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Guidelines to promote the "EUROPEAN WAY OF LIFE"

(EU culture and diversity)
among war refugees



ENGLISH HANDBOOK

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1. Introduction

Purpose of the Guidelines

These guidelines are published within the Erasmus+ **PUENTE project (Protecting Ukrainians Encouraging Non-formal Training and Education – 2024-1-ES01-KA220-ADU-000243485)**.

PUENTE project aims to foster the social and occupational inclusion of Ukrainian war refugees by making European adult education more inclusive and ready to respond to the new challenges brought by the war in Ukraine.

Thanks to the **PUENTE** activities, educators will be equipped with new skills to design more attractive and interactive educational programmes for the Ukrainian war refugees, achieving the goal of making the learning environments more inclusive, removing the barriers to accessing education and training for Ukrainian war refugees, in particular women (counting as the vast majority of adult refugees according to statistics of the OECD), and fostering their social inclusion in harmony with the needs and expectations of the local communities.

Complementary to these educational and training activities, these guidelines will serve as a practical handbook that sets harmonised standards to promote the "European way of life" (EU culture and diversity) among war refugees, in line with the priority of the Von Der Leyen European Commission I.

The Guidelines cover key areas such as cultural norms, social expectations, legal frameworks, and available resources. The handbook offers insights into various facets of EU lifestyle and values, encompassing social norms, cultural expectations, legal frameworks, and practical tips for daily living. It addresses key areas such as communication, education, employment, healthcare, and integration, providing a comprehensive overview of the opportunities and challenges that war refugees (particularly Ukrainian people) may face in their new environment. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of mutual understanding, respect, and inclusivity, fostering a sense of belonging and promoting social cohesion between refugees and hosting communities. A detailed bibliography and list of references are included to facilitate further research and exploration of the topics.

After the end of the project, **PUENTE** partners and other stakeholders are invited to use this tool to promote the "European way of life", rights, and values among Ukrainian refugees. In this way, the **PUENTE project** empowers adult educators and social care professionals not only in providing adapted education for war refugees but also in becoming socially engaged to promote at European level the social and occupational inclusion of this vulnerable group.

Overview of the European Union

The European Union is a political and economic union of 27 member countries. Established to promote peace, stability, and prosperity, the EU is grounded in shared values that include democracy, respect for human rights, and the rule of law. The EU operates through a unique system of supranational institutions and intergovernmental decision-making. Key institutions include the European Commission, which proposes legislation and ensures its implementation; the European Parliament, directly elected by EU citizens; and the Council of the European Union, which represents the governments of the member states.

One of the EU's most notable achievements is the creation of a single market, allowing the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people across member states. Additionally, 20 countries use the euro as their common currency, simplifying trade and travel.

Beyond economic integration, the EU also works on environmental protection, digital innovation, regional development, and foreign policy coordination. It plays a significant role on the global stage, promoting cooperation, sustainable development, and humanitarian aid worldwide. Through these efforts, the EU aims to improve the lives of its citizens while addressing shared challenges and building a more united, resilient, and forward-looking Europe.

The European Union plays a crucial role in providing protection and support to refugees fleeing conflict, persecution, and hardship. Rooted in values such as human dignity, freedom, equality, and the rule of law, the EU has developed a legal and policy framework to ensure that refugees are treated fairly and can rebuild their lives with safety and dignity. Central to the EU's approach is the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), which seeks to harmonize asylum procedures and standards across member states. This system establishes guidelines for receiving, processing, and protecting asylum seekers to ensure fair treatment and prevent disparities between countries.

Beyond legal protection, the EU emphasizes integration policies that help refugees access education, healthcare, employment, and social services. Programmes at both the EU and national levels aim to support language learning, vocational training, and community inclusion, recognizing that successful integration benefits both refugees and host societies.

The EU also collaborates with international organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to address humanitarian needs and manage migration flows. Despite challenges such as differing national policies and resource constraints, the EU remains committed to upholding refugee rights and promoting solidarity among member states.

Overall, the EU's work with refugees reflects its broader commitment to human rights, social justice, and international cooperation, striving to offer protection and hope to those seeking refuge within its borders.

Daily life and social norms

Understanding daily life and social norms can help Ukrainian refugees navigate their new environment with greater ease. Key aspects include:

- **Communication:** While many Europeans speak English, learning the local language can significantly enhance integration. Direct and open communication is generally valued, but it's important to be mindful of cultural differences in communication styles.

- **Social interactions:** Politeness and respect are highly valued in social interactions. Common courtesies include using "please" and "thank you," respecting personal space, and being punctual for appointments.

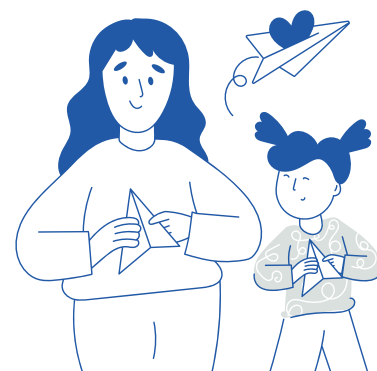
- **Work culture:** The work culture in Europe is generally professional and structured. Employees are expected to be punctual, efficient, and respectful of their colleagues. Work-life balance is also valued, with many countries having laws in place to protect employees' rights to leisure time.

- **Education:** Education is highly valued in Europe, and access to education is generally free or heavily subsidized. Ukrainian refugees may be eligible for educational programmes and support services to help them continue their studies or acquire new skills.

- **Healthcare:** Access to healthcare is a fundamental right in Europe, and most countries have universal healthcare systems. Ukrainian refugees are typically entitled to healthcare services, although the specific provisions may vary depending on the host country.

Importance of integration

Integration is a cornerstone of successful refugee resettlement within the European Union. As people fleeing conflict, persecution, or disaster seek safety and stability, effective integration policies ensure they are not only protected but also empowered to rebuild their lives with dignity. Integration fosters access to essential services such as education, healthcare, housing, and employment, laying the groundwork for independence and contribution to host societies. Beyond practical support, it also promotes social inclusion, cultural exchange, and mutual understanding between refugees and local communities. For the EU, integration is not just a humanitarian responsibility; it is a pathway to social cohesion, economic vitality, and a more inclusive future.





2. Understanding European values

At the heart of the European Union lies a set of fundamental values that guide its policies, institutions, and interactions both within and beyond its borders. These values form the foundation of the EU's identity and are essential for fostering unity, cooperation, and mutual respect among its diverse member states and citizens. Understanding these principles is key to appreciating how the EU functions and what it strives to uphold in its vision for a peaceful and democratic Europe. A cornerstone of these shared principles is the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which brings together in a single, binding document the civil, political, economic, and social rights enjoyed by individuals in the European Union. The Charter reaffirms key rights such as dignity, freedom, equality, solidarity, citizens' rights, and justice, ensuring that all EU policies and actions respect and promote these fundamental values. These rights are not abstract principles, but concrete guarantees that influence real lives. Below is an overview of the main EU fundamental rights:

Human Dignity

Every individual possesses inherent worth and deserves respect, which is a fundamental principle in the EU. This value underpins all EU policies and actions, ensuring that people are treated with fairness, compassion, and equality, regardless of their background, nationality, or circumstances. Upholding human dignity means protecting individuals from inhumane or degrading treatment, promoting social inclusion, and guaranteeing basic rights such as access to education, healthcare, and a decent standard of living. It is a guiding principle that influences everything from EU legislation to humanitarian efforts within and beyond its borders.

For refugees, the principle of human dignity is especially vital. Fleeing conflict, persecution, or hardship, refugees often face vulnerability and uncertainty. The EU's commitment to human dignity ensures that refugees are welcomed and supported with respect and compassion. This includes safeguarding their rights to safety, shelter, healthcare, and education, as well as protecting them from discrimination or mistreatment. By upholding human dignity, the EU strives to provide refugees not only with protection but also with the opportunity to rebuild their lives in a manner that honours their inherent worth as human beings.

Freedom

EU citizens enjoy freedoms of expression, religion, and movement. For refugees, this translates to the right to live freely and securely. The EU is committed to protecting these freedoms for all individuals within its territory, including those seeking asylum. This means the right to speak one's mind, practice one's faith, and move without unjust restrictions. It also ensures protection from persecution and the opportunity to rebuild one's life in a safe and supportive environment. Freedom is not only a legal right in the EU—it is a core value that shapes a just and open society.

For refugees arriving in the EU, the fundamental freedoms enjoyed by citizens are extended to ensure their safety and dignity. This means they have the right to express their opinions, practice their religion freely, and move within EU member states without undue barriers. Protecting these freedoms is crucial in helping refugees escape persecution and rebuild their lives in an environment where they can live securely and participate fully in society. The EU's dedication to freedom underscores its commitment to creating inclusive communities where diversity is respected and every individual's rights are upheld.



Democracy

Democratic governance is integral to the EU, encouraging participation in political processes and respect for the outcomes of elections. Citizens of EU member states have the right to vote and stand for election at both national and European levels, ensuring that governments remain accountable to the people. The EU promotes transparency, dialogue, and civic engagement, supporting institutions that reflect the will of the people. For newcomers, including refugees, understanding and participating in democratic life is an important step toward integration and active citizenship in their host communities.

Equality

The commitment to equality means that discrimination on any grounds is prohibited, including nationality, race, gender, and sexual orientation. In the EU, everyone is entitled to the same rights and opportunities, and equal treatment is safeguarded by laws and policies across all member states. This principle is especially important for creating inclusive societies where all individuals, regardless of their background, can participate fully and contribute meaningfully. For refugees and newcomers, it ensures access to services, education, employment, and protection under the law, helping to build fair and cohesive communities.

For refugees, the EU's commitment to equality is essential in ensuring they are treated with fairness and respect from the moment they arrive. This means they have the right to access the same services, opportunities, and legal protections as other residents, without facing discrimination based on their nationality, ethnicity, gender, or other factors. Promoting equality helps refugees overcome barriers to integration, such as unequal access to education or employment, and fosters social cohesion by encouraging mutual understanding and inclusion. Through these efforts, the EU works to build communities where everyone, regardless of origin, can thrive and contribute to society.

