Temporary protection - Bulgaria

Overview

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Relevant EU legislation

Bulgaria transposed the Temporary Protection Directive in 2007 in the Section V, Articles 80-83 of Law on Asylum and Refugees and activated temporary protection for displaced persons from Ukraine on 14 March 2022 upon Decision of the Council of Ministers. The temporary protection was initially set to last for 1 year but following two decisions of the Council of Ministers, Decision No 95 temporary protection and validity of residence permits was extended.

By Decision No 54 of 25 January 2024, the Council of Ministers decided to extend further the period of temporary protection until 4 March 2025. By Decision No 67 of 1 February 2024, the Council of Ministers approved sample registration cards, and the re-registration process officially begins with the registration cards of Ukrainian citizens who wish to extend their temporary protection in the Republic of Bulgaria.

The State Agency for Refugees proposed amendments of the Law on Asylum and Refugees in order to create the legal possibility for beneficiaries of temporary protection to apply for humanitarian status and to simplify the rules for the examination and coordination of these applications in view of the identical substantive legal prerequisites for their granting under Article 9(1), item 3 and Article 1a(3) of the law. The aim of the proposal is to avoid overloading the national asylum system in the event of the submission of individual applications for being granting of international protection by displaced persons from Ukraine, present in Bulgaria after the expiry of their temporary protection on 4 March 2025.

The validity of temporary protection was extended until 4 March 2026 by Decision of the Council of Ministers No 79 of 20 Febraury 2025. Also, according to the Decision of the Council of Ministers No 78 of 20.02.2025, the term of the

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already issued registration cards for temporary protection has been extended until 30 April 2025 and a sample of registration card of a foreigner who has been granted temporary protection has been approved. The registration cards are issued by the State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers.

Based on the decisions issued, the re-registration of Ukrainians who want their temporary protection on the territory of Bulgaria to be extended has officially begun.

National legislation

Legislation

Section V, Articles 80-83. Rules for temporary protection. Asylum and Refugees | Закон за убежището и бежанците in force since 01/12/2002.

Implementing Acts

14/03/2022: Decision of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, No 144 R.E. of 10 March 2022 for granting temporary protection for displaced persons from Ukraine and amending the National Action Plan for Temporary Protection in the Republic of Bulgaria | Р Е Ш Е Н И Е № 144 от 10 март 2022 година ЗА ПРЕДОСТАВЯНЕ НА ВРЕМЕННА ЗАКРИЛА НА РАЗСЕЛЕНИ ЛИЦА ОТ УКРАЙНА И ЗА ИЗМЕНЕНИЕ НА НАЦИОНАЛНИЯ ПЛАН ЗА ДЕЙСТВИЕ ПРИ ВРЕМЕННА ЗАКРИЛА В РЕПУБЛИКА БЪЛГАРИЯ.

08/04/2022: Order No RD05-263 of the Chairperson of the SAR at the Council of Ministers regarding displaced persons from Ukraine | Державне агентство у справах біженців при Раді міністрів.

22/07/2022: Council of Ministers Decision No 510 of 21.07.2022. Updated action plan for temporary protection in the Republic of Bulgaria and subsequent amendments | с Решение № 510 на Министерския съвет от 21.07.2022 г. : Актуализиран план за действие при временна закрила в Република България и последващите изменения

30/09/2022: On 30 September 2022, the Council of Ministers approved additional financial support of BGN 42.6 million for the implementation of measures to deal with migration challenges that occurred as a result of the war in Ukraine. The Council of Ministers amended the Operational Program "Good Governance" 2014-2020 in order to allow for such additional financial resource.

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15/02/2023: Council of Ministers Decision No 95 from 1 February 2023 extending the temporary protection until 4 March 2024| | С Решение № 95 от 1 февруари 2023 г. Министерският съвет удължи действието на временната закрила на украинските граждани до 4 март 2024 г

Also, on 1 February 2023, the Council of Ministers adopted the Decision No 96 which established a new model for the registration card of a person granted temporary protection. The process of re-registration for temporary protection was launched on 13 February 2023, with a deadline of 31 March 2023 under the Decision No 96/01.02.2023 of the Council of Ministers.

25/01/2024: Council of Ministers Decision No 54 from 25 January 2024 extending the temporary protection until 4 March 2025 | След постановеното Решение No. 54 от 25 януари 2024 г. . за удължаване на срока на временната закрила до 4 март 2025 г.

01/02/2024: Council of Ministers Decision No 67 of 1st February 2024 on the approval of sample registration cards, the process of re-registration of registration cards of Ukrainian citizens who wish to extend their temporary protection | Решение № 67 от 01.02.2024 г. за утвърждаване на образци на регистрационни карти, официално започва процесът по пререгистрация на регистрационните карти на украинските граждани, които желаят временната им закрила на територията на Република България да бъде продължена.

The validity of temporary protection has been extended until 4th March 2026 by Decision of the Council of Ministers No 79 of 20 February 2025.

Competent authority and stakeholders

Area	Competent national authority	Assistance to the competent authority (if applicable)
Screening at the external border (if relevant)	Border Police | Главна дирекция	n/a

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Area	Competent national authority	Assistance to the competent authority (if applicable)
Biometric data (if relevant)	Border Police | Главна дирекция	n/a
Granting temporary protection	State Agency for Refugees | Държавна агенция за бежанците при Министерския съвет	n/a
Issuing the residence permit	State Agency for Refugees | Държавна агенция за бежанците при Министерския съвет	In line with a cooperation agreement, the Ministry of the Interior supports the issuance of residence cards. SAR has provided access to the registration system for employees of the regional police departments to ensure the swift registration of temporary protection beneficiaries.

