# HUMANITARIAN AID AND EMPOWERMENT OF UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

## THE CASE OF VISEGRAD GROUP COUNTRIES: CZECHIA, HUNGARY, POLAND, AND SLOVAKIA

Edited by
Dorota Moroń, Małgorzata Madej and Judit Csoba

# Humanitarian Aid and Empowerment of Ukrainian Refugees

The book presents good practices in humanitarian assistance and empowerment of Ukrainian refugees in various areas: emergency aid to large groups crossing the border, organisation of support in places of temporary stay, learning local languages, inclusion of children in school and adults in the labour market, and inclusion in the local community. It indicates the forms of international protection and the scope of their application by migrants from Ukraine, and discusses the temporary protection status dedicated to Ukrainian refugees.

The volume will be of great interest to scholars and researchers of migration and diaspora studies, immigration law, and public policy.

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# Contents

# Figures

# Tables

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# Preface

This volume is the result of research on the provision of humanitarian aid and implementation of empowerment measures for Ukrainian refugees arriving in the Visegrad countries after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. The author team consists of researchers from the countries of the Visegrad Group: Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, who jointly carried out the research project "Humanitarian Aid and the Empowerment of Ukrainians Coming to the V4 Countries – Good Practices".

The project "Humanitarian Aid and the Empowerment of Ukrainians Coming to the V4 Countries – Good Practices" focused on analysing good practices in supporting refugees from Ukraine who come to V4 countries due to the war. The aim of the project was to find, describe, and select the best practices in the organisation of humanitarian aid and activities for the empowerment of refugees from Ukraine and to analyse the possibility of applying them in further activities. The project involved researchers from universities in the Visegrad Group countries and researchers from Ukraine as well as experts representing the public and nongovernmental sectors implementing activities for Ukrainian refugees. The project was co-financed by the governments of Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia through Visegrad Grants from the International Visegrad Fund. The mission of this fund is to advance ideas for sustainable regional cooperation in Central Europe.

This book shows the migration experience and policies implemented in the Visegrad Group countries, as well as the challenges of organising assistance and support for the unprecedented number of people coming to Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia in 2022 and 2023. This book presents and analyses forms of support that can be described as good practices and disseminated within the migrant support system, both for refugees and labour migrants, from Ukraine and other countries. It points out the importance of humanitarian assistance, provided immediately upon arrival, but also draws attention to longer-term support activities for refugees, leading to their empowerment and self-dependence in the country of temporary, often long-term, residence.

In our publication, we use the term refugee (as explained in the Introduction), although the vast majority of people fleeing Ukraine due to the war enjoy temporary protection status. The end of temporary protection

according to the procedure implemented by the European Union will bring further challenges associated with support of individuals and families who are afraid to return to Ukraine. It is also set to stimulate further research on support for those who have left Ukraine. The issues addressed in this book are therefore not only topical but also developmental, and we hope that our team will also provide readers with further publications on this topic.

Dorota Moroń, Małgorzata Madej, and Judit Csoba

# Acknowledgements

# Humanitarian aid or empowerment? Policy towards support of refugees from Ukraine

## Introduction

*Małgorzata Madej, Dorota Moroń and Judit Csoba*

## Introduction

On 24 February 2022, the Russian Federation invaded the territory of Ukraine, triggering the first full-fledged military conflict in Europe since the Balkan wars in the 1990s. It followed almost eight years of a hybrid war in the Eastern part of Ukraine. The invasion started prolonged occupation of significant areas of Ukrainian territory, siege of major cities and towns, as well as direct fights.

The war brought casualties and losses among the Ukrainian military personnel, but it also affected civilians in the state's entire territory. While inhabitants of the occupied territories are victims of both military operations and direct violence, people in other parts of Ukraine are forced to deal with bombings, destruction of infrastructure, and environmental damage. All these elements force Ukrainians to make dramatic decisions concerning their place of stay and their future. Without any controversy, war and violence have been included in the list of push factors that stimulate migration, forcing people to leave their place of residence (Fihel, 2018, 69). Based on her original analysis of causes of migration covering two decades and literature review, Schmeidl (1997, 302) concluded "that political violence is the most important cause of refugee migration". In the context of direct and indirect threats to civilians in the time of war, "forced migration in war is known to arise from serious assaults on populations and is known to carry serious consequences for the people who move" (Leaning, 2011, 445). The Russian invasion was no exception in terms of triggering a dramatic wave of emigration from Ukraine.

In Europe, the latest open military conflict took place in the 1990s in the former Yugoslavia and its impact on displacements, refugees, and migration policies was the subject of research during the conflict itself (Barutciski, 1994) and until decades later (Hageboutros, 2016). In the 2010s and 2020s Europe became a destination for refugees from other war-torn regions of the world (Dahlman, 2016; UNHCR, 2023a).

The Russian annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of conflict in eastern Ukraine led to a sharp increase in the number of departures from Ukraine, both temporary or permanent migration and humanitarian departures. This

was reflected in a significant increase in the number of people from Ukraine applying for refugee status. In 2014, Ukrainians submitted 13,270 refugee status applications in EU countries, in 2015 more than 20,565, but in 2016, this number decreased to 10,970 and then to 5,130 in 2020 (Eurostat, 2023).

However, when considering the increase in the number of Ukrainians applying for refugee status against the general background of humanitarian migration in the EU, it should be noted that Ukrainians did not pose a refugee challenge to the European Union. In 2014, 530,560 refugee applications were submitted in the EU, and in the record year of 2015 (in the analysed period of 2013–2022), 1,216,860. In 2015, 359,925 Syrian refugees, 175,440 people from Afghanistan, and 118,935 Iraqis applied for refugee status in EU countries (Eurostat, 2023).

For the Visegrad Group (V4) countries, the number of people from Ukraine applying for refugee status and their migration patterns was not a major challenge either. In 2015, Poland had 10,255 refugee applications (including 6,985 from Russia and 1,575 from Ukraine), the Czech Republic 1,235 (including 565 from Ukraine), Hungary as many as 174,435 (including 64,080 from Syria, 45,560 from Afghanistan and only 25 from Ukraine), and Slovakia 270 (including 15 from Ukraine) (Eurostat, 2023).

Europe has thus been facing refugee crises and related problems for years, even before the first full-scale international military conflict on the continent since the Second World War. The war in Ukraine brought a new wave of people fleeing from life-threatening violence with more than 11 million Ukrainians leaving their homes (UNHCR, 2023b). More than 5 million became internally displaced persons staying in other regions of Ukraine where the impact of the war was less severe and over 6 million fled abroad, increasing the vast number of refugees worldwide.

### The concept of a refugee

This book deals with the support of refugees from Ukraine. The use of the term refugee in the title is intentional, but needs to be clarified due to significant differences between the legal understanding of the term refugee and the commonly used social dimension of the term refugee.

In legal terms, a refugee is only a person who has been granted refugee status in accordance with the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. To qualify for refugee status a person must stay outside their country of origin due to a well-founded fear of persecution and undergo a verification procedure in a safe country, as discussed in Chapter 3. We can refer to a person in this process as an asylum seeker.

In social terms, the term refugee is understood much more broadly, often to show the difference between those who leave their country of origin for humanitarian reasons and economic migrants. A migrant is a person who resides outside of their country of origin. Economic migrants are defined as people who are looking for a place to live and/or work outside their country

of origin and whose motives for leaving their country of origin are economic rather than political.

In social terms, refugees are defined as people who leave their place of residence due to threats to their personal security. Goodwin-Gill & McAdam (2021) emphasise that the term refugee means someone in flight who seeks to escape conditions or personal circumstances found to be intolerable. They also add that the place of flight is not relevant in this context, as Grace (2019) also points out, indicating that a refugee is a person who leaves their home but not necessarily their country. The motives for fleeing are humanitarian in nature, but, as Goodwin-Gill & McAdam (2021) point out, they can vary. Refugees flee persecution, oppression, threats to life or health, war, civil conflict, famine, or natural disasters (such as earthquakes and floods). Therefore, the social context of a refugee includes the threat to security and the need for assistance and protection against the causes of flight. The concept of a refugee is therefore moral (Goodman, Sirriyeh & McMahon, 2017), and there is an ethical obligation to provide support for them (Morris, 2012).

The social framing of the refugee is thus broad and additionally evolving, which has specific social implications. Today, for example, it is becoming increasingly common to speak of climate refugees in the context of environmental degradation (Berchin et al., 2017; Farbotko & Lazrus, 2012). Attention should also be paid to the work of Michelle Foster, who points out challenges generated by migration caused by the deprivation of economic and social rights. She emphasises the difficulty of distinguishing between economic and political reasons for migration, for in many cases these motives are strongly linked, which contributes to the identification of categories of economic refugees.

In the context of humanitarian crises caused by war, people leaving their country of origin are also referred to as war migrants or, much more often, war refugees. They are treated as people who have witnessed the violence of war, and their situation is the result of military operations. And even if they are not intentionally harmed, warfare often forces them to leave their homes (Kling, 2016). In the scientific literature, such terms are used, among others, to describe the situation of refugees fleeing from war, e.g., from the Balkans, Iraq, or Ukraine (Ai et al., 2007; Skalski-Bednarz et al., 2022; Oakes, 2003; Leenders, 2009).

Speaking of refugees, another problem should be noted. Researchers point out that there is a distinction between genuine and bogus asylum seekers (Goodman, Sirriyeh & McMahon, 2017), i.e., those who are actually fleeing persecution and those who seek asylum but are not really refugees at all. They are referred to as illegal migrants who want to fraudulently obtain aid (Anderson, 2013). Such categorisations often led to perception of refugees as a threat, people who dishonestly want to get help that is funded by the local population.