Rule of Law

This principle ensures that laws are applied equally and fairly, protecting the rights of individuals, including refugees. In the EU, no one is above the law, and legal systems must operate independently and transparently. The rule of law guarantees access to justice, legal certainty, and the accountability of public authorities. For refugees, this means that their rights are upheld through due legal procedures, and they can seek protection, appeal decisions, and live without fear of arbitrary treatment. It is a cornerstone of trust in public institutions and a fundamental safeguard for freedom and justice in European societies.

Human Rights

The EU highlights the importance of human rights by welcoming refugees and offering them legal protection. These rights include the right to life, freedom from torture and persecution, the right to seek asylum, and access to basic needs such as healthcare, education, and shelter. The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights enshrines these protections for everyone within the EU, regardless of their origin or status. By upholding human rights, the EU not only affirms its core values but also demonstrates solidarity and compassion toward those fleeing conflict, oppression, or hardship.

Case Study 1: Refugee Rights in Austria

Austria has played a significant role in European refugee protection, particularly during major displacement crises such as the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s and the 2015–2016 Syrian refugee influx. The country has developed a structured legal and institutional framework to manage asylum applications and support the integration of refugees.

Legal Framework and Asylum Process

Austria is bound by EU legislation, including the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and the Geneva Convention, and has national laws such as the Asylum Act (Asylgesetz) and the Basic Welfare Support Agreement. These laws define the procedures for granting asylum and subsidiary protection, as well as the rights and responsibilities of applicants. Asylum seekers have the right to legal representation, interpretation services, and a fair hearing before the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum.

Reception and Integration

Austria offers basic services to asylum seekers during the application process, including housing, food, healthcare, and a modest financial allowance. Recognized refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection are granted access to the labour market, education, and vocational training. Integration support is guided by the Integration Act (Integrationsgesetz), which mandates participation in German language courses and orientation programmes covering Austrian laws, values, and culture. Local municipalities and NGOs also play a vital role in providing support services such as counselling, legal aid, and community engagement initiatives.

Notable Initiatives

- **Start Wien Program** (adapted in Vienna): Offers comprehensive support to new arrivals, including education and employment guidance tailored to individual needs.
- **Caritas Austria and Diakonie Austria:** These organizations provide essential services for refugees, including language courses, job readiness programmes, and psychological support.

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Case Study 2: Refugee Rights in Spain

Spain has developed a multifaceted approach to refugee rights, combining national policies with regional and local initiatives to support asylum seekers and facilitate their integration.

National Framework

At the national level, Spain's asylum system is managed by the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration (MISMM), which coordinates with regional governments and municipalities. The system provides reception facilities, legal assistance, and integration programmes for refugees. However, challenges persist, including a high rate of asylum application rejections and delays in processing, which have led to increased pressure on local communities.

Regional and Local Initiatives

In response to these challenges, regional and local governments have implemented complementary programs. For example, the Basque Country initiated a community-based refugee sponsorship programme in 2018, resettling Syrian families with the support of local communities and organizations. This initiative aimed to enhance integration through local involvement and support networks.

Similarly, the city of Barcelona developed the "Nausica" programmes, providing temporary housing, legal support, language courses, and employment assistance to asylum seekers not accommodated by the national system. Between 2016 and 2020, the programme assisted 275 individuals, with notable outcomes in housing stability and employment.

Challenges and Critiques

Despite these efforts, Spain faces ongoing challenges in refugee integration. The high rejection rates of asylum applications, often exceeding 90%, have led to a significant number of refugees remaining in legal limbo or resorting to informal employment. Critics argue that the system's design assumes a linear path to integration, which may not accommodate the complex realities faced by refugees.

Conclusion

Spain's approach to refugee rights demonstrates a blend of national policies and localized initiatives aimed at supporting refugees. While challenges remain, the involvement of regional and local entities has proven essential in providing comprehensive support and fostering integration.

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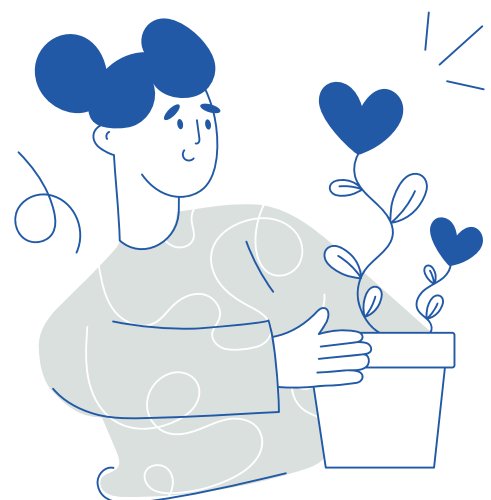
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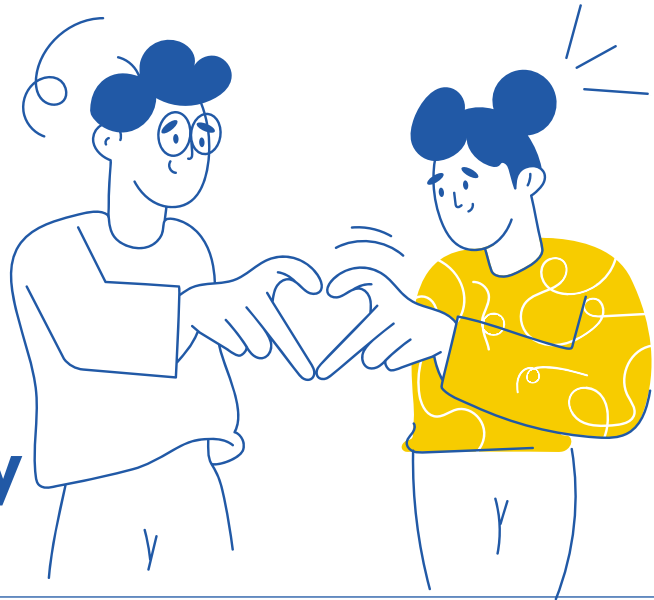
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3. Cultural Diversity in the EU

The European Union is home to a rich tapestry of cultures, languages, and traditions, reflecting its long history and the variety of its member states. This cultural diversity is one of the EU's greatest strengths, fostering creativity, innovation, and mutual understanding among its people. Embracing diversity helps build inclusive societies where different backgrounds are respected and celebrated, contributing to social cohesion and shared prosperity across the continent.

The Importance of Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is celebrated as an asset that enriches communities through diverse perspectives, traditions, and experiences. For refugees, multicultural societies offer a welcoming environment where their cultures and identities can be recognized and valued. Embracing multiculturalism helps break down barriers of misunderstanding and prejudice, fostering mutual respect and social cohesion. It creates opportunities for refugees to share their unique stories, skills, and contributions, which in turn strengthens the cultural fabric and economic vitality of host communities. By promoting inclusion and intercultural dialogue, multiculturalism supports refugees not only in adapting to new surroundings but also in maintaining a sense of belonging and dignity.

Respect for Different Cultures and Languages

EU Member States encourage learning about and respecting various cultures and languages, aiming to create an inclusive society. The European Union celebrates its cultural and linguistic diversity as a cornerstone of its identity and unity. With 24 official languages and countless regional and minority languages spoken across its member states, the EU actively promotes multilingualism and intercultural understanding through education, policy, and cultural exchange programmes. By fostering mutual respect and appreciation for different traditions, the EU strengthens social cohesion, supports democratic values, and builds a more connected and tolerant Europe.

This is especially important for refugees, who bring rich cultural traditions and native languages that contribute to the diversity of European communities. By promoting intercultural dialogue and multilingualism, the EU helps refugees feel valued and understood, easing their integration into new environments. Respecting different cultural identities not only supports social harmony but also empowers refugees to maintain their heritage while actively participating in the cultural and civic life of their host country.

Celebrating Diversity through Festivals and Events

Local festivals often highlight different cultural backgrounds, providing opportunities for interaction and celebration. Across the EU, cultural events—such as food fairs, music festivals, art exhibitions, and heritage days—serve as vibrant expressions of Europe's multicultural identity. These gatherings create spaces where people from different backgrounds can share their traditions, learn from one another, and foster a sense of community. For newcomers and long-time residents, such events promote inclusion, break down stereotypes, and celebrate the richness that diversity brings to European society. They reflect the EU's commitment to unity through cultural exchange and mutual respect.

Case Study 1: Multicultural Festivals in Italy

Italy, known for its rich cultural heritage, also celebrates contemporary diversity through numerous multicultural festivals held in cities across the country. These events play an important role in fostering inclusion, intercultural dialogue, and community cohesion by bringing together people from diverse backgrounds.

In Rome, the Festival delle Culture showcases the cultural traditions of immigrant communities living in the city. Organized in collaboration with local associations and NGOs, the festival includes music, dance performances, food stands, storytelling, and craft exhibitions from various countries. It promotes cultural exchange and offers a space where newcomers, particularly refugees and migrants, can share their heritage and feel a sense of belonging.

Similarly, Bologna hosts the Festival delle Culture Migranti, a week-long event focused on migration, identity, and integration. The festival features films, debates, workshops, and performances that explore themes of displacement, cultural identity, and solidarity. Refugee artists and activists often participate, providing powerful personal insights into the experience of migration.

In Ravenna, the Festa delle Culture is a longstanding celebration organized by the local municipality and community groups. This event transforms public squares into vibrant meeting places where citizens and newcomers alike enjoy intercultural cuisine, music, and dance. Its goal is to challenge stereotypes and foster peaceful coexistence among all residents.

These festivals reflect Italy's evolving identity as a multicultural society. They highlight the contributions of migrant and refugee communities to Italy's social and cultural life, while promoting respect, inclusion, and mutual understanding.

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Case Study 2: Multicultural Festivals in Poland

Poland, while traditionally a more homogeneous society, has increasingly embraced cultural diversity through festivals and events that celebrate multiculturalism and promote inclusion. These initiatives play a growing role in supporting integration and intercultural understanding, particularly in urban centres where refugee and migrant populations are expanding.

In Warsaw, the Multicultural Warsaw Street Party (Warszawski Wielokulturowy Street Party) is one of the most prominent events promoting diversity. Organized by the foundation Inna Przestrzeń (Other Space Foundation), this annual street festival celebrates the city's cultural richness by featuring music, dance, food, and performances from communities representing Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. It provides a platform for refugees, migrants, and minority groups to share their cultural identities and engage with local residents.

Kraków also hosts events such as the Festival of Multiculturalism, which includes workshops, exhibitions, and intercultural dialogue sessions. This event is supported by local NGOs and universities and is aimed at fostering understanding and respect for different cultural backgrounds. Refugees and asylum seekers often participate in storytelling, art, and music presentations, helping to humanize their experiences and promote empathy.

