

Settlement of Ukrainians Receiving Temporary Protection in South Ostrobothnia

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ETELÄ-POHJANMAAN LIITTO
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Finnish Red Cross 



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Opening Words (1/2)

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine began at the end of February 2022. As a result, millions of Ukrainians have fled the country. More than 8 million people have fled the war to the territory of the European Union alone, about half of whom have applied for temporary protection. Only a fraction of those who fled to other parts of Europe have arrived in Finland. However, in relation to the population the share is the highest in the Nordic countries. One year after the start of the war, in February 2023, there were approximately 50,000 Ukrainians living in Finland.

This report examines how Ukrainians have arrived in Finland and South Ostrobothnia. The purpose of the report is to shed light on how the South Ostrobothnia network of authorities, together with non-governmental organizations and volunteers, has been successful in welcoming Ukrainians. In addition, the report tells how the Ukrainians them-

selves have experienced their time in South Ostrobothnia and what kinds of problems they have encountered. The perspective of the report is linked to the challenges of reception. At the same time, however, it should be emphasized that their overall experiences in South Ostrobothnia have been positive. Due to the crisis, people in Finland's least internationalized province have learned how to see both the refugees and the province's own operational potential in a new light. Concepts related to refugee status have become more diverse. The province has also proven that in exceptional situations, it is also capable of coordinating exceptional activities.

The Ukrainians who fled to the European Union are officially and via their legal status receiving temporary protection, meaning they are not refugees under international protection. Although they have fled the war in their home country, and



Opening Words (2/2)

are thus practically refugees (*de facto*), they have not been granted a refugee status recognized by the international treaty system and based on law (*de jure*). In this report, however, we refer to them and to their status often in a way comparable to that of refugees, as we believe this increases the flow and comprehensibility of the text. In our opinion, this choice is important also because the situation with the Ukrainians and their needs and experiences should be considered in a way that corresponds to the facts.

The report is based on interviews with both South Ostrobothnia operators and Ukrainians. The Migration Institute of Finland's Seinäjoki Unit was responsible for implementing the report. The project was led by senior research fellow Markku Mattila. Researcher Toni Ahvenainen carried out most of the workload. Olena Temnikova, who was born in Ukraine but lives in Finland, has been responsible

for conducting expert interviewing the Ukrainians. The analysis of the data and the writing of the report have been carried out in cooperation with the research group. Mika Raunio, a research fellow at the Migration Institute (Seinäjoki Unit), has also participated in writing the report.

The report has been financed by the Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia, the Western Finland District of the Finnish Red Cross and the Migration Institute of Finland. The report was produced in the period 8/2022–3/2023. Thanks to all interviewed civil servants, representatives of civic organizations, volunteers, and especially the Ukrainians.

At Seinäjoki on 31 March 2023

Authors

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Key Conclusions

Crisis Management (1/2)

1. The beginning of the crisis was characterized by a momentary paralysis of official activity in the municipalities of Southern Ostrobothnia. This was due to insufficient information/overview of the situation and an unclear division of responsibilities between the authorities. The directive on temporary protection and the guidelines of the Finnish Immigration Service provided instruction for the authorities' activities. However, without a clearly designated regional leader, many actors drifted alone at the start in terms of interpreting how the directive should be followed in practice.

2. The momentary delay in the authorities' actions was significantly offset by the quick response of non-governmental organizations and volunteers and the considerable material aid they distributed to the newcomers. However, the ability of the vol-

unteers to handle the situation varied and was of a different nature than the activities organized by the authorities within the framework of the law. At its best, the voluntary effort was proactive, well managed, and professional, surpassing the competence of the authorities. At its worst, limited expertise and a lack of information sharing caused additional work and confusion for the authorities and Ukrainians. At the beginning of the crisis, however, the work contribution of organizations and volunteers was so significant that without their help, significant human catastrophes most likely would have occurred when first receiving the Ukrainians.

3. The key special feature and challenge of the crisis was the partly uncontrolled arrival of Ukrainians and their widespread settlement in different parts of the province. In South Ostrobothnia, the



Key Conclusions

Crisis Management (2/2)

readiness of municipalities to receive them differed greatly from municipality to municipality.

Some municipalities had no previous experience with receiving and meeting refugees. In other municipalities, the preparations for receiving Ukrainians were better organized due to refugee work that had been done earlier. Due to limited means and resources, the importance of the work done by volunteers was especially emphasized in smaller municipalities.

4. In particular, the inflexibility of digital systems was an obstacle to conducting effective official work. The key official services related to work, taxation, and housing are strongly based on digital systems. Often, such systems require both an access code and strong identification measures, e.g. the

IDs issued by banks. The large number of Ukrainians and their exceptional circumstances (e.g. lack of travel documents) created a situation where the rigidity of digital systems under stress restricted operations.



Key Conclusions

Reception

1. There are currently more refugees from Ukraine in Finland than there were, for example, asylum seekers in 2015. However, this has not burdened Finland's reception system in the same way, as a decentralized reception model has been introduced since that time. As a result, Ukrainians do not live institutionally in a reception centre, but in rented apartments in the area. The decentralized reception model also allows for private accommodation, the costs of which are paid by the Ukrainians themselves. In this regard, the costs related to reception have been transferred to those who took part in the reception system.

2. Living somewhere other than in an institution is considered more humane by the Ukrainians in South Ostrobothnia because it enables a normal family life better than does in an institution.

This also has had a positive effect on their sense of security.

3. However, clearly identified challenges are also associated with the distributed placement model. The most important challenges are that the authorities may not succeed in reaching all Ukrainians who have arrived in the region and that contact with those under temporary protection may remain limited. Due to the decentralized nature of the reception model, some Ukrainians do not receive enough official information and are possibly unaware of the rights and services to which they are entitled.

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Key Conclusions

Integration

1. The right to work, as outlined in the Temporary Protection Directive, provides a good starting point for labour market integration. The problem is that **the Finnish reception system does not create strong enough or easily recognizable financial incentives for the voluntary integration of Ukrainians into the labour market.** Upon arrival, Ukrainians have a strong motivation to find employment. This advantage is lost if assuming a role of passive customership in the reception system becomes financially more profitable for them than striving for an independent life and actively integrating into the labour market of the area.

2. **South Ostrobothnia has a strong desire to receive Ukrainians and help those willing to settle permanently in the province.** For example, the attitude of the municipalities is indicated by the

fact that South Ostrobothnia has been quite eager to adopt the municipal reception model created by the Finnish Immigration Office. Residents of the province also in many ways have regarded the Ukrainians more positively than they do other refugees. Three out of five Ukrainians announced in the autumn 2022 interviews that they wanted to stay in the province permanently.

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Key Conclusions

Weaknesses of the Region (1/2)

South Ostrobothnia was in many ways unprepared to face the crisis. The lack of preparation was visible, for example, in the following ways:

1. Municipalities had little foresight and weak capabilities to handle the influx of refugees. The province had experienced a refugee crisis in 2015, so some municipalities had prior experience for dealing with a similar situation. However, most municipalities did not have a preparedness plan for large-scale immigration. The active measures taken by the Finnish Immigration Service in 2015 had made local-level contingency plans meaningless in many ways, and the municipalities' understanding of the need for their own foresight had become blurred. On the other hand, the situation in 2022 differed greatly from 2015. Especially at the beginning of the crisis, it was about uncontrolled

large-scale immigration to the entire province, which no municipality could likely have foreseen.

2. The authorities' actions lacked crisis leadership.

In the case of large-scale immigration, no regional leading entity has been defined. At the beginning of the crisis in particular, there was a strong need for regional crisis leadership in order to respond quickly and efficiently to the escalating situation. Instead of taking a proactive approach, local actors often waited for guidance from the national level. Due to the lack of crisis leadership, the region was not able to take quick and effective action, meaning the province as a whole did not take the initiative in responding to the crisis; instead, the role of the authorities remained mostly reactive. Organizations and volunteers operating from different points of view ultimately resolved the lack of lead-

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Key Conclusions

Weaknesses of the Region (2/2)

ership by organizing the affairs of Ukrainians at the grassroots level.

3. The regional authorities adopted the Temporary Protection Directive and the related new operating model haphazardly and in their own administrative silos, leading to friction between authorities, a lack of cooperation and a delayed effective response. The lack of cooperation was partly due to the nature of the Finnish service system, i.e. the fact that services and their availability are often scattered among different organizations and authorities. The flow of information and the creation of new joint processes occurred slowly in the region, which was reflected both in the guidance and services offered to the Ukrainians and in the lack of cooperation with various stakeholders in such a crisis management situation. The response of the

province would probably have been more unified if there had already been more cooperation across the organizational boundaries of the authorities in the region (e.g. information exchange platforms and joint projects) before the start of the crisis.

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Key Conclusions

Success with the Help of Community (1/2)

1. Despite all the challenges, the reception of Ukrainians in the province can be considered successful. Ukrainians are satisfied with the reception and their experience with the events of 2022, especially during the initial phase of the crisis, which was strongly determined by the solidarity and desire to help on the part of the residents of the province. The positive experience of Ukrainians is probably also explained by the large role played by organizations and volunteers in the early stages of the crisis.