People fleeing their country of origin can apply for refugee status, although they do not necessarily have to meet the criteria for refugee status or even

subsidiary protection. This depends on the actual assessment of the situation of the person leaving the country of origin. To qualify for refugee status, a person must meet the requirements of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (as discussed in Chapter 3). Submitting an application for refugee status does not automatically mean that the status will be granted, but only that the asylum procedure will be carried out. People fleeing from their country of origin may therefore have various legal statuses in a safe country: refugee status, subsidiary protection status, temporary protection status, or staying legally (or illegally), waiting for the status to be granted.

In this book, we will use the term refugee – in accordance with the social view of the term – to refer to people who fled Ukraine due to the war, i.e., after 24 February 2022, regardless of their formal status. Most of those who left Ukraine after 24 February 2022 were granted temporary protection status, and they are legally referred to as displaced persons. People who left Ukraine could also apply for refugee status, according to international law.

### Humanitarian aid and empowerment

Emergencies – whether of a natural nature (such as earthquakes or floods) or man-generated (such as armed conflicts) – cause critical threats to the life, health, and well-being of large groups of people, which regional or national authorities are frequently unable to deal with on their own. Such situations require humanitarian assistance, which includes support, relief, and protection activities aimed at saving and protecting people's lives in a humanitarian crisis occurring in the aftermath of an emergency. Humanitarian aid encompasses a wide range of material and logistical activities in support of disaster victims. It typically involves provision of drinking water and food, shelter, basic hygiene, and access to sanitation or basic medical assistance. Humanitarian aid can be provided at the site of a disaster, but also outside the site – to people forced to migrate due to the disaster.

When an emergency occurs, the main focus is on humanitarian aid. However, when an emergency situation, such as the war in Ukraine, is prolonged and refugees are unable to return safely to their place of residence for an extended period of time, the question arises about the extent of the assistance provided. Refugees should not be long-term poor recipients of humanitarian aid. Their empowerment is crucial, helping individuals and families to increase (or achieve) mastery and control over their lives and to become active participants in society, working to improve their own situation as well as that of other members of their community.

Empowerment can be defined as taking control of one's own life and achieving one's own goals, enabling one to work independently for the benefit of oneself, one's family, but also for others (Adams, 2003; Lee, 2001). Empowerment is the opposite of powerlessness; it is the process by which individuals and families gain the ability to function independently, but it is

also the result, the final state, meaning the acquisition of the power necessary to act and to be proactive in relation to one's own life.

In the case of a long or even permanent stay of refugees outside their country of origin, it becomes crucial to take measures that not only provide assistance but also lead to empowerment (Kuyini, 2013) Such activities are difficult, and being active in an environment that is often hostile to refugees may not yield the expected results and sometimes it may even perpetuate the separateness of refugees (Tomlinson & Egan, 2002). In this area, it is crucial to look for ideas and good practices that allow for empowerment, ensure social inclusion, and allow refugees to function in well-being in a safe country.

## Migrants and migration policy in the Visegrad Group countries

It should be noted that before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, migrants from Ukraine were also temporarily or permanently residing in the countries of the Visegrad Group. They were treated as economic migrants, although some of the migrants arrived for humanitarian reasons caused by Russia's invasion of Ukrainian territory in 2014. Considering the data on temporary stay, it should be pointed out that in 2021 in the Visegrad Group countries, public statistics recorded 1,179,936 migrants from Ukraine, including 916,299 people in Poland, 196,875 in the Czech Republic, 49,131 in Slovakia, and 17,631 in Hungary (GUS, 2023; MVCR 2022, UHCP 2022, KSH 2023). Ukrainians were a significant group of migrants in the Visegrad countries. Their share of the total number of migrants in 2021 was the highest in Poland (63.9%) and Slovakia (57.6%), and much lower in the Czech Republic (29.8%) and Hungary (24.1%) (GUS, 2023; MVCR 2022, UHCP 2022, KSH 2023). These people have not been granted temporary protection and are not treated as refugees, but it is important to note the specificity of their situation in connection with the outbreak of war in Ukraine. On the one hand, these are people who have been intensively involved in supporting those who have left Ukraine due to the war: they organised support for their family, friends, acquaintances, but also for strangers, provided support in dealing with formalities, helped with contacts, due to better knowledge of local languages. On the other hand, some of these people found themselves in difficult situations. Those who were studying, financially supported by their Ukrainian parents, often lost their sources of income, and those who were working were burdened with the responsibility of supporting their incoming family from Ukraine. Many relatives of migrants found themselves in critical situations but were unwilling, or unable, to leave Ukraine. This created dilemmas about staying in safe countries or returning to Ukraine.

The four Central European states covered by the present analysis were among the most important destinations for refugees from Ukraine. Czechia, Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland are called Visegrad countries in reference to the Visegrad Group, their institutionalised cooperation formed in 1991

(Visegrad Group, 2023). Three of them are direct neighbours of Ukraine, and therefore relatively easy to reach, especially during the most difficult period after the war began. They are also all members of the European Union and therefore refugees who first arrived in any of the Visegrad Group countries had a chance to travel further to western European states. For those refugees who sought safety further from Ukraine, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia were a convenient transit route. On the other hand, many refugees stayed in these countries – especially in the two bigger ones, Poland and Czechia. This was motivated by the geographical proximity, which made it easier to return to Ukraine after the war, but also to visit and provide help to relatives who stayed behind. Research shows that most refugees tend to seek refuge close to their place of origin, preferably in the same region (Fransen & de Haas, 2022). On the other hand, Czechia, Poland, and Slovakia are – like Ukraine – Slavic states. Cultural similarity, and especially language closeness, meant an opportunity for easier adaptation and functioning for the newcomers.

It should be borne in mind that for a long time, the studied Central European states were rather emigration countries than a destination for immigrants and although the shift started in the 2000s and 2010s (Drbohlav, 2012), the dynamic inflow of foreigners after 24 February 2022 posed a significant change and challenge requiring a new style of thinking and new policies from the Czech, Hungarian, Polish, and Slovak governments, as well as societies. Prior to the war, the question of immigration in the Visegrad countries was rarely a subject of actual strategies and policies. Especially, the problem of refugees was frequently treated by populists and right-wing parties as a useful tool for political campaigning, while on the other hand, control of economic migration responding to labour market challenges was frequently neglected, leading to ambiguous policies and lack of proactive measures.

This ambiguity was well illustrated by the case of Czechia, where more than half a million legally registered immigrants lived in 2017, while the government declared staunch anti-immigration policy (Drbohlav & Janurová, 2019). It should be stressed that the immigrants came mostly from Ukraine, as well as Slovakia and other states of the European Union, the only large non-European group being the Vietnamese. Even though the Czech Republic hardly experienced the refugee crisis of 2015–2016, this situation stimulated a dramatic surge of resentment against immigrants, especially those from Asia and Africa (Drbohlav & Janurová, 2019). This was also coupled with anti-Islamic sentiments.

Poland's migration policy before 2022 was dramatically inconsistent. In view of demographic changes and labour force shortages, Poland needed immigration, especially in economic terms, but the conservative populist governments repeatedly used anti-immigration rhetoric, especially in electoral campaigns (Cywiński, Katner & Ziółkowski, 2019). Consequently, Poland accepted multiple immigrant workers, especially from Ukraine, but also from

Asian states (Kacperska, 2018), while at the same time refusing to support common migration policy by the European Union. This ambiguity was also reflected in the policy towards refugees. Poland refused relocation of migrants from the southern countries of the European Union. During the crisis on the Polish–Belarusian border, when Belarus allowed refugees from Africa and Asia to travel to Belarus in order to move illegally into the European Union, Poland introduced the state of emergency in the region, applied push-backs, and built a wall (Tkachuk, 2022). On the other hand, the Polish government took broad action to support refugees from Ukraine and assisted bottom-up initiatives to help them. The chaotic inconsistency of these measures has been described by specialists as "non-policy" (Łodziński & Szonert, 2023).

Similar as the other Visegrad countries, Slovakia faces demographic challenges. In 2010s, it introduced strategic migration documents designed to attract highly qualified migrants and support their integration in the Slovak society (Přívara & Rievajová, 2021). However, in practice, the question of refugees was until 2022 framed within the discourse of security and the need to protect the state's borders, as well as the national identity (Androvičová, 2016). The conflict over Slovakia's rejection of refugee quota became a reason for a significant increase of Eurosceptic attitudes in the Slovak society. To some extent, this was shaped by the political strategy of the populist government, but it also reflected Slovaks' actual fear of terrorism and identity threats (Henderson, 2017).

Among the Visegrad countries, Hungary stood out in several aspects. Firstly, it was directly and significantly affected by the 2015–2016 refugee crisis, as one of the main routes of influx of refugees from Africa and Middle East was through the Hungarian territory. Hungary's reaction at that time was openly anti-immigrant, refusing to treat the incomers as refugees in need of support, but also rejecting the role of the European Union in migration management (Korkut & Fazekas, 2023). This policy was associated with the discourse of protecting Hungarian identity and self-sufficiency, as well as with stark populist anti-Islamic propaganda, which culminated in the referendum held in 2016, in which Hungarians were asked "Do you want the European Union to be able to prescribe the mandatory settlement of non-Hungarian citizens in Hungary even without the consent of Parliament?" Although the referendum was invalid due to too low turnout (44.04%), an overwhelming majority (93.8%) supported the populist government's anti-immigration stance (Musiał-Karg, 2019). In the case of the Ukrainian refugee crisis, the Hungarian authorities were much more open, allowing people fleeing from Ukraine to enter into and pass through the Hungarian territory, but Budapest's overall policy vis-à-vis the war is more ambiguous, as the government distances itself from anti-Russian sanctions and policies in view of Hungary's economic relations with Russia and previous pro-Russian policies (Madlovic & Magyar, 2023).