In Lublin, the Different Sounds Cross-Culture Festival (Inne Brzmienia) combines music from diverse cultural traditions with debates and educational programmes focused on migration, diversity, and human rights. The festival emphasizes the cultural contributions of minority communities and aims to break down stereotypes and build bridges between different groups.

These festivals serve not only as celebrations of diversity but also as strategic tools for social inclusion, allowing refugees and other newcomers to take an active role in Polish society. They reflect an increasing recognition of the value of multiculturalism in building resilient, open communities.

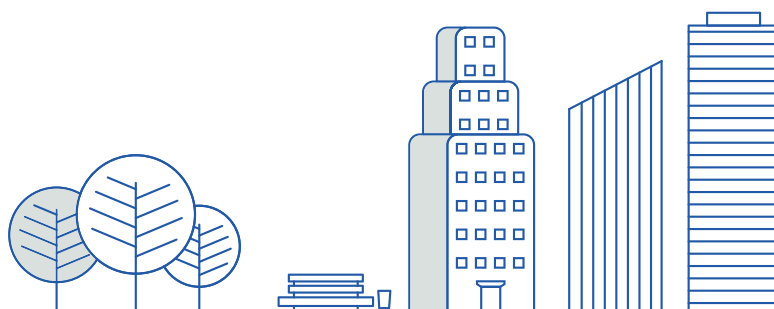
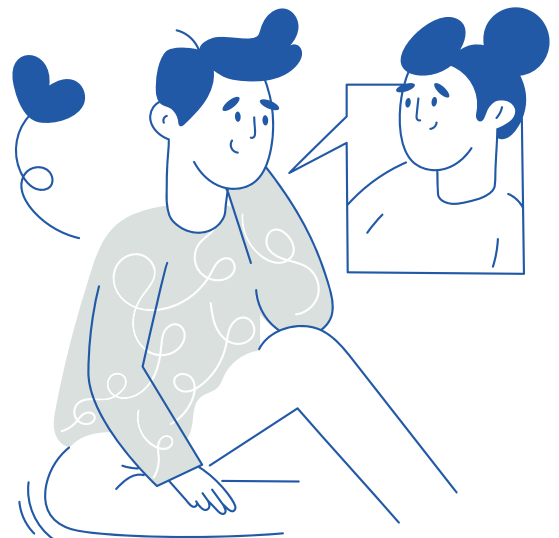
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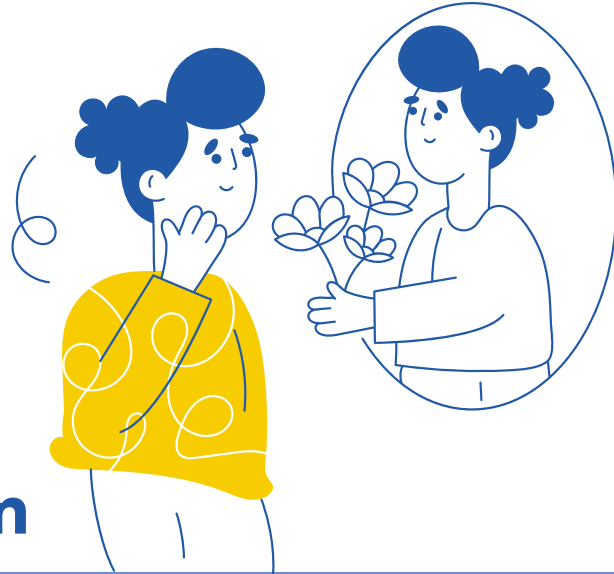
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4. Social Integration

Social integration is a key objective of the European Union, reflecting its commitment to building inclusive, cohesive, and resilient societies. As an area of shared concern among member states, social integration involves ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their origin, background, or legal status, can fully participate in the economic, social, cultural, and political life of their communities.

The EU promotes integration through policies and initiatives to combat discrimination, support equal opportunities, and encourage intercultural dialogue. This includes targeted support for vulnerable groups such as migrants, refugees, minorities, and people with disabilities. Education, access to healthcare, employment, housing, and civic participation are essential components of the EU's integration strategy. By fostering social integration, the EU not only upholds its core values, such as human dignity, freedom, and equality, but also strengthens democracy, enhances social stability, and contributes to the overall prosperity and unity of the Union.

Building community connections

One of the most important steps in rebuilding your life in a new country is forming meaningful connections with the people around you. Building a sense of community can help reduce feelings of isolation, ease cultural adaptation, and open doors to new opportunities. While integration can take time, there are many ways to actively participate and feel more at home.

- **Get to Know Your Neighbours:** Simple gestures like greeting your neighbours, introducing yourself, or offering to help with small tasks can start positive relationships. Many communities in Europe value friendliness and mutual respect. Don't be afraid to make the first move — small interactions often grow into supportive friendships.

- **Join Local Clubs and Interest Groups:** Most towns and cities have a variety of clubs and groups open to all residents — from sports teams and music groups to hiking clubs and book circles. Look for local community centres (often called "Cultural Houses," "Maison de Quartier," or similar), libraries, or online platforms such as Facebook, Meetup.com, or local bulletin boards for announcements and activities. Participating in these groups helps improve your language skills, share your talents, and meet people with similar interests.

- **Volunteer Your Time and Skills:** Volunteering is a powerful way to give back to your host community and connect with people from all walks of life. Many local organizations and NCOs welcome help — whether it's serving meals at a shelter, helping with a community garden, or supporting events. Your unique skills, including language abilities or experience in a trade, can be very valuable.

- **Attend Community Events and Meetings:** Check local municipal websites, social media pages, or community notice boards for events such as festivals, neighbourhood clean-ups, public discussions, or town hall meetings. These gatherings are great opportunities to learn more about your new environment and have a voice in the community. Some municipalities offer interpreters or translated materials for newcomers.

- **Get Involved in Religious or Cultural Centres:** Churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, and cultural centers are often more than just places of worship — they are also hubs for social interaction and mutual support. Many host language classes, job support groups, children's activities, and social events are open to the wider public.

- **Participate in Language Exchange Programmes:** Language is a gateway to deeper integration. Many communities offer free or low-cost language classes or conversation groups. Consider joining a language exchange (tandem partner) where you help someone learn Ukrainian or Russian, and they help you learn the local language. This is not only helpful for language skills but also fosters friendship.

- **Connect with Other Ukrainians and Refugee Communities:** While it's important to meet locals, connecting with fellow Ukrainians or people with similar backgrounds can provide emotional support, shared resources, and advice from those who understand your experience. Look for Ukrainian community organizations or refugee support groups active in your area.

Remember: Integration is not about losing your identity but about creating new connections and mutual understanding. Your presence enriches the community, and your experiences and perspectives are valuable. Be patient with yourself and others — every small step you take strengthens the bonds that make a community thrive.

Accessing support services

When arriving in a new country, understanding where and how to access support can make a significant difference in your well-being and successful integration. Many local governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international agencies provide a wide range of services to help refugees and displaced people settle into their new environment. These services are often free or low-cost and are designed to support you in navigating daily life, understanding your rights, and addressing emotional and practical challenges.

• **Social services and basic needs support:** Local municipal offices or refugee coordination centers often provide access to basic services such as:



Housing assistance

Temporary shelter, subsidized accommodation or help finding long-term housing.



Food aid

Food banks, meal vouchers, or free meal distribution points.



Financial assistance

Emergency funds, social benefits, or support for families with children.



Clothing and hygiene products

Some centers distribute donated items or provide access to thrift shops.

To access these services, you may need to register with local authorities or a refugee support organization.

• **Legal advice and documentation support:** Navigating asylum processes, residence permits, and work authorizations can be complicated. Free legal assistance is often available to help you with asylum and temporary protection applications, family reunification procedures, understanding your legal rights and responsibilities and filing complaints or resolving legal disputes. Many NGOs and legal aid centres offer consultations in Ukrainian or can provide interpreters.

• **Psychological and emotional support:** The trauma of war, displacement, and adapting to a new culture can affect mental health. Free or low-cost mental health services are available in many areas, including counselling and therapy (individual, family, or group), support groups for refugees or trauma survivors, helplines for emotional crisis support and child psychological care. If you are experiencing anxiety, depression, sleep issues, or emotional distress, reaching out is a sign of strength, not weakness.

• **Health services:** Most European countries provide refugees with access to healthcare, including general medical check-ups and urgent care, maternal and child healthcare, vaccinations and COVID-19 testing, chronic disease treatment and medications. You may need a health insurance card, registration with a general practitioner, or a temporary ID number to access care. NGOs and refugee assistance offices can help you with these procedures.

• **Employment and job training services:** To support economic independence, many organizations offer job search support, vocational training and skills development programmes, recognition of diplomas and qualifications, and language courses linked to employment. Some countries also have mentorship programmes that match newcomers with local professionals in their field.

• **Educational support:** Education is a key to long-term stability for children and adults. Support services often include enrollment assistance for schools and preschools, language classes (e.g., integration classes, "welcome classes"), tutoring and after-school programs, adult education and language learning centers. In some countries, public education for children is compulsory and free, even for those awaiting refugee status.



To access these support services, start by:

- Registering at your local refugee reception centre or municipal office.
- Asking for an orientation guide or contact list.
- Visiting websites of trusted NGOs like the Red Cross, Caritas, Save the Children, or local Ukrainian diaspora organizations.
- Checking bulletin boards at community centres, shelters, libraries, or churches.

Many services are also listed online in multiple languages, including Ukrainian, through official government or EU-supported portals.

Country	Website	Description
European Union	EU solidarity with Ukraine European Commission	Info on temporary protection rights, travel, housing, healthcare, and education. Available in Ukrainian and other EU languages.
Poland	PomagamUkraine	Government-run platform connecting Ukrainians with aid offers. Available in Ukrainian, Polish, English.
Austria	BBU	Government-run platform with different information for Ukrainian refugees
Spain	Ucraniaurgente	Official information portal for Ukrainian refugees
Portugal	Ucrânia: Informações e apoios disponíveis em Portugal - gov.pt	Ucrânia: Informações e apoios disponíveis em Portugal



5. Housing and living standards



Finding safe, stable, and dignified living conditions is one of the first and most important steps toward rebuilding life in a new country. Across the European Union, Member States offer various forms of housing support and social assistance to refugees and displaced persons, including those fleeing the war in Ukraine. While housing systems and living standards may differ from country to country, all are guided by the core EU values of dignity, solidarity, and inclusion. This section provides essential information to help you understand your rights and responsibilities, access housing services, and adapt to living conditions in your host country, ensuring your safety, comfort, and integration into the local community.