2. Solidarity and the desire to help are very important in crisis management, as they have a strong effect on promoting community and cooperation. On the one hand, solidarity and a desire to help can also cause disturbances, such as giving too much help or engaging in uncoordinated and risky activities.

3. However, the greatest pitfall of promoting the virtue of community in crisis management is its selective and easily volatile nature. Solidarity and a desire to help are always defined according to some existing political relationship, targeting us rather than others. Therefore, community spirit or the related solidarity and desire to help cannot be the basis on which social systems responding to the crises of large-scale immigration are built. Activities that are sustainable and increase regional resilience must be based on predetermined operating models and division of responsibilities as well as permanent structures. They ensure effective and correct operations even when the newcomers do not immediately arouse the community's sympathy and desire to help, or when the situation does not necessarily conform to the expectations of the residents or the province.

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Key Conclusions

Success with the Help of Community (2/2)

4. Although Southern Ostrobothnia was unprepared for the crisis in Ukraine and the readiness to receive Ukrainians was weak in many places, **the province succeeded in responding to the crisis thanks to a sense of community and positive circumstances.** The structures and resilience of the province's crisis management response, however, should be developed in the future because the next crises will not necessarily be as forgiving in nature.

Key Conclusions

Future (1/2)

1. Southern Ostrobothnia has been the least internationalized province in Finland in terms of population. Immigration and the reception of refugees have both been low in the region. **Now, though, the proportion of the province's population receiving temporary protection is higher than the average in Finland**, and the residents of the region have received and supported Ukrainians in numerous different ways. Despite many practical problems related to the reception process, the encounter between newcomers and residents has been positive. This will affect how the region views immigration and refugees in the future. It has opened the eyes of people in the province to see more broadly the possibilities offered by such phenomena.

2. The process of transferring responsibility to municipalities starting in March 2023 (individually after one year of stay in the country) is likely to put a strain on municipal service systems and requires preparation and close cooperation from the authorities. **Municipalities must prepare for new municipal residents, for example by increasing the capacity of service systems and actively acquiring rental apartments.** At the same time, it is necessary to identify flexible procedures that make it possible for the Ukrainians to ensure a stable life situation when they move from one service system to another, from the reception system to becoming municipal residents. This applies, for example, to housing, day care, schooling, and healthcare.

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Key Conclusions

Future (2/2)

3. Moving to municipalities gives Ukrainians the opportunity to move from one municipality to another and may lead to the migration of Ukrainians within the country. Due to better job opportunities, Ukrainians may move to larger urban areas and especially to the province of Uusimaa, which has the largest numbers of Ukrainians compared to other provinces.



I PROJECT

Basic Information | Material Used



KEY CONCLUSIONS

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I PROJECT

Basic Information

Project name

Ukrainian refugees in South Ostrobothnia
(1/8/2022—31/10/2023)

Implementer

Migration Institute, Seinäjoki unit
(Toni Ahvenainen, Markku Mattila & Olena Temnikova)

Funders

- Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia (AKKE 2022 08)
- Western Finland District of the Finnish Red Cross
- Migration Institute of Finland

Objectives

The goal of the project is to form an overall picture of how South Ostrobothnia has managed to meet the needs of Ukrainians who have applied for temporary protection. What kinds of challenges have the large number of immigrants posed not only for municipal services but also for the province of South Ostrobothnia? In addition, the project also maps what kind of role the third sector has played in responding to the crisis and how Ukrainians have experienced the province’s reception process.

In 2023, the project will also publish policy recommendations, the purpose of which is to offer ideas for strengthening the province’s resilience. The goal is to increase the province’s crisis resistance and resilience in similar situations involving large-scale immigration so that the operations are proactive, sustainable and ethical from the perspective of both the receiving region and the newcomers.





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I PROJECT

Material Used (1/2)

The report is based on the following material:

- Interviews with Ukrainian refugees (16 interviewees)
- Interviews with regional authorities and other actors (9 interviewees)
- Statistical data (Statistics Finland and the Finnish Immigration Service)
- Media material (newspapers)
- Other studies and reports on the subject

Qualitative interview material (n=25) was collected between August 2022 and February 2023. The material includes interviews with both Ukrainian and South Ostrobothnia authorities, representatives of the third sector and other parties involved in crisis management.

Interviews with regional authorities and other actors

The following actors were interviewed: employees of the local municipalities (e.g. immigration coordinators), employees at the Seinäjoki reception centre and representatives of voluntary organizations and congregations. A few expert interviews have also been conducted as part of the project, namely regarding the expertise of the Finnish Immigration Service and Finnish Refugee Council.





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I PROJECT

Material Used (2/2)

Interviews with Ukrainians

Ukrainians under temporary protection were interviewed in their own mother tongue, either Ukrainian or Russian. To create as confidential a relationship as possible with the interviewees, the interviewer was a member of the research team who was born in Ukraine but lives in Finland. Considering the fact that the majority of Ukrainians are women and children, it was an advantage that the interviewer was a woman with a family. The interviewer also translated the interview material into Finnish for use by the rest of the research group.

The participants in the interviews were mainly women with families who had been in the country for about four months at the time of the interview. The typical interviewee was a 34-year-old woman who had at least one family member with her in Finland, typically a kindergarten/school-age child or her own parent. The interviewees’ mother tongue was mostly Ukrainian, with only three reporting Russian as their mother tongue. The interviewees did, though, include two men.

The interviewees came from different parts of Ukraine, large cities like Kyiv, Kharkiv and Odessa, but also smaller coal-mining towns like Myrnohrad or Peršotravensk. The departure areas were not concentrated in any specific region, and the interviewees came from both frontline areas and other parts of Ukraine. However, the starting areas were concentrated on the Dnieper River and the areas east of it (Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Kharkiv, Kyiv, Odessa, Cherkasy, Vinnitsa, Zaporizhia, and Žytomyr).





II FRAMEWORK OF EVENTS

Flight of Ukrainians to Europe | Temporary Protection Directive | Accepted Refugees |
Destination Finland | Routes and Arrival | Journey's End, South Ostrobothnia |
Profile of Newcomers | Finnish Reception System

Flight of Ukrainians to Europe

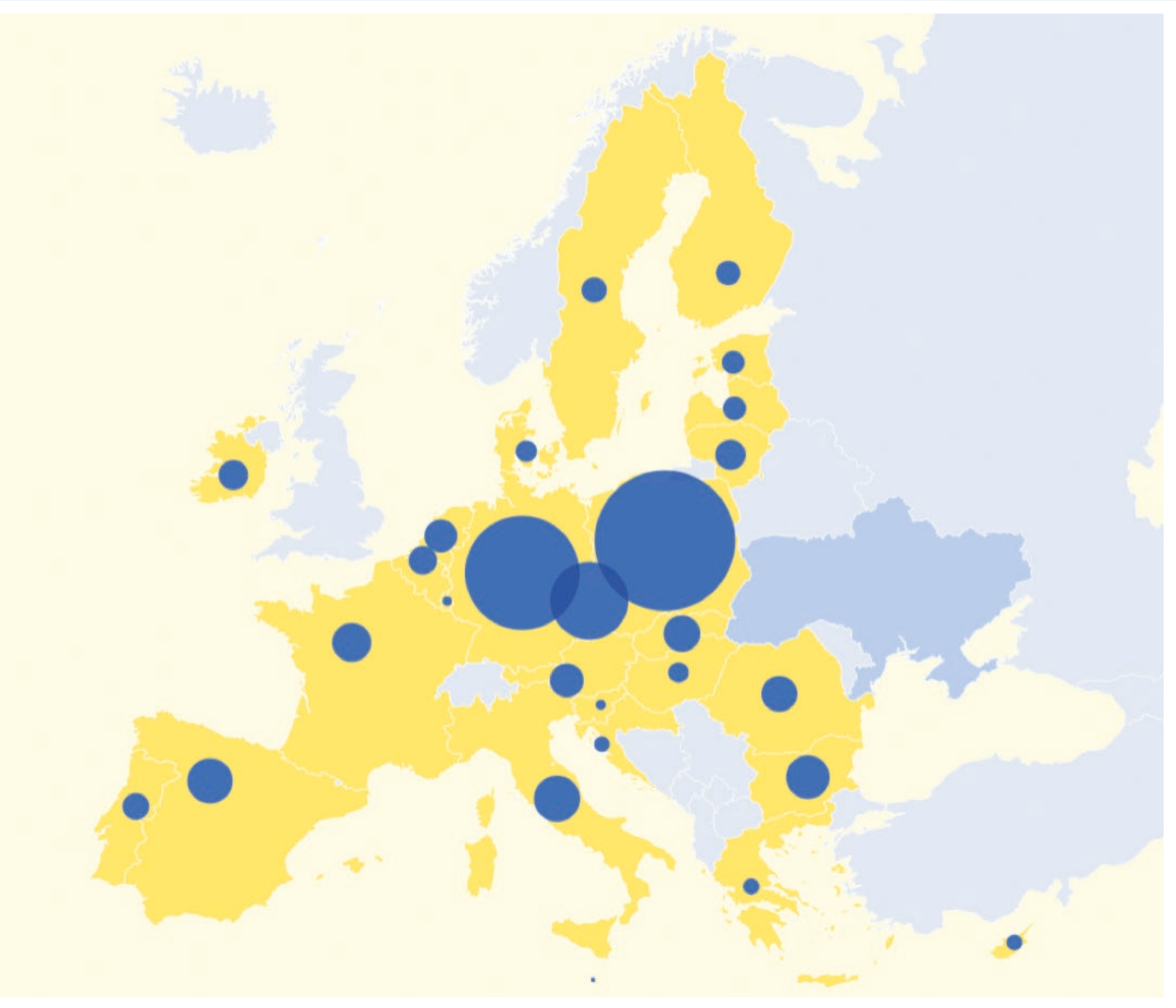


Figure: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

- 7,976,980 Ukrainians fled to Europe (January 17, 2023)
- 4,939,057 registered for temporary protection in the EU region (17 January 2023)
- Measured in absolute numbers, Poland, Germany, and the Czech Republic have accepted the largest number of Ukrainians. Compared to those countries, relatively few Ukrainians have arrived in the Nordic countries. However, it is most reasonable to consider the number of Ukrainians received as a share of the population. The table below shows some shares of Ukrainians by country. (units per thousand, i.e. 1‰ = 0.1%)

