; the existence of informal networks of contacts with members of the Ukrainian community in Portugal, able to provide pre-arrival information; the [police work to combat and prevent it](#); and the effort made by both migrant associations and public institutions to provide correct and timely information, including on reception conditions and available legal services. In this sense, the Bar Association has offered [free legal assistance](#) to displaced people.

However, fear of exploitation was also mentioned in one of the interviews; a Ukrainian woman stated that she had heard many stories of exploitation of Ukrainians in "Europe" and therefore could not trust anyone. She claimed, in this sense, that volunteers did not offer stability in the reception given, not guaranteeing the same protection as the state.

Researching the phenomenon of trafficking in human beings constitutes in itself an added difficulty since it carries an associated risk not only for the interlocutor, but also for those who conduct the research. This situation makes it difficult to ascertain its true dimension. In addition to the information and fears mentioned above, we were also aware of situations in the factory environment that led us to ponder this phenomenon. However, these turned out to be difficult to verify and prove, given the interlocutors' fear of dealing with the subject. Despite labelling as "charitable and kind acts" the fact that two of their acquaintances, who are businessmen, go to Poland and bring displaced Ukrainians to Portugal to work in their factories - at the time of the interview they had already brought more than forty people - our interlocutors did not really understand what happens to people who arrive in Portugal, with regard to





accommodation or documentation. Their perception of the researcher's interest in these issues and the fact that they were unable to respond, led the interviewees to avoid further contacts with the entrepreneurs.

As such, and according to our methodology, writing about the phenomenon of trafficking in human beings and its scale becomes a challenging task dependent upon different external factors, just like any other subject that involves illicit acts. Even so, we refer briefly to the possibility of its existence and to the research limitations to situate our analysis.

5. Access to services and documents

Some practices introduced to cope with the current emergency and aimed at facilitating the integration of displaced persons from Ukraine could serve as **innovations of an administrative nature**. Such innovations concern:

- A. Simplified access to a valid driving licence in Portugal.¹⁶
- B. Simplified access to the automatic recognition of professional certification for drivers.¹⁷

¹⁶ “Beneficiaries of temporary protection under RCM No. 29-A/2022 of 1 March may exchange their driving licence for a Portuguese driving licence, without the need to present the certificate proving the authenticity of the driving licence and the theoretical and practical driving test examinations, with exemption from the payment of the respective fees” [Os beneficiários de proteção temporária ao abrigo da RCM n.º 29-A/2022, de 1 de março, podem trocar o seu título de condução por carta de condução portuguesa, sem necessidade de apresentação da certidão comprovativa da autenticidade do título de condução e das provas teórica e prática de exame de condução, com dispensa do pagamento das respetivas taxas], <https://portugalforukraine.gov.pt/documentacao/> (our last viewed: 12 November 2022).

¹⁷ “The holders of driver attestations provided for in Article 5 of Regulation (EC) No 1072/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 October 2009 may request automatic recognition of the professional certification and, if they are unable to provide documentary proof of the exercise of this profession, they may apply for the code 95 to be added to their driving licence, provided they attend continuous training of 35 hours and pass the respective examination, with exemption from payment of the respective fee” [Os titulares de certificados de motorista previstos no artigo 5.º do Regulamento (CE) n.º 1072/2009, do Parlamento Europeu e do Conselho, de 21 de outubro de 2009, podem pedir o reconhecimento automático da certificação profissional e, quem não conseguir fazer prova documental do exercício dessa profissão, pode requerer o averbamento do código 95 na carta de condução, desde que frequente ação de formação contínua, com a duração de 35 horas e aprove no respetivo exame, com dispensa do pagamento das respetivas taxas), <https://portugalforukraine.gov.pt/documentacao/> our last visualisation: 12 November 2022).





- C. Direct and automatic access, at the moment of the registration application of beneficiaries of temporary protection as residents, to the Tax Identification Number (NIF), the Social Security Number (NISS), the National Health System user number.¹⁸
- D. A set of measures aimed at facilitating the educational and school integration of displaced children and young people.

