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## Connecting Ukrainians at Home and Abroad

### Policy Lessons from Unity Hubs and Dialogue Projects

This knowledge sheet was commissioned by the Directorate-General for Migration (DGM) of the Ministry of Justice and Security. It forms part of the Migration Knowledge Portal (Kennisportaal Migratie), a collaborative initiative in which Clingendael researchers, at the request of the DGM, quickly compile existing literature and knowledge to effectively support policymakers in developing policy. Responsibility for the content rests solely with the authors. For an overview of previously published knowledge sheets within the Migration Knowledge Portal, see: <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/kennis-brieven-migratie>. For all Clingendael's migration work, see:



## Introduction

The EU's Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) now seems to expire in March 2027, though discussions about a possible extension are ongoing.<sup>1</sup> The Dutch government's long-term policy for after the TPD ends entails a three-year transition status for displaced Ukrainians hosted in the Netherlands.<sup>2</sup> This would allow Ukrainians

to stay and work in the Netherlands for three additional years after the Directive ends, while preparing for voluntary return.

Because the willingness to return is partly influenced by how strongly displaced persons remain connected to Ukraine, maintaining and strengthening these ties is an aim for both the Ukrainian and the Dutch government. The Ukrainian government is setting up Unity Hubs to strengthen the political and cultural connection between the diaspora and Ukraine.<sup>3</sup> Next to the social ties, such places can provide

1 Nicolette Ionta, 'EXCLUSIVE: Capitals mull sixth year of emergency status for Ukrainians,' *Euractiv*, 19 March 2026.

2 By 28 February 2026, 134 thousand Ukrainian refugees were registered in Dutch municipalities: Rijksoverheid, 'Cijfers opvang vluchtelingen uit Oekraïne in Nederland,' accessed 19 March 2026. This preparation is in line with the 'Council Recommendation on a coordinated approach to the transition out of temporary protection for displaced persons from Ukraine,' 8 September 2025; Ministerie van Asiel en Migratie, 'Verzamelbrief over opvang Oekraïners november 2025,' 28 November 2025.

3 Giulia Mori et al., 'Diaspora Engagement Report: Case Studies and Best Practices for Ukraine,' *International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)*, March 2025.

counselling and integration support and assist those ready to return. Originally initiated under the Ukrainian Ministry of Unity, the Hubs are now implemented under the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity as part of their wider Unity policy. This policy includes economic engagement, social cohesion, return and reintegration.<sup>4</sup>

The Council of the EU, too, recommends using such hubs set up for maintaining connections with Ukrainians abroad for other ends, like information provision on legal statuses, exploratory visits, or voluntary return programs.<sup>5</sup>

In the Netherlands, several diaspora-led Ukrainian houses and social hubs offer similar support. Aligned with the Recommendations of the Council of the EU, the Dutch government is exploring possibilities to offer (financial) support to the Ukrainian houses and social hubs, to provide the needed information and long-term policy updates to Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection (BoTPs), and to support bonding, bridging and linking activities, in order to empower BoTPs in their participation and self-reliance while staying in the Netherlands, and to stimulate the connection with Ukraine and a voluntary return when possible.

In 2025, the Dutch government has asked a Dutch and a Ukrainian NGO to design a first round of dialogues on a civil society level between key figures of the BoTPs community in the Netherlands and envoys of internally displaced persons' (IDP) councils to enforce mutual understanding and to discuss (possible pathways to) social cohesion in a future Ukraine.

To learn from similar initiatives elsewhere, this knowledge sheet focuses on the role of Unity/ social hubs in strengthening the trust and social ties between Ukrainians here and in Ukraine,

including IDPs. Specifically, it looks at the role dialogues between displaced persons in Ukraine and abroad can play to restore such trust, or offer a valuable contribution to policymaking, aimed at a voluntary return programme and support future recovery efforts. Lastly, it maps other initiatives to inspire the Dutch voluntary return programme.