Poland:	approx. 1,6 million,	or 41‰ of the population
Germany:	approx. 1 million,	or 12‰ of the population
Czech Republic:	approx. 0,5 million,	or 46‰ of the population
Baltic countries:	approx. 150,000,	or 25‰ of the population
Nordic countries:	approx. 175,000,	or 6‰ of the population

The Nordic and Baltic countries

Estonia:	32 ‰ of the population	Norway:	7 ‰ of the population
Lithuania:	26 ‰ of the population	Denmark:	6 ‰ of the population
Latvia:	19 ‰ of the population	Iceland:	6 ‰ of the population
Finland:	9 ‰ of the population	Sweden:	6 ‰ of the population



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II FRAMEWORK OF EVENTS

Temporary Protection Directive

On 4 March 2022, the European Union enacted the Temporary Protection Directive (2001/55/EC). It was originally drawn up in 2001 for Balkan conflicts and forced migration, but it had never been used before the current Russo-Ukrainian War. True to its name, the purpose of the directive is to enable the European Union to offer temporary protection to people arriving in the region as “a mass influx of displaced persons” and to promote the equal distribution of the resulting stresses among the various member states.

The enactment of the directive made it possible for Ukrainians to register for international protection in any EU country in an expedited asylum process. Those persons registering for temporary protection have an immediate right to protection, residence, and work and for studying in the entire EU region. Finland approved the directive on 7 March 2022.

The directive was a reaction to the mass influx of Ukrainians into European Union territory as a result of the crisis in Ukraine. At the same time, it also constituted a strong political statement

that turned the crisis into a security issue for the entire European Union, clearly outlining the EU’s related moral positions and responsibilities. The directive has strongly influenced the reception of Ukrainians in Finland as well.

From the Finnish point of view, the Temporary Protection Directive is also a bold experiment in immigration policy. Like refugees, Ukrainians receive international protection, but at the same time they also have a completely open and immediate right to work in the Finnish labour market: they do not need a separate work permit, and they are not subject to local labour market testing like other foreign labourers. The situation is exceptional in the history of Finnish immigration policy. It is not yet possible to assess how this policy experiment will affect the country’s immigration policy in the future.





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II FRAMEWORK OF EVENTS

Accepted Refugees (1/2)

The nature of the crisis in Ukraine is significantly different from previous situations, such as, e.g. the refugee crisis of 2015. The key difference is the European context of the crisis, which is evident in the following ways:

■ **The crisis is seen differently.** The crisis in Ukraine is now understood more as a security issue than a refugee policy issue. While the refugee crisis of 2015 also gave rise to varying security and refugee policy perspectives, the disputes between different countries mainly had to do with responsibility, leading to refugee-related crisis rhetoric throughout Europe (e.g. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 2018, vol. 16, nos. 1–2). Unlike in 2015, the need to receive new arrivals in the current crisis is not perceived as the key problem or source of debate. There is a consensus among the EU member states that the issue is primarily about European security.

■ **The crisis is being handled differently than before.** Ukrainians receive special treatment compared to other groups seeking international protection. This represents a clear departure from

the principle that political views should not influence international protection and the realization of human rights. In the background, European security policy concerns are having a clear effect on the situation.

■ **Meeting newcomers is different than before.** Ukrainians are European; they are seen as essentially similar to us on a cultural and social level. Therefore, racism or images of cultural otherness are not influencing the reception process. On the contrary, the reception has even been exceptionally warm in some places.



Accepted Refugees (2/2)

For Finland, the European context of the crisis can be seen in, e.g. the following ways:

Comprehensibility

The causes and backgrounds of the crisis in Ukraine are easily understandable to Finns based on their own historical experience (Russia's attack on a neighbouring state smaller than itself). The Finns' solidarity on the matter and their desire to help have been strong for this very reason.

Consensus

The management of the crisis has had strong European guidance, meaning the issue of receiving and supporting Ukrainians has not been politicized in the form of a national debate.

A window to do otherwise

The strong political consensus has opened a window for conducting different immigration and integration policy experiments. Examples of this are the reception centres operating on the principle of decentralized management, the possibility for Ukrainians to organize their own accommodation, and the municipal model created by the Finnish Immigration Service.

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II FRAMEWORK OF EVENTS

Destination Finland

After the start of the war, the temporary protection offered Ukrainians in Finland could have been handled in at least three different ways:

1. Voluntary arrival (especially at the beginning of the war);
2. Transport carried out by Finnish volunteers, e.g. through Poland;
3. Staying in Finland already at the start of the war on the basis of a temporary residence permit (e.g. a work/study place in Finland).

Although the majority of Ukrainians staying in Finland have registered under the Temporary Protection Directive, not all have done so, even if they are de facto fleeing the war.

Finland’s attractiveness to Ukrainians is based on the country’s good reception system (e.g. Nordic Council of Ministers 2022), work opportunities, and physical and social security.

■ **Reception system.** The Finnish reception system and support for the reception system are generally seen by Ukrainians as better than in, e.g. Germany and Sweden. For example, arranging accommodation is easier in Finland than in Germany. Compared to Sweden, Ukrainians are supported in Finland with a larger reception allowance. Ukrainians’ perceptions of the differences between different countries are also greatly influenced by shared experiences and sometimes false rumors..

■ **Job opportunities.** Ukrainians have been for a long time the largest single group of Finnish seasonal workers. So, the already familiar job opportunities have been the main reason that many newcomers chose Finland.

■ **Finland has a reputation as a safe and developed country in terms of social security.** Finland is known among Ukrainians as a country with free schooling, good healthcare, and strong social equality. Also, the process of applying for and receiving NATO membership has made Finland look like an even safer option.





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II FRAMEWORK OF EVENTS

Routes and Arrival (1/2)

Ukrainians have arrived in Finland mainly through Poland. In the early stages of the crisis, many Ukrainians felt that Poland was an easy choice as a place of refuge due to its geographical proximity, the countries’ previous relations, and a language that Ukrainians can easily understand. However, as the crisis has dragged on, the burden placed on Poland has grown significantly, for instance in relation to accommodation and work opportunities, which has pushed Ukrainians who arrived later to continue travelling even to Finland.

The journey from Poland to Finland has been relatively easy for Ukrainians. Volunteers have organized many free rides for them both to Finland and also to many other European countries.

Ukrainians have also arrived in Finland via the eastern border from Russia before border control was tightened on 30 September 2022. However, from Finland’s point of view, the eastern route to Finland was less used than the western route via the EU to Finland.

From the perspective of the authorities, the arrival of Ukrainians in Finland — either voluntarily or with the help of rides organized by volunteers, and often without contact with the Finnish authorities — became uncontrollable especially at the beginning of the crisis. For example, it was not until autumn 2022 that the residence and status of all Ukrainians staying in the region showed in the authorities’ registers.



Routes and Arrival (2/2)

Ukrainians arrived in Finland and South Ostrobothnia in four different stages:

1. At the beginning of the war, family members, relatives, and acquaintances of Ukrainians already staying in the country arrived in Finland.
2. In the second phase, Ukrainians in acute need of protection arrived in Finland, mainly from war zones. Many of them probably had some existing relationship with Finland (e.g. work, relatives).
3. In the third phase, Finland established itself as a target country of choice for Ukrainians (e.g. information about the advantages offered by the Finnish reception system spread among Ukrainians). Ukrainians having previous contact with Finland started arriving in the country.
4. The fourth stage is characterized by family reunification. Ukrainians who have settled in Finland try to reunite their families not only from Ukraine, but possibly also from other parts of Europe.

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Journey's End, South Ostrobothnia

The orientation process of Ukrainians in South Ostrobothnia is explained by the following four factors:

- 1. Job opportunities (e.g. existing relationships with the Finnish labour market and seasonal work);
- 2. Social relationships (e.g. family members, relatives, and acquaintances staying in Finland);
- 3. Activities of the volunteers from South Ostrobothnia (e.g. organizing transportation to the area and the support provided by volunteers);
- 4. Coincidence.