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Area	Competent national authority	Assistance to the competent authority (if applicable)
Providing accommodation	State Agency for Refugees | Държавна агенция за бежанците при Министерския съвет	In line with the plan for temporary protection, approved by the Council of Ministers, accommodation is provided by the Ministry of Tourism according to the approved programme for support of the businesses that provide accommodation. There is also a special working group with the Council of Ministers that is responsible for the requests for accommodation in a government accommodation facility and decides where the beneficiary will be accommodated.
Medical care	Regional Health Inspectorates	SAR provides data for all registered applicants who can benefit from medical insurance, provided under the rules of Ministerial Decree No 69 from 5th May 2022.
Social welfare	The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy	Initiatives from civil society organisations

Eligibility

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According to points 1 and 3 of Council of Ministers Decree No 144 of 10 March 2022, the categories of persons entitled to temporary protection are:

- Ukrainian nationals residing in Ukraine before 24 February 2022;
- Stateless persons or nationals of third countries other than Ukraine who have been granted international protection or equivalent protection in Ukraine before 24 February 2022;
- Family members of the above categories of persons; and
- Stateless persons or third-country nationals who can prove that they have resided legally in Ukraine before 24 February 2022 on the basis of a valid permanent residence permit issued in accordance with Ukrainian law and who cannot return permanently to their country or region of origin under safe conditions.

The Council of Ministers Decree was amended by the Council of Ministers Decision No 180 of 30 March 2022. The later was repealed by judgment No 6819 of 7 July 2022 by the Supreme Administrative Court. The Supreme Administrative Court ruled on 14 July 2023 in a cassation appeal in a five judge panel that the termination of international protection procedures for applicants from Ukraine is lawful.

If a person does not fall into these categories, he/she will be subject to the general residence of foreign nationals under the Law on Foreigners in the Republic of Bulgaria. Also, a person has the right to request international protection in Bulgaria.

Foreigners who are not Ukrainian citizens and stateless persons who resided in Ukraine before the outbreak of the war may apply on the basis of a temporary residence permit (TRR) or a permanent residence permit (PRR), if they have difficulties to travel from Bulgaria to their countries of origin.

Admission to the territory

Holders of a biometric passport can enter visa-free and stay in the country for a total of 90 days within the last 180 days. An extension of this period can be requested once and the Migration Unit of the Ministry of the Interior should be contacted in this case, in Sofia or in the regional cities. The Migration Directorate provides information here.

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In the absence of a biometric passport, displaced persons from Ukraine can enter with:

- old passport format without biometric data;
- ID card;
- driving license;
- birth certificate for children up to 14 years;
- other official documents that indicate identity, for example certificates, passes, diplomas, membership cards, bank cards, employment records, property documents, etc.; or
- without any documents – exceptionally and after an inspection by border police officers, under Article 8 of the Schengen Visa Code.

Provision of information

According to Article 39(2) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees, those who were granted temporary protection must be provided with written information in a language they are supposed to understand, about the rules regarding temporary protection.

Information material

Information platforms (websites)

Dedicated portal "Bulgaria for Ukraine" for the people affected by the war in Ukraine provided by the Bulgarian government, including all registration points across the country, useful information, FAQs in BG/UK/EN/RU

Information and updates are available on the homepage of the State Agency for Refugees under the Council of Ministries website

Dedicated contacts

Telephone lines:

- Questions on temporary protection can be addressed to all general telephone numbers at SAR or through email (sar@saref.government.bg)
- National telephone line at the Unified Portal for People Affected by the War in Ukraine: 029055555 and +380322465075.
- Crisis line of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: +35929482404.

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- Legal protection of refugees and migrants at the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee: 029813318 and 029802049.
- All useful contacts are available on the dedicated website "Bulgaria for Ukraine"

E-mail address:

Ministry of Foreign Affairs: crisis@mfa.bg

Other

- Regular updates and information for displaced people from Ukraine on the website of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee
- Free of charge webinar organised by a law firm on 1 April 2022 for those affected by the war in Ukraine and seeking temporary protection in Bulgaria
- The Association of Ukrainian Organisations “Mati Ukraina” Facebook group (BG/UK)
- Legal assistance in Varna by the Foundation for Access to Rights
- Dedicated info sessions by the International Organisation for Migration Bulgaria

Procedural aspects

Procedure to register and be granted temporary protection

Bulgaria opened registration points where displaced persons from Ukraine are registered and granted temporary protection, e.g. police stations, border crossing points, Migration Directorate offices. The capacity of institutions to issue registration cards progressively increased and the list of places for registration and issuance of temporary protection was constantly updated.

Between 26-30 March 2022, 40 new registration points for temporary protection were opened for those fleeing the war in Ukraine. 130 points are already functioning and receiving submissions of documents, located in 67 places in 56 settlements. The location of registration places is accessible on the dedicated governmental platform Bulgaria for Ukraine.

There is no deadline for registration, but it has to be done before the expiry of the 90 days of the visa-free regime. However, the Council of Ministers decision no 180 of 30 March 2022 provided a deadline for registration until 15 April 2022 for third-country nationals who are not Ukrainian citizens and stateless persons. The

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decision has been repealed by a judgment of 7 July 2022 of the Supreme Administrative Court. The decision of the Supreme Court has been repealed by Decision of the Supreme Court (panel of 5 judges) of 13 December 2022. This decision rejected the appeal against point 3 of the Council of Ministers decision No 180/30.03.2022. The decision is final.