## The development of Unity and social hubs

Since 2022, the support for displaced Ukrainians has moved from emergency aid to a more permanent, state-supported structure. This process began in late 2022 with the establishment of Ukrainian Consultation Centres (UCCs) by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) in cooperation with the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Currently, ICMPD operates six such centres: three in Germany (Berlin, Düsseldorf, and Munich), one Ukrainian Consultation and Community Centre in the Czech Republic (Prague), and one UCC and one call centre in Poland (Gdańsk and Warsaw). These facilities are operational, focusing on native-language information provision regarding registration and legal rights in the host country, as well as pre-consular activities. Each country approaches the model differently, prioritising distinct services: in Germany, for example, return is rarely discussed due to the security situation in Ukraine, meaning German Hubs focus primarily on integration, providing information on daily life, legal registration, and access to the labour market.<sup>6</sup>

As the conflict transitioned into a protracted war, the Ukrainian government recognised the need for a more comprehensive engagement strategy to preserve national identity and maintain human capital. In early 2024, the Ukrainian Ministry of National Unity was established to spearhead the “Unity Hub” initiative, designed as multifunctional ecosystems for legal residence, cultural ties, and voluntary return. In 2025, Ukraine signed additional declarations with Spain, France and

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4 Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity of Ukraine, [‘Diaspora Alliance for Recovery of Ukraine,’](#) accessed March 2026.

5 Council of the European Union, [‘Protection of displaced Ukrainians: Council adopts recommendation about transition out of temporary protection,’](#) 16 September 2025.

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6 Interview Taskforce BMI, January 2026.

Italy to initiate the development of Unity Hubs in each country.<sup>7</sup>

Whereas ICMPD's UCCs are project-funded entities focused on immediate administrative hurdles, Unity Hubs operate on a "dual-intent" model that simultaneously supports integration in host countries and prepares for sustainable return. In September 2025, the Council of the EU published its recommendations for transitioning out of the TPD.<sup>8</sup> For its third pillar, information provision for displaced persons, the Council recommends building on existing Unity Hubs meant to maintain a connection with Ukraine to prevent duplication of efforts – showing the possibility of dual intent for these hubs.

Since the Minister of Unity had to step down,<sup>9</sup> the setup of Unity Hubs has now been placed under the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity of Ukraine. This Ministry is also currently drafting a broader strategy 'for maintaining ties with Ukrainians abroad and facilitating their voluntary return for 2026–2036.'<sup>10</sup> Unlike the UCCs, the Unity Hubs are founded on state-to-state agreements that assign a more active role to the Ukrainian government, aiming to strengthen long-term cultural and economic ties with the diaspora.

ICMPD is currently working on the transition of its UCCs into fully fledged Unity Hubs in line with the EU Council Recommendation, with its Prague centre already operating as the first such hub in the EU.<sup>11</sup> This shift implies that Unity Hubs will become larger, more comprehensive facilities, potentially including services such as Ukrainian schools.

In December 2025, Berlin's Unity Hub was officially opened, although the facility is not yet operational as of February 2026.<sup>12</sup> The centre is currently in a 'phasing-in' stage to complete essential logistical requirements, including the installation of furniture and internal infrastructure. The German government ceremonially handed over the hub's authority to the Ukrainian government, which now manages the space.<sup>13</sup> For more information on the responsibility for the different hubs, see Annex A.

Sweden, too, is exploring the creation of a Unity Hub in Stockholm, planned for summer 2026, which aims to strengthen connections between Ukraine and the wider diaspora community.<sup>14</sup>

In the Netherlands, citizen (often diaspora) initiatives have emerged to support displaced Ukrainians and set up 'social hubs' in many municipalities. These hubs' activities have broadened with time, from emergency information provision to social centres. As they are not organised centrally, the set-up and priorities of the social hubs differ, though the social aspects are similar. They support in maintaining ties with Ukraine, while also providing assistance participating in the Dutch society. Help with voluntary return has so far not been an aim of these hubs.<sup>15</sup>

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7 Spain: National Unity Ministry, '[Joint Declaration on creation of Ukrainian Unity Hub in Spain signed](#),' 28 March 2025; France: Ministry of National Unity of Ukraine, '[Declaration on the establishment of the Ukraine Unity Hub in France signed](#),' 26 March 2025; Italy: Ministry of National Unity of Ukraine, '[Opening of the Unity Centre in Rome and preparations for URC-2025: Oleksiy Chernyshov meets with Italian government representatives](#),' 1 May 2025.

8 A. measures to promote the transition into other legal statuses, B. measures to pave the way for a smooth and sustainable reintegration in Ukraine, C. measures to ensure information provision to displaced persons and D. Measures to ensure coordination, monitoring and exchange of information among Member States and with the Ukrainian authorities: Council of the EU, '[Recommendation on a coordinated approach to the transition out of temporary protection for displaced persons from Ukraine](#),' 12015/25, 8 September 2025.