Finding Accommodation

Refugees can seek housing through local listings, government initiatives, and NGOs dedicated to assisting migrants. Many EU countries offer temporary shelter upon arrival, followed by support in finding more permanent housing. Municipalities often provide social housing or subsidized rental options, while non-profit organisations and community networks can help identify available rooms, apartments, or host families. It's important to register with local authorities as soon as possible, as this may be required to access housing assistance. In some cases, financial support or rent subsidies are available to help cover costs. Language barriers or unfamiliar legal procedures may make the process challenging, but many NGOs and local support centres offer translation, legal advice, and mediation services to help you navigate the system. Always make sure to sign a rental agreement and understand your rights and responsibilities as a tenant in your host country.

Understanding tenant rights

It is important for refugees to be aware of their rights as tenants, which include access to safe, clean, and habitable housing, as well as fair and non-discriminatory treatment by landlords. In all EU countries, tenant rights are protected by law, and landlords must meet basic housing standards, such as heating, sanitation, and structural safety.

Tenants have the right to a written rental agreement that clearly outlines the terms of the lease, rent amount, duration, and conditions for termination. Landlords cannot evict tenants without legal cause or due process, and discrimination based on nationality, refugee status, or ethnicity is strictly prohibited under EU law and national regulations.

If you feel your rights are being violated—for example, if you face unsafe living conditions, harassment, or illegal eviction—seek help from local authorities, refugee support centers, or legal aid organizations. Understanding your rights and responsibilities not only protects you, but also helps you settle more confidently and securely in your new home.

Some Examples by Country:

Spain:

Refugees have access to state-supported housing through the Asylum Reception System (Sistema de Acogida). After the initial reception phase, organizations like CEAR (Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado) and ACCEM assist in finding rental housing and understanding tenancy agreements. Tenant rights are protected under the Ley de Arrendamientos Urbanos (Urban Leases Law), and rent increases, evictions, and contract conditions are regulated.

Austria:

Refugees are initially provided with accommodation through the Basic Welfare Support (Grundversorgung) system. As they transition to private housing, tenant rights are covered by the Tenancy Act (Mietrechtsgesetz). Austrian tenants are entitled to legal security in rental contracts, capped rent increases in many cases, and protection against eviction without court proceedings. NGOs such as Caritas, Diakonie, and Volkshilfe offer housing advice, legal support, and social integration assistance.

Poland:

Refugees from Ukraine are entitled to housing support through government and local community initiatives. Legal aid and tenant advice are available via NGOs like the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights and local refugee support centres.

Italy:

Italian regions manage social housing and offer temporary accommodations to refugees. The Tenant Statute (Statuto degli Inquilini) ensures fair treatment, and organizations like ARCI or Caritas provide support for housing and legal assistance.

Portugal:

The Urgent Housing Support Programme (Porta de Entrada) is a Portuguese government measure to respond to the immediate need for housing for refugees and displaced persons through financial support that allows accommodation in hotels, tourist establishments or rental houses with state co-financing.

Utilities and basic living needs

Accessing and setting up utilities such as electricity, gas, water, heating, and internet is a key part of settling into a new home and adapting to daily life. The process may vary between EU countries, but some basic steps and services are common across most member states. When moving into a rental property, utilities may already be included in the rent ("all-inclusive" or utilities included) or require separate contracts with service providers. It's important to clarify this with your landlord before signing the lease.

Setting up utilities

Electricity & Gas: You may need to choose a provider and sign a contract. In some cases, previous tenants or the landlord will have active contracts you can take over. Bring identification (e.g., passport), proof of address, and your rental agreement.

Water: Usually managed by the municipality and often included in rent or building charges. Ask your landlord or housing provider how it's arranged.

Heating: In apartments, heating may be centralised (e.g., through the building) or individual (e.g., gas or electric heaters). Understand who pays and how billing works.

Internet & Phone: Several private companies offer mobile and home internet packages. You may need a local bank account or tax ID to sign up. Some companies offer prepaid options with no long-term contract.

Things to know

Billing: Keep copies of all bills and contracts. Most providers issue monthly bills, which you can pay by bank transfer, direct debit, or online.

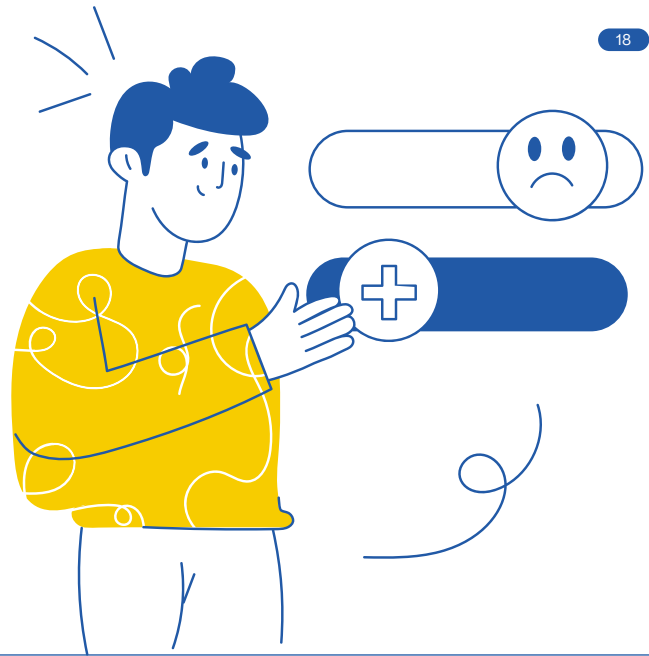
Energy Efficiency: Be aware of energy-saving practices, as heating and electricity can be expensive. Many countries offer advice or subsidies for low-income households.

Utilities: Check if utilities are included in rent before signing your lease.

Assistance: If you're facing financial difficulty, local social services may offer energy support schemes or help with basic household needs.



6. Health and Well-Being



Access to healthcare and emotional support is essential when adjusting to life in a new country. The EU and its Member States are committed to ensuring that refugees, including those from Ukraine, can receive medical care, psychological support, and guidance on staying healthy. Whether you need to visit a doctor, get vaccinations, or seek mental health assistance, services are available—often for free or at low cost—through national health systems and humanitarian organizations.

Access to healthcare services

Refugees are entitled to healthcare services in all EU Member States. Access to timely and appropriate medical care is vital for physical and mental well-being, especially for individuals and families recovering from conflict and displacement. Upon arrival in the host country, refugees are usually registered with local authorities or migration services, which enables access to the national health-care system. In many cases, refugees are granted the same healthcare rights as nationals or other insured residents, including:

General medical care (doctor visits, diagnostics, prescriptions)

Emergency care and hospitalisation

Maternal and child healthcare

Vaccinations and preventive services

Mental health and psychological support

Chronic illness management and specialist referrals

Refugees should register with a local health authority or clinic to receive a health card or number that gives them access to these services. Medical care may be provided free of charge or require a small co-payment, depending on the country.

In addition to public services, many humanitarian organisations—such as the Red Cross, Médecins du Monde, and local NGOs—offer free or low-cost medical assistance, translation services, and guidance in navigating the healthcare system. Refugees are encouraged to ask for help if they face difficulties with access, language, or documentation. Health is a right, and EU countries are committed to ensuring that no one is left behind.

Country-specific information

Spain:

Ukrainian refugees are granted access to the Spanish public healthcare system upon registration with local authorities. They can obtain a health card (tarjeta sanitaria), which allows them to receive free or subsidized healthcare. Services include general practitioners, emergency care, pediatrics, gynecology, and vaccinations. Mental health services are available through primary care centers or referred specialists.

Austria:

Ukrainian refugees are entitled to free healthcare through the Austrian public health system. After registering for temporary protection and receiving an e-card, refugees can access general practitioners, specialists, hospital care, mental health services, and medication. Preventive services such as vaccinations and maternal health care are also available. Organisations like Diakonie and Caritas Austria offer additional support, including translation and social counselling.

Poland:

Ukrainian refugees are eligible for free healthcare through the National Health Fund (NFZ). After registration and obtaining a PESEL number (national ID), they can access doctors, hospitals, maternity care, and vaccinations. Emergency care is available even without full registration. The Polish Red Cross and NGOs like Fundacja Ocalenie offer assistance and help with translation.

Italy:

Refugees can access the National Health Service (SSN). After obtaining a tax code (codice fiscale) and residence permit, refugees can register with a local health authority (ASL) and be assigned a family doctor. Services include general medical care, maternal and child healthcare, emergency services, and mental health support. NGOs such as Emergency and Caritas also provide medical care, especially in cases of urgent need.

Portugal:

Portugal provides full access to the National Health Service (SNS) for refugees. After registration with local services and receiving a user number (número de utente), individuals can access family doctors, emergency care, medication, and specialized consultations. Services for pregnant women, children, and psychological support are prioritized.

Mental health resources

Mental health care is an essential part of overall well-being, especially for refugees who have experienced war, loss, displacement, and uncertainty. Recognizing and addressing emotional distress is just as important as treating physical illness. Most EU countries provide free or low-cost psychological support through their national health systems. Refugees can access mental health services by contacting local family doctors, community health centres, or refugee support organizations. Services often include:

- Individual or group therapy.
- Support for children and families.
- Treatment for trauma, anxiety, and depression.
- Crisis counselling and helplines.
- Cultural mediation and interpretation support.

Where to start

- Ask your general practitioner or local health clinic for a referral to a psychologist or psychiatrist.
- Contact local NGOs such as the Red Cross, Caritas, or Médecins du Monde, which often run special programmes for refugee mental health.
- Some municipalities and hospitals offer walk-in mental health services or partner with trauma centers specializing in refugee care.