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Registration	Temporary protection is granted upon an oral request to the border police, SAR or other bodies of the Ministry of the Interior (migration, police) to people who meet the eligibility criteria. Registration is done in person at the nearest Regional Directorate of the Ministry of the Interior (ODMVR), Sofia Directorate of The Interior (SRD) - for Sofia or in one of the Registration and Reception Centres (RRC), or before police authorities of the applicants' place of residence. The list of registration places for temporary protection is available here (Map is available). Upon request for temporary protection, the applicant must provide information about identity and family ties and will be photographed. If the applicant meets the requirements for temporary protection, a registration card is issued certifying the rights of the person with temporary protection in Bulgaria. The procedure takes 5-15 minutes and temporary protection is provided immediately. By Decision No 96 of 1 February 2023, the Council of Ministers established a new model for registration of card of a displaced person for temporary protection. Thus, new registration cards were granted to persons with temporary protection with a period of validity until 4 March 2024. In addition, also in connection with the two decisions of the Council of Ministers of 1 February 2023, a process of re-registration for temporary protection was launched on 13 February 2023, with a deadline of 31 March 2023 under Decision No 96/01.02.2023 of the Council of Ministers. Until 31 March 2023, the applications for re-issuance of a foreign national's registration card with granted temporary protection was submitted to the temporary protection registration sites – the Regional Directorates of the Ministry of Interior, the Sofia Directorate of Interior and the Registration and Reception Centres of the State Agency for Refugees under the Council of

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Residence permit	After registration, the applicant is issued a document called “Registration card of a foreigner who has been granted temporary protection”, which contains a photo, personal data and the foreigner's personal number (ЛНЧ). It contains also the person’s signature and children under 14 (if there are any). After one year, the term of temporary protection may be extended every 6 months up to 3 years. This period could be terminated earlier if the war is over, and peace and independence are restored in Ukraine. The Council of Ministers adopted a decision where it specified that displaced persons from Ukraine who have received registration cards of a foreigner, can use them fully in front of all institutions and providers of public services. It applies also to cards issued without a stamp and without a current address. The registration card of a foreigner is given when registering for temporary protection status and is part of the rights of citizens who have received such status. Starting with 1 April 2023, applications for the reissuance of registration cards for temporary protection beneficiaries and the re-registration of persons with temporary protection in the structures of the ODMVR and the Sofia Directorate of the Interior Ministry were suspended. The applications could be accepted only at the reception centers (RRC) of the State Agency for Refugees under the Council of Ministers at the following addresses: • RRC-Sofia, Ovcha Kupel quarter, Montevideo St. No. 21A; • RRC-Sofia, Vrazhdebna quarter, Botevgradsko Shose Blvd. No 270; • RRC-Sofiq, Voenna rampa quarter, 29 Ivan Georgov Str.; • RRC-Banya,Banya village, Municipality Nova Zagora, Mineralni bani No. 17;

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Legal aid	Pursuant to Article 22(1), item 8 of the Legal Aid Act, foreigners applying for or having been granted international protection or temporary protection can benefit of legal assistance. Ukrainian citizens seeking protection in Bulgaria are eligible for free legal aid through lawyers registered in the National Register of Legal Aid. Legal services are available at regional counselling centers across the country. The Center for Legal Aid and the Foundation for Access to Rights offer legal assistance and training for refugee law lawyers, focusing on temporary protection and human trafficking. The Access to Rights Foundation also provides support in multiple cities (Dobrich, Varna, Burgas, Plovdiv, Sofia) via a hotline and online requests for legal help. The foundation assists with health services, social and financial aid, education, childcare, housing, and employment. More details are provided on the governmental website "Bulgaria for Ukraine - Legal Services". Many services, including inter alia legal information, was initially provided in the Blue Dots opened in 2022, but after their closure in 2023, the services were replaced by Compass centers, funded by UNHCR. Legal assistance for judicial review is the same as for the regular procedure.

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Appeal	An appeal is possible regarding the revocation of temporary protection, pursuant to Article 84 of the Law on Asylum and Refugees, within 7 days. There is automatic suspensive effect pursuant to Article 84(5) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees. The time limit for deciding is 1 month from the initiation of the case, which is within 3 days from the receipt of the appeal – see Article 85(1), Law on Asylum and Refugees. According to Articles 84(3) and 85(3), Law on Asylum and Refugees, a cassation appeal may be lodged with the Supreme Administrative Court.

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Exclusion	The grounds for exclusion from temporary protection are the same as for international procedure and are laid down in Article 17(5) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees. Exclusion grounds apply for persons who (see Article 12(1), items 1-3 of the Law on Asylum and Refugees): • committed an act which constitutes a war crime or a crime against peace and humanity. • committed a serious crime of a non-political nature outside the territory of Bulgaria. • when there are reasonable grounds to believe that the person is committing, inciting, assisting, participating in training or preparing for acts contrary to the objectives and principles of the UN set out in the Preamble and in Article 10(1 and 2) of the UN Charter, as well as in its resolutions on measures to combat international terrorism; and • pose a threat to national security or society (Article 17(5) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees.

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Termination/Withdrawal	The grounds for termination and withdrawal of temporary protection are laid down in Article 82 of the Law on Asylum and Refugees which provides that temporary protection may end when its designated terms expire or there is a Decision made by the Council of the European Union. The Chairman of the State Agency for Refugees may withdraw temporary protection under specific legal provisions, namely pursuant to Article 17(5) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees (see exclusion clauses above). In such cases, Article 78 applies, and the decision is served following Article 76 procedures. If temporary protection is terminated or withdrawn, and the individual has not applied for international protection, the Law on Foreigners in Bulgaria governs their legal status. The State Agency for Refugees Quarterly Report on the Quality of the Procedure for International Protection Directorate for the period January – March 2024 mentioned that, within the framework of the pilot project with the EU Commission, the Ministry of the Interior and the State Agency for Refugees drafted a concept for the necessary legislative amendments to the Asylum and Refugees Act concerning temporary protection. The amendment will provide the legal possibility for the Chairperson of the State Agency for Refugees under the Council of Ministers to terminate temporary protection by an individual administrative act vis-à-vis the individual applicant.

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Reception and accommodation

Overview

Accommodation can be chosen from the listings proposed on this platform. However, the authorities warn beneficiaries of temporary protection to be careful when contacting the hosts.

The government adopted the Decision of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, No 144 R.E. of 10 March 2022 to provide temporary protection in Bulgaria, which provides a number of facilities and forms of assistance to all people who left Ukraine as a result of hostilities. In the same session, the Council of Ministers also approved a program for the use of humanitarian aid for persons seeking temporary protection in the Republic of Bulgaria.