This alteration of administrative measures is relevant, as it fills in the gaps in the reception and integration system previously detected. The exchange of driving licences, the recognition of school diplomas and professional certifications, the establishment of a pathway with clear and well-defined directives, both for the school integration of minors and for the professional training of adults, represent some of the major problems that refugees from previous waves had to face - often without success. The sample used in the framework of the project on "The integration of refugees in Portugal" (PTDC/FER-ETC/30368/2017) highlights a large number of refugees who had difficulties accessing documents. In at least ten interviews conducted with refugees, delays in issuing the residence card or renewing the temporary residence permit made it difficult to access social benefits [RSI], family allowance, open a bank account and obtain a driving licence.

Regarding points A, B and C, in the case of previous waves of refugees, the difficulty of access to relevant documents for the integration process is explained by the absence of an administrative guide with indications on how to proceed when applicants do not

¹⁸ "The holders of driver attestations provided for in Article 5 of Regulation (EC) No 1072/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 October 2009 may apply for automatic recognition of the professional attestation and, if they are unable to provide documentary proof of the exercise of this profession, they may apply for code 95 to be added to their driving licence, provided they attend a continuous training course lasting 35 hours and pass the respective examination, with exemption from payment of the respective fees" [Os titulares de certificados de motorista previstos no artigo 5.º do Regulamento (CE) n.º 1072/2009, do Parlamento Europeu e do Conselho, de 21 de outubro de 2009, podem pedir o reconhecimento automático da certificação profissional e, quem não conseguir fazer prova documental do exercício dessa profissão, pode requerer o averbamento do código 95 na carta de condução, desde que frequente ação de formação contínua, com a duração de 35 horas e aprobe no respetivo exame, com dispensa do pagamento das respetivas taxas], <https://portugalforukraine.gov.pt/documentacao/> (our last visualisation: 12 November 2022)..





possess all the necessary original documentation or whose original documentation is not easily subject to recognition by the Portuguese authorities.

By way of illustration, the staff of the entities hosting refugees generally point to the difficulty in exchanging driving licences. The absence of this document imposes other obstacles, such as access to schools (especially when the reception occurs outside metropolitan areas), professional courses and job opportunities. Faced with pressure in the real estate market, living on the outskirts or in the interior often ends up being the only affordable option. This makes the possibility of having a driving licence of fundamental importance in the life of a displaced person or refugee.

For the same reason it is important that the recognition of professional certification for drivers has been facilitated, as this favours the labour integration of at least this category of workers.

Facilitating the acquisition of fundamental documents for access to basic services is another relevant innovation of this reception wave. If, on the one hand, access to the NIF and the SNS did not pose major problems in the past, **access to the NISS** was subject to different interpretations and practices by the various Districts of the ISS-IP, and only in recent years has the practice of attribution become more homogeneous and efficient.

Many civil society entities that received refugees in previous years witnessed difficulties - and even refusals - in obtaining the NISS, without which access to the Institute of Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP) is virtually impossible. As a matter of interpretation of administrative rules in some Districts, the existence of an employment relationship was seen as a prerequisite for the attribution of the NISS, which de facto excluded newly arrived refugees from vocational training. In recent years (from 2020 onwards), both our data and the [OM's statistical report 2022](#) (p. 11) highlight the need for the allocation of the NISS to follow more homogeneous and favourable pathways for applicants. However, its attribution was not automatic, nor was it accompanied by the attribution of the NIF and the NHS user number.





The IEFP's approach to the current wave of displaced people also seems to be more proactive. The Institute had not previously developed instruments dedicated to the labour inclusion of beneficiaries of international protection, but it did so during this latest wave: its homepage provides employment and training services and measures aimed at national employers and displaced citizens from Ukraine, linking directly to the [Portugal for Ukraine](#) portal.¹⁹

Our sources point to a remarkable job offer, especially from private individuals, for displaced people coming from Ukraine, at least for those who are Ukrainian nationals. In the *matching* initiatives organised by civil society associations, the offer of employment generally exceeded demand. Despite the high supply, *matching* seems somewhat problematic. In the assessment of one of our sources with experience in this procedure, the qualifications of newcomers are higher than the levels employers are looking for.