At the end of 2022, there were 1,746 Ukrainians receiving temporary protection in South Ostrobothnia. The number of Ukrainians in Southern Ostrobothnia is large. Compared to annual immigration numbers for the entire province, the number of Ukrainians who arrived in 2022 corresponds to the combined total immigration for the previous three years (see Figure 1).

The large number of Ukrainians puts a significant burden on the service network of the province and municipalities. In addition to the large number of arrivals, the load is influenced by, e.g. the fact that (1) counselling and guidance services for immigrants in municipalities are often resourced according to the assumed annual number of arrivals and that (2) in the case of humanitarian immigration, the need for support and services is usually greater compared to study- and work-based immigration.



Figure 1. Average income of foreign immigrants to South Ostrobothnia (2010–2021) compared to the number of Ukrainian immigrants in 2022. Source: Statistics Finland 2023.

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Profile of Newcomers

By the end of 2022, almost 47,000 people had applied for temporary protection in Finland. Ukrainians who arrived in Finland have the following profile (Alho et al. 2022):

- Adult population arriving with children (about 70% adults / about 30% minors);
- Female-dominated population (around 60% of adults are female);
- Educated population, as a considerable number of Ukrainians likely have both secondary and higher education degrees. There is no exact information on educational background, but the existing information confirms this view (OECD 2023, 4; Svynarenko & Koptsyukh 2022, 16—17).

The profile of the Ukrainians who arrived in South Ostrobothnia largely matches that of the other Ukrainians who arrived in Finland. Sixty-six per cent of them were of legal age, and 68% of those of legal age were female (Finnish Immigration Service 2023a).

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Finnish Reception System

Before the start of the crisis in Ukraine, the Finnish Immigration Service had 27 reception centres in Finland, 20 of which were for adults and 7 for minors (February 2022). While the number of places in the reception centres was relatively small (3,350), the existing capacity was sufficient, as there were approximately 1,000 available places. From a comparative standpoint, the capacity of the Finnish reception system was about a tenth of the peak figure for the situation in 2015 (Ilkka-Pohjalainen 25 February 2022).

During the crisis in Ukraine, the number of reception centres has been increased significantly: and at the end of 2022, there were 121 of them nationwide with a total of 28,648 places (Finnish Immigration Service 2023b). However, the load placed on the national reception system was still lower than it had been in 2015 (144 reception centres with a total of 33,000 places), even though there are now more arrivals in the country. This is due to the fact that Ukrainians can arrange their own accommodation if they so desire (so-called private accommodation). More than one-third (36%) of Ukrainians have been living in private accommodation (Alho et al. 2022, 24).

In relation to the number of arrivals, the Finnish reception system is now financially less burdened than in 2015. Part of the burden and its costs have been transferred to the accounts of the arrivals because the costs of private accommodation are paid by the accommodated persons from their own available funds. The reception system pays for the living expenses of those staying in the reception centre or municipal model.

It is still difficult to say what effects the new way of distributing the financial burden between the system and the newcomers will have on the reception of Ukrainians and the protection they receive. The act of distributing the economic burden also does not mean that the crisis in Ukraine is not socially burdensome.





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Delayed Response from the Authorities (1/2)

In South Ostrobothnia, municipal actors described the initial phase of the crisis as a “chaos”-like situation where different actors were unsure of their own roles and areas of responsibility. For instance, authorities were unclear about how to handle the following issues in the early stages of the crisis:

- How Ukrainians who arrived in the region already in February (before the temporary protection directive) or after that should be treated.
- Who had the responsibility/authority to respond to their distress and basic needs.
- How to meet basic needs in practice.

The surprise and challenge of the situation was increased by the fact that the Ukrainians arrived in the municipalities in an uncontrolled manner and often without preliminary contact with the authorities. Most municipalities did not have contingency plans, or if they did, they did not prepare the municipalities for such a

large-scale influx of people. Although the Temporary Protection Directive offered the authorities a uniform operating model, it proved challenging to implement.

There were big differences in the readiness of municipalities to receive newcomers. Some municipalities, for example, had no previous experience with refugees and meeting them. Other municipalities, though, were better equipped to receive Ukrainians due to the refugee work already carried out earlier. Such municipalities included, e.g. Kauhava and Seinäjoki. The ability to receive refugees was distributed unevenly and in a point-like manner in different parts of the province.

Not all authorities immediately understood the exceptional nature of the situation, its scope, or the need for a quick response. Instead of crisis management, they tried to respond to the crisis with the usual bureaucratic methods. Partly this type of reaction can be explained by the surprising nature of the situation, as the





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Delayed Response from the Authorities (2/2)

first Ukrainians fleeing the war arrived in Southern Ostrobothnia only a few days after the war began.

The authorities’ reaction was also delayed by the lack of local contingency plans. In 2015, the Finnish Immigration Service had taken on a stronger role and in many ways made local level contingency plans irrelevant. This experience clouded the municipalities’ understanding of the need for their own foresight. On the other hand, the situation in 2022 was quite different from 2015. Especially at the beginning of the crisis, it was about independent, uncontrolled, and large-scale arrival of refugees in the region. Such a situation could not easily have been anticipated beforehand.

The situation was brought under the control of the authorities by the beginning of autumn, when the spontaneous arrival of Ukrainians in the region had stopped and the reception process was mainly being handled by the authorities. The Temporary Pro-

tection Directive was mostly adopted by all authorities, and a provincial coordination group had been created at the local ELY centres (State Centres for Economic Development, Transport, and the Environment) for cooperation between authorities. The province also had a situational picture of the status of Ukrainians in the province and where they were staying.





Significant Role of NGOs and Volunteers (1/2)

Non-governmental organizations and voluntary citizens (the third and fourth sectors of social activity) played a significant role in responding to the crisis. Especially in the initial phase, several different actors compensated for the delayed reaction of the authorities through efficient and quick actions.

Due to the delayed reaction of the authorities, organizations and volunteers had to participate significantly in arranging the affairs of the Ukrainians (e.g. emergency accommodation, taking care of basic needs, furnishing apartments, and interpreting).

The most capable actors were on the front line of crisis management, e.g. organizing safe and professionally implemented humanitarian transports to Finland and arranging for interpreters and the delivery of supplies to Ukraine (e.g. Operaatio Ukraina). The effects of the organized activities of the volunteers were especially emphasized in the smaller municipalities of the province, where few preparations had previously been made for dealing

with refugees (e.g. material aid from the Finnish Red Cross).

However, cooperation between authorities and volunteers proved to be difficult, as there were no necessary capacities for regional coordination. As a result, the expertise of organizations and volunteers was not utilized to the best degree possible. On the other hand, the lack of coordination also contributed to the emergence of voluntary actors who often caused more harm than good for the authorities (e.g. spreading false information, interfering with the area of responsibility of the authorities, causing dangerous situations). Due to the lack of coordination, it was not possible to support the activities of the volunteers with the necessary planning and persistence.

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Significant Role of NGOs and Volunteers (2/2)

In the early stages of the crisis, organizations and volunteers were able to react more quickly than the authorities because their operations were flexible and they were not tied to prescribed processes and bureaucratic structures. Many actors also had more experience with crisis management than the authorities or had received training for similar situations, which is why the organizations were equipped to act efficiently and quickly. However, better coordination on the part of the authorities would have increased the efficiency and consistency of operations.

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New Operating Model (1/2)

Responding to the crisis meant that authorities throughout Finland and in South Ostrobothnia particularly had to quickly create and adopt a new operating model. However, they confronted many challenges at both the national and regional level in terms of how best to interpret the EU directive:

- The directive does not specify how it should be implemented in an individual country within the framework of existing laws, administrative hierarchies, and service systems.
- The position of the Ukrainians as targets of the administrative efforts and as customers of the local service system was initially unstructured and required interpretation. A new operating model was needed to handle them.
- Due to the novelty of the operating model, individual actors still had to wait for instructions either from national bodies (e.g. Finnish Immigration Service, various ministries, Association of Finnish Municipalities) or from other actors.

The adoption of the new operating model in South Ostrobothnia was made difficult by many factors:

- **Lost time.** At a local level, the directive came into effect quite late, after the crisis had already started. At the same time, the authorities had to both adopt a new operating model and solve the problem of satisfying the basic needs of the newcomers.
- **The extent of change and unpaced adoption.** In addition to putting the new model into operation, authorities faced the challenge of learning new processes and often building new operational networks with other authorities. Organizations adopted the new operating model at different rates, which caused friction when trying to cooperate with one another.
- **System problems.** The need to handle matters according to the new operating model collided with established digital systems. In particular, problems related to easily accessing Finnish personal identification numbers hindered the response speed of the network of authorities and their ability to cooperate. The problem



New Operating Model (2/2)

could not be resolved quickly because the missing ID numbers proved a problem in several services (e.g. taxation and banks).

■ **Uncertainty.** The novelty of the operating model produced uncertainty and risk-taking avoidance. Authorities often ended up waiting for further instructions instead of taking action. This further delayed the operation.