Beneficiaries of temporary protection have the right to receive assistance for accommodation and meals in accommodation places registered in the National Tourist Register, in the total amount of BGN 40 without VAT per person per night and food, including tourist tax which is paid to the service provider. The aid will be provided for a period of up to 3 months. People who have expressed a desire to access the labour market have the same rights and this assistance will be provided for up to 1 month from the date of application. The period of validity of the program is expected to be from 24 February 2022 to 31 May 2022.

On 30 March 2022, the Council of Ministers adopted a decision to amend the Program for the use of humanitarian aid to persons seeking temporary protection in Bulgaria. Thus, the aid can be used not only in registered accommodation places, entered in the National Tourist Register, but also in sites, entered in the register of places of accommodation created for the purposes of the program implementation. The term in which humanitarian aid will be provided to these persons without explicit registration for temporary protection was extended.

The Council of Ministers adopted Decision no 245 and decree no 61 of 19 April 2022, which regulate the payment for the expenses incurred by the hotels participating in the Program. The Ministry of Tourism announced that the amount of BGN 11,075,446.40 will be paid, including 9% VAT, to 328 legal entities operating in 506 accommodation places within the meaning of the Tourism Act. The funds were approved and verified for the first reporting period, covering the

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period from 24 February to 31 March 2022.

The deputy Prime Minister announced on 13 May 2022 Governmental measures to be implemented as of 31 May 2022 concerning private accommodation in hotels for displaced persons from Ukraine when the humanitarian program ends. The Deputy Prime Minister announced that the state program providing humanitarian aid to persons who were granted temporary protection continues after May 31 in state, municipal and departmental resorts. Relevant information on the process was provided here: Всичко което трябва да знаете за "31 май" | Bulgaria for Ukraine

The deputy Prime Minister announced on 20 May 2022 that following multiple requests, the government decided to allow in addition to the departmental bases, but also the accommodation places registered in the National Tourist Register to participate in the new humanitarian program for accommodation of persons with temporary protection after 31 May 2022. The new program, developed by the operational coordination group, provides BGN 15 per day per person per night and three meals.

The State Agency for Refugees under the Council of Ministers (SAR) monitored and coordinated the survey of Ukrainian citizens seeking protection in Bulgaria. Between 21-25 May 2022, SAR formed groups of interviewers in all hotels that received Ukrainian refugees on the Black Sea coast - the districts of Burgas, Varna and Dobrich. The survey for Ukrainian citizens had specific questions related to their health, opportunities and desire to start work, educational needs for children and more.

There was a high number of hotels ready to accommodate displaced persons from Ukraine after 31 May 2022. More than 23,000 beds in accommodation registered with the National Tourist Register were included in the new humanitarian program for the accommodation of Ukrainian refugees. The new humanitarian program for accommodation started on 1 June 2022 and provided for two options – BGN 15 for a bed and food or BGN 10 for a bed only. The program did not cover additional services such as room cleaning and laundry.

On 29 and 30 May 2022, the Bulgarian authorities informed about the decision to end the program of accommodating displaced Ukrainians, mainly in hotels situated along the Black Sea coast. The transfer program could be used only once, and transportation was provided. Approximately 300,000 displaced Ukrainian nationals arrived in Bulgaria since the war started in Ukraine and more than 110,000 persons have received temporary protection and accommodation

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from the state. Since the mediators and field teams deployed to collect information and assess needs for relocation could not gather relevant, reliable and timely information on the intentions of displaced Ukrainians to relocate under the humanitarian accommodation program, it was decided to end the accommodation plan. Consequently, those who were in hotels and in need of shelter were temporarily accommodated in buffer zones in the Sarafovo and Elhovo centers. Accommodation continued at the state holiday places, used usually by state employees for summer holidays. In 2022, these locations were cancelled for state employees in order to offer shelter for displaced persons from Ukraine. Those who refuse to be accommodated in the departmental holiday bases, had to declare it under the humanitarian program. Refusal of accommodation did not deprive beneficiaries of temporary protection of other rights and entitlements.

The Ministry of Tourism announced on 5 October 2022 to have introduced an automated system to process data on humanitarian programs that were adopted to support accommodation of displaced persons from Ukraine. The aim was to have a more efficient system and reduce the time for processing and verification of documents.

On 17 October 2022, the Government approved a new payment of over BGN 8.4 million for hotels that accommodate displaced Ukrainian nationals. The payment covered the period between 1 June to 31 August 2022 for additional verified candidates for funding under the Program.

The Acting Minister of Internal Affairs announced in a briefing of the Council of Ministers held on 31 October 2022, that the humanitarian program and assistance in the accommodation of displaced persons from Ukraine will continue. On 1 November 2022, the Governmental platform for Ukraine made available detailed information on the program.

By judgement of 20 December 2022, a five judges panel of the Supreme Administrative Court allowed a cassation appeal against decision no 181 of the Council of Ministers submitted on discrimination grounds between beneficiaries of temporary protection.

On 28 June 2023, the Council of Ministers decided to extend the humanitarian program and accommodation in hotels for beneficiaries of temporary protection until 30 September 2023. The hotels will receive a subsidy of BGN 15 per day per person. The extension was adopted by Presidential Decree No 317 of 2023. The facilities are categorised or registered accommodation places which are in the

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National Tourist Register, after the persons seeking temporary protection have passed through buffer centres. The Ministry of Tourism also informed about the conditions of the humanitarian program and its extension until the end of 2023.

By Council of Ministers Decision No. 297 of 26 April 2024, the duration of the Humanitarian Aid Program for Displaced Persons from Ukraine with temporary protection granted in the Republic of Bulgaria was extended until 31 July 2024, under the same conditions.

The authorities published information on the conditions and procedures for accommodation under the Humanitarian Assistance Program for Displaced Persons from Ukraine with Temporary Protection in the Republic of Bulgaria (the Program), adopted by Decision No. 317 of the Council of Ministers in 2022.