Regarding the issue of unemployment and/or shortage of income, one institutional source reported that not all displaced persons from Ukraine are well informed about the rules of the Social Insertion Income (RSI) to which they might be entitled. Although it is not an automatic allocation, they would need to be better informed about the existing legislation on this issue.

Regarding point D, the measures aimed at the **inclusion of displaced children and young people of school age** from Ukraine take advantage of some innovations already introduced in 2020, based on the experience of previous years with the integration of refugee pupils. Such measures include simplifications at the level of "granting equivalences, progressive integration in the curriculum and strengthening the learning of the Portuguese language, as well as school social action", also considering "their positioning in the education system", according to the [Circular Letter S-DGE/2020/2040 - DSDC-DEPEB](#) regarding "Educational measures for the integration of refugee children and young people into the education system", and [Circular Letter 10976/2022/DGE-DSDC-ECE](#) regarding "Ukraine - Granting of

¹⁹ See IEFP <https://www.iefp.pt> (our last view: 12 November 2022).





equivalences and integration of children and young people into the Portuguese education system". The school and social integration of children and young people raise complex issues and present more sensitive aspects.

6. The issue of children and youth

Two features distinguish the educational and school integration of displaced children and youth from Ukraine in comparison with those from other countries:

- a. The existence of an educational attainment comparison table.
- b. The possibility of completing compulsory education through distance learning provided by Ukrainian schools.

Regarding the first point, children and young people coming from the Ukrainian education and school system enjoy the existence of a table of equivalences, which allows the recognition of their qualifications, unlike children and young people coming from other countries from which there is a considerable flow of refugees, such as Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea, etc., as stated in Point 1.2 of the [Circular Letter 10976/2022/DGE-DSDC-ECE](#). (There are, however, tables of equivalences between Portugal and Turkey, as well as between Portugal and Pakistan).

Point b), regarding compliance with compulsory school attendance, while fair and reasonable in itself, raises a number of questions.

The [Guide](#) with guidelines from the Directorate-General for Education (DGE) on the reception in schools of displaced children and young people from Ukraine highlights the emotional fragility that may arise from the displacement situation of this target group:

“It is always necessary to take into account that, like other refugees, these minors arrive in a context of trauma [É sempre necessário ter em consideração que, tal como outros refugiados, estes menores chegam num contexto de trauma]” (p. 4).

The Guide stresses the importance of implementing inclusion strategies, both academic in the strict sense of the term, and social, through socialisation within the





school and in the educational context, starting from the obligation to attend school even in the case where distance learning is chosen - a measure that also allows for the verification of compliance with educational obligations:

“The student's presence at school is compulsory in the course of online sessions provided by the Ukrainian school [A presença do aluno na escola é obrigatória no decurso das sessões em linha proporcionadas pela escola ucraniana]” (p. 4).

It is also "compulsory to attend the activities of Portuguese as a non-native language" (p. 4). In the same vein, these are measures that aim to achieve a management of activities and workspaces so that no student "is isolated" (p. 5), to establish "meaningful interactions between children and young people and adults" (p. 8), etc.

However, the information gathered in the course of our interviews indicates that the **level of integration expected and targeted by these measures has not yet been achieved.**

According to the information gathered, of the almost 14,000 minors who arrived in Portugal since the beginning of the conflict, only around 4,000 seemed to be integrated into the Portuguese school system by mid-October, with information missing on the remaining 10,000. This absence may have its roots in several phenomena.

Firstly, the **housing problem** forces displacement (both within Portugal and eventually abroad), delays integration and generally makes the lives of displaced young people and adults precarious.

Secondly, the consequent **precariousness of the lives of displaced persons** aggravates their stress and their situation of psychological discomfort. Reports on psychological assistance to displaced persons point to the resistance of young people and children: in short, there is difficulty in accepting the displacement itself, they want to return to their country, and they show signs of suffering in terms of mental health. This stressful situation due to the precariousness of their human, geographical and social circumstances in Portugal contributes to the worsening of their already difficult





psychological condition. We can hypothesize that **the stress due to displacement, together with the precarious housing conditions of the displaced persons from Ukraine, may be responsible for the delay in the school integration of children and young people.**

On the other hand, we can exclude that there is a lack of information about schooling options, or that information is not easily accessible.

