

# Reluctant benevolence: The reception of refugees from Ukraine in Sweden

*Abstract*

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When large numbers of people started to flee from the Russian attack on Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the EU was quick to try to offer solutions and accommodate those refugees by, for the first time, activating its temporary protection legislation. The response of the EU and its Member States has by and large been described as positive as it offered refugees from Ukraine unbureaucratic access to temporary residence permits, access to welfare, health care, education, and work. Compared to the deterrence strategies that have characterised the EU's responses to refugee flows from other countries and regions of the world, we can speak – as Jonas Bornemann has put it – of an approach of “selective benevolence” towards people from Ukraine.

Almost two years into this historic refugee situation, however, emerging research shows that there are significant differences between the various EU Member States when it comes to the treatment of, and conditions for, people who have fled from Ukraine, with some countries acting more welcoming than others. Sweden, as this paper shows, has chosen a restrictive and minimalist approach. Compared to the other Nordic countries and other EU Member States, it offers poorer conditions when it comes to, for example, access to the welfare system; financial allowances; access to healthcare and education; as well as integration arrangements such as language courses. Although the Swedish treatment of refugees from Ukraine has received public and media attention, and there has been pressure on the government to make improvements, conditions for Ukrainians under temporary protection are still aligned to the Swedish reception conditions for asylum seekers rather than to the conditions for recognised refugees. Moreover, it is currently still unclear what longer-term options Sweden might offer to people from Ukraine once the current temporary protection regime expires in March 2025, and status changes towards other types of statuses or residence permits are not possible.

This means that, rather than benefiting from an approach of selective benevolence, refugees from Ukraine in Sweden have been engulfed by the general migration and asylum strategy of the Swedish government, which is characterised by obsession with “pull factors” and attempts to reduce Sweden's attractiveness as a destination for people seeking protection. We should therefore speak of “reluctant” rather than “selective” benevolence.