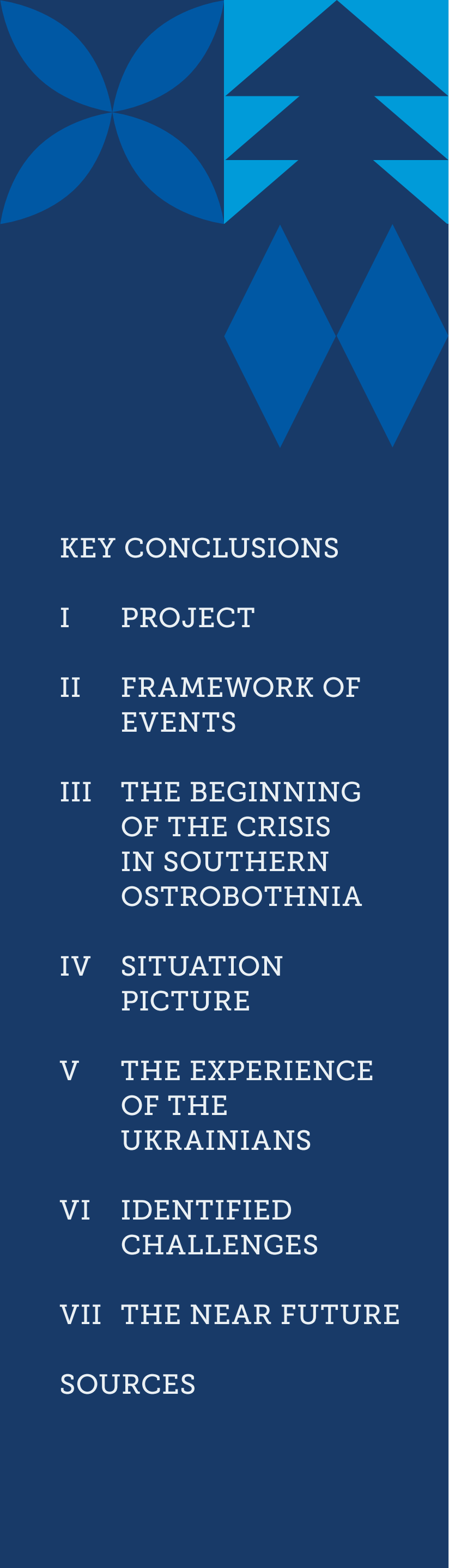
When reacting to a crisis, regional actors can be divided into three groups based on their level of initiative and flexibility:

- 1. **Proactive and flexible**
Humanitarian organizations, volunteers, certain municipal actors (e.g. immigration coordinators), and some individual organizations (e.g. Seinäjoki MONI-info, Järviseutu Vocational Institute JAMI) and companies (e.g. Atria).
- 2. **Bureaucratic but adaptable**
For example, the ELY centre of South Ostrobothnia and the Seinäjoki reception centre.
- 3. **Bureaucratic and inflexible**
For example, the TE services centre (Work and business centre), Kela (Social Insurance Institution of Finland), banks, health-care, and social care services.

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Seinäjoki Reception Centre (1/2)

When the war started in February 2022, no reception centre existed in South Ostrobothnia. The Seinäjoki (approx. 100 places), Lappajärvi (approx. 250 places), and Kauhava (approx. 400 places) reception centres established in 2015 had been deemed unnecessary and shut down in 2016, 2017, and 2019 (Ilkka-Pohjalainen 3.3.2016, 28.12.2016, and 26.6. 2019).

The key measure that affected the region was the Seinäjoki reception centre established by the Finnish Immigration Service in March 2022. Everyone applying for temporary protection in South Ostrobothnia needed to visit the centre. The reception centre operated via a distributed placement model: clients were placed in apartments rented by the centre. In addition, authorities established an emergency accommodation unit and a service point for those in private accommodation. An institutional branch (Törnävä) was established in autumn of 2022 (Ilkka-Pohjalainen 16.3.2022, 11.4.2022, and 19.10.2022.)

The reception centre was accepted without any disagreement. For example, residents of Kauhava did not voice any opposition, un-

like in 2015 (Kelahaara & Mattila, 2017, 29—41). However, the operations of the newly established reception centre were hindered by problems related to resources and cooperation:

- **Load.** The reception centre was overloaded right from the start: the accommodation capacity was already full by mid-May. The burden was visible in terms of, e.g. a delay in guidance and counselling.
- **Recruitment.** Competent staff could not be recruited in the necessary manner, while the reception center mainly focused on increasing operational capacity. For this reason, other basic tasks associated with the reception centre (e.g. guidance and counselling) was not carried out as desired.
- **High expectations at the local level.** As a regional core player in crisis management, the Seinäjoki reception centre was subject to high expectations from the very beginning, some of which were unrealistic. The expectations created challenges for cooperating with local actors, including problems in communication (needs



Seinäjoki Reception Centre (2/2)

and expectations) and confusion regarding roles (shared responsibilities and tasks).

The reception centre's heavy workload continued throughout the year. Authorities responded by increasing capacity in the summer and by establishing the above-mentioned branch office in Törnävä in autumn of 2022. The capacity at the end of 2022 was as follows: Seinäjoki, 300; Törnävä, 250; and one emergency accommodation unit, 150 (Emigration Agency 2023b).

Considering the high number of Ukrainians in South Ostrobothnia, the reception centre has played a significant role in responding to the crisis in the region. However, cooperation with the network of local authorities (sharing information, development of operations) has occurred less frequently than hoped and not at a very comprehensive level.

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Prolonged Crisis

As the crisis drags on, the focus of regional action must shift from reception to integration and how to best support it. This point of focus is also in line with the objectives of the Temporary Protection Directive. When accounting for the profile of the newcomers (women and children), this means addressing at least the following needs: housing, employment, integration into Finnish society, and ensuring children's well-being.

Municipalities and their services play a central role in the process of integrating Ukrainians. For example, immigrant services that offer guidance and counselling, schools and kindergartens, health and social services, employment services for immigrants, and various meeting places for immigrants are all central. The goal should be to enable Ukrainians to live independently in the province.

The areas of responsibility for facilitating the integration process are extensive. Actors also include the state's local representatives and regional actors. Employers and the private sector also need to contribute, as do non-governmental organizations and volunteers through various actions.





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Housing (1/2)

At the end of 2022, almost a quarter (23%) of those receiving temporary protection in Southern Ostrobothnia lived in accommodation organized by the reception centre, while half (50%) lived in municipal model accommodation. A good quarter (27%) of Ukrainians lived in private accommodation, i.e. had arranged their housing themselves (Mahaanmuuttovirasto 2023a). Ukrainians have been living throughout the province.

When compared to the national picture, the combined share of those receiving housing based on the municipal model and private accommodation in South Ostrobothnia is significantly higher (77%) than on average in the rest of Finland (47%). In particular, the proportion of those receiving housing according to the municipal model is higher in South Ostrobothnia than in most other provinces, where it is typically around 10% (Mahaanmuuttovirasto 2023a; Alho et al. 2022, 24). This tells much, at least indirectly, about the desire of people in the province to help: Ukrainians have been welcomed and they want to remain as municipal residents.

The large number of Ukrainians in the province causes a local housing shortage. For example, in Seinäjoki the demand for rental apartments is greater than the number of vacant apartments. The imbalance has led to an increase in rental prices. It has also created a situation in which local residents or those moving from other parts of Finland (e.g. students) and Ukrainians (both municipally and privately housed) compete for the same apartments.

The housing shortage has created some problems with accommodation for Ukrainians. For example, some Ukrainians have wound up staying in places not intended for year-round living (e.g. summer cottages). Housing shortages and low-quality housing (e.g. temporary housing) can also expose people to such problems as diseases or abuse.





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Housing (2/2)

The Finnish Immigration Service created the municipal housing model to ease the challenges of finding housing for Ukrainians and the point-like regional load it produces. At the same time, the municipal model has also resulted in an inefficient use of resources in the region. Some municipalities have used the financial resources provided by the municipal model for, e.g. apartments that are too large and expensive for the number of residents, and have not allocated enough resources for other necessary activities. Small municipalities in South Ostrobothnia especially have been susceptible to such errors due to their small populations and limited financial room for manoeuvring and experience in receiving refugees.





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Employment (1/2)

The employment opportunities for Ukrainians in South Ostrobothnia are basically good:

- The general level of education in Ukraine is quite high, which can be seen both among the Ukrainians who arrived in Finland (Alho et al. 2022, 29) and also in the interviews conducted in South Ostrobothnia.
- Many of the Ukrainians who arrived in South Ostrobothnia probably already had some connection to the local labour market through seasonal work in the province. In addition, South Ostrobothnia also has many industries in which it is possible to find a job without knowing the Finnish language (e.g. various jobs in primary production activities dominated by immigrants).
- Ukrainians have been highly motivated to work, and it is likely that they will not face major adaptation challenges in settling into Finnish working life and culture.
- Ukrainians have been well received in South Ostrobothnia, and some companies have already hired Ukrainians. With the crisis, the threshold for hiring a workforce that speaks at least a little Finnish is also likely to decrease.