7. The management model of the reception system

The management model of the current wave of displaced persons from Ukraine follows the pattern of the relocation programme. Under the coordination of the ACM, a **Single Operating Group**²⁰ is convened, in which the interested institutions participate, such as ISS-IP, DGE, SEF, etc. The reception itself is the result of a collaboration between these entities and civil society organisations.

The organisation of the two fundamental aspects of reception - accommodation and monitoring (for the purposes of access to services) - also shows a remarkable *path dependence* of the general model for the reception of refugees in Portugal. Such a model consists of the direct intervention of civil society and local authorities - mainly, the Municipal Councils - as the initial response of the reception. In fact, there is no reception capacity that the State can make available in the emergency phases. Instead, there are reception centres organised by some Municipal Councils and managed by civil society entities, together with housing that the entities themselves can provide.

The triangulation between ACM, IHRU and Municipal Councils is an interesting novelty in the attempt to solve one of the biggest problems of refugee reception in

²⁰ See Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 103/2020 of 23 November establishing a reception system for applicants and beneficiaries of international protection, published in the Official Gazette No. 228/2020, Series I of 2020-11-23, pages 40-44 available at: <https://dre.pt/dre/detalhe/resolucao-conselho-ministros/103-2020-149220089>





Portugal; namely, the issue of housing. Such triangulation, as already mentioned above, aims at a more systematic and structured intervention of public organisations. It is, however, too early to estimate its results regarding the Portuguese reception capacity.

Under current conditions, the management of large flows of people becomes complex, both because of the need to coordinate numerous and different organisations and because of the scarcity of available places. Therefore, what the officials in charge of managing the flows do on a day-to-day basis is first of all to find *ad hoc* solutions to the occasional issues that arise. Often, this means seeking accommodation on a case-by-case basis, with no ready-made models for action.

With regard to the second aspect of accommodation (monitoring), **there are still limits to the intervention of public organisations**. This is due to their organisational characteristics and their endowment of human resources, often insufficient to ensure the provision of specific services. For example, the "multidisciplinary emergency teams for accompaniment" mentioned on the *Portugal for Ukraine* portal have not in fact started up, according to information from our sources. The accompaniment of displaced people, in the sense of facilitating the access to documents and services through an intervention on the field, as opposed to the attendance in the office, continues to be, in practice, delivered to civil society organizations, volunteers or individuals, contacted through informal networks, such as the Ukrainian community in Portugal.

8. Recommendations

8.1 The housing challenge

Portugal has a [serious housing issue](#). The entire resident population is affected by this problem, but the vulnerable population, which includes a large proportion of refugees





and displaced persons, is particularly affected by this issue.²¹ In the case of this specific sub-group, the problem is twofold: emergency reception (on arrival) and permanent housing. The first point is even more relevant in the case of sudden influxes of displaced persons, such as the current influx of displaced persons from Ukraine.

In order to cope with the international obligations that the Government of Portugal has assumed, the first task is **to build temporary and emergency reception capacity** that can absorb the first waves of displaced people as they occur. The strengthening of the current mechanism, which in fact delegates such a task to the municipalities, through a national emergency reception plan, financed by *ad hoc* national funds, duly promoted and sponsored by the Government of Portugal, may be the first step in that direction.

The ACM, in coordination with entities, both international and from civil society, active in the management of reception centres, seems to have the capacity to support municipalities to set up the necessary responses in the field of accommodation, able to, namely:

- - Assess the quantitative dimension of the capacity to be constituted.
- - Determine the functionalities that the spaces destined for reception should satisfy.
- - Supervise the creation of this capacity.

Sudden, unpredictable flows, such as the mass movement of people from Ukraine, can easily exceed the reception capacity established for "normal times". Nor does it seem reasonable to build up permanent emergency reception capacity on the basis of current numbers (which would leave long-term reception spaces largely empty). An emergency mechanism will therefore have to provide for alternative ways of absorbing sudden flows that may arise in the future.