9 UNN, '[The Verkhovna Rada explained what will happen to the Ministry of Unity](#),' 16 juli 2025.

10 Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity of Ukraine (MSPFU), '[Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity drafts Strategy for maintaining ties with Ukrainians abroad](#),' 21 January 2026.

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11 Interview ICMPD Eastern Europe and Central Asia team, January 2026. ICMPD, '[ICMPD opens Ukrainian Consultation and Community Centre in Prague; the first fully operational Unity Hub](#),' 4 March 2026.

12 BMI, '[Ceremonial opening of Unity Hub Berlin](#),' 19 December 2025.

13 Interview BMI Head of Ukraine Taskforce

14 MSPFU, '[Ilona Havronska Discusses Preparations for Opening a Unity Hub in Stockholm with Swedish Partners](#),' 11 March 2026.

15 Laurens Klein Kranenburg et al., '[Opzet en bijdrage Oekraïense social hubs](#),' Ipsos I&O, December 2025, p. 9.

The Dutch authorities cooperate closely with diaspora organisations and the Ukrainian embassy, with a strong focus on culture, language, mental health, and reliable information provision. The current exploration focuses on enforcing the existing infrastructure of Ukrainian social hubs rather than establishing separate Unity Hubs.

### Facilitating dialogue between BoTPs and IDPs

Currently, the centres managed by ICMPD do not directly facilitate dialogue between Ukrainian displaced people abroad and IDPs nor are these cross-group dialogues planned for the near future. This is because the current focus remains on the provision of services to displaced people from Ukraine in the host states to support people's informed decisions. However, the ICMPD centres have always included a *diaspora component* focusing on both provision of networking opportunities and capacity building for diaspora's engagement in reconstruction and development of Ukraine.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, on a policy level, "ICMPD advocates for community-based reintegration of externally and internally displaced people, once safe and sustainable return is possible; therefore, the actual dialogue and actions will be further elaborated in future programming".<sup>17</sup>

As part of a recent information gathering exercise, the European Migration Network (EMN) collected responses from 20 EU Member States to understand how BoTPs maintain meaningful links with Ukraine.<sup>18</sup> The inquiry focused on two central questions: first, whether Member States are developing projects aimed at preserving BoTPs' connections to their home country; and second, whether these initiatives also engage IDPs inside Ukraine. The EMN results offer a quick overview of developing projects in Member States.

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16 Interview ICMPD Eastern Europe and Central Asia team, January 2026.

17 Ibid.

18 EMN, 2025.72 (planned) [projects aimed at fostering the connection of BoTPs to Ukraine](#), January 2026.

Five Member States reported currently developing projects: Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Sweden and The Netherlands. The remaining 15 responding Member States indicated no such projects.<sup>19</sup> No Member State, except for the Netherlands, reported currently implementing a project involving dialogues with IDPs in Ukraine.

Austria does not have a UCC or a Unity Hub. It instead operates a coordination unit for Ukrainian refugees that maintains regular contact with the Ukrainian embassy and diaspora organisations. Support is complemented by the NGO *Train of Hope*, which provides cultural activities, counselling, and language courses. Austria also offers multi-language information websites, allows voluntary return without financial support, and participates in the EU MedEvac programme.

Belgium likewise does not have a UCC or a Unity Hub. Its main initiative is the *helpukraine.brussels* platform, developed with the Ukrainian community, which provides BoTPs with practical information on employment, schooling, housing, and other services, and helps maintain ties to Ukraine through cultural and community events organised by the diaspora.<sup>20</sup>

In Czechia, the UCC operated by ICMPD in Prague supports engagement with the Ukrainian diaspora. The UCC is also being transformed into a Ukrainian Consultation and Community Centre as part of the U-CARE initiative. This expanded role includes providing information, documentation and consultation services, strengthening community networks, and empowering diaspora organisations to contribute to Ukraine's recovery, in close cooperation with the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity of Ukraine.

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19 EMN: 15 Member States indicated no such projects including Cyprus, Croatia, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Finland, and Latvia.

20 In addition, the organisation [Ukrainian voices](#) is active in the Brussels region, offering support through Special Persons of Contact, an initiative supported by UNHCR. However, due to a loss of financing, its community centre had to [close](#) its doors.