While current policies evolve significantly in individual countries with political change, depending on whether right-wing populists are in power or

not, the Visegrad countries have never committed to the European Union's refugee relocation policy. In September 2015, the four governments jointly issued a statement against such policy (Visegrad Group, 2015). On the other hand, Czechia and Poland – and to a lesser extent Hungary – hosted before 2022 large numbers of economic migrants from Ukraine, forming growing and increasingly important minorities. However, none of the countries had developed a comprehensive integration policy to address the needs of these people.

All of these elements resulted in Central European states' lack of consistent and well-considered strategies, policies, and mechanisms in place when the war in Ukraine started, triggering a need for more spontaneous reactions.

The influx of refugees from Ukraine to the Visegrad Group countries in connection with the outbreak of the war in 2022, the policy towards them, and the extent of support provided is therefore an interesting research problem. Not only state authorities, but also local governments, NGOs, and citizens in the analysed countries have taken action with regard to refugees, and the number of people arriving from Ukraine has posed an unprecedented challenge to aid systems.

## Study, analysis, and presentation of good practices in support of refugees from Ukraine

The present book arises from the scientific project titled "Humanitarian aid and the empowerment of Ukrainians coming to the V4 countries – good practices", co-financed by the Governments of Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia through Visegrad Grants from the International Visegrad Fund. The objective of the project was to identify, analyse, and evaluate measures taken by various actors and addressed to Ukrainian refugees in order to select good practices which combined help and support with actual empowerment and integration to ensure the best functioning of new inhabitants within their new communities of residence. With the cooperation of researchers from universities in Czechia, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland, the project provided a unique comparative perspective and insight into the specificities of individual countries and societies and their reactions, thus contributing to a comprehensive picture of new measures for refugees. The participation of scholars from Ukraine ensured that the collected material and its evaluation considered also the Ukrainian perspective and were not limited to the host country's perception of the entire process.

The project applied an innovative methodology of local signal scanning. Local signals are defined here as observed and recorded actually implemented measures that can be evidenced by documentation, printed and/or online publications, interviews with service providers and/or beneficiaries, as well as other materials. Such signals were collected by designated local signal scanners, who were trained by researchers involved in the project. The scanners were students and PhD candidates of the partner universities who are hereby

thanked by the research team. It should be noted that the greatest variety of local action signals was identified in Poland. This is simply due to the size of the country and the number of refugees that have entered its territory. The scale of activities in Poland was incomparably larger than in the other countries of the Visegrad Group. Hence, the book is dominated by Polish solutions but it also captures good practices implemented in the other countries. Each identified signal was described in detail and documented by relevant materials, and subsequently all signals were categorised in pre-defined areas of support and assessed as good practices or not. The analysis of good practices was carried out through innovative workshops with experts representing academia, the public sector, and NGOs, which were carried out in the countries of the Visegrad Group and Ukraine.

The research process allowed not only the inclusion of actually implemented measures, both those providing humanitarian aid and those stimulating empowerment, but also their comparison between the analysed countries, identification of strengths and weaknesses, and forming predictions on future usefulness of the tools. The material can be used as a recommendation for the reception and integration of migrants and refugees in the future – not only in the Visegrad countries. It also showed challenges that appeared in the reception of Ukrainian migrants in Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, and which may reoccur elsewhere.

The book is divided into two parts. The first one analyses the overall situation of refugees and contains four chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the readers to the context of the reception Ukrainian refugees in the Visegrad countries by exploring pre-war migration policies of Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, discussing the situation of migrants in these states and the local societies' attitudes toward migrants and migration. Chapter 2 outlines the main characteristics of the war-period migration, referring to the estimated numbers of refugees, transfer routes, and settlement patterns. Chapter 3 discusses the legal framework of treatment of incomers from Ukraine in the Visegrad countries in the context of international law. Chapter 4 focuses on the organisational aspect of the reception of immigrants in the studied countries, exploring the role of the main actors involved in the process: the state, local government, and bottom-up civil initiatives.

The second part of the book looks at how these actors handled different areas that were key for humanitarian aid, empowerment, and integration of refugees, especially in the first months after the outbreak of the war. They are based on identified action signals which have been analysed and described. The topics of the chapters were selected on the basis of the signals collected and analysis of the identified activities and their importance in supporting refugees. Chapter 5 explores the problems of emergency reactions and organisation of temporary stay right after the refugees' arrival, analysing both national policies and local initiatives. Chapter 6 dives deeper into the question of providing housing for refugees, analysing how previous experience was applied and developed in view of the new challenge of the large numbers

of incomers in the first months after the outbreak of the war. Chapters 7 and 8 deal with education, focusing on the teaching of local languages to immigrants and on the inclusion of refugee children and young people in the local education system. They present the good practices developed, but also challenges and barriers identified. Chapter 9 proceeds to problems of integration by addressing the fundamental questions of how to help immigrants maintain their unique identity, while making them a part of the local community at the same time. Chapter 10 moves to the practical problems of refugees' functioning in the labour market. Starting with an analysis of the legal framework, it goes on to present both good practices and challenges in this area. Part two ends with Chapter 11, looking into the involvement of commercial actors. Companies and businessmen in all Visegrad countries took initiatives responding to the outbreak of war and arrival of refugees, but their actions have to be measured both in the humanitarian and commercial contexts. This duality and ambiguity is addressed in the chapter.

The book ends with conclusions addressing the fundamental question of how to provide support to refugees, while empowering them, helping them to function in their new place of residence, and also preserving their social capital and empowering them for the future. These concluding remarks include recommendations that can be useful for state and local authorities, as well as citizens and NGOs in different parts of the world.

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# 1 Visegrad Group countries towards migration

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## Introduction

The 2015 migration crisis has consolidated the Visegrad countries. It has essentially built a coalition of states, influenced by several factors. First, undoubtedly they shared the attention paid to security and its increased importance both internally and externally. Moreover, February 2016 marked the 25th anniversary of the formation of the Visegrad Group. This was an opportunity to refer to the values that not only underpinned their cooperation, belonging to the region, but also their geographical proximity, similar past, and culture. This fostered the creation of common positions on migration issues as well as plans. The discussion was accompanied by changes in the balance of political power in these countries, as well as growing negative attitudes towards immigrants, as will be discussed below. It is worth mentioning that the members of the Visegrad Group also had grounds for pursuing common interests due to the significant divisions within the European Union related to Brexit. These countries therefore saw opportunities to strengthen their position. Second, the Lisbon Treaty significantly reduced the institutional strength of the V4 countries, as they were unable to form a blocking minority. Being aware of the prospect of marginalisation within the European Union, they decided to strengthen their cooperation (Gostynska & Parkes, 2012). The common attitude towards migrants and refugees strengthened the cooperation of the V4 countries. This was used to articulate the strength and importance of the region, and the need to respect decisions of this part of Europe. Increasingly, government representatives and prime ministers of the group used various ceremonies and international events to demonstrate their position. Moreover, politicians very often presented their positions in a rather radical way, keeping in mind both the international reception and the audience in their own countries. On 20 June 2018, the International Refugee Day, Poland's Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki – symbolically on behalf of the entire group – refused to attend an emergency meeting of the European Commission on the relocation of migrants, as a sign of opposition to EU policy. And Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, receiving the Man of the Year award at the 27th Economic Forum in Krynica, was very explicit about the dangers of migration.

## V4 countries in regard to the European Union's migration policies

Exploration of the discourse on the migration policy of the Visegrad countries can be divided into three categories based on international relations analysis and foreign policy analysis. The first describes migration policy in the context of state interests and geopolitical circumstances using neo-realist reasoning. The second group of narratives uses domestic party politics as the best explanatory factor for V4 foreign policy on migration issues, reflecting a neo-liberal institutional approach. The third category, which uses the basic principles of social constructivist methodology, explains the Central European bloc's approach to migration based on identities and norms in the Visegrad countries (Szalai, Csornai & Garai, 2017). Hence, it seems crucial to consider these three factors influencing the V4 countries' approach to migration.

A discussion of migration policy would not be complete without reference to the events of 2015 and the massive crisis Europe faced regarding the studied issue. The crisis was caused by such push factors as the so-called Arab Spring of 2010–2013, i.e., social protests and armed conflicts in Arab countries, the bloody fighting in Syria that has been going on since 2011, the destabilisation of the political situation in Libya, or the so-called Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia in 2010/2011. The search for better living conditions by citizens of the Balkan countries was also a cause of mass migration (Łotocki, 2022).

The approach of the Visegrad countries to migration has been called flexible solidarity (Fehler, Cebul & Podgórzańska, 2017). This approach grants individual states the right to decide for themselves on refugee policy and the shape of migration policy. The shape of this concept was developed at the Bratislava summit, recognising that refugee policy should be tailored to the experiences and specificities of the individual states (Visegrad Group, 2016c). Also, the Visegrad countries were unlikely to be a destination point for refugees before the war in Ukraine and the scale of transit is different for individual countries. Hence, it is worth analysing their situation even before 2022.

The transformation process, the opening of the EU borders, and the accession of the Visegrad countries to the European Union have enabled free movement within the community. It can be noted that V4 countries proposed solutions to identify the root causes of migration and suggest measures to address them. Thus, first and foremost, it was to support the coalition fighting Daesh in Iraq and Syria and to provide various means of support for the coalition's efforts and the stabilisation of Iraq (Visegrad Group, 2015a). Further proposals concerned increasing financial and expert support to countries of origin of migrants as well as transit countries (Visegrad Group, 2015b). The issue of migration also came up at subsequent meetings of Prime Ministers of the V4 countries. This was no different in Prague on 8 June 2016, at the end of the one-year Czech V4 presidency. In the declaration adopted at that time, the prime ministers reaffirmed the

main tenets of the approach to migration, namely, support for protection of the European Union's external borders, proper border management, fully functioning hotspots, an effective return policy, full implementation of the European Union-Turkey Action Plan, and emphasising the importance of developing both Frontex and European Asylum Dactyloscopy Database (Eurodac) (Visegrad Group, 2016a). The adoption of these joint declarations on migration by the leaders of the Visegrad Group gave a clear signal of its unity, reaffirming a common point of view and expressing the hope of taking collective action across the European Union (Czyż, 2018). There was also clear opposition to Germany's open-door policy. This involved various quota-based refugee relocation proposals. This was met with refusal from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania. Poland voted in favour, but after the change of government it joined the group opposing the new proposal put forward by the European Commission in May 2016.