²¹ See SIC Notícias, "Evicted from their home, mother and son now live in a tent on the beach in Matosinhos" [Despejados de casa, mãe e filho vivem agora numa tenda na praia em Matosinhos] Available at: <https://sicnoticias.pt/pais/2023-01-23-Despejados-de-casa-mae-e-filho-vivem-agora-numa-tenda-na-praia-em-Matosinhos-21dfd06d>





One strategy to address such eventualities is to formulate a plan - or implement civil protection plans - to mobilize public infrastructure, taking advantage of under-utilized spaces that could serve as accommodation, as would be the case for natural disasters and incidents. Considering the insufficiency of the current infrastructure for the annual flows - itself largely predictable - of displaced persons and asylum seekers, there is a great margin for improving the national response capacity.

Yet, concerning more permanent reception solutions, the second strand presents great scope for improvement. In this sense, the mechanism thought up to face the current wave of displacements from Ukraine, based on a collaboration between municipalities and IHRU, under the coordination of the ACM, seems promising. Previously, the search for housing for refugees or displaced citizens who, due to lack of income or other vulnerabilities, could not get housing in the real estate market was a task performed by the host entities or by the Social Security technicians, with the eventual help of the human resources of the municipalities.

The current triangulation between municipalities, ACM and IHRU - if properly implemented and duly supported by resources, both human and financial - allows, in principle, for a broader coordination and a more systematic effort to find housing solutions and a closer assistance to vulnerable groups. If implemented with a view to absorbing the average annual flows of refugees and displaced persons - in themselves relatively constant and predictable -, the mechanism may even represent a response to the housing problem of this and other vulnerable groups. Monitoring the implementation of this mechanism and ensuring its functioning, not only in the context of the current wave of displacements, but also in the context of the reception of refugees and displaced persons in general, is an important task that public institutions, and the Government of Portugal in particular, should pay attention to.

8.2 The mental health challenge

Dealing with distress and disorientation is probably one of the biggest challenges for those who accompany or provide services to displaced persons. The research we





conducted as part of the project "The reception of refugees in Portugal" highlights how the use of psychological care is rarely implemented in the reception of refugees. The absence of psychological assistance or counselling is also important for those who host, not necessarily in a therapeutic sense, but rather in the ability to manage conflicts between those hosted and those being hosted. Therefore, providing specialized support, both to those who welcome and accompany, and to those who are accompanied and received, represents one of the main actions to be taken into account within the scope of international protection.²²

It should be noted, however, that there are obstacles to the implementation of such actions, such as the issue of the language barrier,²³ which is difficult to overcome when providing psychological assistance to displaced persons. For methodological reasons, such as the principle of direct contact with the patient, the protocol followed by mental health professionals prevents the intermediation of interpreters. It is, however, necessary to create the conditions in which such assistance can be provided.

This assistance is twofold:

- a. Psychological monitoring or treatment of displaced persons. Counselling for individuals, members of civil society and technicians from public organisations who accompany or provide services to displaced/refugees.

With regard to the first point, the psychological accompaniment or treatment of displaced persons can be mediated by immigrants' associations, which can provide specialised technicians, capable of providing the service in the mother tongue of the displaced person. Given the current numbers of displaced persons from Ukraine, however, such capacity is limited. Establishing **institutional links with the**

²² See World Health Organization, "Mental health and forced displacement", available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-and-forced-displacement>

²³ See Brisset C, Leanza Y, Rosenberg E, Vissandjée B, Kirmayer LJ, Muckle G, Xenocostas S, Laforce H. Language barriers in mental health care: a survey of primary care practitioners. *J Immigr Minor Health*. 2014 Dec;16(6):1238-46. doi: 10.1007/s10903-013-9971-9. PMID: 24375384, available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259491441_Language_Barriers_in_Mental_Health_Care_A_Survey_of_Primary_Care_Practitioners





national health services of Ukraine for remote (online) provision may represent a necessary complement, even considering the limitations and possible contraindications that remote provision from a country other than the country of residence may present. Another resource is the displaced persons themselves, among whom can be people with specialised training in mental health or interpreting, who can be involved in the assistance plan for their compatriots.