Country-specific information

- **Spain:** Mental health services are available via public health centers (centros de salud). NGOs like CEAR and ACCEM offer trauma-informed care.
- **Portugal:** The SNS provides access to psychologists; mental health units in hospitals support refugees. Cruz Vermelha and Doctors of the World also help.
- **Poland:** PESEL holders can access free psychological care through NFZ. NGOs like Fundacja Ocalenie provide therapy and emotional support in Ukrainian.
- **Italy:** Services through ASL include psychotherapy and psychiatric care. Organizations like Emergency and Caritas Italiana provide culturally sensitive mental health assistance.
- **Austria:** Refugees with an e-card can access psychologists through the public health system. Diakonie and Psychosocial Center ESRA offer trauma support.



Healthy lifestyle choices

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle is important for physical and mental well-being, especially during times of transition and stress. A balanced diet, regular physical activity, and good daily habits can support your body's resilience and help you feel more in control of your life in a new country. Across the European Union, healthy living is a shared value supported by many public initiatives and community services. EU countries promote accessible healthcare, nutritious food options, active lifestyles, and mental well-being as part of daily life. Refugees and newcomers are encouraged to take part in this culture of well-being through different means:

A) Nutrition

Eating a variety of healthy foods (fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats) can strengthen the immune system, improve mood, and boost energy. In many EU countries, fresh and nutritious foods are available at local markets and supermarkets, and public programmes may support low-income families in accessing food through:

- Food vouchers or subsidies.
- Community kitchens and food banks.
- Nutrition programmes for children and pregnant women.

B) Physical activity

Exercise can help reduce stress, improve sleep, and support emotional balance. Even simple activities like walking, stretching, or playing outside with children can make a difference. Many communities offer:

- Free or low-cost access to parks, gyms, or swimming pools.
- Group activities like team sports, walking clubs, yoga, or dance classes.
- Programmes for children and teens to stay active and socialise.

C) Daily Habits

Establishing a daily routine that includes healthy meals, movement, rest, and social interaction can improve stability and promote a sense of normality. If you are facing challenges, try to:

- Sleep regularly and avoid excessive screen time before bed.
- Stay hydrated and reduce sugary drinks or processed foods.
- Connect socially by spending time with family, joining local events, or joining support groups.
- Limit alcohol and tobacco use, and seek help if you're struggling with dependence.

Even small steps toward healthier living can make a big difference. By embracing these practices, refugees can care for their health and connect with the values of their host communities. Living well is a key part of feeling safe, supported, and at home in the EU. Ask local health professionals or NGOs about programmes in your area to support your physical and mental wellness.





7. Education and language learning

Enrolment in local schools

Refugee children have the right to education, and it's important for parents to understand the enrollment process in their local school systems. Each EU country may have slightly different procedures, but generally, the following steps apply:

1. Contact the local education authority

Visit or call the municipality or local education office where you are residing. They will guide you on which school your child can attend based on your address and their age.

2. Prepare necessary documents

Commonly required documents include:

- Proof of identity (passport or ID).
- Proof of residence (temporary protection certificate, rental contract, or confirmation from a refugee shelter).
- Immunization and health records (if available).
- Previous school records or certificates (if available).

Don't worry if you are missing some documents—many schools offer flexibility for refugee families.

3. Language support and integration programmes

Many EU schools provide language support for children who do not yet speak the local language. These can include preparatory classes, bilingual support, or additional tutoring. Integration programmes also help children adapt socially and culturally to their new environment.

4. School supplies and assistance

Ask about assistance programmes that may help with school materials, meals, transportation, and extra-curricular activities. Many communities offer support through schools, NGOs, or local charities.

5. Rights and inclusion

Refugee children have the same rights as local students, including the right to a safe learning environment, special education support if needed, and access to extracurricular programmes. Discrimination in schools is not tolerated under EU law.

6. Involvement of parents

Parents are encouraged to participate in school activities and maintain regular contact with teachers and staff. Interpreters may be available to help communicate with the school.

Enrolling your child in school not only ensures continued education but also plays a vital role in helping them regain a sense of normality, security, and community.

Country-specific information

Country	Enrollment Authority	Key Documents	Language Support	Special Measures
Austria	Municipality MA 10	Meldezettel, recent certificate, ID	Prep classes, flexible docs	Submit by May/Aug deadlines
Italy	Comune USR	Residence, ID, school records	L2 programmes, catch-up	Regional variations check locally
Spain	Ayuntamiento CCAA	Empadronamiento, ID, school records	Welcoming classes	Check with advisor
Portugal	Escola Município	ID, proof of arrival/ residence, records	NNL reinforcement, teams	Simplified equivalence, reception centres
Poland	School + Municipality	PESEL, application, records or declaration	Polish classes, assistants	Attendance tied to benefits, psycho- social help

Language Courses and Learning Opportunities

Language proficiency is crucial for integration and accessing employment opportunities. Many local governments offer free or subsidized courses for refugees.

1. Government-sponsored language courses

Most EU countries provide publicly funded language programmes tailored for refugees and newcomers. These often include:

- Beginner to advanced classes
- Courses focused on everyday communication, work, and cultural orientation
- Flexible schedules to accommodate childcare or employment

These courses are usually offered through adult education centers, integration offices, or local community centers.

2. Online learning platforms

In addition to in-person classes, free or low-cost language learning apps and websites are available. Examples include:

- Duolingo, Memrise, and Busuu for self-paced study
- BBC Languages, DW Learn German, or Institut Français resources for country specific language training
- Ukrainian-language options may be available to ease the learning process

3. Courses for children and teens

In schools, children often receive dedicated language support or transition classes designed to help them catch up academically while learning the local language.

4. Language and employment programmes

Some vocational training programmes combine language learning with job skills, helping you prepare for employment in specific sectors (e.g. healthcare, construction, hospitality). Ask local employment or refugee services for available options.

5. Community and volunteer initiatives

NGOs, religious organizations, and volunteer groups frequently offer informal language cafés, conversation clubs, or peer learning groups. These are great for practicing speaking in a relaxed and supportive environment.

6. Certification and progress

Completing formal language courses often leads to certification (e.g., A1, A2, B1 levels under the CEFR system), which can help with job applications, residency status, or further education.

Learning the local language takes time, but it is one of the most empowering steps toward building a new life in your host country. Don't hesitate to ask for help or join group activities that encourage daily practice.

Country-specific information

Country	Providers	Course Types	Cost	Extras
Austria	ÖIF, Sprachportal.at	German A0–C1, sector-specific, online options	Free	Cultural consultations, evening/weekend classes
Italy	Scuole migranti, adult schools	Italian & civics, A2/B1 exam prep	Low fee (~€15)	Free official exams, varied by region
Spain	EOIs, NGOs	Public Spanish courses, conversation clubs	Subsidized/free	Cultural integration via NGOs
Portugal	CPR, Camões, SPEAK	Beginner Portuguese, literacy books	Free/subsidized	Community & cultural exchange
Poland	Foundation Ukraine, Lingva, Universities	Polish classes A1–B2, online platform, full-time academic courses	Free	Intercultural assistants, employment-linked clubs

Lifelong learning and adult education

Education does not stop at a young age; opportunities for adult education and vocational training are essential for personal development. Refugees and displaced adults across the EU have access to a wide range of adult learning programmes designed to help them integrate, gain new skills, and improve their employment prospects.

1. Public adult education centers

Most EU countries offer adult education through public institutions such as vocational schools, municipal education centers, and specialized training colleges. These programmes may include:

- o- Language and literacy classes
- o- Digital skills and computer literacy
- o- Secondary school completion programmes (e.g. evening classes)
- o- EU-recognized vocational qualifications

2. Vocational training and reskilling

Many countries provide job-oriented training that prepares adults for specific trades or professions in demand. These include sectors like healthcare, construction, hospitality, transportation, and IT. Programmes are often:

- o- Short-term and practical
- o- Delivered in partnership with employers
- o- Supported with language training and job placement assistance

3. Recognition of prior learning (RPL)

If you have professional experience or qualifications from Ukraine, you may be able to have them recognized or validated in your host country. Contact local employment offices or chambers of commerce for guidance on:

- o- Translating and evaluating credentials
- o- Taking bridging courses or competency exams

4. Online learning platforms

For those who prefer or need to study from home, many accredited platforms offer free or affordable courses in various subjects. Examples include:

- o- Coursera, edX, FutureLearn (many offer refugee scholarships)
- o- National e-learning portals (e.g. Poland's NAVOICA or Austria's Bildungshub)

5. NGO and community programmes

Non-profit organizations frequently provide accessible training programmes, mentorship, and career coaching tailored to the needs of refugees and migrants.

6. Support services

Adult learners may also benefit from:

- o- Childcare during classes
- o- Travel reimbursements
- o- Career counseling and psychological support

Lifelong learning empowers adults not only to adapt to a new country but also to thrive, building a future that aligns with their skills, interests, and goals.

Case study 1: Lifelong learning in Austria

• **"Mom learns German"**: Offers migrant mothers German language training, orientation to Austrian systems, and free childcare—empowering them to support their children's education and become active in their communities.

• **"Mentoring für Migrantinnen und Migranten"**: A collaboration between the Austrian Economic Chamber, AMS, and ÖIF. Qualified migrants are paired with Austrian business mentors for six months, aiding job search, application prep, and career guidance. Over 1,800 mentor-mentee pairs established by 2018.

Case study 2: Lifelong learning in Italy

Integration & Skills Modules for Young Adults
A multi-module programme targeting learners 16+, offering:

- **Italian language** (3 modules)
 - **Health & well-being, career guidance, active citizenship, and integration courses**
 - Largely attended by Ukrainians: in a recent run, 73 of 216 participants were Ukrainian; ~68 % achieved ≥75 % attendance.
- This initiative reflects practical integration through language, employment, and civic education.

Case study 3: Lifelong learning in Portugal

SPEAK Community Conversation & Vocational Training

• Funded by AMIF and NGOs (CPR, JRS), SPEAK provides free/subsidized Portuguese classes combined with vocational workshops and conversation groups.

• By spring 2022, over 5,700 refugees participated, and 1,400 found employment. The IEFPP portal listed ~29,000 job opportunities, tied to training completion.