Assistance under the Program is provided to individuals holding a valid registration card for foreigners with temporary protection, issued by the State Agency for Refugees.

Individuals are accommodated at the Transit Reception Center in the town of Elhovo, where they submit an application to the Vulnerability Assessment and Accommodation Needs Determination Working Group for Ukrainian citizens with temporary protection, which work under the National Operational Headquarters at the Council of Ministers.

The Working Group makes a decision within 7 working days based on the information gathered from the application.

The decision of the Working Group regarding the accommodation of the individual with temporary protection is provided to the concerned applicants within a 3-day period.

The decision specifies the location allocated to applicants for accommodation under this program. The location can be state facilities, hotels, or other accommodations within Bulgaria.

On 29 April 2025, the Council of Ministers adopted a Program for humanitarian support and integration of displaced persons from Ukraine, beneficiaries of temporary protection in Bulgaria. The program aims to ensure conditions for long-term integration of beneficiaries of temporary protection – through access to employment, education and social support. Persons from vulnerable groups will continue to receive humanitarian support for accommodation for the entire period of temporary protection. The integration process will involve state

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authorities based on their area of competence or expertise, with an obligation for their administrations to inform and consult temporary protection beneficiaries on the possibilities of being supported with integration measures.

Organisation of reception and accommodation

Initial reception: Displaced persons from Ukraine can either opt to choose from this list or any private accommodation if they have the means to cover for their basic needs. If displaced persons do not have the means to cover for basic, they have to apply first for temporary protection and by contacting border authorities at the border checkpoint and the person will be directed and transported to a hotel designated by the authorities, where accommodation and meals (breakfast, lunch and dinner) will be provided for up to 3 months or until 31 May 2022 under the Governmental Humanitarian Aid program.

Accommodation: Every foreigner who enters Bulgaria has the legal obligation to register his/her address at the police station of the place of residence within 3 days. However, the law does not impose any restrictions on the registration of the address after the expiry of the 3 days. If the person is staying in a hotel, the address registration is carried out ex officio by the administration of the hotel. If the person is staying in private accommodation – rented or with friends/relatives – the owner of the home should do the address registration. The homeowner must go to the police with the person being accommodated and bring the ownership document (deed). If the owner is unable to go to the police, he/she can sign and certify a declaration before a notary (download the declaration form here). With this declaration and a copy of the title deed, people who are staying in his home can go to the police themselves and get their address registered. The police issues an address card to a foreigner.

The Council of Minister adopted decisions for implementation of a humanitarian program for accommodation in hotels for beneficiaries of temporary protection. The Ministry of Tourism is the implementing authority of the humanitarian programme for the accommodation of beneficiaries of temporary protection in hotels, which in turn receive a subsidy for every person hosted. This programme has been extended until 31 July 2024.

The Humanitarian Assistance program is provided to beneficiaries of temporary protection in possession of a valid registration card. Under this program, individuals are provided with accommodation at the Transit Reception Centre in

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the town of Elhovo where they submit an application to the Vulnerability Assessment and Accommodation Needs Determination Working Group for Ukrainian Citizens with temporary protection. This working group falls under the National Operational Headquarters at the Council of Ministers. The application is processed by the working group within seven days, and the decision specifying the location for accommodation is communicated to the applicants within three days. This procedure can be found on the United Platform for Ukraine website.

Provision for means to obtain housing: Beneficiaries of temporary protection have the right to receive assistance for accommodation and meals in accommodation places registered in the National Tourist Register, in the total amount of BGN 40 without VAT per person per night and food, including tourist tax which is paid to the service provider. The aid will be provided for a period of up to 3 months.

Rights of people granted temporary protection

According to Article 39(1) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees, beneficiaries of temporary protection have the right to: i) remain in Bulgaria, access work and vocational training; iii) access adequate accommodation or means of accommodation; and iv) access to social assistance.

Rights	Description

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Access to the labour market	After the receipt of the registration card, beneficiaries of temporary protection are entitled to work in Bulgaria without a work permit. They can register as job seekers at their permanent or current address and benefit from employment services and vocational training. Information is available on the governmental website "Bulgaria for Ukraine" **Employment statistics** According to the National Revenue Agency, in total, more than 5,600 displaced Ukrainians have found employment under temporary protection, representing over 15% of the working-age population among those who fled the war. However, this figure does not include those employed on civil contracts or probationary periods. This is the highest integration rate of refugees in Bulgaria's recent history, achieved within just three months. Ukrainian employees are spread across almost all districts in 20 economic sectors and 9 professional fields. They work in industries such as hospitality, administration, construction, IT, and research. The IT sector initially estimated a need for 30,000 workers, while the textile industry projected an intake of 20,000 employees. Ukrainians have been employed as managers, specialists, technicians, administrative staff, and workers in non-specialized professions. **Employment measures** On 6 June 2022, the Employment Agency launched a program to support displaced Ukrainians with temporary protection. Ukrainian citizens who start working in Bulgaria are eligible for BGN 356 per month for rent and overhead expenses for three months. Additionally, during the subsidised employment period, employers will receive financial support to cover the minimum wage (BGN 710), mandatory insurance contributions, and incentives for other employment-related expenses in accordance with labour and social security laws. These funds are provided by the EU Solidarity Project, financed through the Operational Program "Human Resources Development" (2014-2020)