While the first point requires professionals who speak the mother tongue of displaced persons, the second is of interest to professionals, volunteers and members of civil society operating in the national context. In March 2022, the Order of Psychologists published a [Guide for welcoming refugee people](#). **Disseminating this Guide** among those who receive refugees, as well as within the school system, could constitute a first step towards promoting a culture of reception awareness of the specific challenges related to the reception of people displaced from conflict zones.

Even if the dissemination of guides and scripts is an important step towards increasing awareness and literacy about the phenomenon of forced migration and its inherent difficulties, there is a great distance to overcome in order to progress from abstract knowledge of the challenges of reception to practical skills in interacting with displaced persons. **Providing a professional psychological assistance and counselling service** to those who receive refugees therefore represents an important action in developing and strengthening national reception capacity. The existence of such a service, which, taking into consideration the consistency of current flows, could be provided both face-to-face and remotely, representing an added value for the management of conflicts that may arise in the interaction between those who receive or accompany refugees and those who are received or accompanied.

In the absence of professional paths for the training of intercultural mediators, the activation of this service may, however, pass through the cooperation between the public institutions that lead the reception policies, the Psychologists' Association and the NHS. In order to cope with the current flows, this would be a task to be urgently considered by public and governmental institutions, which would involve the revision





of the statute of the socio-cultural mediator, ²⁴ through **the establishment of a professional pathway and a register of intercultural mediators**²⁵ indicating the expertise in which they may develop their activities (mental health, legal, etc.). This constitutes a step to be taken in a medium-term perspective.

8.3 The organisational model

The current model for the reception of refugees and displaced persons in Portugal shows a marked *path dependence* on the past. The main actors on the ground are civil society organisations, joined spontaneously and sporadically by volunteers and private individuals, whose intervention is, however, heavily dependent on the media coverage of emergencies and, therefore, subject to the fluctuating moods of public opinion. Quantitatively, civil society provides much of the reception and follow-up.

On the other hand, public institutions design the scope of the legislation on reception, formulating guidelines and providing mediation and assistance to those operating on the ground. Public institutions are involved in monitoring refugees and displaced people through the intervention of the ISS-IP, whose human resources do not always allow for the necessary assistance to cope with the vulnerabilities of this target public. Access to public services is, as a rule, hindered by the characteristics of the target public, who do not always have the required documents available. The solution to these impasses depends on cooperation between different institutions and Directorates-General, whose actions are not always up to the challenges.

Against this background, the current wave of displaced persons from Ukraine seems to have had a positive impact on cooperation between different civil service structures, as highlighted in relation to the administrative flexibilities mentioned in Point No. 5 of this *Policy Brief*.

²⁴ See Legal statute of the socio-cultural mediator - Law no. 105/2001, of 31 August, published in Diário da República no. 202/2001, Series I-A of 2001-08-31, pages 5586 - 5586, available at: <https://dre.pt/dre/detalhe/lei/105-2001-632069>.

²⁵ We prefer the term intercultural to sociocultural one.





The cooperation between ACM, IHRU and municipalities may represent another sign that the national reception system can still evolve towards building a greater structural capacity for this reception.

Despite these signs, the national system for the reception of refugees and displaced persons continues, for the most part, to rely on factotum employees, dedicated to the different daily tasks, as well as on the involvement of individuals and associations, whose goodwill is not debatable, but which show, at the same time, limited competence and capacity to deal with both the complex psychological profiles of the displaced persons and their practical needs.

The national reception system is still characterised by a form of management in which officials are tasked with ensuring access to basic services on a case-by-case basis, usually in an emergency situation. This means that it intervenes in the absence of an "automatic" and satisfactory response capacity on the part of public services, or to remedy shortcomings, either of volunteers or of those entities whose involvement in reception, as a very recent norm, is not necessarily accompanied by the necessary technical skills.