Case study 4: Lifelong learning in Poland

Ukrainian Educational Hub

- Partners with UNHCR and CEI to deliver:
 - Psychological support workshops addressing "refugee syndrome"
 - Lectures on employment: résumé writing, interviews, legal and tax guidance, entrepreneurship.
- Additionally, the "InclusionApp" developed a mobile game and e-learning portal to teach language and culture to refugees and migrants

Country-specific information

Country	Main Providers & Programmes	Focus Areas	Key Extras
Austria	ÖIF, AMS, Jugendcollege, b.mobile	Integration year, youth/vocational prep	Apprenticeship support, German/math, career/psych support
Italy	CPIA, VET hubs, decree-led specialist pathways	Skills profiling, Italian/civic language, health professions	Allowances, psych/legal support, qualification fast-track
Spain	National vocational system, contingency funding	Credential validation, vocational/higher education	Ukrainian teacher support, EU-funded counseling
Portugal	IEFP/Qualifica, SPEAK NGOs	Vocational, language and job readiness	Employment placements, wage-condition monitoring
Poland	Educational Research Institute, Ministry, NGOs	Inclusive teaching, vocational reskilling	Specialist and inter-cultural assistants, diploma recognition procedures



8. Employment and Economic Participation

Job market overview

Understanding the job market can help refugees identify potential employment sectors that align with their skills and experiences. Each EU country has specific sectors where the demand for workers is high, and many governments actively support refugee employment through tailored programmes and incentives for employers.

1

High-demand sectors

Refugees may find opportunities in areas experiencing labor shortages, including:

- Healthcare (nurses, caregivers, hospital support staff)
- Construction and skilled trades (plumbers, electricians, carpenters)
- Agriculture and food production
- Transport and logistics (drivers, warehouse workers)
- Hospitality and tourism
- IT and digital services (particularly for those with prior training or experience)

2

Recognition of qualifications

If you previously worked in a regulated profession (e.g. doctor, engineer, teacher), you may need to apply for recognition of your qualifications. This process varies by country, but support is often available through:

- National recognition bodies
- Refugee support organizations
- Fast-track schemes (available in some countries, particularly for healthcare roles)

3

Job search resources

Many countries offer free job search services through public employment agencies. These typically include:

- Job listings and matching services
- CV and interview workshops
- Career counseling and skills assessments
- Language and integration support tied to job training

4

Employment rights and protections

Refugees working under temporary protection have the same labor rights as local workers. This includes:

- Legal contracts
- Minimum wage guarantees
- Health and safety protections
- The right to join labor unions

It's important to be aware of your rights and to avoid informal or exploitative work. Seek guidance from official agencies or NGOs if you're unsure.

5

Supportive employers and initiatives

Many businesses participate in refugee hiring programmes or receive government incentives to provide work placements. Refugees can also access mentorship and apprenticeship opportunities to help transition into new sectors.

6

Entrepreneurship

Some countries provide support for refugees who wish to start their own businesses, including:

- Free training in business planning
- Legal and financial guidance
- Micro-loans and grants

Country-specific information

Country	Entry Sectors	Qualifications Recognition	Support Programmes
Austria	Hospitality, cleaning, general helpers	Flexible with language-based placement	ÖIF/AMS integration support
Italy	Mechanical, assembly, logistics, care	CPIA skills mapping & fast-track	Mi Integro, UNHCR Assolavoro, job placement tools
Spain	Healthcare, tourism, construction, logistics	Regional credential recognition	Plan contingencia; EU-funded integration support
Portugal	Manufacturing, hospitality, transport	Local equivalence for trades	IEFP/Qualifica vocational training and placements
Poland	Manufacturing, food & accommodation, logistics	Reskilling for trades & healthcare	UNHCR grants, vocational programmes, assistance tools

Understanding employment rights

Refugees should be aware of their rights as employees, including fair pay, working hours, and the right to unionize. When working in the European Union, refugees with temporary protection have the same rights and obligations as local workers. Knowing these rights is essential to avoid exploitation and to ensure safe and fair working conditions.

1

Equal treatment

Refugees have the right to:

- Receive the **minimum wage** set by national law
- Work no more than the legal **maximum number of hours per week** (typically 40 hours, with overtime pay where applicable)
- Receive **paid leave**, rest periods, and sick leave, depending on national laws
- Have access to **social security**, healthcare, and employment insurance programmes

3

Employment contracts

Before starting work, refugees should receive a written contract outlining:

- Job responsibilities
- Salary and benefits
- Working hours
- Termination conditions

Tip: Never agree to work without a signed contract. If you're unsure, ask for help from a legal aid office or NGO.

2

Workplace safety and health

Employers are legally required to provide a safe and healthy working environment. This includes:

- Proper safety equipment and training
- Protection from workplace harassment or discrimination
- The right to report unsafe conditions without retaliation



4

Right to join a union

All workers, including refugees, have the right to:

- o- Join or form **trade unions**
- o- Participate in **collective bargaining**
- o- Receive support in case of disputes with employers.

Unions can offer legal help, representation, and advice on workers' rights.

5

Protection against exploitation

Refugees should **not be forced** to accept underpaid or informal jobs. Warning signs of exploitation include:

- o- Being paid in cash with no record
- o- Working without breaks.
- o- Threats of deportation or withholding of documents.
- o- Living in employer-controlled housing under poor conditions.

Report abuse to local labor inspectors, police, or organizations supporting refugees and workers.

6

Access to legal help

If you face problems at work, you can:

- o- **Contact a local labor office** or **employment inspectorate**
- o- **Seek free** legal assistance from NGOs, unions, or legal aid organizations
- o- Call anonymous hotlines in some

countries to report abuse or ask questions. Understanding your employment rights is key to building a safe and sustainable life in your host country. Don't hesitate to ask for help—many services are free and confidential.

Austria

- o- Labor Inspectorate (Arbeitsinspektion) enforces workplace rights such as contracts, pay, safety, and working hours.
- o- Trade unions (e.g., ÖGB) can help with contract disputes and representation. Many offer free consultations.
- o- For personalized legal support, reach out to refugee advice centers or ÖIF/AMS integration offices that also cover employment rights.

Italy

- o- Trade unions and patronati: If your employer fails to pay you or forces unacceptable working conditions, contact your local sindacato or patronato, where counselors can help document cases and report to the National Labor Inspectorate—often in English/Italian.
- o- Legal aid NGOs: Include ASGI, CLEDU, CIR, Casa della Carità, Astalli (JRS), and NAGA, all offering free legal advice on employment contracts, rights violations, and recourse.
- o- IRC's Refugee.Info provides up-to-date guidance and digital referrals across Italy.

Spain

- o- Labour Inspectorate ("Inspección de Trabajo") enforces worker rights; you can report wage theft and violations.
- o- Unions such as UGT or CCOO provide support, representation, and multilingual assistance.
- o- NGOs (e.g., Red Cross, CEAR) and municipal social services offer referrals for legal help and worker protection.

Portugal

- o- High Commission for Migration (ACM), Legal Support Office: Offers free advice on labor rights, social security, and dispute resolution
- o- Portuguese Refugee Council (CPR) and Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS): Provide legal counseling on labor issues, contracts, and rights at work
- o- Labour Inspectorate (Autoridade para as Condições do Trabalho, ACT): You can file complaints about unpaid wages or unsafe conditions.

Poland

- o- National Labour Inspectorate (Państwowa Inspekcja Pracy): Hotline in Ukrainian and legal advice in Ukrainian available.
- o- International Rescue Committee (IRC) "Know Your Rights" campaign: Offers Ukrainian-language support on wages, contracts, and employment rights
- o- Institute of Migrant Rights (Instytut Praw Migrantów) in Wrocław: Free advice, legal referrals, and employment support in Ukrainian/Polish/English
- o- UNHCR Poland and partner NGOs: Provide free legal counseling and referrals for labor disputes
- o- Trade union initiatives like "Be Like Nina" offer workshops and assistance to defend against exploitation

Country	Where to report	Who can help	Hotline / NGO support
Austria	Labour Inspectorate (Arbeitsinspektion)	ÖGB unions, ÖIF/ AMS integration support	Refugee advice centers
Italy	National Labour Inspectorate via unions/patronati	Sindacati & Patronati, ASGI, CLEDU, CIR, JRS, NAGA	Refugee.Info (IRC)
Spain	Inspección de Trabajo	UGT, CCOO unions; Red Cross, CEAR NGOs	Municipal social services
Portugal	ACT, ACM Legal Support	CPR, JRS legal counseling	Labour Inspectorate for workplace reports
Poland	National Labour Inspectorate hotline & complaints	IRC campaigns, Institute of Migrant Rights, UNHCR partners, trade unions	Ukrainian-language hotlines available



9. Civic Engagement and Participation



Understanding the EU Political System

Familiarity with the EU's political structure is key to participating in civic life and understanding how policies affect refugees. The European Union (EU) is a political and economic union made up of 27 member states that work together to ensure peace, democracy, and prosperity in Europe. The EU has several main institutions that play different roles:

- The European Parliament represents the citizens of the EU. Its members (MEPs) are directly elected every five years and are responsible for passing EU laws, approving budgets, and overseeing other EU institutions.

- The European Commission is the executive body that proposes new laws, enforces EU treaties, and manages the day-to-day business of the EU. It works to ensure that EU law is applied fairly in all member states.

- The Council of the European Union (also known as the Council of Ministers) brings together government ministers from each member country. They coordinate policies and adopt laws with the Parliament.

- The European Council consists of the heads of state or government of the EU countries and sets the EU's overall political direction and priorities.

For Ukrainian refugees, understanding these institutions helps clarify how decisions that affect asylum procedures, social services, and integration programmes are made. It also allows individuals to better navigate their rights and responsibilities under EU law. As refugees settle in EU Member States, they may also engage with national governments, which implement EU directives and provide social services. Becoming familiar with both EU-wide and national systems is important for successful integration.

While you may not yet have voting rights in EU elections (unless you are a citizen of an EU country), staying informed and involved—through community events, language learning, and local initiatives—can strengthen your voice and help you better understand the society you are part of. Knowledge of the EU political system empowers you to advocate for your rights, participate in dialogue, and build a future in your new community.

The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) play a vital role in advocacy and providing support to refugees, helping them to navigate their rights within the EU framework.

Across the European Union, NGOs operate at both local and international levels to support individuals fleeing conflict, including Ukrainian refugees. These organizations offer a wide range of services to assist with the transition to life in a new country. Some of the key areas where NGOs can assist include:

- **Legal support:** NGOs often provide free or low-cost legal advice on asylum procedures, residency permits, and family reunification.
- **Housing assistance:** Many organizations help refugees find temporary or permanent housing and advocate for better living conditions.
- **Language and education:** NGOs organize language classes, cultural orientation sessions, and tutoring for children and adults to help with integration and access to education systems.
- **Healthcare access:** Some NGOs help refugees understand their healthcare rights and connect them with medical services.
- **Employment and skills training:** NGOs frequently run programmes to help refugees develop job skills, prepare for interviews, and connect with potential employers.
- **Psychosocial support:** War and displacement can be traumatic. NGOs offer counselling and mental health support to help refugees cope with stress, anxiety, and loss.
- **Community building and advocacy:** NGOs also facilitate community events and activities, promoting inclusion and giving refugees a platform to share their experiences and concerns with decision-makers.