The Netherlands is the only country that has initiated a dialogue series between BoTPs and IDPs. Their purpose is to build mutual understanding of each group's experiences over the past three and a half years, to identify shared challenges, and to maintain attention on a future-oriented perspective towards Ukraine. The first key take-away was that both IDPs and BoTPs found it valuable to get insight in each other's situation and understand the possible role of IDP councils for return and reintegration in Ukraine. Secondly, it was confirmed that integration abroad and recovery at home are mutually reinforcing processes.<sup>21</sup>

### Experiences and themes of these projects

As no member state other than the Netherlands has set up projects to facilitate dialogue between IDPs and refugees abroad, we have looked at related and earlier dialogue projects from different contexts.

In March 2025, ICMPD published a paper on the different case studies and best practices for diaspora activities for Ukraine.<sup>22</sup> Lessons learned and recommendations include:

- There needs to be institutional mechanisms for ongoing dialogue with the diaspora.<sup>23</sup> This helps prevent the sense of undermining local initiatives which was felt in past cases. To ensure transparency, the authors propose a dedicated agency to facilitate such dialogue and a way for the diaspora to play a role in government structures.
- Invest in specific programs to inspire diaspora populations to engage in sectors critical for reconstruction and make use of the skills within the diaspora community for post-conflict recovery.

- Be aware of the risk of competing diaspora agendas and make sure a diverse range of actors is involved.

Around 25% of IDPs that have been displaced abroad face discrimination from the local community. Of the total group of IDPs, this number is a bit lower, 19%.<sup>24</sup> Thus, next to facilitating dialogue between two displaced groups, policies could entail dialogue facilitation between non-displaced persons and possible future returnees.

In other countries, specific projects aimed at dialogues were not specifically focused on dialogue between the IDP community and the diaspora, but mainly at community building *within* diaspora (such as the 'i-dijaspora' project) or government-to-diaspora dialogue (such as the D4D program), both for people from Bosnia Herzegovina, mostly aimed at improved cooperation and investments.<sup>25</sup>

### Other ways to enhance social cohesion

Other ways to facilitate social cohesion upon return include participation in reconstruction efforts, both in the host country and in Ukraine. Helping people to cooperate and engage economically, even remotely, can strengthen bonds between groups.<sup>26</sup> Supporting displaced Ukrainians to maintain and develop their skills while staying abroad preserves the human capital needed for rebuilding Ukraine, while also enhancing their participation in host communities.<sup>27</sup>

21 Anna Bilenska, 'Rebuild, Return, Reconnect,' *OpenEmbassy and Stabilization Support Services (SSS)*, September 2025.

22 Mori et al., '[Diaspora Engagement Report: Case Studies and Best Practices for Ukraine.](#)'

23 Ukraine has set up a "Diaspora Alliance" in December 2025, which could centralise these efforts. IOM, '[Diaspora Alliance Brings Together Governments and Global Ukrainian Community to Foster Ukraine's Recovery.](#)' 15 December 2025.

24 IOM, '[Displacement and Social Cohesion in Ukraine: Discrimination, Inclusion and Long-term Intentions.](#)' February 2025.

25 Camila Arroyo and Amelie Kaupa, '[Ukraine Diaspora Engagement and Returnees' Policy.](#)' LSE, October 2025; World Bank, '[International Mobility as a development strategy: Bosnia and Herzegovina Country Report.](#)' June 2024. For results of the d4d, see '[Diaspora for Development \(D4D\).](#)' accessed March 2026.

26 Arroyo and Kaupa, '[Ukraine Diaspora Engagement and Returnees' Policy.](#)' pp. 40-41.

27 OECD, '[Ukraine's Strategic Response to the Displacement Crisis: Return, reintegrate, reconnect.](#)' 20 March 2026.

Diaspora-led mentorship and language clubs are recommended to support professional development and to strengthen connections between displaced Ukrainians across borders. The findings also call for stronger cultural and educational ties between temporarily displaced and internally displaced children through joint online activities, as well as summer language camps and leisure programmes that combine language immersion with the preservation of Ukrainian identity. Student exchange visits within the Ukrainian diaspora and accessible educational platforms further support motivation, networks, and informed decisions about education and return.<sup>28</sup>

Engagement of Ukrainian professionals abroad is viewed as preparation for return, as remaining active prevents deskilling and enables individuals to reintegrate with additional skills and international experience. Employing Ukrainian professionals in the Netherlands as social workers and cultural mediators to support newly arrived families is highlighted as a measure that fosters cohesion by strengthening trust between displaced communities. Complementary findings from Italy and Poland show that language learning and suitably matched employment opportunities are crucial enablers of social participation, yet they remain structurally under-supported, limiting displaced people's ability to contribute fully.<sup>29</sup> Together, these approaches reinforce cohesion locally by reducing isolation and dependency while fostering shared ownership of Ukraine's recovery.

