



EMOTIONAL DYNAMICS OF TEMPORARY PROTECTION POLICY IN PORTUGAL

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UNDERSTANDING THE EMOTIONS
OF PROTECTIVE POLICIES
PROTEMO Thematic Briefs

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This policy brief draws on discussions and insights from an in-person workshop examining the emotional dimension of temporary protection for Ukrainians in Portugal , held in Coimbra, Portugal on 26 November 2025, and organised by the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of the University of Coimbra.



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MAIN FINDINGS

- Shortcomings in three policy areas were identified as having a negative impact on the emotional well-being of beneficiaries of temporary protection in Portugal: residence, information and communication, and psychological assistance.
- The temporariness of residence under the temporary protection policy contradicts the current long-lasting situation of forced displacement, being a major policy challenge at the EU level. At the national level, the negative impact of temporariness is amplified by Portuguese outdated temporary protection permits/documents.
- Communication and information regarding temporary protection are not sufficient. The lack of official information and communication channels generates a risk of being subjected to manipulation and disinformation regarding temporary protection for both its beneficiaries and the Portuguese population at large.
- Despite providing physical safety from war, the implementation of temporary protection in Portugal puts its beneficiaries into a situation of liminality, characterised by prolonged uncertainty and generating additional anxiety. Psychological assistance is not included in the TP legal framework, either nationally or at the EU level.

1. INTRODUCTION

This brief is based on the workshop “When policies meet emotions: The emotional dimension of temporary protection for Ukrainians in Portugal” - organised by the UC-PROTEMO team in Coimbra, Portugal, in November 2025, which brought together policymakers, members of the Ukrainian community, researchers and practitioners. During the workshop, shortcomings and challenges of temporary protection in Portugal were discussed, and stakeholders’ opinions were collected in order to analyse the emotional dynamics and consequences of temporary protection in Portugal, as well as to develop recommendations on how to improve this policy.

TP is an example of “protective policy”, defined as policies that provide protection to specific groups or are framed as such by political actors (Albertson & Gadarian, 2015). PROTEMO aims to study the emotional reactions of citizens and non-citizens to protective policies – such as anger, satisfaction, and anxiety – as well as the behavioural consequences of these reactions, including changes in (political) participation (Wenzelburger & Carbone, 2023). As a European project, PROTEMO seeks not only to explore protective policies, but also to strengthen European democracies by integrating an emotional dimension into protective policies’ design.

The TP mechanism aimed at people fleeing Ukraine after Russia’s full-scale invasion has been introduced by the Council of the EU decision (EU, 2022) that activated the Temporary Protection Directive, adopted in 2001 as a result of legal and political reflection on the refugee flows during the Yugoslav wars (Malynovska, 2023). It has provided all EU members with a common framework on how to act in case of a mass influx of displaced persons. By envisioning collective protection instead of classic asylum

based on individual procedures, it relieved EU members of a significant load of migration management system and of difficult legal and ethical questions that would hypothetically emerge, such as dis-parities between safety levels of Ukraine’s regions or the risk of large-scale irregular crossings across the EU–Ukraine border.

TP provides its beneficiaries with an extensive set of rights and opportunities. These rights include access to residence, housing, healthcare, social welfare, education, and the right to choose the destination country. One of the main improvements of TP in comparison to classical asylum rules was the exemption of the “first safe country” rule. It also allows BTPs to sporadically travel back to Ukraine (Lazarenko & Rabinovich, 2025), which is not available under classic asylum¹.

At the same time, TP sits uneasily with the protracted nature of forced displacement, creating structural challenges for BTPs, undermining integration efforts, generating anxiety and negatively affecting their well-being. As of November 2025, there were approximately 4.3M BTPs in the EU, including around 65,000 in Portugal (Eurostat, 2025). Due to the large numbers of people who fled Ukraine and the geopolitical context, the EU’s temporary protection policy became an important factor of social cohesion and solidarity in the EU as a whole and in its member states.

2. MAPPING CHALLENGES AND SHORTCOMINGS OF TP IN PORTUGAL

This brief is based on the assumption that protective policies, in particular, those that target forced migrants, should meet emotional needs ² ranging from ensuring agency to guaranteeing one’s feeling of security and of belonging in the host country/community. It focuses on limits and gaps that are connected with the core of TP policy and were signalled by

form secure attachments with others and cultivate a healthy sense of self and identity. That may be, for example, the need for belonging or autonomy, or safety (PROTEMO, 2025).

¹ Country-specific limitations exist, but they do not affect overall possibility to leave and then return (ECRE, 2023).