It is extremely important that significant differences have emerged in the positions of the Member States of the European Union regarding the problem, as well as different ideas on how to solve it. Cooperation within the group, consisting of meetings and statements on migration, has intensified considerably. The V4 Group started to be seen in terms of reluctant cooperation with the European Union on this issue. The four states were also accused of a lack of European solidarity and of overlooking human rights policy in their position.

The position of the V4 countries was made quite clear at the Visegrad Group Summit in Prague on 15 February 2016.

> It was reflected in a statement on migration, where the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group countries expressed their full support for measures adopted at the European Union level to protect external borders more effectively, including strengthening cooperation with third countries while reiterating their negative stance on the permanent automatic relocation mechanism. They also discussed further steps and practical measures to stabilise the situation on the Western Balkan migration route, intensify communication between the countries concerned, strengthen security, and prevent tensions in the region.
>
> (Visegrad Group, 2016b)

Above all, attention was drawn to the need to end the war in Syria and to seek solutions to avoid migratory pressures.

## Migration policies of the V4 countries

Although a joint statement was issued, it cannot be overlooked that the positions of the individual countries resulted from different internal circumstances. Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico presented slogans related to Slovakia's

defence against the "close-knit Muslim community" during the election campaign, which shows that, as in other V4 countries, the migration crisis was one of the most important topics of the election campaign. In response to the European Union's policy towards migrants, the Slovak government challenged the EU Council's decision of 22 September 2015 on quota-based refugee relocation before the EU Court of Justice. The situation changed somewhat after the elections, as Slovakia took over the EU presidency on 1 July 2016, and the issues it faced were precisely related to migration. First and foremost, there was the announcement of a sustainable migration and asylum policy based on the protection of external borders (EU, 2016). In the end, despite a negative approach to relocation and an appeal against the decision on the matter to the Court of Justice, the Slovak Republic accepted three persons from Greece in need of protection (European Commission, 2016, 1). Thus, it was, along with the Czech Republic, one of the V4 members that accepted refugees based on an EU Council decision (Adamczyk, 2017, 27).

Hungary is one of the countries in which attitudes towards immigration policy were particularly negative[1]. This was mainly due to Hungary's location on the so-called migration route, known as the Western Balkan Route. Besides, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's radical attitude towards the migration crisis contributed to overcoming a crisis of support for his party Fidesz. Orbán, incidentally, based his election programme on the migration crisis by organising a referendum on the elections, in which the Hungarian public was asked: "Do you want the European Union to be entitled to order the mandatory settlement of non-Hungarian citizens in Hungary without Parliament's consent?" (European Court of Human Rights, 2018). 98% of those who cast a valid vote answered in the negative. However, the referendum was invalid, as only 40% of those eligible to vote took part, so according to the legal interpretation, its result was not binding on the Hungarian Parliament. Viktor Orbán, in October 2016, also submitted a draft constitutional amendment. Among the proposals, there was a provision on the possibility of consenting to the settlement of foreigners from outside the European Economic Area only "on the basis of an application individually considered by the Hungarian authorities according to the procedure set out in a law passed by parliament" (Adamczyk, 2017, 19). These amendments were rejected by the parliament on 8 November 2016. Prior to this, however, other legal regulations were successfully introduced, among others, the institution of an integration contract was abolished, and legislation was adopted concerning immigrants, under which crossing the border in violation of the law is not treated as an offence but as a criminal offence sanctioned with a prison sentence of up to three years. As the analyses show, the Hungarian Prime Minister's activities at the national level overlapped with his activities in the Visegrad Group.

In Slovakia – on 3 September 2016 – a local referendum was also held on the admission of refugees from a camp in Austria. With a 60% turnout, 97% of citizens were against it. The Slovak Parliament, on the other hand, passed

a law making it difficult to recognise a specific religion as official which was aimed directly at believers of Islam. At the same time, the number of believers allowing a particular confession to be able to apply for grants and work in their own schools was increased from 20,000 to 50,000.

The Czech government was also opposed to quotas and to Germany's attempt to impose a mechanism for distributing migrants, but the then prime minister Bohuslav Sobotka tried to ease tensions between Prague and Berlin because the Czech Republic had concluded a so-called strategic dialogue with Germany a year earlier. Moreover, the experience of the Czech Republic, through which the migration route did not pass, may have influenced their approach to the problem. However, this did not prevent them from formulating harsh arguments during their talks with Angela Merkel, where Czech President Milosz Zeman declared that a refugee-friendly policy was nonsense and Germany should not shift the responsibility to other countries in terms of accepting refugees, as the Chancellor herself had invited illegal migrants to Europe (Czech President, 2016). In February 2016, from the quota proposed by the EU Council, the authorities decided to accept a total of 30 migrants from Italy and Greece. Of these, only seven passed the vetting process. The Prime Minister also asserted that he was ready to accept migrants from Turkey within the mandatory quotas previously proposed in the European Union. As of 8 November 2016, the Czech Republic had accepted 12 migrants residing in Greece (European Commission, 2016). The revised law introduced the requirement of certificates of freedom from infectious diseases, as well as the rule that if an immigrant applicant for refugee status commits a serious crime, they will be deported. However, as the case showed, those who chose to come to this country were not interested in staying permanently.

In Poland, too, the migration crisis has caused considerable emotions. After all, Poland was the second country of the V4 Group, after Hungary, in which foreigners submitted the largest number of applications for refugee status. Thus, in 2015, 10,255 persons did so, and in the two-quarters of 2016, there were 6,170 of them (Adamczyk, 2017). The attitude of the Polish authorities during the migration crisis was undergoing some evolution, which was related to the change of government in Poland in October 2015. The attitude of the predecessors, i.e., Civic Platform and Polish Peasant Party, was rather positive towards the steps taken by the European Commission. Ewa Kopacz emphasised that EU membership required solidarity with others. When Law and Justice took over, it made a U-turn in migration policy. When Beata Szydło headed the government, it was declared that Poland would honour the European Union's arrangements on the crisis; however, the security factor for Polish citizens would be important at the same time. In her exposé, the new prime minister drew attention to the issue of refugees, pointing out the proper understanding of the principle of solidarity in emergency or dangerous situations. The change of government also resulted in the rejection of the proposal for an automatic relocation mechanism for migrants. As early as December 2015, Jacek Skiba, Deputy Minister in the Ministry of the

Interior and Administration, announced a correction of migration policy by amending the law on repatriation (Tutak, 2018). Several other changes and modifications were also made, e.g., there was a resolution of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland of 1 April 2016 on Poland's immigration policy (Official Journal of the Republic of Poland, 2016a) and a resolution of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland on the proposal to establish an EU corrective mechanism for the allocation of refugees and a financial solidarity mechanism, adopted on 2 December 2016 which referred to the planned relocation of foreigners to Poland in 2016 (Official Journal of the Republic of Poland, 2016b). Among the proposals related to ensuring security, there was also the idea of erecting a 500-kilometre-long fence on the border with Ukraine.

It is worth mentioning here that, as in Hungary, in Poland the ruling party decided to reach for the instrument of a referendum in 2023 during the parliamentary elections. The question was asked in a biassed way that suggested the answer: "Do you support the admission of thousands of illegal migrants from the Middle East and Africa in accordance with the forced relocation mechanism imposed by the European bureaucracy?". While the entire expression is manipulative, attention should be drawn to the second part of the question, which has no grounding, since no forced relocation mechanism is currently in force and new rules have been included in the Regulation on Asylum and Migration Management (European Council, 2023). The planned relocation is not imposed but is part of the pool of solidarity measures under the Common European Asylum System, of which Poland as an EU country is a part. Linking the referendum in Poland to migration undoubtedly demonstrates the politicisation of this topic, as well as the creation of an atmosphere of fear of people with migration and refugee experience. Moreover, it undoubtedly has the effect of dehumanising this group.

Furthermore, protests, demonstrations, and poster campaigns were organised in all countries to demonstrate their opposition to accepting refugees. Demonstrations took place in both large cities and small towns. One example from Poland involved inhabitants of Piwniczna Zdrój and Olecko who protested against the location of a refugee centre in their towns. It is worth adding that most municipalities were against it. Out of 2,478 municipalities, only 66 were in favour (Czyż, 2017).

Referring to the events of 2022, it seems that the current position of the V4 countries towards the migration crisis on the Belarus-EU border is unanimous. The countries have called on the EU institutions to consider the problem and to help solve it without delay. The statement by the chairs of the parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committees of the Visegrad Group on the situation at the European Union's external borders with Belarus reads:

> We strongly condemn the instrumentalisation of irregular migration artificially created as part of hybrid actions targeted against the EU for political purposes. Using human beings in need to advance political goals clearly violates fundamental European values and international

norms. The actions of the Belarus leadership evidently and systemati-
cally endanger the lives of vulnerable people, which is unacceptable.