Unity hubs, while still in early stages, hold the potential to bridge the gap between displaced communities and their home country. By providing a combination of practical support, community engagement, and information on return, Unity Hubs can empower Ukrainians to

navigate their uncertain future, whether it lies in their host country or in a future Ukraine.<sup>30</sup>

The OECD further writes that there is an opportunity to expand and enhance services by developing partnerships with the private sector and NGOs in host countries. Unity Hubs that facilitate the supply of services by NGOs and the private sector are set up to realise better service quality and greater sustainability, if this is obtained through a competitive process.<sup>31</sup>

## Return and reintegration literature

The return-migration literature identifies nine interconnected themes shaping returnees' decisions and reintegration outcomes, as summarised by Arroyo & Kaupa (see table 1).<sup>32</sup>

Evidence shows that timing is critical: most returns occur within the first five post-conflict years and are predominantly spontaneous rather than programme-driven.<sup>33</sup> Refugees frequently resettle in urban rather than rural areas due to better economic opportunities, while access to livelihoods, property restitution, and resources accumulated abroad decisively influences the feasibility of return. Conversely, successful economic integration in host countries tends to reduce the likelihood of going back. Family ties and social networks, ranging from emotional attachment to prospects of reunification, serve as strong motivators, alongside security considerations and access to essential services such as healthcare and education, although systemic barriers like credential recognition remain significant. Return intentions are further shaped by individual characteristics including age, gender, and cultural identity, and often result from direct comparisons between the

28 Bilenka et al., 'Rebuild, Return and Reconnect.'

29 Krawczyk et al, 'From Emergency Solidarity to Sustainable Inclusion,' OPORTA, February 2026.

30 Also highlighted in initiatives such as the IOM-supported Diaspora Alliance, see IOM, '[Diaspora Alliance Brings Together Governments and Global Ukrainian Community to Foster Ukraine's Recovery](#),' 15 December 2025.

31 OECD, '[Ukraine's Strategic Response to the Displacement Crisis](#).'

32 Arroyo and Kaupa, '[Ukraine Diaspora Engagement and Returnees' Policy](#),' pp. 40-41.

33 Based on: Arroyo and Kaupa, '[Ukraine Diaspora Engagement and Returnees' Policy](#),' pp. 3-4.

**Table 1: Return policies: Summary of findings from the literature<sup>34</sup>**

Theme	Key Findings
Return rates and timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only 1/3 of refugees return within 10 years post-conflict.</li> <li>• Return rates are highest in the first 5 years, then decline.</li> <li>• The first 5 years are a critical window for return policies.</li> <li>• Most returns are spontaneous, not through assisted programmes.</li> </ul>
Urban vs rural settlement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refugees predominantly migrate to urban centres.</li> <li>• Most are originally from rural areas but do not return there.</li> <li>• Young returnees especially prefer urban areas.</li> <li>• Cities offer better jobs, services, and infrastructure.</li> </ul>
Economic factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to livelihood assets is crucial for return.</li> <li>• Property reclamation possibilities are a key factor.</li> <li>• Financial resources built in exile matter.</li> <li>• Economic integration in the host country may reduce the return.</li> <li>• Fragile economies pose major challenges for returnees.</li> </ul>
Family and social connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional attachment to the homeland is a major influence.</li> <li>• Family reunification is a key driver.</li> <li>• Social networks provide trusted information.</li> <li>• Families have a key role in the return process. They host refugees.</li> <li>• Families often split - some test conditions first.</li> <li>• Community dynamics shape reintegration expectations.</li> </ul>
Security and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Security is the most influential factor for return.</li> <li>• Four key conditions: security, services, housing, livelihoods.</li> <li>• Access to healthcare and education is crucial.</li> <li>• Women and children prioritise services.</li> <li>• Academic qualification recognition problems persist.</li> </ul>
Individual characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age affects attachment (younger, less attached).</li> <li>• Gender influences priorities and decisions.</li> <li>• Preference for returning where no ethnic minorities.</li> <li>• Cultural identity influences return desire.</li> </ul>
Host vs origin country comparison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decisions based on comparing conditions.</li> <li>• Host country factors are less influential than origin conditions.</li> <li>• Feeling unwelcome in the host country can push the return.</li> <li>• Legal status enables circular migration.</li> <li>• Visa bans and restrictions deter voluntary return.</li> </ul>
Return process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Return is often temporary or part of circular migration.</li> <li>• Many returnees intend to migrate again.</li> <li>• Requires 4 processes: repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation, reconstruction.</li> <li>• No consistent definition of "successful return".</li> <li>• Mobility remains an essential livelihood strategy.</li> </ul>
Institutional support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires collaboration from humanitarian, development, government, and private actors</li> <li>• Coordination challenges persist across contexts.</li> <li>• Long-term planning and investment are essential.</li> <li>• Development efforts must enhance livelihoods, services, and housing.</li> <li>• Property restitution seems necessary.</li> </ul>

