

Germany is cutting benefits for refugees from Ukraine

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On 19 November, the German government adopted a draft amendment to the Act on the Adjustment of Social Benefits Regulations (*Leistungsrechtsanpassungsgesetz*), changing the rules for supporting refugees from Ukraine. Those arriving in Germany after 1 April 2025 will receive €441 per person per month – the same amount as other asylum seekers – instead of the current €563 granted under the *Bürgergeld*, the social welfare *benefit* available to German citizens. Ukrainians who arrived in the country before that date will continue to receive support under the previous rules.

The bill still requires approval from the Bundestag, but the governing coalition is in agreement on its adoption. The new regulations are expected to come into force at the beginning of next year. According to data from the German Interior Ministry, around 58,000 Ukrainian citizens entered Germany between 1 April and August this year. Thus far, approximately 720,000 Ukrainians – including children – have received benefits. In total, around 1.1 million Ukrainians are currently residing in the country.

The restriction of benefits stems from the coalition agreement and is intended to demonstrate the government's ability to reduce expenditure on migration policy and social support for foreigners. It also aims to encourage more Ukrainians living in Germany to take up employment.

Commentary

- **The benefit cuts align with the coalition's tightening of migration policy.** In the first months of Friedrich Merz's government, the number of asylum applications fell significantly – to 97,000. By October this year, 51% fewer applications had been submitted compared with the same period last year. This decline was driven not only by restrictive measures – such as stricter border controls, improved deportation procedures, and reduced support for refugees – but also by a lower level of migration pressure on the EU, which, according to Frontex, fell by 22% year on year. At the same time, the number of young men arriving in Germany from Ukraine has been rising since September. This results from changes to Ukrainian legislation, which now allow citizens aged 18 to 22 to leave the country.
- **The German government aims to increase employment among Ukrainians, and the reduction in social assistance is intended to accelerate this process.** Since early 2024, when a dedicated employment support programme (*Job-Turbo*) was introduced for this group, the share of working refugees from the war-affected country has risen from around 30% to 51%. However, this remains significantly lower than in countries such as

Poland, where the employment rate exceeds 70%. Several factors contribute to this situation. Refugees often focus on learning the language during their first months, a period in which they receive benefits and attend courses. Additional obstacles include lengthy procedures for recognising professional qualifications, insufficient childcare support – particularly relevant as 75% of refugees are women – and relatively generous welfare payments. For families with children in particular, these benefits can enable them to manage without employment, and taking up work does not always result in a significantly higher income than benefits alone. Germany has stated that it has spent around €30 billion on supporting Ukrainian refugees since 2022.

- **The majority of German citizens continue to support aid for Kyiv.** According to surveys conducted in October, 45% of respondents favoured increasing European military support for the war-torn country, 28% supported maintaining it at current levels, while 23% backed reducing it (survey for ZDF television). At the same time, the government is under pressure from the AfD, which is leading in most polls with 26%, ahead of the CDU on 25%. The party is calling for the discontinuation of assistance for Ukraine, a stance supported by its electorate: 79% of AfD supporters expressed this view in a February poll, also commissioned by ZDF. Aid for Ukraine is expected to become a key issue in next year's regional election campaigns, including in Saxony-Anhalt and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. In both federal states, the AfD has a realistic chance of winning, and support for Kyiv is noticeably lower there than in western Germany.