<div align="right">(Visegrad Group, 2021)</div>

As far as Belarus is concerned, it should be added that the Union has, in prin-
ciple, pursued a restrictive policy towards the regime of Alexander Lukashenko
since 2004 (European Council, Council of the European Union, 2022). Between
October 2020 and June 2022, it adopted six packages of sanctions, imposed on
persons and entities supporting the actions of the state authorities, as well as those
responsible for the use of violence and persecution of Belarusian society and the
democratic opposition. Lukashenko did not take long to respond, the Belarusian
authorities in June 2021 suspended the country's participation in the Eastern
Partnership and announced that they would no longer stop migrants seeking asy-
lum, as well as human traffickers, and drug and nuclear smugglers from entering
the European Union. This could be seen as an announcement of a desire to use
migrants for political purposes and to facilitate their transit into the European
Union. The highest intensity of illegal border crossing attempts was recorded in
October 2021 with 17,447 attempts (Szczepańska, 2022). In December 2021
the European Commission proposed temporary emergency measures in favour
of Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. These included the application of simplified
national procedures for the return of persons whose asylum applications had
been rejected. The proposal also highlighted the possibility for Lithuania, Latvia,
and Poland to benefit from the support of EU agencies (EASGiP, the European
Asylum Support Office – now the EU Asylum Agency, Europol). Poland was
reluctant to work with the agencies due to concerns about their interference in
national procedures and a kind of imposition of solutions incompatible with
Polish interests. This could have fostered violations of the principles and stand-
ards of immigration and asylum policy by Polish services, e.g., carrying out so-
called "pushbacks", as well as a lack of control of the relevant proceedings in line
with the extraordinary measures proposed by the Commission. Undoubtedly,
this crisis has revealed weaknesses in the European Union's system of managing
migrant inflows; it has shown that the European Union does not have the tools
to respond to the actions of third countries exploiting migrants. Moreover, the
example of migration policy may reassure Member States that an independent
response to the crisis is more effective (example of Poland and Hungary).

Despite the above-described similarities, the divergent positions of the
V4 countries predominate above all in EU policy towards Ukraine. This
is particularly true in the case of the sanctions imposed on the Russian
Federation and the support by the European Union to Ukraine. Although
the V4 countries did not agree in principle to opening the borders to ille-
gal migrants from outside the EU, the divergence concerned the approach
to the regulations on the asylum procedure and on asylum and migration
management. The proposal was worked on during the Czech Presidency
(1 July 2022–31 December 2022) and included the right to request an
exemption from the compulsory relocation mechanism. The proposed

solution sets a minimum annual number of persons relocated from Member States located at the EU borders to countries with fewer migrants. It also proposed an equivalent of EUR 20,000 for each person not accepted for relocation. This means in practice that a Member State will be able to choose between accepting migrants or contributing to migration policies with an extra EUR 20,000 for each person not accepted. The position also included a provision for the return of migrant women and men to so-called safe third countries. However, as part of the compromise, it was agreed that it would be up to the Member States, and not the EU, to decide which third country is "safe" for migrants turned back on the grounds that they do not qualify for international protection. The position was adopted by a qualified majority. Hungary and Poland voted against it, while Bulgaria, Lithuania, Malta, and Slovakia abstained. The position will form the basis for negotiations between the EU Council Presidency and the European Parliament. The settlement between them will become EU law (European Council, 2023).

**Migrants in V4 countries**

Immigration studies show that the overall number of migrants in the V4 countries increased between 2014 and 2022. The largest increase was observed in Poland, where 101,204 migrants were recorded in 2014 and as many as 457,038 on 1 January 2021. A very large number of migrants resided in the Czech Republic, where 538,237 migrants were recorded on 1 January 2022 (Figure 1.1). It should be emphasised that data reported to Eurostat based on national registers (e.g., residence or work permits) do not include all foreigners residing in the country (e.g., for short-term stays). For example, the 2021 National Census in Poland showed that there were 1,433,779 immigrants temporarily residing in Poland, including up to 3 months – 519,511 people, from 3 to 12 months – 604,959 people, while 309,309 people were immigrants residing in Poland for at least 12 months. 73.1% of the migrants were Ukrainian nationals and 18.5% were Belarusian (GUS, 2023). In the Czech Republic, statistics indicated 668,238 migrants in 2021, mainly from Ukraine, Slovakia, and Vietnam (Ministerstvo Vnitra ČR, 2023).

The main reason for migrating to V4 countries by 2022 was to take up employment. An analysis of the first residence permits issued in 2022 shows that the predominant reason for issuing a permit was employment, with Poland being the most affected (Figure 1.2). In the Czech Republic, the share of work permits was the smallest, with relatively high shares for work permits issued for family and educational reasons (26.5% and 18.8%, respectively in 2022). In Poland, on the other hand, the share of permits for so-called other reasons, including humanitarian reasons, was relatively high – 12,5% of permits in 2021 and 28.7% in 2022, compared to less than 10% in the other V4 countries (Eurostat, 2023b).
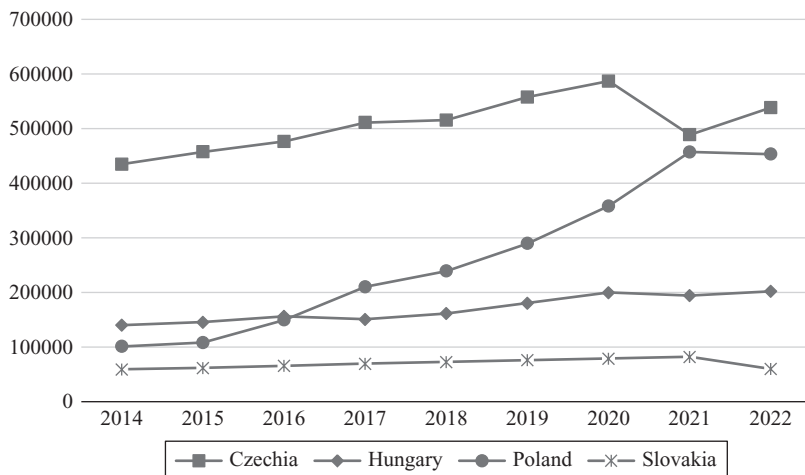
*Figure 1.1*   Number of foreign country citizens and stateless persons (as of 1st January).

*Source:* Eurostat, 2023a.
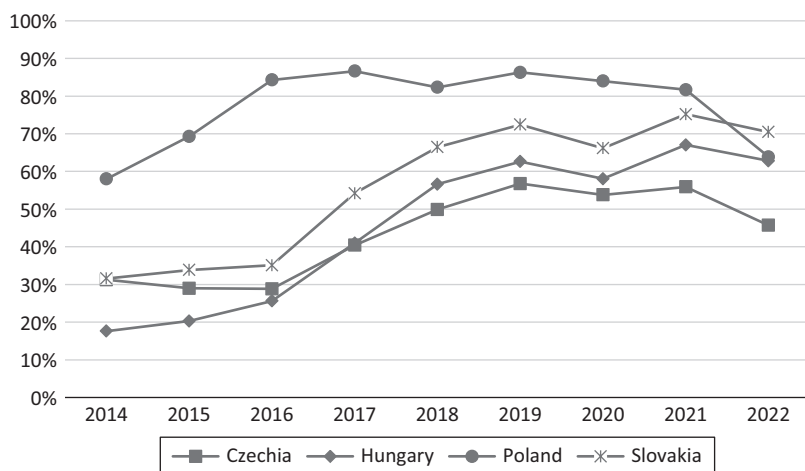


*Figure 1.2*   Share of labour-related permits in the overall number of first-time permits to stay.

*Source:* Eurostat, 2023b.

The number of foreigners applying for international protection compared to the total number of immigrants in the V4 countries is less, with the exception of Hungary in 2014–2016, which was associated with the influx of refugees from Afghanistan and Syria into the country (Table 1.1).

*Table 1.1*   First-time asylum applicants

| Country | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Czechia | 915 | 1,240 | 1,205 | 1,140 | 1,360 | 1,575 | 795 | 1,060 | 1,335 |
| Hungary | 41,215 | 174,435 | 28,215 | 3,120 | 635 | 470 | 90 | 40 | 45 |
| Poland | 5,610 | 10,255 | 9,785 | 3,005 | 2,405 | 2,765 | 1,510 | 6,240 | 7,700 |
| Slovakia | 230 | 270 | 100 | 155 | 155 | 215 | 265 | 330 | 505 |

*Source*: Eurostat, 2023c.

For the whole period 2014–2022, the number of positive protection decisions (granting refugee status, subsidiary protection, and humanitarian status) issued at first instance totalled 2,395 in the Czech Republic, 3,280 in Hungary, 9,200 in Poland, and 755 in Slovakia. The highest number of positive decisions was issued in 2022 in Poland – 3,870 and the lowest in 2022 in Hungary – 30 (Eurostat, 2023d).

Until 2022, labour immigration was the main type of immigration in Visegrad countries. The number of labour migrants has been increasing in recent years, and the differences in the number of migrants between the V4 countries were mainly influenced by the size of the country, economic development, the situation of the labour market, as well as the attitude of the population and authorities towards migrants. However, all Visegrad countries accepted them in view of the demographic crisis and resulting shortages on the local labour markets.

Humanitarian migrants represented a small proportion of incomers, and Visegrad countries were most often not their destination country, as they went on to western and northern European states. The situation changed significantly in 2022 with the outbreak of war in Ukraine and the influx of a wave of refugees fleeing Ukraine into the V4 countries, as presented in Chapter 2.

## Public discourse in V4 countries

The political discourse, as written above, together with the media discourse has had a significant impact on the perception and understanding of migration policy in Visegrad countries. In our opinion, the knowledge of V4 citizens about the situation of migrants is very cursory.

The media use a lot of stereotypes, echo emotions, and focus on radical cases. In the image shaped by the media and politicians, migrants are a crowd, with no names, no country of origin, an no social or cultural context. The media use terms such as "security threat" and "migrant assault". No distinction is made between migrants and refugees. Every "stranger" is simultaneously presented in terms of a threat. Above all, migrants were identified with Muslims. This also led to repeated media messages depicting the radicalisation of Muslims, examples of terrorist attacks, and their attitude towards women. It was repeatedly highlighted that most migrants were young men. The issue of religion was one of the most important elements

of the discourse in all V4 countries. It was emphasised that aid should be directed to Christians. In Slovakia, an agreement was made in 2015 to accept a small group of refugees, but on condition that they were Christians. This was perceived in the European Union as religious discrimination. In response, Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico stated that he would not allow a Muslim community to be established in Slovakia.