South Ostrobothnia's labour shortage is particularly focused on the social and healthcare sector and the performing of various manual labour jobs (e.g. restaurant work, construction industry, industrial assembly and process work, transport sector, and agricultural work) (Etelä-Pohjanmaan ammattibarometri, II / 2022). However, it is likely that the skills of Ukrainians and the regional labour demand only partially match.

The challenges of finding adequate employment and problems related to the region's location in Finland also came up in the interviews. Several persons said they were looking for a job, but only less than half (7 interviewed) were employed at the time. The jobs were typically temporary and in agriculture or cleaning or limited to entry-level positions. Those with a primary or secondary education were the most likely to have found employment. Only a few of those with higher education were employed, but even they were not employed in a job corresponding to their education.

Some of the interviewees also stated that they do not want to be employed in fields that do not correspond to their level of education.





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Employment (2/2)

However, the employment gap problem in terms of matching skills with available positions for Ukrainians is broader than the traditional sectoral perspective. As a result of the mass exodus, Ukrainians have ended up in the receiving societies rather randomly. Their skills, education, or preferences do not necessarily match the nature, opportunities, or labour needs of the receiving regions. For example, persons who have arrived in rural municipalities from a larger city are often not able to use their skills in a suitable manner in the new environment, even if there are jobs available.

The Ukrainians who arrived in South Ostrobothnia are probably not a "quick cure" for the province's labour shortage. Therefore, they should not only be seen as satisfying the need for labour, but also as a resource, with skills that can benefit the development of local business life. They bring new know-how to the region, which, when properly used, can result in a new type of economic activity and even positively shape the economic structure of the region.





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Barriers to Employment (1/3)

Although Ukrainians are generally well-educated and highly motivated, their barriers to employment are similar to those faced by other humanitarian migrants. The reasons raised in the investigation include, for example:

- **Factors related to language skills.** Ukrainians do not know Finnish and their English skills are often weak. This makes finding employment significantly more difficult. Ukrainians themselves often see language skills as the main obstacle to employment.
- **Lack of education and skills.** Despite possessing a good level of education, the lack of education/professional qualifications needed in the Finnish labour market can be an obstacle to employment for Ukrainians. The reasons can have to do with, for example, the differences between the countries' education systems and labour markets and the regulations that regulate them. Ukrainians' perceptions of the Finnish labour market can also be limited, and they may not fully understand or see the different paths leading to potential employment opportunities.

- **Temporality of the crisis.** A residence and work permit based on temporary protection is perceived as unstable for the future. Starting a new profession/career in a foreign country requires a long-term commitment and resources, which Ukrainians do not view as profitable if the permanence of the residence permit is not certain.
- **Incentive traps created by the reception system.** The reception system creates financial incentive traps in two ways: 1) in terms of the way housing is financed and 2) by varying the amount of reception money. Those living in private accommodations pay their own living expenses, while the expenses of those living in accommodations organized by the reception centre or under the municipal model are paid by the reception system. The amount of reception money depends on the size of the adult family receiving the money, meaning that it may not be economically viable for a person to seek a job. The reception money can be so generous that the salary offered does not significantly increase the income compared to the reception money alone. For a private resident, the salary left over after mandatory expenses (e.g. housing) may not





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Barriers to Employment (2/3)

be competitive compared to the reception money. The situation is heightened by the types of jobs on offer, for which the salary is often low. In South Ostrobothnia, Ukrainians have sometimes quit a job because they perceive it as easier and more financially profitable to remain with the reception system.

■ **Women's high care burden and their educational background.** Most of the adult Ukrainians who arrived in South Ostrobothnia are women, often travelling with children or elderly people: children and elderly people make up 39% of Ukrainians who came to the region (Maahanmuuttovirasto 2023a). Due to the heavy caregiving burden, it can be difficult for women to apply for a job and enter the labour market, a phenomenon that has also been observed in Estonia (Sõjapõgenike ökiltlusuuring 2023). In addition to this hurdle, women's employment may be made more difficult by the fact that their education is often not related to the work they perform; many persons, for example nurses and teachers, find it difficult to secure employment due to the regulations for certain professions.

■ **Limited number of jobs.** Especially in small municipalities, the number of jobs is limited and the municipalities' own residents often compete for them. The relative number of Ukrainians in small municipalities may be so large that it is difficult to employ them.

■ **The limited internationality of the labour market in South Ostrobothnia.** Although there is a labour shortage in the region, employers have not always made systematic attempts to take advantage of Ukrainians as a new source of labour. Due to the limited internationalization of the labour market, employers may find that hiring, familiarizing themselves with, and guiding Ukrainians in Finnish work life is time-consuming and difficult. Employers may also place an unnecessary amount of importance on good Finnish language skills.



Barriers to Employment (3/3)

Considering the large number of Ukrainians in South Ostrobothnia, it would be good to think about whether their employment prospects can be promoted within the framework of the existing system, or whether it would be necessary to develop special paths for them in the region as well as other activities that promote employment (e.g. mentoring, workplace partnerships). The Ukrainians’ own community should also be included when removing barriers to employment.

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Integration (1/2)

Like other immigrants, Ukrainians need to be integrated at both the local (South Ostrobothnia) and national (Finnish society) level. The integration work has been facilitated and hindered by, for example, the following factors:

- **Integration services in the region are sized according to the usual annual need.** It is estimated the services could accommodate no more than a fifth of the need at the end of 2022. Typical annual immigration to the region is about 500 people: now, approximately 1,800 Ukrainians have been added to that number for the region.
- **Ukrainians' desire to integrate is high.** Ukrainians understand the importance of the Finnish language in terms of employment, integration, and permanent residence. They do not want to isolate themselves within their own community but want instead to get to know the locals and interact with them. Many feel pressure to choose between work and language training (short-term versus long-term benefit). Activities organized by volunteers and meeting places can have a significant impact on integration.

- **Language education has been increased in the province, but more is still needed.** Language training has been greatly increased in the province, and it has also been organized in small municipalities. Language training is no longer as strongly regionally focused and aimed just at TE office clients, as it was before the Ukraine crisis. However, Ukrainians' needs and opportunities to participate in language classes vary, and not all those who are willing can necessarily be reached through official service paths. Therefore, there is still a need to increase language training at different levels and organize it in different ways.
- **Accessibility is a challenge.** Ukrainians live in different parts of the province, and the distances between municipalities can be great. In addition, some women may not have had a driver's license in Ukraine either. Low income limits the ownership and use of one's own car and the use of paid public transport. Additionally, the public transport network in the province not comprehensive. All of this adds up to present a special provincial challenge for providing language and integration training, especially with respect to the smaller and more remote municipalities.





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IV SITUATION PICTURE

Integration (2/2)

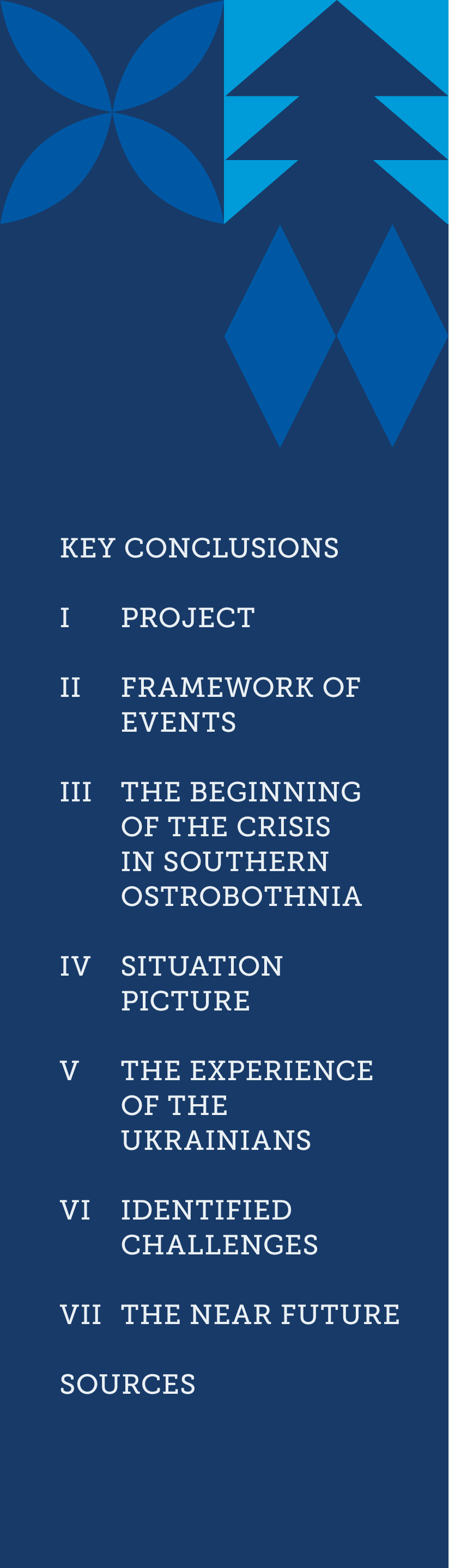
■ **Nursing burden and coping.** Ukrainians’ willingness to participate in language and integration training is also influenced by the burden of caring for young children and the elderly. Many of the women who arrived in the region have children or parents to take care of, which is why they may not have time to participate in language training. Some may consider even temporary employment a priority, so that they do not have time to learn the language, which ultimately weakens their position in the labour market. Due to the crisis, many are also mentally tired and have experienced stress in trying to adapt to their new surroundings, which is why their strength may not be immediately sufficient to participate in training courses. In their case, low-threshold activities and the creation of supportive relationships with the locals are needed.