conditions and opportunities available in host versus origin countries under varying legal and mobility constraints. The returning process itself is multifaceted, spanning repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation, and reconstruction, and definitions of "successful return" vary across contexts. Sustainable reintegration ultimately depends on coordinated institutional support across

humanitarian, development, governmental, and private sectors, with long-term planning, investment, and property restitution emerging as necessary foundations for durable outcomes

Ukraine's post-conflict recovery can benefit from global lessons on diaspora engagement, which show that diasporas can strengthen governance, economic reconstruction and social cohesion when their involvement is well-structured and inclusive. The ICMPD

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

report shows that experience from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Somalia and Liberia that strong institutional mechanisms and transparent dialogue channels are essential for engaging diasporas and enabling skilled professionals to contribute to state-building.<sup>35</sup> Somaliland and Sri Lanka illustrate how targeted, long-term investment programmes can accelerate recovery, while cases from Somalia, Bosnia and Sri Lanka warn that politicised or fragmented diaspora agendas can undermine cohesion. Models such as Afghanistan’s AEP, Lithuania’s *Create Lithuania* and Germany’s GIZ demonstrate how governments can systematically integrate diaspora expertise through structured recruitment and oversight. Together, these lessons underline the need for Ukraine to institutionalise engagement, channel contributions strategically, ensure inclusivity and harness global advocacy to maximise diaspora support for return, reconciliation and sustainable reconstruction.

### Comparison displacement former Yugoslavia and Ukrainian displacement

Refugee studies on displacement from former Yugoslavia show that decisions to stay or return were shaped by shifting, multilayered motivations rather than singular drivers.<sup>36</sup> Research and media analyses indicate broad reluctance to reexperience the disruption and emotional strain of forced migration, aligning with earlier findings of limited willingness to remigrate or return among former Yugoslav refugees.<sup>37</sup> Longing for home often outweighed financial incentives, with return premiums functioning mainly as practical facilitators rather than core motivations. The literature further notes that early arrivals, expecting a short conflict, anticipated rapid return, while

later arrivals and those repeatedly displaced internally were more inclined to settle long term in host countries.<sup>38</sup> Over time, integration, social networks, and children’s wellbeing created a “point of no return” that anchored many refugees in the Netherlands, alongside factors such as employment opportunities, qualification recognition, health, age, and the logistical feasibility of migration.<sup>39</sup> Decisions remained fluid and difficult to steer: returnees emphasised family reunification and emotional attachment to home, whereas those who stayed highlighted their rootedness in Dutch society and improved life prospects. Lessons from the former Yugoslavia also underline that prolonged legal uncertainty undermines integration and wellbeing, reinforcing the need for timely clarity and support.<sup>40</sup> Similar patterns appear among Ukrainian refugees today, who experience heightened uncertainty, reduced life satisfaction, and mental health vulnerabilities, prompting calls for sustained social, psychological, and economic support as many are expected to remain in host countries for extended periods.<sup>41</sup>

35 Giulia Mori et al., ‘[Diaspora Engagement Report: Case Studies and Best Practices for Ukraine](#).’

36 WODC, ‘[Over komen en gaan: beweegredenen van Joegoslaven toen en Oekraïners nu](#),’ 17 October 2024.

37 Stef Jansen, ‘[Refugees: locating Bosniac repatriates after the war in Bosnia Herzegovina](#),’ pp. 140-152, *Population Space and Place* 17, no 2; Richard Black et al., ‘[Understanding voluntary return](#),’ Home Office Publications, 1 January 2004.

