

Beyond temporary protection: A roundtable on the future of Ukrainians with Status S in Switzerland

As the full-scale invasion of Ukraine approaches its 4th year, the tension between temporary protection and the long-term needs of both Ukrainian refugees and Swiss organizations has become clearer than ever. For this reason, a closed roundtable was organized with representatives from different levels of Swiss government, NGOs, and international organizations using the [Chatham House Rule](#) to discuss the future of Status S.

As of December 2025, there are over 71,000 Ukrainian refugees with Status S in Switzerland. As there seems to be no end to the war in sight, it is difficult for all involved parties – refugees and administration alike – to plan ahead. Carefully considering different scenarios seems the best approach. Switzerland continues to pursue a dual strategy of integration and eventual return. The implementation of this strategy, however, can be confusing for Ukrainian refugees, potential employers, and the general population.

A central challenge lies in the tension between the uncertain outcome of the war on the one hand, and refugees' desire to have control over their own lives, alongside a push from officials for them to be economically independent. Though finding work in Switzerland remains challenging. For one, the Swiss labor market is demanding, and many Ukrainian refugees do not have exactly the right profiles, diplomas, work experience, and tacit knowledge. Moreover, employers often hesitate to invest in workers they expect to leave the country in a few months. Given these circumstances, the participants of the roundtable considered the labor force participation comparatively high (for a population of forced migration), although greater economic independence would be preferable.

Changes Ahead in 2027

Currently, temporary protection under Status S is provided until March 2027. That year will also mark five years of temporary protection for many of the Ukrainian refugees, and the cantons will be solely responsible for financing refugees who are not economically independent. What is more, from a legal point of view, Ukrainian refugees will be able to apply for cases of hardship. Given that cantons are primarily responsible for these, the participants of the roundtable call for harmonization to the extent this is possible to avoid unequal treatment, not least because we can expect many applications and the refugees were randomly allocated to the cantons in the first place.

At the same time, there will be parliamentary elections in 2027, so the participants expect that Ukrainian refugees will be politicized. In this context, it is possible that cantons will push towards active labor force participation more strongly. Financial incentives may lead cantons to innovate and try to find new ways to increase economic integration. Without clear perspectives, however, Ukrainian refugees will probably continue to find it difficult to make the decisions that are conducive to finding paid work.

A Need for Different Pathways

What is missing at the moment are clear pathways to a more stable status than temporary protection, even to residency and settlement, as some countries have started to develop and discuss. With a clear pathway, refugees should find it easier to make the necessary decisions and trade off aspects like potential dequalification against a clearer future. At the same time, we should not forget that some refugees cannot work, such as pensioners or people with disabilities. Whatever the pathways, the experience to date shows that information is central to avoiding confusion among refugees and the general population.

From surveys, we know that most Ukrainian refugees want to stay in Switzerland beyond the war. The participants agree that, in principle, a clear transition from the logic of protection to a logic of

work is desirable. What is more, a generous return premium should be discussed transparently, as it allows an informed decision. It is essential that voluntary return remains truly voluntary and protection is assured where necessary.

Providing different pathways is also beneficial for administrations, where a large number of refugees remains a challenge when changing status simultaneously altogether when the war ends. For the administration, predictability is as beneficial as for the refugees.

While no concrete plans are on the table at the moment, pathways to work logics need to consider that protection is paramount. For instance, if a Ukrainian refugee could apply for a residence permit (Permit B) because they are gainfully employed, a protection status should be available in case they lose their job and the Permit B cannot be renewed.

Swiss Decisions Depend on Geopolitics

The European Union pushes its member states to national solutions, something Switzerland provided from the beginning. At the same time, coordination remains important to ensure orderly migration.

The discussion made it apparent that a transition to different pathways is difficult to plan, given how unpredictable the geopolitical situation is, including the political and economic situation in Ukraine. The participants of the roundtable expect that the way the war ends and the perspectives in Ukraine will have a large effect on how many Ukrainian refugees return voluntarily at the end of the war. For instance, a clear path towards EU membership implies economic opportunities, but more generally, the participants expect that Ukraine will need support for reabsorbing refugees.

It is difficult to conclude the discussion before the end of the war is clear. We can make plans on likely scenarios, but the participants were under no illusion that the future may bear out in ways we do not presently anticipate. At the same time, thinking about and planning different scenarios can help develop long-term solutions, even though at the moment short-term protection is paramount. The participants were not expecting any definite political decisions in the near future, even though they encouraged politicians to work towards the implementation of different pathways, both to ease the administrative burden at the end of Status S and to provide Ukrainian refugees with greater control over the situation. Perhaps solutions could be developed to be applied to others who seek protection under ordinary asylum procedures as well.

Protection and Orderly Return Are Paramount

Despite the political challenges, the participants were of the opinion that the aim should be to find durable solutions. This means that voluntary return to Ukraine would probably require programs on the ground to help the country reabsorb returnees.

When alternative pathways are explored or even implemented, the experience to date has made it clear that information is central. This means involving civil society and actively informing refugees, although cantonal differences remain a challenge for communication, especially in a context where refugees exchange information and their experiences across the country.

Many open questions remain around protection, some of which involve the situation after the end of the war. For example, Ukrainian men with family in Switzerland may seek to come to Switzerland, and the return of Ukrainian refugees originating from Russian-occupied territories remains uncertain and poorly defined, if the occupation persists after the war.

The participants underlined the priority of providing protection, but finding solutions before the end of the war would reduce the strain when Status S ends. While Ukrainian refugees continue to have high trust in Swiss institutions, there is general uncertainty about the future, including misinformation that is circulating about future possibilities. For the administration at various levels, having (more) data on the number of Ukrainian refugees likely considered as cases of hardship could enable a discussion about phasing out Status S that varies according to individual circumstances.

Being Prepared Through Dialogue

Looking ahead, an open dialogue with different stakeholders is necessary to make sure the diverse needs of the Ukrainian refugees are met and that there is a plan prepared for likely outcomes. Such a dialogue increases the chances that sustainable solutions are found and that administrations are prepared for the large number of status changes, and that different actors support each other for a smooth transition.

Some participants voiced concern that different protection statuses are treated differently but recognized that changes in one status can later be applied to others, like people who seek protection under the ordinary asylum system.

Both refugees and administrations seek pathways out of Status S, albeit for different reasons. In any case, safety and dignity should be the guiding principles so that no person needing protection can fall through the cracks. To achieve this, it is important that different actors maintain close communication and engage in an open dialogue. Even as the geopolitical situation remains difficult to predict, all actors can invest into preparedness, trying to remove uncertainties around open questions as far as possible, be they administrative or legal in nature. In all the scenarios we can think of today, there will be a need for a transitional period as Status S ends.

*This summary was drafted on the basis of the discussions that took place during the round table on [Beyond Temporary Protection: The Future of Ukrainians with Status S in Switzerland](#) in Neuchâtel – 21 November 2025.