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Access to medical care	The State Agency for Refugees (SAR) provides information on access to medical care (hospitals, doctors, etc.), which is at the same level as for Bulgarian citizens. Important information is available on the governmental website Bulgaria for Ukraine-Medical information and Urgent medical help. **Finding a General Practitioner (GP)** Beneficiaries of temporary protection or those in the process of international protection can apply for a GP through the Regional Health Insurance Fund (HHIF). A written application must be submitted to the director of the relevant HHIF, which will assist in finding a personal doctor. Contact details and application forms are available on the NHIF website. **Immunization campaign for persons displaced from Ukraine** The Bulgarian authorities planned an immunization campaign for Ukrainian adults and children due to differences in vaccine schedules. Vaccinations cover 11 diseases, including tuberculosis, diphtheria, tetanus, polio, hepatitis B, measles, and rubella. Each child's immunization plan is prepared by a regional health inspectorate doctor or a chosen GP, and an immunization certificate will be issued. These certificates will be required for school and kindergarten enrolment. **Health insurance coverage for Ukrainian citizens** On 5 May 2022, the Council of Ministers granted equal healthcare rights to Ukrainian citizens under temporary protection. Those who entered Bulgaria before April 26, 2022, are considered health insured from April 26, while those arriving after this date become insured from the date of receiving temporary protection. For adults aged 18 to 63 (women) and 18 to 65 (men), the state covers health insurance for the first three months. For children under 18 and seniors above 63/65, the state covers health insurance for the entire duration of temporary protection.

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Social welfare assistance and means of subsistence	Upon registration and receipt of a temporary protection card, refugees from Ukraine will be entitled to request social assistance, which is granted by the Social Assistance Directorate at their current address. An application for social assistance can be downloaded here. Information is available on the governmental website "Bulgaria for Ukraine". Social assistance can include monthly financial assistance or a one-time lump sum of up to BGN 375 for health, education, and other essential needs. The amount is determined based on the applicant's financial and family situation. To apply, eligible beneficiaries need to apply with their temporary protection card, Ukrainian identity document, and address card. The Social Assistance Directorate processes applications and conducts a social survey to evaluate the applicant's social and health circumstances. Assistance payments can be made either in cash through a licensed postal operator or non-cash to a Bulgarian bank account. As of April 2022, 3,147 Ukrainian refugees received one-time assistance. A project launched in September 2022 provided 40,000 vouchers worth BGN 100 each for food and essential goods for displaced Ukrainians. The program, which ran until January 2023, prioritized families with children. Additional assistance programs have been introduced, including a cash assistance program by UNHCR and free public transport in Sofia for Ukrainian refugees. However, in November 2022, the Bulgarian government ended food provision for displaced Ukrainians, a decision later suspended by the Supreme Administrative Court in December 2022. In December 2022, the Bulgarian Red Cross launched a financial assistance program for displaced Ukrainians, requiring registration to access the support.

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Education	Ukrainian children in Bulgaria, granted temporary protection, are entitled to free education, including kindergarten for children up to 6 years old and schooling for those under 18 years old. The Regional Education Departments (RUO) manage school and kindergarten placements, with enrolment facilitated by submitting a residence card and an application detailing the child's background. Information on how to apply can be found on the Ministry of Education and Science website. To support education, Bulgarian language courses and online resources for Ukrainian students, the platform Prosveta I e-просвета launched a Ukrainian "classroom", dedicated to children from Ukraine and containing more than 160 e-readable versions of textbooks up to Grade 11 in Ukrainian. The books on the platform are accessible free of charge here and can be used by all teachers and parents involved in the education of Ukrainian children to facilitate their work. Access to the textbooks in "e-просвета" does not require registration and is done quickly through a specially-created page "For UKRAINE". Several initiatives have been launched to support young beneficiaries education, including centers for children aged 3-6 and those providing home-schooling for displaced Ukrainian children. In Plovdiv, the Foundation for the Support of Ukrainians has opened centers for both younger and school-aged children, and the Red Cross provides extra Bulgarian language training. Additionally, free educational centers like Integriko in Varna focus on integrating children into the Bulgarian education system. Other organisations, including the BCause Foundation, the Open Doors Situation Centre, and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), are also contributing to educational initiatives and cultural integration for Ukrainian beneficiaries of temporary protection. Information is available on the: • the governmental website "Bulgaria for Ukraine"

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Family reunification	Beneficiaries of temporary protection have the right to family reunification with their spouse and minor and unmarried children, as provided under Article 39a of the Law on Asylum and Refugees. Family members who live in another country have only to register as temporary protection holders upon arrival and they receive the same benefits and rights. According to Article 39a (2), the Chairman of the State Agency for Refugees can allow reunification with extended circle of family members in Bulgaria under temporary protection through a special procedure. The determining authority can authorise the reunification with other close relative if it is proved that they lived together as part of the household with the beneficiary of temporary protection before the war in Ukraine and if they were dependent on the temporary protection beneficiary in Ukraine. The assessment will be case-by-case assessment on the consequences and difficulties that could arise if applicants are not reunified with the temporary protection beneficiary. When the location of the family members is unknown, the State Agency for Refugees must initiate search and tracing in cooperation with UNHCR, Red Cross and other relevant organisations – see Article 39a (3) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees. Upon reunification, those family members will enjoy the same rights as the sponsor who is beneficiary of temporary protection. In case of family reunification in another EU Member State, the status granted in Bulgaria must cease. The applicant can no longer benefit from the family reunification procedure in the Republic of Bulgaria, and all temporary protection rights and benefits will cease, pursuant to Article 39a (5) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees.

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Other	**Bank cards:** The country's legislation allows Ukrainian citizens to open a bank account for basic operations. This account is opened in BGN and through it many payment operations can be performed – depositing, withdrawing money at a cash desk or ATM, and transfers, including online. According to the law, banks offer payment services on this account free of charge or for a reasonable fee, regardless of the number of services provided through the account. Ukrainian citizens can use their Visa or MasterCard debit and credit cards within the daily limit set by Ukrainian banks and up to the guaranteed limit for the specific card. More information on the governmental website "Bulgaria for Ukraine - Legal rights". **Pets:** It is possible to enter Bulgaria with pets, regardless of whether they have identification with a chip, passports or vaccination certificates. The relevant Bulgarian authorities have adopted a simplified procedure for these cases. For more information on this issue, write to e-mail: ukraine@bfsa.bg More information on the governmental website "Bulgaria for Ukraine - Legal rights". **Transport:** The Bulgarian State Railways provide free transport by train in Bulgaria for refugees from Ukraine. Many cities and municipalities (e.g. Sofia, Stara Zagora and Antonovo) announced free use of urban transport within the village for Ukrainian refugees when presenting a Ukrainian document. **Vehicles:** Vignette and tolls — the government has decided by Decision No 129 of 8 March 2022 to exempt from payment of vignette vehicles with Ukrainian registration as of 24 February 2022. **Freedom of movement and travel withing the EU:** Ukrainian displaced persons with temporary protection in Bulgaria can travel within the EU but will only enjoy temporary protection rights in Bulgaria unless they re-register in another EU country. Ukrainian nationals with biometric passports can travel freely in the EU and renew expired passports at the