■ **Not everyone sees studying Finnish as a worthwhile investment.** Due to the temporary nature of the crisis, some Ukrainians think that it is not worth investing time and effort in learning the Finnish language (too small a language in a larger world). For them, studying English seems more profitable, because the Eng-

lish language is sufficient for employment in the region and it can be useful even after the crisis.

Considering the nature of the crisis and the fact that, thanks to temporary protection, Ukrainians have an exceptional status in the Finnish system (immediate right to work and study), the situation is likely to be favourable for new kinds of integration work experiments. Such efforts might include, for example, combining integration and language training with work. In that case, Ukrainians would not have to choose between work and integration training.





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Children’s Well-Being (1/3)

Among the Ukrainians who arrived in South Ostrobothnia, the proportion of minors is high. Taking care of children's well-being is a key part of successful reception and integration. Children's well-being is also important when deciding whether to stay permanently in South Ostrobothnia.

Ukrainian children have the right to participate in both early childhood education and primary education if their parents so desire.

- At most, half of all Ukrainian children were in early childhood education (under 7 years of age). At the end of 2022, this meant around 70–100 children, 28 of whom were in Seinäjoki and the rest in other municipalities in the region. Ukrainians accounted for about 0.8% of all children participating in early childhood education in Seinäjoki (Immigration Office 223c; notification by Aija-Marita Näsänen.)
- Nearly two out of three (63%) school-aged children (ages 7–17) living in the province were enrolled in school in 2022. At the end of 2022, there were approximately 250 Ukrainian chil-

dren enrolled in basic education, with two out of five children (40%, 100 children) being in Seinäjoki and the rest (60%, 150 children) in other municipalities in the region. In Seinäjoki, Ukrainians accounted for approximately 1.4% of elementary school students (Emigration Office 223c; Notice Antti Takala).

Not all children in the region have attended school, though. The reasons may be related to the perceived temporary nature of the crisis, to mistrust, or to the fact that children attend school in Ukraine via remote connections. From the integration perspective, this may cause harm to such children. In terms of children's well-being, it would be good to reach those children as well and bring them within the scope of school education.

The large number of Ukrainian children has placed severe burdens the schools in the region. For example, before the crisis in Ukraine, Seinäjoki had only one group of preparatory education students, and only 13 students had an immigrant background. At the end of 2022, there were at best five groups and almost 100 students in the preparatory education programme, most of them Ukrainian children.





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Children’s Well-Being (2/3)

The load placed on schools has highlighted, for example, the following challenges:

- **Shortage of teachers.** There have been difficulties in hiring qualified special education teachers for preparatory education groups. In part, the teacher shortage is affecting the entire country, but it is also affected by the fact that large urban areas are better able to compete for teachers (e.g. permanent employment relationships). In South Ostrobothnia, the shortage of teachers has delayed the response to the increased workload and burdened already existing groups.
- **Challenges in language learning.** Due to the large number of Ukrainians, children focus almost solely on preparatory lessons in the groups, thus slowing down children's learning of the Finnish language. Since the groups consist mainly of Ukrainians, the children do not have to learn to use the Finnish language in the classroom.

- **Integration challenges.** Due to the large number of Ukrainians, integrating children into regular classes is also challenging, as there may be relatively more groups of preparatory education students in a single school than more mainstream classes of native Finns. For this reason, efforts have been made, e.g. to move Ukrainian children to other nearby schools, which admittedly may bring additional challenges to the everyday life of Ukrainian families.
- **The region’s load is concentrated in individual schools.** Neighbourhood and village schools in smaller municipalities do not necessarily have experience with students from an immigrant background and in organizing their education. For this reason, the task of accommodating Ukrainian children is concentrated in individual schools, such as Seinäjoki’s Marttila School, which is better equipped to organize preparatory courses and teaching for children with immigrant backgrounds.





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Children’s Well-Being (3/3)

As of March 2023, Ukrainians can apply for the right of domicile. After a possible transfer to the municipality of residence, children of compulsory school age will become obliged to attend school, which means that some of the children who cannot currently be reached for various reasons may be added to school attendance records. Early childhood education is still voluntary.

The well-being of Ukrainian children requires the organization of activities outside of school as well. For example, many Ukrainian families are eager to find similar low-cost club activities for their children in South Ostrobothnia as is common when raising children in Ukraine. Although the province has a wide range of opportunities for children, the costs are too high for Ukrainian families living on reception money. In this sense, the participation of various hobby and sports clubs in supporting the well-being of Ukrainian children is still important.





V THE EXPERIENCE OF THE UKRAINIANS

Arrival in the Region | Everyday Life with the Service System |
Intergroup Relations | Experiences with South Ostrobothnia



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Arrival in the Region (1/2)

From the point of view of Ukrainians, the biggest disadvantage of arriving in the region was related to the delayed reaction of the authorities in the initial phase of the crisis. They mainly felt it had to do with a lack of information and pointless detours.

■ **Informal reception.** The first person to receive many new arrivals was often a representative of a non-official body. This could be, for example, a citizen of one’s own country (acquaintance or relative), a volunteer worker, or a Finnish employer. Unofficially received information often contradicted official information received from authorities. In addition, the unofficial recipient’s knowledge of the newcomer’s rights and the services that he/she was entitled to often clashed with official directives, and the sharing of information could also be random.

■ **The emphasized role of volunteers compared to the authorities.** Volunteers and organizations played a visible and central role in the reception of Ukrainians from the outset (e.g. distribution of basic supplies, furnishing of apartments). For that reason, many newcomers felt that the volunteers and organizations were

closer to them than the authorities operating in the province. They also perceived the authorities as being more distant because their activities are rule-based and bureaucratic; the actions taken by authorities also began later than the actions of volunteers and organizations. Hence, the Ukrainians felt that it was the residents of the province who had welcomed them and helped them the most.

■ **False beliefs and unnecessary detours.** The arrival reports of the Ukrainians often repeatedly mention their initial misconceptions and the unnecessary detours as a result of having received contradictory information. One example of a misconception held by many Ukrainians is that Finnish society does not support Ukrainians in any way. Due to such a misconception, a newcomer may have, for example, applied for a job, taken care of his/her children, and lived in poor conditions before establishing contact with the authorities and the official reception system. In addition, many Ukrainians came to the region on their own, and due to the delayed start of official activities, they often only learned about the support services available to them after some time..



Arrival in the Region (2/2)

■ **The strength of official advice.** As a general rule, however, Ukrainians who came without local contacts quickly found the best way to make use of the services. They also received better advice when the authorities began to operate in the region. The existing local contact network could therefore have slowed down the process of becoming familiar with the services precisely because it was less knowledgeable and willing to give advice about the rights, obligations, and services included in the reception system.

Finding the service system was challenging at times and happened slowly. It was especially difficult to reach those who were living in private accommodations and get them to use the services.



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Everyday Life with the Service System

Ukrainians are generally satisfied with the services they receive. Dissatisfaction is mainly related to the availability of services and the slowness of accessing them. Although Ukrainians consider the Finnish reception system good, they do not always fully understand how it operates or consider it fair in all circumstances.

■ **Health care.** The quality of health care is generally perceived as being good. However, waiting times to receive treatment are long and Ukrainians feel that they have to "fight" to receive treatment. Meeting with specialists in particular is difficult and delayed. The interviewees included persons who, due to difficulties in accessing treatment, had ended up visiting their home country, e.g. for cancer treatment. The difficulties in accessing health services can partly explain how they evaluate the healthcare systems in Ukraine compared to Finland (Svynarenko & Koptsyukh 2022, 34).

■ **Difficulties related to children's schooling.** The expectations of Ukrainian parents and the operating models of schools have not always been well aligned. In particular, the concept of pre-

paratory education is foreign to Ukrainian parents and the slow progress of students transitioning to more mainstream classes has caused frustration among parents.

■ **Unfair system.** Ukrainians feel that the reception system has treated different groups of Ukrainians differently and inconsistently. For example, those persons already in the region at the beginning of the war who arranged their affairs independently (private accommodation, work, other costs) receive less support in the reception system compared to those who came to the region perhaps only by chance and without any intention of finding employment or integrating. The Ukrainians feel that surviving independently, becoming familiar with the area, and giving work input are "punished" by, e.g. reducing the reception money, while those who do nothing are awarded financial support and free time. According to the Ukrainians, commitment to the region should also lead to reciprocity on the part of Finnish society.

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V THE EXPERIENCE OF THE UKRAINIANS

Intergroup Relations

Ukrainians generally feel that relations with Finns and other groups in the region are good. As a result of the war, however, they have a strong distrust of Russians and groups with a Russian background.

■ **Good relations with Finns.** Relations with Finns are perceived as good but getting to know each other without a common language has proven difficult. It is also difficult to get to know the locals personally because Finns are more reserved than Ukrainians. Also, the children’s relationships with their new friends in early childhood education and school are generally good, and bullying of Ukrainian children has, for example, not been observed.