While such a form of action may prove useful in the case of massive and sudden influxes of displaced persons, especially in the area of housing, it may also represent a reception policy that resists the implementation of greater professionalisation. This concerns not only the role of volunteers and, in some cases, civil society entities, but also the dysfunctions of public services, as manifested in the absence of a structured response capacity in access to vocational training, the labour market, higher education and sometimes compulsory education and the NHS (even if in the latter cases there are examples of dedication and professional commitment in the assistance provided to this target audience).

The scarcity of professionalization in most civil society entities, the quantitative importance of volunteers and individuals in foster care, and the continuous emergency request of the technicians of public institutions active in the management of foster care leads to an often-insufficient result, in terms of the expectations of social inclusion and





the response capacity to ensure access to basic services. This "amateurism" aspect also implies situations of physical and mental weariness, both on the part of those who welcome on the field and on the part of those who are called to manage the reception as a whole. The same "amateurism" can generate mistrust, disillusionment and the perception of precariousness and insecurity in the person being hosted.

In terms of improving the reception system as a whole, **the reconstitution of the Operational Group** may contribute to streamlining the management of issues that arise on a daily basis. In previous waves, the actions taken after relocation were characterised by **peer-to-peer contacts** between the officials of the different public institutions and the representatives of the reception entities each time an obstacle to accessing documents or services arose. The existence of an Operational Group means that this type of communication can be replaced by "top-level" contacts.

However, top-level contacts should be something exceptional, aimed at the discussion and eventual revision of the organisational model and functionality of the various components of the civil service involved in the reception actions. In other words, the representatives of public entities should have sufficient **protocols of action**, instructions and capacity for decentralized coordination to enable the necessary solutions to be found, whenever there are problems with access to services or documents. The solution of occasional problems should not belong to the "top" level of the civil service. **Formulating such protocols and installing a permanent capacity to monitor their implementation**, either at the level of the Directorates General or at the level of the Operational Group, would be a necessary action for the reception system to develop the "automatic" capacity to intervene. Such a capacity could also return officials to their role as mediators of exceptional situations in terms of access to services, taking them away from the day-to-day management of individual cases. The same staff members could then act as mentors, providing assistance to volunteers and associations operating in the field and helping with intercultural communication.





An adequate **training on intercultural relations**, especially focused on the challenges of hosting refugees and displaced persons, and addressed both to technicians of the institutions providing public services and to volunteers and members of civil society associations, would be an important complement to such an approach. With regard to the positioning and involvement of civil society, improving the response capacity in the area of volunteering involves access to more information and more training on forced migration.

Formulating specific protocols of action and training technicians specialized in monitoring and/or assisting displaced persons and refugees within public institutions would allow for the reduction of current deadlocks in access to public services and, at the same time, speed up the functioning of the system as a whole, since the institutions could develop an internal capacity for *problem-solving*.

8.4. Beyond media coverage

In the words of the people interviewed, whether from public bodies or civil society, the innovations introduced to cope with the current wave of displaced persons from Ukraine can be explained by the "media pressure" that accompanied it. This pressure, together with the rules of the Council Decision that activated the Directive on temporary protection, in order to guarantee the reception of displaced persons, prompted a reflection on the existing capacities and led to an additional effort to adopt measures whose necessity had already been evident at the time of the previous waves of refugees.

This framework of innovations reinforces the conviction - widely shared, both in the civil society entities involved in the reception of refugees and in the sphere of public entities - that **the existence of an emergency condition**, together with the **sympathy of public opinion** with the refugees, facilitated the **necessary conditions** for decision-makers and top officials of the public administration to take the necessary steps to strengthen the reception capacity.





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However understandable the role of public opinion in determining the collective will to host, the dependence of the reception capacity on this will is at the root of the phenomena of amateurism and contributes towards the structural limits of the national reception system mentioned in the previous paragraphs. This wave of displacement may be the opportunity to take a step beyond mediatisation and "charity" towards a more professionalised and efficient reception system, thus ensuring that the rights of persons to be protected - under asylum or temporary protection - are safeguarded.



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