38 Hein de Haas, ‘[Hoe migratie echt werkt: Het ware verhaal over migratie en de effecten daarvan](#),’ 21 September 2023; Nella Geurts and Marcel Lubbers, ‘[Dynamics in intention to stay and changes in language proficiency of recent migrants in the Netherlands](#),’ pp. 1045-1060, *Journal Of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 43(7), 25 October 2016.

39 Cyrine Hannafi and Mohamed A. Marouani, ‘[Social integration of Syrian refugees and their intention to stay in Germany](#),’ *Journal of Population Economics*, pp. 581-607, 27 June 2022; Jeanine Klaver and Arend Odé, ‘[Een weg vol obstakels: de moeizame integratie van vluchtelingen op de Nederlandse arbeidsmarkt](#),’ *Migrantenstudies* 21, no. 2; Sanne Noyon and Mieke Maliepaard, ‘[Verblijfsintenties van Syrische Statushouders in Nederland](#),’ in Miltenburg et al., ‘[Opnieuw beginnen: Achtergronden van positieverschillen tussen Syrische statushouders Den Haag](#),’ *Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau*, pp. 52-69, 2019.

40 Yuliya Kosyakova and Hanna Brenzel, ‘[The role of length of asylum procedure and legal status in the labour market integration of refugees in Germany](#),’ *Soziale Welt* 71, pp. 123-159, 2020; WRR, ‘[Geen tijd verliezen: van opvang naar integratie van asielmigranten](#),’ 16 December 2015.

41 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), ‘[Fleeing Ukraine: Displaced people’s experiences in the EU](#),’ 28 february 2023; Pronk et al., ‘[Geen weg terug? Oekraïense ontheemden tussen hoop en realiteit](#),’ 7 november 2025; *Clingendael*, October 2022; WODC, ‘[De leefsituatie en positie van Oekraïense vluchtelingen: Een eerste scan van de literatuur](#),’ 14 November 2023.

## Conclusion

Encouraging dialogue between displaced Ukrainians abroad and internally displaced persons in Ukraine can help rebuild trust and foster mutual understanding. So far, the Netherlands is the only EU-member state actively facilitating such dialogues, revealing shared challenges and the link between integration abroad and recovery at home. By prioritising dialogue, policies can better align with the needs of both displaced communities and Ukraine’s broader recovery goals.

Unity and social hubs, though still in their early stages, offer a promising way to bridge the gap between displaced communities and Ukraine. By providing a combination of practical support, community engagement, and information on return, hubs can empower Ukrainians to navigate their uncertain future and support Ukraine’s recovery, both from their host country and in a future Ukraine.

## Annex A

Structure of different UCC/Unity hubs:

Country	City	Opened	In charge	Co-steerers	Funding
Germany	Berlin UCC	May 2023	ICMPD	BMI + Ukraine Ministry	AMIF + BAMF
	Berlin Unity Hub	December 2025	Ukraine		Ukraine, Facility provided free of charge
	Munich	2023	ICMPD	BMI + Ukraine Ministry	AMIF + BAMF
	Düsseldorf	September 2025	ICMPD	BMI + Ukraine Ministry	AMIF + BAMF
Czechia	Prague Community Centre	Not yet opened, transition started in September 2025	Ukrainian Government		
	Prague UCC	May 2023	ICMPD		Czech Interior Ministry (U-CARE)
Poland	Gdańsk UCC	May 2023	ICMPD		MPF
	Warsaw Call Center		ICMPD	Consulate of Ukraine	MPF

UCC vs Unity Hubs

Feature	Ukrainian Consultation Centres (UCC)	Unity Hubs
<b>Primary Goal</b>	Immediate administrative & legal assistance.	Long-term “Dual-Intent” support: Integration + Return readiness.
<b>Governance</b>	Project-based, often led by ICMPD with donor support.	State-to-state agreements involving the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity of Ukraine.
<b>Service Scope</b>	Pre-consular support, documentation, and basic referrals.	Business networking, cultural schools, and reconstruction coordination.
<b>Target Audience</b>	Primarily BoTPs.	BoTPs and the pre-existing long-term Ukrainian diaspora.

### About the Clingendael Institute

Clingendael – the Netherlands Institute of International Relations – is a leading think tank and academy on international affairs. Through our analyses, training and public debate we aim to inspire and equip governments, businesses, and civil society in order to contribute to a secure, sustainable and just world.

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