

Governments prepare to slash benefits for Ukrainian refugees

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Ukrainian refugees across Europe and elsewhere in the world are facing increasingly dire prospects as NATO countries prepare to further slash humanitarian aid for those who have fled the war zone. While the EU just announced that it is extending the temporary protected status granted Ukrainians so that they can live and work legally in the EU until March 2025, governments are making it increasingly impossible for them to do so. There are tens of billions of dollars available to ensure that Ukrainian workers continue to kill their Russian brethren and die themselves in the process, but not so much to ensure that they live.

On Thursday, Poland, where around 1 to 1.2 million Ukrainian refugees currently reside, announced that it would end publicly-funded benefits for that population in the first quarter of 2024. Speaking to the press, government representative Piotr Müller declared, “The term of decisions on providing assistance is gradually coming to an end; this is stated in the law and the payments will not continue.”

In late August, Warsaw, which cut support for refugees in half earlier this year, canceled childcare benefits for Ukrainian refugees who leave the country for more than 30 days. Even if a person returns within that time frame, if their entry is not properly documented by a border guard, they are permanently ineligible for the family allowance.

This threatens the livelihood of thousands of Ukrainian families, many of whom have begun to travel back and forth to their home country to the extent that conditions on the ground make it possible. Because men between 18 and 65 years old are prohibited from leaving Ukraine, wives and children who fled are indefinitely separated from their husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers unless they make a return visit. Should an error be made at the Polish border or a train be delayed on its way back from Kiev, these Ukrainian female-headed refugee households in Poland will be stripped of essential means, jeopardizing their ability to survive. Mothers of young children who cannot pay for childcare also cannot work.

Making clear that it has no intention of accommodating any future waves of refugees, Poland recently closed its

largest shelter for fleeing Ukrainians, kicking out three hundred people still living at the facility in Nadzaryn. “They gave them some food in bags and that was it,” one aid worker told *FT*. With the center’s doors having been closed at 5pm and all denied admittance, some did not even have time to pack their belongings.

A recent study by HelpAge on older Ukrainian refugees in Poland, of which there are approximately 73,000, found that just 8 percent can pay their medical bills. Medicines, doctors’ visits, and specialist appointments—in other words, pretty much everything—are unaffordable. Fully 80 percent of elderly Ukrainian refugees report suffering chronic depression and anxiety, which is magnified by social isolation. Unable to work, the population is highly dependent on various forms of public assistance.

Germany, whose chancellor, Olaf Scholz, just declared that the number of asylum seekers in the country is “too high at the moment,” is leading the way in the assault on refugees. In late September, the government announced that it will cut spending on refugee aid sent to states by nearly 50 percent and, according to Reuters, entirely “halt its contribution to the costs of caring for and integrating the 1.08 million Ukrainian refugees.”

In total, federal refugee expenditures will be reduced from 3.75 billion euros in 2023 to 1.25 billion in 2024 and subsequent years. Even with current funding levels, local authorities are reporting that the system for asylum seekers is in crisis.

In June of this year, Engelhard Mazanke, the head of Berlin’s immigration office, told the press, “We are on the verge of dysfunctionality.” Nonetheless, a spokesperson from Germany’s finance ministry explained that going forward finding money for municipal administrations to provide for refugees will be the problem of the states.

According to the website of the German federal government, over the course of just 2023, Berlin has provided Kiev 5.4 billion euros worth of military aid and pledged another 10.5 billion worth.

In Britain, which in 2022 gave \$2.8 billion to support

Ukraine's war machine, at least 7300 Ukrainian households, including 4740 with children, are now homeless. These data, published by the government on August 15, are a significant undercount, however, as they apply exclusively to England and do not include other parts of the United Kingdom. In addition, only about two-thirds of local authorities responded to the request for information.

The country's "Homes for Ukraine" program, launched with much fanfare in the spring of 2022, has turned into a debacle. While tens of thousands of British families, for the derisory sum of 350 pounds a month, have volunteered to host Ukrainian refugees for a six-month period, the government has done nothing to find permanent housing for the population. Of those families who opened their doors to fleeing Ukrainians, just 12 percent indicate they have gotten any assistance in finding long-term accommodations for their guests. The refugees are hard-pressed to help themselves, as many landlords require proof of financial means and long-term employment—neither of which they have—before they will rent out an apartment.

In both Britain and elsewhere, unemployment, underemployment and low-wage employment are an ongoing problem. With foreign degrees that governments do not recognize, language barriers, and other vulnerabilities, the experience of Ukrainian refugees is no exception to the near-universal reality that confronts all asylum seekers. They have been unable to find work that matches their skill levels or been taken advantage of by employers.

In July, *Byline Times* reported the case of a Ukrainian immigrant in Britain. The woman was offered "trial shifts" with various restaurants whereby she would work in the kitchen or clean and not be paid for her time, only to then be told several months later that, after "trialing" many others, the job was given to someone else. "I spent four hours peeling kilos and kilos of broccoli and sweet potatoes," she explained, resulting in bleeding hands and no paycheck.

In Germany, the Institute for Employment Research found that 41 percent of refugees are underemployed, a number that rises to over 50 percent for Ukrainians.

Unfolding in the midst of a hysterical anti-immigrant atmosphere, there is a clear intention to drive Ukraine's refugees out of the European Union.

After having already made large cuts to assistance for Ukrainian refugees earlier this year, the Czech Republic is now further "encouraging" them to go by providing them one-time financial assistance to return home. However, if these refugees later seek a long-term Czech visa, they will have to repay half of the repatriation aid they receive and be barred from ever receiving a visa should they not do so. In short, in the event of a dramatic worsening of war-time conditions, Czech borders will effectively be closed to

thousands of people.

Meanwhile, the tiny country is doing its part to escalate the violence in Ukraine. According to RFE/RL, as of February, Prague has given Kiev "38 tanks, 55 armored vehicles, four aircraft, and 13 self-propelled howitzers from its army reserves alongside larger shipments from the private sector." In mid-September, the government came to a deal with Denmark and the Netherlands to finance the delivery of Czech arms to Ukraine.

Outside of Europe, the same prevails.

In late August, the Israeli government pulled medical care from 14,000 Ukrainian refugees. The move, which caused an uproar, was later reversed. However, authorities have only extended healthcare benefits until the end of 2023 and indicate they intend to cancel them again in the new year. Furthermore, the interior, social, and health service ministries are refusing to foot the bill for the extension and demanding that the state treasury pick up the tab.

For its part, Australia ended its humanitarian visa program for Ukrainians in July 2022. While some have been able to remain in the country by switching to other visa types, they have lost housing, income, and other forms of government aid, such as free English lessons. Canberra has committed several hundred million dollars worth of lethal aid to Kiev.

The United States, which now has reportedly accepted about 270,000 Ukrainian refugees, requires that these asylum seekers prove that they have a financial backer in the US before they are granted entry. Meanwhile, according to the Kiel Institute, Washington has thus far given Ukraine \$46.6 billion in military aid. Its humanitarian funding for the country has amounted to under \$4 billion.



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