Similarly, in 2016 in Hungary, the government established the Deputy State Secretariat for the aid of persecuted Christians to ensure that Budapest becomes a major centre of this issue. Among other initiatives, a scholarship programme was announced for Christian youth suffering persecution, supporting their study in Hungary. According to Reményi, Glied, and Pap:

> About EUR 3 million was allocated for the operation of the state secretariat in 2017, and from September, 72 young Christian students (mostly from the Middle East) commenced their studies as Hungarian state scholarship beneficiaries, which was followed by around 100 additional students per year. […] At the end of 2021, approximately 300 students received the scholarship. This group differs greatly from other migrant groups welcomed by the government as – according to official communication – their favourable acceptance is based upon moral values. As the protector of Christian values, the Hungarian government promotes the message that common roots and commitment to preserving culture/civilisation is of utmost priority.
>
> (Reményi, Glied & Pap, 2022, 334)

Another example is a grassroots initiative in Czechia. A Christian foundation, Generace 21, was set up there and raised 15 million CZK to cover the costs of stay for Christian immigrants from Iraq for the first year. The government agreed to take in 153 people. The Iraqis were granted international protection, but eventually some of them returned to their homelands and the rest went to Germany. This situation led to termination of the voluntary admission of refugees. Czech Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka stated that, "The Czech Republic cannot be a travel agency that takes migrants to their chosen destination countries" (Czyż, 2017). This example is characteristic and reflects the opinion of the citizens of all four countries. Both politicians and citizens believed that Central Europe was not a destination for refugees and that, therefore, there was no point in detaining them or convincing them to stay if they wanted to live in Western or Northern Europe. Norman Davies acknowledged that this was caused by television and the internet showing crowds of people pushing their way across borders, packed trains, and camps. "And yet this is only a slice of reality. The media have a big responsibility these days. The reactions of Europeans depend on whether they speak of 'bordering a continent' or of 'fleeing from murderous regimes'" (Davies & Żyła, 2015). At the same time, Davies also places a huge responsibility on politicians.

Such attitudes are largely shaped by the media, including the discourse of politicians in the media. The media play an important role in understanding reality and often determine the way people think and act. This means that the way citizens perceive reality depends largely on how the media show it to them. In Poland, the migration theme was even used in the local elections, in the Law and Justice election spot of 17 October 2018. It presents a vision of Poland in 2020 ruled by the then opposition. The spot features drastic scenes and information that Poles are afraid to leave their homes because refugees have taken up residence in Poland. The 2023 campaign often featured a narrative referring to the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border. The situation is similar in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary.

Attitudes towards the Ukrainian community were markedly different. There were declarations of support and assistance, and media covered the events in Ukraine with commitment and support. In the case of the war in Ukraine, the media referred to Ukrainians themselves to report and explain the situation. Consequently, they are not "silent" participants in the events. During the 2015 migration crisis, media in the V4 Group mainly talked about the migrants, but they were neither spoken to nor given a voice in the media. In the case of refugees from Ukraine, the coverage was very emotional, with women and children being the most common protagonists. Importantly, the media also showed the attitudes of citizens, their help and commitment. It was pointed out that all V4 countries decided to introduce temporary protection status – recognised as legal residence – in 2022 as part of their assistance to Ukrainians. All V4 countries extended the period of legal residence of Ukrainians in their countries.

However, cracks have also begun to appear in the case of assistance to Ukrainians. Although support for Ukrainians is still high, there are more and more doubts about their continued stay, work, and presence of children in schools. Among the criticisms, there are also claims that the money allocated for Ukrainians should go to V4 citizens. However, as early as 2023, significant issues of contention and decisions of authorities in the V4 countries emerged in the political discourse. In 2023, the Polish government decided to ban the import of agricultural products, including grain, from Ukraine. Viktor Orbán, speaking up for Hungarians, denied financial support for Ukrainians from the EU budget. On top of this, the rights of the Hungarian minority in Ukraine have been a contentious issue for years. Robert Fico, Prime Minister of Slovakia, firmly stated in a public radio interview that Ukraine could not become a member of NATO and some parts of Ukraine, including Donbas or Crimea, would have to become a part of Russia.

**Public perceptions of migrants in V4 countries**

The majority of V4 citizens were against accepting refugees and participating in the relocation of refugees and migrants from Western Europe, as evidenced

in opinion polls since the 2015 migration crisis. Of course, attitudes of reluctance towards "others" had already been visible much earlier. Public opinion polls revealed quite strong xenophobic attitudes among citizens of the Visegrad countries. Citizens" attitudes became even more radicalised in the case of crisis situations, such as terrorist attacks. We are revisiting the 2015 crisis because it is relevant and has an impact on today's public perception of migrants and refugees.

In the 2015 survey by CBOS, a leading public opinion polling institution in Poland, respondents from the four Visegrad countries displayed a significant lack of trust in migrants. They mainly highlighted fears about migrants' attitudes towards the host country. The concern was that in a situation of a war or political crisis, they would be loyal to their homeland. This was the view of 87% of Czechs and Slovaks, 80% of Hungarians, and 76% of Poles. In the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary, as many as three-fourths of the respondents feared that migrants would transmit unusual diseases (including as many as 84% of Czechs sharing this opinion). In Poland, almost half of those surveyed believed that migrants could be a threat to the health of others, and at the same time 46% did not believe this. Poles, however – more than 57% – believed that the standard of living would deteriorate due to migrants. The smallest differences among the citizens of the V4 countries were visible in the assessment of the labour market. Fears that migrants would take away jobs were strong in all countries, with 66% of Czechs, 61% of Slovaks and Hungarians, and 54% of Poles holding this view. The survey revealed a fear that migrants would take away jobs from the local population. This was felt by 66% of Czechs, 61% of Slovaks and Hungarians, and 54% of Poles. Fears of an increase in crime caused by migrants were very common. This was the view of as many as 78% of Czechs, 71% of Slovaks, 62% of Hungarians, and 49% of Poles. Another category that emerged in the survey concerned defending cultural identity as 73% of Czechs, 68% of Slovaks, and half of Polish respondents feared its loss. The research showed that the greatest number of fears was expressed by Czechs and the least by Poles. This was certainly influenced by many factors within the countries, media coverage, and statements by politicians (Kowalczuk, 2015).

The situation changed in 2022. The war in Ukraine was met with opposition to Russia's invasion. V4 citizens supported Ukrainian refugees. The length of the border with Poland meant that the country experienced a huge influx of refugees from the first days of the war. One could observe a huge activation of civil society and, in the following days, also a pro-Ukrainian attitude of the Polish government. It is worth mentioning that in a CBOS survey in March 2022, as many as 94% of Poles supported helping Ukrainian refugees (Chankowska, 2022).

It cannot be overlooked that Poland was hit by a humanitarian crisis on the border with Belarus in 2021 and the government's attitude was completely different. The Polish government did not agree to accept refugees and decided on 2 September 2021 to impose a state of emergency in a strip near

the border with Belarus and an information blockade. By a decision of the Polish government and parliament, a wall was erected on the 180-km-long border (construction completed in June 2022). Representatives of several NGOs accused the border guards of using pushbacks and intimidating volunteers who tried to help at the border. They also added that dozens of people (the exact number is not known) died in the forest due to lack of assistance, including many who had experienced violence. It should be added that the prosecutor's office has opened proceedings in this case. Based on what happened at the Polish-Belarusian border, Agnieszka Holland directed the film "Green Border", which received the Venice Festival Special Award in 2023.

Hungary, like Poland, decided to help refugees from Ukraine by granting them temporary protection status, among other things. Many researchers argue that the government's response was somewhat late but the delay was due to a lack of preparation and facilities. In recent years, reception centres were closed, and many integration programmes were dismantled. There was tremendous support from citizens who were very willing to help Ukrainians. Civil society involvement was also observed in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. In all V4 countries, the vast majority supported Ukrainians. Many citizens helped at points opened in many cities for Ukrainians. The number of volunteers was impressive. Especially in the first days of the war, huge financial and material support was evident.

## Conclusions

Migration policy is an issue that is undoubtedly one of the most important topics of discussion in the V4 countries. Changes in government, when right-wing populists take power (as in Slovakia due to the victory of the SMER-SD coalition) or lose it (as in Poland when Law and Justice was defeated in elections) will undoubtedly influence the fluctuation of this process. And it should be seen in the context of the discussion on the institutional shape of the EU, its sectoral policies, as well as the Common Foreign and Security Policy. Mention should also be made of a certain divergence in the approach of Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic to relations with Russia, which is to some extent pragmatic and manifests itself in criticism of the sanctions imposed on that country for the situation in Ukraine. Poland, which takes a normative approach with an emphasis on treating Ukraine as a neighbouring and buffer state, promotes a western orientation. In this respect, the divergence is clearly visible in the policies of the V4 countries. Certainly, the differences will become even more apparent with the radicalisation of Viktor Orbán's position and the change of government in Poland in 2023. The negative attitude towards migrants and refugees in the V4 countries is based on frequent negative messages in the media, which are influenced by those in power. This is a consistent message with that presented by politicians. In all countries, migrants are seen as a security threat, and there is fear of Islamisation and loss of national identity. V4 citizens fear a deterioration

of living standards and an increase in crime. Public opinion polls in 2015–2016 showed that a majority of Visegrad citizens were against accepting even those refugees who came from war zones. The situation was different for citizens of Ukraine, where the largest number of refugees crossed the border into Poland and were met with spontaneous and supportive. There was a positive perception of refugees from Ukraine, whose presence is not seen as a threat to the society's security. The official narrative of the Polish government and the reaction of the public were consistent in this aspect.