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Assistance to unaccompanied minors

General description

Guidelines are in place for action in case of an unaccompanied child displaced from Ukraine, located at a border checkpoint, checkpoint (initial reception points), Migration Directorate, Regional Police Department or the State Agency for Refugees registration centre.

All minors arriving from Ukraine can enter Bulgaria by presenting an identity document – passport, internal passport, ID card, birth certificate or any other available document certifying the identity of the child, regardless of whether the child is accompanied by a parent, guardian or unaccompanied child.

Unaccompanied children have the right to enter Bulgaria in view of their best interests and their right to request and receive temporary protection in the Bulgarian state.

Children who do not have any documentation should be allowed entry into Bulgaria. However, the border authorities are obliged by Bulgarian law to conduct a special interview (same as for adults wishing to enter without documents). Representatives of the Child Protection Unit must also participate in this interview to ensure that the best interests of the child are protected. During the interview, the representatives of the border authorities and the child protection authorities must try to establish the identity and the relationship with any accompanying adult.

Unaccompanied minors can be a child accompanied by an adult relative (grandparent, aunt, uncle, brother or sister) or by another person close to the family (neighbour, family friend) to whom the parents have entrusted him. The entrustment is proved by presenting a power of attorney from a parent (a sample power of attorney can be downloaded here), or in the absence of a power of attorney, by filling in and submitting a declaration by the accompanying person (download here) to take responsibility and care for the child. This form must be given to the border police officers.

If the declaration for childcare is not submitted at the border, it can be filled in and submitted later to the social services for child protection in Bulgaria - Department of Child Protection (CPD) at the local directorate "Social Assistance" (DSP).

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Guidelines on the identification of unaccompanied minors are published on the website of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee.

Information on the governmental website "Bulgaria for Ukraine - Information for unaccompanied children".

Legal guardianship

Ukrainian citizens who accompany children who are not their parents and reside in reception centres must visit the Child Protection Department in the Social Assistance Directorate, which is responsible for the respective reception centre. The Child Protection Department will issue a document to legitimise them as carers of the child for all Bulgarian institutions, for example in order for the child to be provided with medical assistance, to be enrolled in school, etc.

In order to be issued such a document, the accompanying persons will have to present the documents for their relationship with the child as "persons responsible by law", "persons responsible by virtue of custom";, an accompanying person authorised by a parent or accompanying person with a declaration in a form completed with the Bulgarian border authorities. Child protection officers will initiate a procedure called a "social survey and assessment of the child's situation", in which it is possible to visit the child and the accompanying person at the address where they are staying. The aim is to make sure that the accompanying person acts in the best interests of the child and the attendant is issued with a document giving him the right to represent the child before all Bulgarian institutions. This order shall be upheld by a decision of the court. Pending the judgment, legal actions for the protection of the personal rights of the child related to his health, education and civil status, as well as for the issuance of identity documents, shall be carried out by the relevant Social Assistance Directorate. If they receive a report of an unaccompanied child, social services may initiate such a social survey and without the attendant explicitly requesting it.

When it is established that the child does not have accompanying adults who agree to take care of him/her or if they do not act in his/her interests, the child protection authorities must provide care under the Bulgarian law. If the best interests of the child are to be registered for temporary protection or the child explicitly wishes to do so, the relevant Social Assistance Directorate at his/her location must arrange for the registration.

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If the child has unknown or deceased parents, after registration for temporary protection, the Bulgarian authorities will initiate a procedure to designate a guardian, unless the child is placed in a social service for children.

Information on unaccompanied minors is provided by the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee here and here.

Accommodation:

Pursuant to Article 39 (4) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees, unaccompanied minors or accompanied minors, beneficiaries of temporary protection must be accommodated places where the family of relatives or close friends live, foster family, social or integrated health and social service for residential care under the terms and conditions of the Child Protection Act or other places of accommodation with special conditions for minors and minors.

Education: information about education is available in the previous section 4.

Assistance to people with special needs

Beneficiaries of temporary protection are entitled to emergency medical care. Vulnerable applicants' groups – children under the age of 18, unaccompanied children, pregnant women, single parents with minors, the elderly and people with disabilities, serious health problems, mental disorders victims of trafficking or suffering torture, rape or other severe forms of violence – have the right to full medical care as Bulgarian citizens.

Updated information on access to medical care is available here: https://ukraine.gov.bg/health-information/

Information and emergency contacts is available on this website www.antitraffic.government.bg for potential victims of trafficking in human beings.

The State Agency for Refugees at the Council of Ministers conducted a needs assessment of vulnerable displaced persons from Ukraine. SAR staff from the Directorate of Social Action and Adaptation prepared integration profiles of all displaced Ukrainian nationals from vulnerable groups. The information includes their specific needs and the educational and professional experience and competence of their families. The aim is to support their social adaptation and

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cultural orientation, as well as to provide them with social, health and psychological assistance. According to the SAR Chair a number of 25,952 Ukrainians are accommodated in departmental bases until 31 August 2022 and the efforts are towards reaching and supporting those who are scattered in smaller groups in the country, in order to help them in the process of integration.

On 8 June 2022, the State Agency for Refugees team assessed the needs of vulnerable displaced Ukrainian refugees in the Burgas region, and the region was also visited by EUAA representatives.