² Emotional needs are psychological and emotional requirements crucial for a person to

BTPs in Portugal and other stakeholders during the workshop as generating specific negative emotions, such as anxiety or irritation. Overcoming these limits and closing the gaps would reinforce feelings of safety, agency and belonging both among BTPs and in the host society.

Challenges and shortcomings of TP policy in Portugal reflect its dual nature as an all-EU framework implemented through diverse national practices. While most identified gaps concern national implementation, TP in Portugal cannot be analysed without reference to EU-level constraints. Temporariness and uncertainty of residence status are the major challenges of TP policy both at the EU and national level. Two additional policy areas were identified during the workshop as particularly challenging for BTPs in Portugal: communication and information, and psychological assistance. Other challenges to TP policy in Portugal were identified, with their own emotional dimension, such as availability of language courses, employment, recognising qualifications, housing, healthcare, or the issue of children attending Ukrainian online schools.

2.1. Residence permit/status

The current policy proposal preserves the uncertainty-generating status of TP. Although originally intended to last a maximum period of three years, TP has been repeatedly prolonged and is now set to end in March 2027. In September 2025, the Council of the EU (2025) published a recommendation on a coordinated approach to the transition out of temporary protection for displaced persons from Ukraine that calls member states to facilitate the transfer of BTPs to national or EU residence statuses, and simultaneously to adopt programs of voluntary return with the possibility of exploratory visits to Ukraine. This approach has been considered by expert community to be “the path of least resistance” (EPC, 2025) leading to national divergences in eligibility, application procedures and statuses granted (ICMPD, 2025). Such approach may worsen the situation of the most vulnerable categories (Ciger, 2025), like single parents, the elderly and the disabled, who have

less chances to obtain national residence permits that require competition on job market or studies.

Anxiety and irritation are generated by formal flaws of the document certifying the legal status of BTPs in Portugal, which is an A4 PDF paper without photo, signature or stamp, with an expired date of validity after the first year of TP. Portugal is the only EU country that uses such type of TP document permanently and on non-alternative basis (ELENA, 2023). The lack of these formalities leads to daily life problems that BTPs face, in particular, when interacting with official institutions or travelling abroad.

BTPs in Portugal also have to deal with the emotions elicited by this state of uncertainty and insecurity when applying for TP. Although, in most cases, the application procedure is fast and efficient, and for adults it can be processed online, there are regular reports about significant delays in TP permit issuance that may be connected with insufficient numbers of AIMA (Portuguese Agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum) personnel (ECRE, 2025).

2.2. Information and communication

The lack of proper and accessible information about procedures and statuses of BTPs, as well as the absence of stable and effective communication channels, is another challenge faced by Ukrainians staying in Portugal as BTPs.

Providing information for BTPs in accessible language is legally required by the Portuguese law on TP. Though the Portuguese government did create a dedicated site for this purpose, it has been offline since, at least, 2025 (ECRE, 2025). The lack of reliable and up-to-date information not only increases feelings of uncertainty among BTPs but also pushes them to search for information in unofficial sources, which frequently disseminate inaccurate or misleading information.

BTPs also lack effective mechanisms to provide feedback and to let their opinions/experience be heard, such as participation in advisory bodies. BTPs were not included as members of the

Ukrainian community in Portugal which prevented its representation in the National Council on Migration and Asylum (CNMA), thereby limiting their voice in migration and temporary protection policy matters.

The lack of proper information about TP also affects Portuguese citizens who may feel frustrated or angry due to a perceived inequality in resource distribution. Narratives portraying BTPs as being prioritised in access to healthcare and social welfare have been highly visible in countries with large Ukrainian communities, such as Poland and Czechia (IFES, 2023), highlighting the risks of misperception and disinformation in the absence of clear public communication.

Though forced migration is associated with trauma, stress and depression, and the need for psychological support among refugees and forced migrants is widely recognized, neither EU nor Portuguese legislation contains specific provisions regarding psychological assistance for BTPs.³ Moreover, as referred by members of the Ukrainian community in Portugal, there is a significant shortage of school psychologists who speak and understand Ukrainian. Regarding adults, the availability of psychological assistance is also limited and is usually provided by non-state actors that are dependent on external funding. For example, the psychological assistance hotline in Ukrainian and Russian languages available for calls in the majority of the EU countries was suspended for several months as a result of cessation of operations of USAID in early 2025, illustrating the fragility of reliance on ad hoc and externally funded support mechanisms.

3. TEMPORARY PROTECTION IN PORTUGAL: IMPROVING THE EMOTIONAL DIMENSION

³ It is implied in Article 15(4) of Law 67/2003, but only in relation to person with disabilities, unaccompanied children, and victims of violence.

