

FFVT/IMIS Panel debate

“Stay or Return? Options, Interests and Policy Responses”

Monday 27 Nov, 17.15 – 18.45 CET (18.15-19.45 Kyiv time)

Introduction

On 27 November 2023 we held an online panel debate with representatives from the Ukrainian and German government, two international organisations and an umbrella organisation of the Ukrainian diaspora in Germany. The aim was to carve out the key trends and challenges and current affairs, as perceived by these actors, for forced migration and its management due to the Russian war against Ukraine. The debate was structured by two rounds of questions to the panellists followed by a discussion.

Panellists

D. Andryunina (Ukrainian Ministry of Economy), H.U. Benra (German Ministry of Interior), M. Wagner (International Centre for Migration Policy Development), A. Lauren (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), N. Pryhornytska (Alliance of Ukrainian Organisations, Germany)

Key messages

- Post March 2025, after the TPD expires, currently no subsequent legal arrangement (asylum, residence permit, new status) is convincing. Any transition to another residence status has its challenges as these are usually conditioned (employment, studies, family reasons) and entail fewer rights. However, prolonging the TPD or a status related to EU accession might provide solutions.
- Distinction needs to be made between the period during and after displacement. Short visits, return, stay, long-term return and transnational practices (pendulum migration) are the most obvious migration options.
- Many Ukrainians are likely to stay, the longer they stay, the less likely they are to return. They will be offered and will see significant opportunities to stay. However, cross-border networks, twinning projects, foreign direct investments (FDI) and transnational mobility complement this pattern.
- The war exacerbated Ukraine’s pre-war labour shortage. The country now is in even more dire need of labour; in the EU, too, demand for labour is high. This constellation provides for a potential conflict of interest and requires a nuanced policy approach sensitive to the interests of Ukraine, the host countries and forced and their families.
- Migration, integration, return, reconstruction and development and empowering women go hand in hand. A sustainable and comprehensive approach should take all these options into account. Return requires dedicated support policies, notably for those with fewer resources.
- Migration decisions are largely an individual affair, migration from Ukraine is embedded in wider trends and Ukraine and the EU should provide opportunities and pathways for the desired policy goal. Liberal mobility regimes are best suited to govern the current situation.
- Large-scale return impacts on IDPs in the country, increases competition for jobs and housing. This requires sensitive policies.
- The partnership relation between Ukraine and the EU and the comprehension of the predicament of Ukraine provides an opportunity to generally rethink collaboration on migration matters.
- Some argue that it is too early to decide future migration policies whereas others suggest the clock is ticking. Again, this reveals some conflicting perspectives.