Caritas Sofia launched the project "Support for the Future" in 2022 in partnership with the Council of Refugee Women, funded by the Norwegian Financial Mechanism under the Home Affairs Programme. During one year of implementation, more than 900 children from refugee centers in Sofia and Harmanli have benefited from specialised care focusing on personal needs. Games, entertainment, drawing and joint activities heal the soul and stimulate child development and education, experts say. The exhibition "The Wall of Dreams" showed the innermost desires of children – to be next to their family and in their own home.

Solidarity (relocation of people who are eligible for temporary protection)

Currently, no relocation measures or activities have been initiated in Bulgaria for temporary protection beneficiaries.

Impact of simultaneous application for international protection

In Bulgaria, it is not possible for persons under temporary protection to have a parallel procedure for an individual assessment of their case for international protection (refugee or humanitarian status) – see Article 68 (1) point 2 of the Law on Asylum and Refugees. However, Article 58 (7) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees stipulates that a beneficiary of temporary protection has the right to submit an application for international protection.

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Pursuant to Article 39 (5) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees provides that a beneficiary of temporary protection who submits an application for international protection may not benefit from the rights of a third country national in proceedings for granting international protection.

Starting with 14 March 2022, when the Decision No 144 of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria to grant temporary protection to persons displaced by the war in Ukraine was published and entered into force, the decision automatically covers all Ukrainian refugees who have entered or are on Bulgarian territory.

On 8 April 2022, the State Agency for Refugees under the Council of Ministers adopted an ORDER № RD05-263 / 08.04.2022 which provides the following:

- all registration and procedures for granting international protection for displaced persons from Ukraine shall immediately cease and all applications are to be registered as for being granted temporary protection;
- an individual international protection procedure may be initiated regarding displaced persons from Ukraine only in exceptional situations where the person does not have any valid documents or other documentary evidence from which it can be established that he or she falls within the category of persons covered by the temporary protection introduced pursuant to Article 2 of EU Regulation No 2022/382 of 4 March 2022 and points 1 and 3 of Council of Ministers Decree No 144 of 10 March 2022, as amended by Council of Ministers Decision No 180 of 30 March 2022. According to the instructions of the Council of Ministers and the European Commission, such documentary evidence may be produced by means of identity documents, driving licences, birth certificates for children up to 14 years of age and other official documents indirectly proving their identity, such as certificates, passes, diplomas, membership cards, bank cards, workbooks, property documents and the like. In such cases, the international protection proceedings initiated should be conducted as soon as possible.
- Any exceptional procedure on international protection shall be terminated when the foreign national provides documents or other documentary evidence proving he or she is eligible for temporary protection,
- provisional enforcement of al decision taken after 14 March 2022 to terminate international protection procedures at the request of displaced persons from Ukraine is allowed;
- relevant ‘registration card of a foreigner to whom proceedings have been initiated for the examination of the application for international protection’

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> issued under Article 41 (1) (4) of the LAR for displaced person from Ukraine whose proceedings have been terminated on the basis of this order shall immediately change her status in AIS ‘Refugees’ to ‘invalid’.

The SAR provided an explanatory note for the Order of 8 April 2022. The SAR mentioned that a person can not apply for both temporary protection and international protection (Article 19 TPD). According to the Article 68 (1) (2) LAR the procedure for international protection can be initiated after the temporary protection has ceased. According to the national legislation implementing the EU legislation, if the applicant is a person already holding temporary protection, he or she will only be able to register as an applicant for international protection on the basis of his/her application and to initiate international protection proceedings only after the suspension or withdrawal of temporary protection. According to Article 39 (5) of the LAR, a foreign national enjoying temporary protection who submits an application for international protection cannot enjoy the rights of a foreign national in proceedings for the grant of international protection. Following the adoption of the Decision No 144 of the Council of Ministers of 10 March 2022 granting temporary protection in the Republic of Bulgaria to displaced persons from Ukraine and its entry into force following its publication on 14 March 2022, the State Agency for Refugees can not register Ukrainian citizens as applicants for international protection and can not initiate a procedure for granting refugee and humanitarian status. The SAR is obliged to issue a document in accordance with Article 41 (1) (5) of the LAR certifying their status as persons already granted temporary protection.

Administrative Courts found as unlawful and contrary to the Directive 2001/55/EU and to the national legislation the decisions of the Deputy Chair of the State Agency for Refugees to terminate the proceedings for international protection because the applicants, Ukrainian nationals, have applied for temporary protection:

Administrative Court Varna [bg. Административен съд -Варна], Applicant v State Agency for Refugees, 29 July 2022.

Administrative Court, City of Sofia [bg. Софийски градски съд], E.K. v State Agency for Refugees, NO 5424, 9 September 2022.

Administrative Court, City of Sofia [bg. Софийски градски съд], Applicant v State Agency for Refugees, NO 5540, 29 September 2022.

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The Supreme Administrative Court ruled on 14 July 2023 in a cassation appeal in a five judge panel that the termination of international protection procedures for applicants from Ukraine is lawful.

The report Quarterly Report of the of the Quality of the Procedure for International Protection Directorate for the international protection procedure carried out for the period 1.1.2024 – 31.3.2024 mentions that within the framework of the pilot project with the EU Commission, the Ministry of the Interior and the State Agency for Refugees drafted a concept for the necessary legislative amendments to the Asylum and Refugees Act concerning temporary protection.

The amendment will regulate the legal possibility of submitting an individual application for humanitarian status by displaced persons holders of temporary protection, as well as simplified rules for the examination and coordination of such applications in view of the identical substantive conditions for granting them under Article 9(1)(3) and Article 1a (3) of the Law on Asylum and Refugees. The aim of the amendment is to avoid overburdening the national asylum system in the event of the submission of individual applications for international protection by displaced persons from Ukraine who are present on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria after the expiry of their temporary protection on 4 March 2025.

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