**Note**

1  According to Frontex data, 764,038 illegal immigrants entered Western Europe through Hungary in 2015 (Frontex, 2016).

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# 2 Refugees from Ukraine in the countries of the Visegrad Group

*Małgorzata Madej*

## Introduction

The outbreak of the war took a dramatic toll on civilian inhabitants of the war-torn territories (OHCHR, 2023). Access to data on the situation near the frontline and especially in the Russian-occupied parts of Ukraine is limited, and therefore only estimations and eyewitness reports are available. However, those confirm multiple circumstances forcing Ukrainians to run from their place of residence and seek refuge in safer parts of the world.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reported almost 10,000 confirmed deaths of civilians and almost 17,000 injured civilians between February 2022 and July 2023, stressing that these numbers were significantly underestimated due to misinformation and lack of information. Among the confirmed victims, there were 541 children killed and more than 1,100 injured. The highest number of casualties and injuries was confirmed for the first three months of the conflict (in actuality, 57% of the casualties were recorded in February, March, and April of 2022), but this tendency, too, may be due to difficulties in establishing numbers of human losses during an active military struggle and in occupied territories especially. A vast majority were victims of explosive weapons and bombing, "including shelling from heavy artillery, multiple launch rocket systems, missiles and air strikes" (OHCHR, 2023).

The direct threat to their lives forced Ukrainians to flee from their places of residence, particularly during the early phase of the war. There is also material damage making life in the conditions of a military invasion insufferable for civilians, and Russia uses such attacks as a strategy aimed at intimidating the Ukrainian population. In her statement in August 2023, the United Nations' Humanitarian Coordinator For Ukraine, Denise Brown, highlighted that Russian operations caused "damage to homes, a kindergarten and other civilian infrastructure that are hundreds of kilometres away from the front line. These are the parts of the country where millions of people are seeking safety and refuge after fleeing the horrors of Russia's invasion. Russia's persistent attacks hitting essential infrastructure in populated areas cause immense human suffering" (United Nations, 2023b). This refers not only to damaging the social welfare and public utility objects, such as

schools and hospitals, but especially the systematic destruction of Ukraine's critical infrastructure. According to UN estimations of April 2023, the damage to critical power, gas, and heating infrastructure exceeded $10 billion, while emergent repairs would require an expenditure of $1.2 billion (United Nations, 2023a). These circumstances make it difficult to remain inside the Ukrainian territory for civilians, including families with children.

In endangering the lives of non-military inhabitants of Ukraine, Russia targeted also the ecological infrastructure. The most prominent case of such strategy involved destruction of the Kakhovka Dam in June 2023, believed to be a result of the Russian army detonating explosives in the dam. The immediate consequences included a flood, spread of toxic substances, and epidemiologic risks, while in the long-term the situation threatens the regional ecosystem and compromises anti-flood protection (Ber & Matuszak, 2023). Other ecological crimes by the invading army include threatened use of nuclear weapons, deployment of land mines, deforestation, and destruction of natural habitats of various species (Ohanesian, 2023).

In conclusion, in various aspects, the Russian invasion of Ukraine made it dangerous for Ukrainian citizens to remain within their places of residence and places of origin, forcing them to flee especially from eastern regions of the country and seek refuge elsewhere in Ukraine or in other countries, joining over 30 million of international refugees and over 60 million internally displaced people worldwide (UNHCR, 2022).

**Number of Ukrainian refugees worldwide**

People forced to run from violence and threat in war-ridden territories made various choices concerning their destination. There were two major patterns chosen: either migration into safer territories within Ukraine, i.e., especially western Ukraine, or moving outside the country into other states which were not directly affected by the war operation. When escaping from war, many people tend to stay in a place close to their place or country of origin, firstly because of the hope to return when the situation improves, and secondly to minimise the cultural shock and remain in a similar environment.

According to the data by the United Nations Refugee Agency, in mid-2023, there were 5.1 million internally displaced people in Ukraine and 6.2 million Ukrainian refugees worldwide (UNHCR, 2023b) compared to the country's total pre-war population of 43 million; this means that more than one in four Ukrainians had to migrate from their place of residence, and almost 15% left the country (Figure 2.1).

Non-European countries welcomed a total number of 367,000 refugees, including over 173,000 in Canada (Government of Canada, 2023) and much fewer in other countries: 14,000 in the USA (US Department of State, 2023) and 10,000 in Australia (Australian Government, 2023). A significant group (almost 44,000) relocated to Turkey. However, more than 60% of those who left Ukraine found refuge in the member states of the European Union.
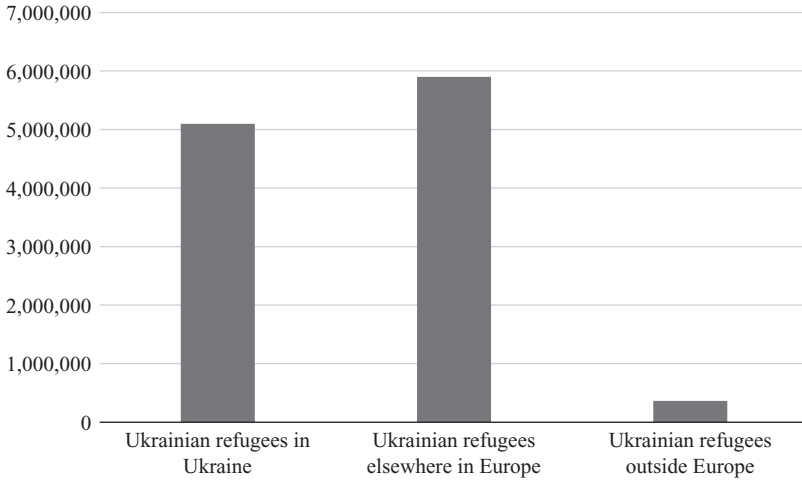
*Figure 2.1* Number of Ukrainian refugees, August 2023.
*Source:* UNHCR, 2023a.

Therefore, a vast majority of refugees outside Ukraine remained in Europe, in line with prior research indicating that refugees tend to remain close to their country of origin (Fransen & de Haas, 2022). Other factors that determined the choice of destination involved economic circumstances (chances for finding employment and possibilities and maintaining families) and cultural proximity, making it easier to function in countries of similar culture and especially language. Possibilities of networking mattered, too, encouraging refugees to choose countries with significant communities of earlier Ukrainian migrants.

Between February 2022 and August 2023, the country admitting the largest number of Ukrainian refugees was Poland. In August 2023, for the first time, the largest number of refugees was recorded in Germany (Table 2.1).

It should also be mentioned that even a larger number of Ukrainians (1,250,315) fled to Russia, and a further 32,500 to Belarus. Even though many of them are covered by assistance from the United Nations, too, their situation is unclear. Some of them may be collaborating with Russia, while others, on the contrary, may be victims of forced migration. The estimated number doesn't include some people displaced into Russia against their own will. This latter situation may concern children transferred from occupied territories of Ukraine into the Russian Federation (International Criminal Court, 2023).

**Number of Ukrainians in V4 countries**

Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia became important destinations for Ukrainians fleeing from the war. In August 2023, Poland's population

*Table 2.1* Number of Ukrainian refugees by country, August 2023

| Country | Number of refugees |
| --- | --- |
| Germany | 1,084,410 |
| **Poland** | **968,390** |
| **Czechia** | **363,195** |
| United Kingdom | 210,800 |
| Spain | 186,045 |
| Italy | 167,210 |
| Moldova | 117,160 |
| **Slovakia** | **106,935** |
| Romania | 94,415 |
| Netherlands | 94,415 |
| Ireland | 92,108 |
| Bulgaria | 86,490 |
| Belgium | 73,095 |
| France | 70,570 |
| Austria | 68,700 |
| Switzerland | 65,500 |
| Finland | 60,315 |
| Portugal | 56,995 |
| Montenegro | 55,190 |
| Norway | 53,440 |
| **Hungary** | **52,290** |
| Estonia | 48,590 |
| Lithuania | 43,015 |
| Denmark | 42,755 |
| Sweden | 40,930 |

*Source*: UNHCR, 2023a.

of Ukrainian refugees was the second largest in the European Union, and Czechia's was the third. Slovakia ranked tenth and Hungary 21st in terms of absolute numbers of refugees welcomed. The refugees who found shelter in the Visegrad countries accounted for almost one in four of all those who left Ukraine because of the war (Figure 2.2).

Especially Poland and Czechia, which became the chosen destination for 15.6% and 5.9% of all refugees were confronted with a big challenge in terms of humanitarian aid and integrating the new inhabitants in the communities. The scale of the challenge can be illustrated by another estimation. The number of refugees constitutes almost 3.5% of the entire Czech population, 2.5% in Poland, 2% in Slovakia, and 0.5% in Hungary.