⁴ Reconstruction permit is a hypothetical new legal instrument that would effectively extend TP

The unique experience of implementing the TP Directive in the EU for the first time is ambiguous in its effects. On the one hand, in specific policy areas, TP policy in Portugal, as a protective policy, instead of confirming agency, security and belonging, may generate uncertainty, anxiety and insecurity among its beneficiaries. On the other hand, this pioneer experience constitutes an opportunity to seek for new and more effective protective policies.

3.1. Residence permit/status

Uncertainty and anxiety connected with the ambiguity of TP residence status can be addressed by developing a clear and transparent pathway to permanent residence for BTPs. This may include counting periods of stay under TP towards eligibility for EU long-term resident status or Portuguese nationality. Alternatively, it may include special residence status granted at the national level or possible EU-level solutions, such as the introduction of a “reconstruction permit” or “pre-accession permit” (ICMPD, 2025).⁴ These measures should be accompanied by the renewal and proper reissuance of TP permits and documentation, which could be implemented even within the existing TP framework as a minimum corrective action.

3.2. Information and communication

An online, up-to-date and easily accessible information database in Ukrainian language, covering basic rules of living in Portugal, bureaucratic procedures (e.g. school enrolment, healthcare registration, taxation, use of CMD), as well as Portuguese culture, history, and the rights and obligations of BTPs, constitutes a crucial need for both newly arrived individuals and those residing in Portugal for several years.

The inclusion on such a platform of official and regularly updated messages on temporary protection—its outlook, planned changes and implemented measures—issued by the

for ten years and link protection in the EU with Ukraine’s reconstruction. Pre-accession permit ties legal status of BTPs to Ukraine’s accession to the EU proposing to treat BTPs as EU citizens residing in another member state (ICMPD, 2025).

Portuguese government or competent authorities (e.g. AIMA), would contribute significantly to building trust and certainty about future.

No less important is informing Portuguese citizens about the nature of TP and impact of Ukrainian BTPs in Portugal to avoid misperceptions or disinformation. A good example is a recent study by Deloitte & UNHCR (2025) that showed that the economic impact of Ukrainian BTPs in Poland amounted to 11 billion EUR of extra revenue for the state budget. Such communication initiatives may be implemented by the state or by legitimate non-state actors, such as NGOs.

The Ukrainian community, including Ukrainian BTPs, also feels the need of a proper channel to communicate its concerns and questions to state and/or local authorities in Portugal and to take part in decisions directly affecting their lives. This may happen by carrying out structured surveys at the municipal or national level, or through the participation of representatives of migrant communities in working groups organised a priori the political decision-making process on the local and national level. If BTPs were considered as a part of the Ukrainian migrant community for the purpose of participation in the National Council on Migration and Asylum that would provide this group with a stable channel of communicating its problems and concerns.

3.3. Psychological assistance

The issue of psychological assistance to forced migrants remains underestimated within the TP policy framework at both European and national legislation. In the Portuguese context, introducing an explicit obligation to provide psychological assistance to BTPs could represent one of the most important lessons drawn from the first experience of implementation of the TP policy, contributing to more holistic, humane and emotionally responsive protection systems.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Meeting BTPs' emotional needs, such as ensuring agency or guaranteeing one's feeling of security and of belonging in the host country/community, constitute an important function of protective policies targeting forced migrants.*
- *To reduce anxiety and increase feelings of safety among BTPs, uncertainty associated with being a beneficiary of temporary protection in Portugal needs to be addressed through the following steps:*
 - *Reduce the liminality of residence status of BTPs through at least one of the following:*
 - 1) *Develop a new residence status for BTPs at national level and/or the EU level (e.g. "Ukrainian", "reconstruction" or "pre-accession" residence permit);*
 - 2) *Re-issue outdated certificates of temporary protection to ensure legal certainty and everyday usability;*
 - *Establish a permanent, official information channel in Ukrainian language providing up-to-date guidance on living in Portugal, including bureaucratic procedures (e.g. school enrolment, healthcare registration, taxation, use of CMD), as well as information on Portuguese culture, history, and the rights and obligations associated with temporary protection, including policy updates;*
 - *Create institutionalized participation mechanisms, such as advisory or consultative bodies at local and national levels, ensuring the meaningful inclusion of BTP representatives in decision-making processes affecting temporary protection and integration policies;*
 - *Strengthen public communication targeting Portuguese citizens by disseminating evidence-based information on BTPs and their social, economic, cultural and scientific contributions to Portuguese society, in order to prevent misperceptions and disinformation;*
 - *Insert a clearly defined obligation to facilitate access to psychological assistance for BTPs into national law on TP, ensuring that mental health support is recognised as an integral component of protection and integration.*

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