NGOs often collaborate with local governments, EU institutions, and other international bodies to ensure that refugees receive the support they are entitled to under EU law. As a Ukrainian refugee, connecting with NGOs can be one of the most effective ways to access essential services and feel welcomed in your new environment. Don't hesitate to reach out—many organizations have Ukrainian-speaking staff or volunteers and are specifically focused on helping those affected by the war in Ukraine.

Main NGOs list per country:

Italy

1. ARCI (Associazione Ricreativa e Culturale Italiana)

Website: arci.it

Services: Legal assistance, language courses, social integration programmes.

2. Sant'Egidio Community

Website: santegidio.org

Services: Hospitality, food aid, job training, humanitarian corridors.

3. Centro Astalli

Website: centroastalli.it

Services: Legal support, education, medical and psychological services.

Spain

1. CEAR (Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado)

Website: cear.es

Services: Legal aid, housing, employment support, integration.

2. ACCEM

Website: accem.es

Services: Reception, housing, language training, social support.

3. Cruz Roja Española (Spanish Red Cross)

Website: cruzroja.es

Services: Emergency aid, healthcare, psychosocial support.

Austria

1. Caritas Austria

Website: caritas.at

Services: Housing, language courses, mental health and integration services.

2. Diakonie Flüchtlingsdienst

Website: diakonie.at

Services: Asylum support, legal advice, education access.

3. Asylkoordination Österreich

Website: asyl.at

Services: Coordination hub, refugee rights support, advocacy.

Germany

1. Pro Asyl

Website: proasyl.de

Services: Legal support, refugee advocacy, publications.

2. Diakonie Deutschland

Website: diakonie.de

Services: Shelters, legal counselling, social work, integration.

3. Caritas Germany

Website: caritas.de

Services: Full support including housing, legal aid, employment.

4. Refugee Councils (Flüchtlingsrat)

Website: Varies by federal state (e.g., www.fluechtlingsrat.de)

Services: Local legal advice, rights advocacy.

Poland

1. Fundacja Ocalenie (The Ocalenie Foundation)

Website: ocalenie.org.pl

Services: Legal and psychological help, housing, language courses.

2. Polish Humanitarian Action (PAH)

Website: pah.org.pl

Services: Humanitarian aid, healthcare, Ukrainian refugee support.

3. Polish Red Cross (Polski Czerwony Krzyż)

Website: www.pck.pl

Services: Food and hygiene kits, shelter, family reunification.

4. Homo Faber Association

Website: www.hf.org.pl

Services: Legal support, cultural integration, Ukrainian family assistance.

Portugal

1. CPR – Portuguese Refugee Council

Website: <https://cpr.pt>

Services: Asylum support, legal aid, reception centers, integration programmes

2. Jesuit Refugee Service Portugal

Website: www.jrsportugal.pt

Services: Legal assistance, employment support, social inclusion

3. Portuguese Red Cross

Website: www.cruzvermelha.pt

Services: Emergency assistance, housing, healthcare, social support

4. Associação Solidariedade Imigrante

Website: www.solimigrante.org

Services: Legal advice, migrant rights advocacy, community support

Voting rights and civic participation

As residents, many refugees may have the right to vote at local level, encouraging civic engagement and participation in democratic processes. While voting rights in the European Union vary by country and legal status, some EU member states allow non-citizen residents, including recognized refugees, to participate in local or municipal elections. This helps foster inclusion and ensures that the voices of all residents are heard in decisions affecting their communities.

Key points:

- **EU citizens in another EU country:** EU citizens living in a different EU country can generally vote and stand as candidates in local and European Parliament elections in their host country.
- **Recognized refugees and third-country nationals:** In several EU countries, long-term residents and recognized refugees may have the right to vote in local elections, though they typically cannot vote in national elections unless they become naturalized citizens.
- **Country-specific rules:**
 - In Sweden, Denmark, and the Netherlands, non-EU residents (including refugees) can vote in local elections after a few years of residence.
 - In Germany and Italy, voting rights at the local level are more restricted and usually require EU citizenship.
 - In Spain, Austria, and Poland, voting rights for non-EU residents are generally limited or subject to bilateral agreements.

Refugees and newcomers are encouraged to engage in other forms of civic participation as well:

- Community meetings and local forums to discuss issues that matter to your neighbourhood.
- Volunteering and joining NGOs or integration programmes.
- Participating in school boards or parent-teacher associations.
- Learning the language and laws of your host country to understand and contribute to society.

Being involved in democratic life fosters belonging and ensures that refugee voices contribute to shaping inclusive and resilient communities.

Case Study 1: Civic Engagement Programmes in Italy

Italy has implemented programmes aimed at fostering civic engagement among refugees, enabling them to participate in community decision-making processes. These initiatives are designed to go beyond basic integration by encouraging active citizenship, mutual understanding, and social cohesion. A few key examples include:

- **FAMI-funded civic orientation courses:** Funded by the EU's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (FAMI), these courses provide newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers with information about Italian laws, democratic values, public services, and rights and responsibilities. The courses are often delivered by local municipalities and NGOs in collaboration with the Ministry of the Interior.
- **Local Integration Councils:** In cities such as Bologna, Milan, and Palermo, local governments have established immigrant councils or consultative bodies where refugees and migrants can voice their concerns and contribute to municipal policy discussions. These platforms help build trust and representation in local governance.
- **Community volunteering and public service:** Many municipalities support refugee participation in voluntary civic projects, such as neighbourhood clean-up initiatives, cultural events, or local public services. These activities not only promote community engagement but also foster positive perceptions and reduce social isolation.
- **Collaboration with civil society organizations:** Organizations like ARCI, Centro Astalli, and Caritas Italiana promote civic engagement through social cooperatives, advocacy workshops, intercultural events, and mentorship programmes. Refugees often play active roles in organizing and facilitating these activities, helping shape local narratives around integration.
- **Participatory budgeting projects:** In a few municipalities, participatory budgeting initiatives include specific efforts to involve refugee and migrant communities in deciding how a portion of the local budget is spent, especially on education, social inclusion, and neighbourhood development.

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2. European Commission – AMIF (Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund).
Project Database and Country Factsheets – Italy.
Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration>

3. Comune di Bologna – Consulta Comunale delle Cittadine e dei Cittadini Stranieri
Documentazione della Consulta Comunale per l'Integrazione.
Available at: <https://www.comune.bologna.it>

4. Centro Astalli
Rapporti annuali sull'accoglienza e l'integrazione dei rifugiati in Italia.
Available at: <https://www.centroastalli.it>

5. ARCI Nazionale.
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Available at: <https://www.arci.it>

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Centri d'Italia – Civic Participation and Refugee Reception Models.
Available at: <https://centri.datoscopio.it>

Case Study 2: Civic Engagement Programmes in Spain

Spain has developed multiple programmes to promote the civic integration and participation of refugees and migrants.

- **Municipal support and participation councils:** Many cities, such as Barcelona and Madrid, have established immigrant and refugee councils where newcomers can engage in local decision-making and community planning.
- **CEAR's civic workshops:** The Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado (CEAR) runs workshops on rights, the Spanish political system, and civic participation.
- **Volunteering networks:** Organizations like ACCEM and Cruz Roja promote refugee involvement in volunteering to build skills and social ties.

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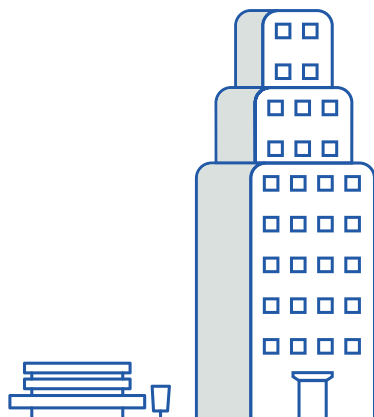
Case Study 3: Civic Engagement Programmes in Austria

Austria emphasizes formal civic orientation and integration counselling for refugees.

- **Civic orientation courses:** Funded by the Austrian government and the EU, these courses educate refugees on political rights and democratic participation.
- **Local advisory councils:** In Vienna and Graz, immigrant advisory boards facilitate refugee voices in municipal policymaking.
- **NGO-led integration projects:** Diakonie and Caritas run programmes to encourage volunteering and cultural exchange.

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Case Study 4: Civic Engagement Programmes in Portugal

Portugal is notable for its inclusive approach to refugee integration and civic participation.

- **Refugee councils:** Local councils include refugee representatives in community discussions.
- **Portuguese High Commission for Migration (ACM):** Offers civic education, language classes, and legal rights seminars.
- **Volunteering and mentorship programmes:** NGOs like the Portuguese Refugee Council facilitate refugee participation in social initiatives.

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Case Study 6: Civic Engagement Programmes in Poland

Poland focuses on community integration and legal support to foster refugee participation.

- **Local integration hubs:** Organizations like Fundacja Ocalenie offer legal aid and civic education workshops.
- **NGO-led civic education:** Polish Humanitarian Action and Homo Faber run programmes encouraging active citizenship.
- **Social and cultural events:** These events help refugees engage with local communities and build networks.

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Case Study 5: Civic Engagement Programmes in Germany

Germany has a robust framework of refugee civic engagement initiatives supported by federal and local governments.

- **Integration courses with civic modules:** The federal government provides language and civic courses that include modules on rights, duties, and political participation.
- **Local refugee councils (Flüchtlingsrat):** These councils advocate for refugees' rights and promote participation in local politics.
- **Volunteering and social projects:** NGOs like Pro Asyl and Caritas encourage refugees to take active roles in social initiatives.

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10. Safety and Security



Understanding the Legal Framework

Refugees should be informed about the legal protections available to them within EU Member states, including asylum processes and personal safety regulations. This includes understanding their rights under the Temporary Protection Directive, the steps to apply for asylum or temporary protection, and what documents are required. Refugees should also be aware of deadlines, appeal procedures, and the support services provided during the application process. Additionally, knowing the legal provisions related to access to health-care, employment, education, and housing is essential. Understanding these frameworks can help refugees navigate their new environment more confidently and avoid legal pitfalls or exploitation. Reliable legal aid services and refugee support organizations are also important resources to be aware of.

