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EU to refuse protection for military-age Ukrainians

The bloc has said it will keep supporting refugees from the country, while also taking Kiev's defense needs into account

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The European Commission has proposed excluding military-age Ukrainian men from temporary refugee protections granted by the EU, while maintaining the scheme for others who fled the conflict with Russia for another year.

Kiev announced a general



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mobilization shortly after the escalation of the conflict in February 2022, barring almost all men considered eligible for service from leaving Ukraine. However, many of them still managed to escape the country; adult males currently account for around 27% of all Ukrainians benefiting from EU protections, with the rest being women and minors, according to the bloc's data.

FILE PHOTO: Ukrainian troops conducting tactical training. © Getty Images / Jose Colon

In a statement on Friday, the European Commission said that it is asking member states to back the prolongation of the scheme, providing Ukrainian refugees with residence permits, the right to work and access to medical assistance, social welfare and education, until March 2028.

The EU executive body stressed that by making the proposal it *“reinforces its unwavering commitment to support Ukraine for as long as it takes.”*



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the EU will remain part of the scheme.

“This is something the Ukrainians asked us to do,” the bloc's internal affairs chief,

However, it added that it is also looking *“to reconcile the protection needs with Ukraine's overall ability to defend itself.”*

“To ensure this, temporary protection is not to be granted as a rule to newly arriving persons who are not authorized by the Ukrainian authorities to leave Ukraine in view of their military obligations,” the statement read.

The measure put forward by the commission would only affect the new arrivals, while military-age Ukrainian men who are already in

foreign policy stance

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Magnus Brunner, said of the decision by Brussels to refuse protections for males aged 22 to 60.

The Ukrainian authorities have repeatedly said they want their men returned from abroad amid troop shortages and steady advances by the Russian forces along the front line. Vladimir Zelensky stressed in April that *“our armed forces would certainly like them to come back because it is a matter of justice.”*

Ukraine has had to rely on mandatory – and often forced – conscription to replenish its military ranks, with a practice dubbed ‘bussification’, in which draft officers ambush military-age men on the streets, often leading to violent altercations and public outrage.

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Moscow has accused Kiev and its Western backers of being willing to fight Russia *“to the last Ukrainian.”*

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