■ **Distrust of Russians and people of Russian background.** Due to the war, Ukrainians’ relations with Russians and people with a Russian background are cold and plagued by mistrust. In South Ostrobothnia, Ukrainians have encountered persons with a Russian background especially as interpreters, and the encounters have often been accompanied by suspicions of deliberate mistranslation and indifference. Additionally, they have, for instance,

encountered people with a Russian background working in positions of authority or as school counsellors. Since Russians constitute a significant minority in Finland, such encounters cannot be avoided. However, it would be necessary to consider how the shadow of war impacts such encounters whenever possible.

■ **Disputes within the Ukrainian community.** Being a refugee is always accompanied by such phenomena as fraudulent use of the reception system or operating in the grey economy, which creates divisions within the Ukrainian community. The majority of Ukrainians condemn fraudulent activity, but there are always those who seek personal gain from the situation. Additionally, some Ukrainians are also pro-Russian and supported the previous pro-Russian administration of Ukraine. They are not a visible group, and there are probably not many of them in South Ostrobothnia either. Still, it is clear that they can cause controversy within the Ukrainian community.





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Experiences with South Ostrobothnia

The experiences of Ukrainians are clouded by worry and uncertainty about the future, but their general experience in the province has been positive.

■ **An uncertain future.** Most Ukrainians are mainly concerned for their family members/relatives still in Ukraine. The temporary nature of protection in Finland and a difficult-to-conceive future are also causes for concern.

■ **A hard everyday life.** In general, managing everyday live in a foreign country is difficult and affects the well-being of both parents and children (adjustment stress). Some Ukrainians have also experienced trauma related to the war and dislocation, which may surface only now, when the initial phase of the crisis is over and life has at least somewhat stabilized.

■ **The reception received in the province has been a positive experience.** Despite all the practical difficulties, Ukrainians see the help given by South Ostrobothnia and its inhabitants as important and valuable. Although the province has had difficulties in

responding to the crisis, the difficulties appear to the Ukrainians as relatively minor compared to the situation at home.

■ **Solidarity and the desire to help.** Interviews with Ukrainians conveyed the message that the most important element of the province's welcome has been spiritual. The most significant aspects of the reception were the residents' solidarity and desire to help, which helped convince Ukrainians that the severity of their plight and situation is understood.





VI IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES

National Interface for Crisis Management |

Regional Cooperation and Organization of Activities |

Rigidity of Digital Systems in a Crisis Situation | Integration



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VI IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES

National Interface for Crisis Management

The lack of national guidance or its ambiguous nature made the crisis management system unpredictable and posed challenges for the regional organization of operations.

- The officials interviewed felt that the crisis management system was deficient at all levels, from the Finnish Immigration Service through regional government agencies to individual municipalities.

- The operators working in South Ostrobothnia felt that the Finnish Immigration Service did not engage in enough regional proactive cooperation and did not make its own operations transparent enough (e.g. perceived lack of advance information when establishing the Seinäjoki reception centre).

- Anticipatory information about the actions of the Finnish Immigration Service in the region would have enabled the municipalities to prepare and increase the capacity of their service networks in good time (guidance and counselling, schools, kindergartens, healthcare).

- The lack of predictability caused a delay in organizing activities at a regional level.





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VI IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES

Regional Cooperation and Organization of Activities

1. The shock phase, which is often integral to a crisis situation, resulted in a lack of agency during the initial phase of the crisis.

- The organization of the authorities’ activities and the division of responsibilities were unclear, causing a lack of information.
- The quick reaction and action of non-governmental organizations and volunteers made up for delayed official actions.

2. The region’s ability to react uniformly and quickly to unexpected situations was modest due to the lack of leadership and cooperative structure.

- The introduction of the Temporary Protection Directive was challenging due to the lack of a regional cooperative operating model, actor network, and leadership.
- However, the process of interpreting and implementing the directive took place at the operational level (e.g. immigration co-ordinators).

3. The efforts at cooperation between the Seinäjoki reception centre and operators in the area have been hindered by the centre’s heavy workload, which is why the goals of the new directive are not yet reflected in its operations.

- The reception centre’s cooperation with operators in the area has so far been rather limited.

4. The authorities’ cooperation with the third and fourth sectors was uncoordinated and lacked a unified understanding of the direction and quality of the activities.

- Although the work of the volunteers played a significant role in the region’s response to the crisis, the uncoordinated activities of the volunteers also caused disorder and increased the workload of the authorities.



Rigidity of Digital Systems in a Crisis Situation

Finnish digital systems proved overly rigid and their interfaces hindered the response speed and performance of the authority network.

- In Finnish society, key official services related to work, taxation, and housing are strongly based on digital systems.
- The large-scale influx of Ukrainian refugees, often without travel documents, highlighted the rigidity of digital systems in exceptional circumstances.
- It is important to ensure that customers whose customership and customer-related information may be incomplete in such systems (refugees) can nevertheless still be effectively served through digital service systems.

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Integration

1. Due to the decentralized management principle, some of the Ukrainians living in the region are deprived of the rights and services that belong to them.

- Especially Ukrainians living in private accommodation and so-called home accommodation are easily overlooked by services.

2. The experiences of inequality among Ukrainians employed in the region speak of the incentive trap plaguing the reception system; such experiences do not support the aim of integration for Ukrainians in the labour market.

- In many cases, the compensation received for working is not significantly higher than the reception money paid by the Finnish system after mandatory expenses.
- Due to the incentive trap included in the reception system, some Ukrainians have quit their jobs and sought to return to accommodation supported by the reception system.

3. South Ostrobothnia’s limited public transport network affects the settlement and integration of Ukrainians in the region.

- The lack of sufficient public transport makes it difficult for Ukrainians to take up work, study, or participate in inclusive education.
- The difficulty of moving around in the region weakens the holding power of small municipalities.





VII THE NEAR FUTURE

Possibilities | Threats



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Possibilities

The settlement of Ukrainians in the region has brought new opportunities:

- **More than half plan to stay.** In our interview, three out of five (60%) have indicated a willingness to stay in the province (preliminary assessments of moving to different municipalities are also positive). The level of education does not seem to significantly correlate with the desire to stay.
- **Factors that support staying are safety, clean nature, and an equal society.** In South Ostrobothnia, clean nature and safety are especially emphasized. Additionally, Ukrainians in South Ostrobothnia may like local seasonal work opportunities and the integration of children into the region.
- **Supporting the internationalization of the province.** With the crisis, the concept of refugee has taken on new and clearly broader meanings in the region. Through the experience, the local population of the region has become more aware of the opportunities and challenges related to humanitarian immigration. Employ-

ers in the region can also see the potential of immigrants as a labour pool more positively than before. Ultimately, positive experiences related to the reception of Ukrainians and the meeting of newcomers and locals can be stratified in a positive way as part of the region's self-understanding. After the crisis in Ukraine, the self-understanding of the region remains positive, with the experiences and significance of hosting the refugees having a positive effect on the identity of South Ostrobothnia and hopefully supporting the province's internationalization efforts in the future as well.





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Threats (1/2)

The prolongation of the crisis also brings with it threats:

- **Increase in load.** The Finnish Immigration Service predicts that the number of refugees in Ukraine will double during 2023. Additionally, the increased cost of living complicates the situation for refugees throughout the province. Therefore, the amount of help given by volunteers is still important. Centralized cooperation is necessary to ensure assistance even in smaller municipalities.
- **Moving to municipalities.** As of March 2023, Ukrainians who have stayed in the country for more than a year can become residents of municipalities. This may put a strain on the municipalities' service systems, as the number of people moving to the municipalities may be large, causing congestion and bottlenecks. A successful transition to municipalities requires active housing acquisition from municipalities and close cooperation and effective information from the authorities.

- **Migration of Ukrainians.** The chance to move to a certain municipality may impact the migration of Ukrainians throughout Finland, because then they can freely choose their municipality of residence. Are large urban areas more attractive than South Ostrobothnia because of larger job markets and more study opportunities? In the end, what is the importance of children as a binding force for the current places of residence?
- **Passivation of Ukrainians.** The protracted war and the resulting protracted displacement may passivate Ukrainians living on support systems and receiving aid. In particular, the economic incentive traps of the reception system may weaken the motivation to seek employment — even to the extent that, for example, those who have already done seasonal work in agriculture do not want to return to that work. This may lead to a situation where employers in the region face a shortage of seasonal workers and have to acquire the necessary workforce at short notice, which can be challenging.



Threats (2/2)

■ **The solidarity among Finns is fading.** In Finland, the crisis in Ukraine and the Ukrainian people have so far been viewed mostly from the perspective of an idealized good-bad scenario. Adopting more realistic perspectives may negatively affect Finns' desire to support Ukraine. Due to the prolonged nature of the crisis and the increased load, supporting the Ukrainians may also become politicized in Finland.

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Notifications

Aija-Marita Näsänen, Director of Early Childhood Education, Seinäjoki (23.1.2023).

Antti Takala, Director of Education and Welfare, Seinäjoki (23.1.2023).