Tips for Refugees

Call ahead to confirm hours, languages supported, and required documents.

Bring identity and travel documents, plus any Ukrainian registration.

Consider multilingual hotlines, often available in Ukrainian, Russian, and local languages.

Make use of pro bono services at universities and NGOs (e.g., UPF Barcelona, CEAR Madrid).

Useful addresses

Italy

UNHCR Italy – Rome Front Desk

- **Address:** Largo Leopardi 1, 00185 Rome
- **Hours:** Tue 9:30–13, Thu 14–17
- **Phone/WhatsApp:** 800 905 570 (toll-free in Italy) or +39 351 137 6335

Austria

BBU Hotline (Federal Refugee Agency)

- **Phone:** +43 1 2676 870 9460 (Ukr/Rus: 24/7; German: 08:00–18:30)

Diakonie Refugee Legal Hotline

- **Phone:** +43 1 343 0383 (Mon–Fri, 09:00–12:00)

ÖIF Ukrainian-language Info Hotline

- **Phone:** +43 1 715 10 51 – 120 (daily, 08:00–18:00)

Interface Wien / MALVA (temporary aid centre)

- **Address:** Gerhardusgasse 25, 1200 Vienna
- **Phone:** +43 1 524 50 15 / 300 (varied hours)

Portugal

Portuguese Refugee Council (CPR) – Lisbon office

- **Phone:** +351 21 831 43 72 or +351 96 963 89 16
- **Email:** apoio.juridico@cpr.pt or geral@cpr.pt

High Commission for Migration (ACM) – Legal Support Office

- **Email:** apoio.juridico@acm.gov.pt
- **Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS)**
- **Email:** jrs@jrsportugal.pt

Poland

Halina Nieć Legal Aid Center (Cracow)

- **Address:** ul. Krowoderska 11/7, Kraków (Mon–Fri, 10:00–15:00)
- **Phone:** +48 693 390 502 (Ukr/Rus/Eng)

Halina Nieć Legal Aid Center (Helpline)

- **Phone:** +48 725 449 374

Polish Red Cross (Lublin branches)

- **Address:** Bursaki 17 & Tramwajowa 2b, Lublin (Tue–Thu 09:00–16:00)
- **Helpline:** +48 725 449 374; Legal aid for children: +48 725 449 356

Spain

CREADE – Barcelona (Red Cross)

- **Address:** Carrer de San Fructuoso 78–80, Barcelona
- **Phone:** +34 93 238 2199 (Mon–Fri, 8:30–15:00)

Toll-free number for Temporary Protection application

- **Website:** <https://www.inclusion.gob.es/el-ministerio/atencion-al-ciudadano>

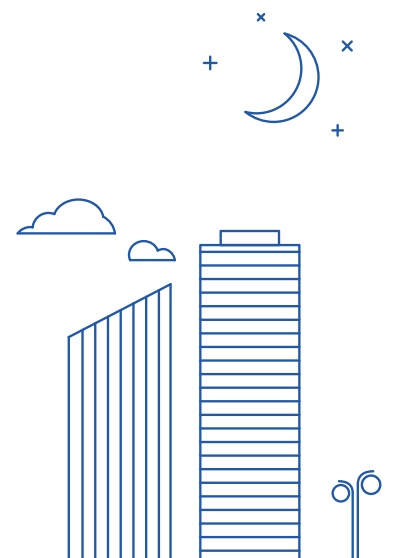
Spanish Commission for Refugee Aid (CEAR)

- **Phone:** +34 91 555 06 98 or +34 91 555 29 08

Seeking Help and Reporting Incidents

Understanding how to report incidents of discrimination or violence is crucial; many communities have dedicated resources for addressing such situations. Refugees who experience or witness abuse (whether physical, verbal, or institutional) should know their rights and how to safely access help. Most EU countries offer confidential reporting mechanisms through the police, equality bodies, or ombudsman offices. Additionally, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), refugee legal aid centers, and hotlines often provide multilingual support to guide individuals through the complaint process.

It is important to report even minor incidents, as this helps authorities monitor trends and improve protections. Victims should be encouraged to document what happened (time, place, people involved) and seek legal or psychological support if needed. Some organizations also assist with legal action, relocation, or emergency housing. Refugees should not fear retaliation or losing their residence status for speaking up—legal protections are in place to shield them from such consequences. Knowing where to turn—and having the confidence to act—can make a significant difference in promoting safety, dignity, and inclusion.



Tips for Refugees

- Always document incidents with names, times, locations, and photos if safe.
- Seek help through trusted NGOs before or alongside formal reporting.
- Use multilingual hotlines when possible to ensure you're fully understood.
- **Emergency? Call 112** anywhere in the EU.

Anti-abuse contact points per country

Italy

Reporting Abuse or Discrimination:

- **UNAR (Ufficio Nazionale Antidiscriminazioni Razziali)**

- **Role:** National office against racial discrimination
- **Hotline:** 800 90 10 10 (Mon–Fri, 9:00–19:00)
- **Email:** unar@unar.it
- **Website:** unar.it

Support Organizations:

- **ARCI**
 - Offers legal and social support for migrants and refugees; offices across Italy.
 - **Website:** arci.it
- **Telefono Rosa**
 - Specialized in gender-based violence and domestic abuse
 - **Hotline:** 1522 (24/7, multilingual)

Austria

Reporting Abuse or Discrimination:

- **ZARA (Zivilcourage und Anti-Rassismus-Arbeit)**

- **Online reporting platform:** repoting.zara.or.at
- Handles racism, hate speech, and abuse
- Support in Ukrainian, Russian, German, and English

• Austrian Ombudsman Board (Volksanwaltschaft)

- Handles complaints about public institutions
- **Website:** volksanwaltschaft.gv.at

Portugal

Reporting Abuse or Discrimination:

- **CICDR (Commission for Equality and Against Racial Discrimination)**

- **Website:** cicdr.pt
- **Report form:** Complaints portal

• Portuguese Ombudsman (Provedoria de Justiça)

- Independent authority for human rights
- **Website:** provedor-jus.pt

Support Organizations:

- **APAV (Victim Support Association)**
 - **Hotline:** 116 006 (free, confidential, Mon–Fri, 9–21)

Support for victims of violence, hate crimes, and discrimination

- **Website:** apav.pt

• High Commission for Migration (ACM)

- Offers legal advice and complaint mechanisms for migrants
- **Website:** acm.gov.pt

Poland

Reporting Abuse or Discrimination:

• Commissioner for Human Rights (Rzecznik Praw Obywatelskich)

- Handles discrimination, racism, and state abuse
- **Online form:** bip.brpo.gov.pl
- **Email:** biurorzecznika@brpo.gov.pl

• Police Emergency Line: 112 (for immediate threats)

Support Organizations:

- **Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights**
 - Offers legal assistance to victims of abuse
 - **Website:** hfhr.pl
- **R2P (Right to Protection Poland)**
 - Help desk and Telegram support for Ukrainian refugees
 - **Website:** 2p.ngo
- **Nasz Wybór Foundation / Ukrainian House in Warsaw**
 - Cultural and legal help for Ukrainians in Poland
 - **Website:** ukrainskidom.pl

Spain

Reporting Abuse or Discrimination:

- **Ministry of Equality – 016 Gender Violence Hotline**

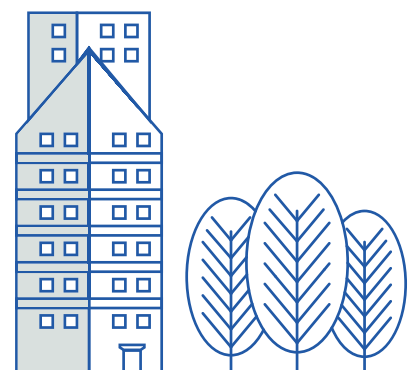
- **Phone:** 016 (24/7, multilingual)
- For For deaf/hearing-impaired people: 900 116 016
- **Website:** igualdad.gob.es

• Council for Eliminating Racial/Ethnic Discrimination (CEDRE)

- Free legal help for victims of racial discrimination
- **Email:** info@igualdadynodiscriminacion.es
- **Website:** igualdadynodiscriminacion.migualdad.es

Support Organizations:

- **CEAR (Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado)**
 - Offers legal assistance to refugees
 - **Website:** www.cear.es
- **SOS Racismo Spain**
 - Provides legal and psychological support
 - **Regional offices:** sosracismo.eu





11. Conclusion

Embracing the EU lifestyle

Refugees are encouraged to embrace elements of local culture while sharing their own heritage, fostering a two-way cultural exchange. From language learning and local customs to participation in neighbourhood events and civic life, engaging with host communities builds mutual understanding and respect. While adaptation takes time, openness to new experiences can enrich both personal growth and the broader society.

The importance of community and support

Establishing a support network among fellow refugees and local residents is essential for successful integration, providing emotional support and practical assistance. Whether through cultural centers, religious groups, volunteer initiatives, or refugee organizations, building community helps reduce isolation and creates a sense of belonging. In many cities, Ukrainians have formed vibrant support circles—sharing housing advice, job leads, childcare, and emotional comfort.

Moving forward with confidence

Despite the uncertainty and challenges of displacement, refugees in the EU are protected by a strong legal framework and supported by numerous civil society initiatives. By knowing your rights, seeking support when needed, and actively participating in your new community, you can rebuild your life with dignity and security. Your resilience, talents, and culture are valuable contributions to the European mosaic.

**You are not alone—
and your presence
matters.**



12. Annexes

A: Contacts for Support Organizations

Red Cross (Various Countries):

Provides a broad range of support services to refugees.

UNHCR:

The UN's refugee agency, offering assistance globally.

Local NGOs:

Various small organizations focused on refugees and immigrants.

B: Helpful Links and Resources

European Union Refugee Policies:

EU Home Affairs

ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum_en

Language Learning Resources:

Duolingo www.duolingo.com

Rosetta Stone rosettastone.com

EU Healthcare Access:

European Health Insurance Card

ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=559



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Guidelines to promote the "EUROPEAN WAY OF LIFE"

(EU culture and diversity)
among war refugees



puenteproject.eu



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