Focusing on the static picture of the actual number of Ukrainians residing in the Visegrad countries in August 2023 may be misleading. Three of the Visegrad countries – Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia – share borders with Ukraine, which means that they served also as transfer routes for many refugees headed into western Europe or other destinations. Another important factor that affects the fluctuation of the number of refugees in individual countries concerns return migration. These processes may be illustrated by the number of border crossings into and out of these countries between
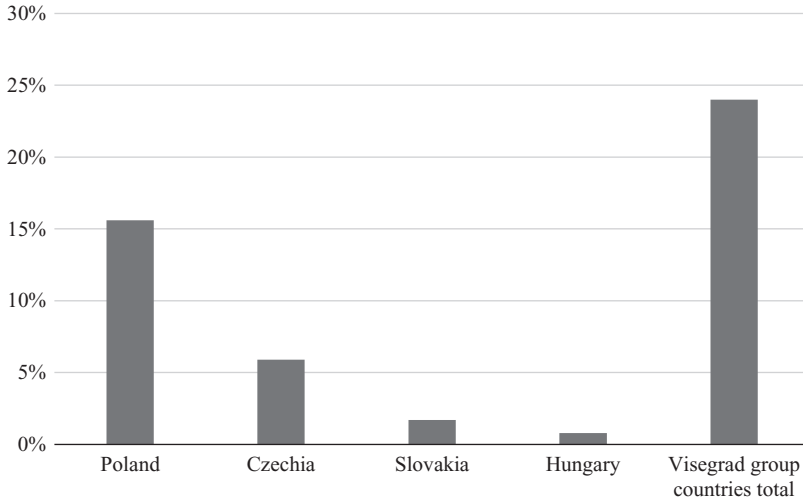
*Figure 2.2* Ukrainian refugees in Visegrad countries as a percentage of the total war-
triggered migration.

*Source:* Developed by the author based on UNHCR, 2023a.

February 2022 and August 2023 (see Table 2.3). It should be stressed that although those migrants did not remain in Hungary, Poland, or Slovakia, they still needed assistance in various areas during their temporary stay.

The dynamics had also a prominent temporal pattern with the largest groups arriving in the first months of war, followed by a decreasing but steady inflow in later months. A reversal of this trend was recorded in the summer of 2023, with more refugees travelling further west to other states of the European Union. This phenomenon was also reflected in measures taken in the V4 countries, as the first months required large-scale emergency initiatives, before the practices could be settled and addressed to a larger extent to people who resolved to stay in Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia (Table 2.2).

*Table 2.2* Timeline of Ukrainian war migration to Visegrad countries – number of
Ukrainians registered for temporary protection

| Country | June 2022 | September 2022 | December 2022 | March 2023 | June 2023 |
|---------|-----------|----------------|---------------|------------|-----------|
| Czechia | nd | nd | 464,701 | 499,887 | 345,880 |
| Hungary | 24,091 | 29,170 | 32,271 | 34,248 | 52,335 |
| Poland | 1,164,627 | 1,365,810 | 1,521,085 | 1,573,267 | 994,775 |
| Slovakia | 78,113 | 92,295 | 102,406 | 112,154 | 102,910 |

*Source* UNHCR, 2023a.

**Migration routes and settlement patterns in Visegrad countries**

While some of the refugees fled Ukraine by plane, mostly they chose the land route on foot, by car, or by train through one of the seven neighbouring countries of Ukraine (Table 2.3). Due to the widespread use of train transport, for many migrants the first place of contact with the host country was a railway station.

Although the data show individual crossings of the border and not the count of persons migrating out of or returning to Ukraine, and despite the missing data, it can be concluded that many people left Ukraine in the first days of the highest uncertainty when the war started and then returned back to Ukraine (either to their prior places of residence or becoming internally displaced persons in western Ukraine).

Those who resolved to settle, at least temporarily, in Visegrad countries, had to choose a specific place. The decisions were determined especially by social networking (family or acquaintances in the host countries), accommodation and employment policies, access to social infrastructure, and also personal preferences (e.g., some refugees from rural areas in Ukraine were unwilling to settle in big cities).

In Czechia, the most frequently selected settlement place for refugees was the capital city of Prague: according to the data by the Czech Ministry of Interior for April 2023 (Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky, 2023), almost one in four (24%) new Ukrainian residents of Czechia stayed there, and further 14% in the surrounding Central Bohemian Region. Other regions where a significant share of the refugees stayed were: South Moravian Region (10%), Plzeň Region (8%), and Moravian-Silesian Region (6%). It is no coincidence that these are the regions containing the largest cities in Czechia.

The Polish data indicate the same tendency: "Most refugees living in Poland settled in big cities or medium towns. Few chose to live in small towns and villages" (Długosz, Kryvachuk & Izdebska-Długosz, 2022, p. 14). This finding is confirmed by an analysis based on the local government units where Ukrainian refugees applied for the Polish personal identification number (UNHCR, 2023a). The data reveal slight predilection to settling in

*Table 2.3* Border crossings from Ukraine into and out of neighbouring countries (February 2022 – August 2023)

| Country | Number of border crossings from Ukraine | Number of border crossings into Ukraine |
|---|---|---|
| Poland | 14,881,470 | 12,525,620 |
| Hungary | 3,436,310 | nd |
| Romania | 3,340,865 | 2,757,515 |
| Russia | 2,852,395 | 2,852,395 |
| Slovakia | 1,676,750 | nd |
| Moldova | 905,050 | 582,900 |
| Belarus | 16,705 | nd |

*Source* UNHCR, 2023a.

western regions of Poland, but the most prominent feature of the settlement pattern is domination of the biggest cities with 120,000 people registered in Warsaw, 45,000 in Wrocław, 32,000 in Kraków, and 31,000 in Poznań. In all, about 30% of all refugees who decided to register their stay in Poland did so in the 18 biggest cities – regional capitals. According to the Union of Polish Metropolises, an organisation representing local governments of the biggest cities in Poland, the estimated increase in population ranged between 11% and 35% in the 12 cities analysed in April 2022 (Wojdat & Cywiński, 2022).

Finally, in Slovakia, areas identified by the Ministry of Interior as those with the highest number of refugees with temporary protection status included Bratislava, Nitra, Zilina, and Kosice (REACH, 2023). These, too, are four of the five biggest cities in the country.

In the case of Hungary, no viable estimations are available, mostly due to the very high mobility of Ukrainian refugees in this country, as 99% of them treated Hungary as a transition area and not a place of destination. However, the vice mayor of Budapest estimated that the capital city was one of the main choices when in Hungary (CrisisReady & Direct Relief, 2022), and this tendency can be confirmed by the scope of support activities offered in Budapest (IOM, 2023a) as well as the second largest city, Debrecen (Debrecen.hu, 2022).

## Profile of refugees in V4 countries

Despite difficulties in keeping records and tracking spontaneous mobility of refugees, many scholars and organisations strive to study the profile of refugees (Długosz, Kryvachuk & Izdebska-Długosz, 2022; IOM, 2022; IOM, 2023e; IOM, 2023c; IOM, 2023f; Klimešová, Šatava & Ondruška, 2022; Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky, 2023; Narodowy Bank Polski, 2022; UNESCO, 2023; UNHCR, 2023a). It should be stressed that none of these studies are actually representative surveys or in-depth analyses. They are based on interviews covering samples of several hundred refugees. There are no reliable and comprehensive registers of immigrants from Ukraine, and therefore possibilities of organisation of any other type of research are significantly limited. However, learning about the profile of the incoming migrants is very important. It serves both cognitive and practical purposes as characteristics of the incomers translate into their needs and potential.

The key questions concern gender and age of the immigrants. The Ukrainian refugees' population was significantly feminised (Figure 2.3) due to multiple factors, not the least importantly due to the legal rules of the martial law which prohibited men in the conscription age (18–60) from leaving the state territory (Romanenko, 2022). According to the data of the Czech Ministry of Internal Affairs, women constituted 65% of the refugee population. UNHCR's estimations for Poland were similar, while surveys for Hungary and Slovakia showed even the number of 77% and 88%, respectively.
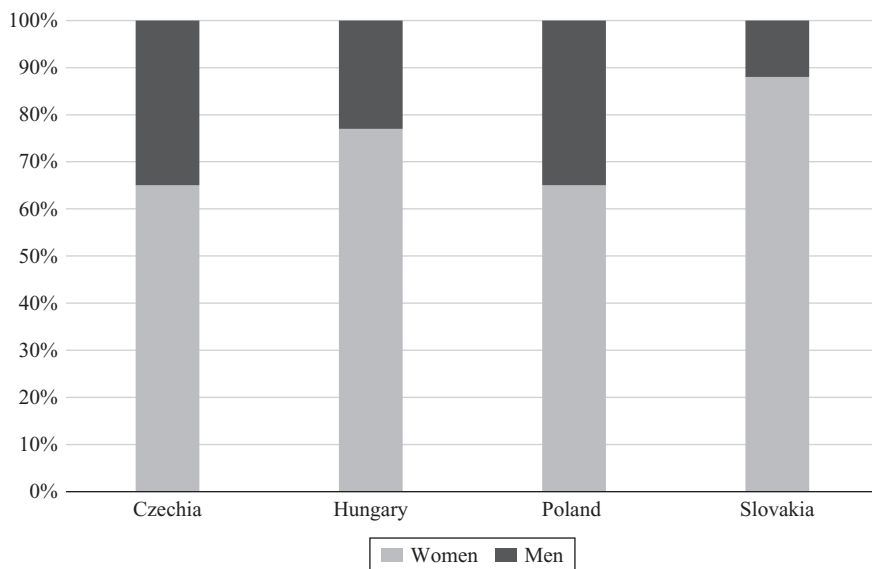
*Figure 2.3* Gender of Ukrainian refugees in V4 countries.

*Source:* Developed by the author based on Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky, 2023; IOM 2023c; UNHCR, 2023b; IOM, 2023e.

The estimated share of children in the population of Ukrainian refugees in Czechia was above one quarter and varied in different studies from 28% to 35%. UNESCO estimated the share of children of school age (excluding younger children) in Slovakia at 25%, 28% in Czechia, 33% in Poland, and 34% in Hungary. This meant that the typical profile of a refugee was a woman travelling with at least one minor: "The most common refugee household consists of a mother with one child. The second most numerous is the household of a single adult, followed by a woman with two children" (Klimešová, Šatava & Ondruška, 2022, p. 38).

In one Polish study (Narodowy Bank Polski, 2022), the researchers claimed that "The refugee population includes also a relatively high share of senior citizens (60+) who normally do not choose to migrate"; however, estimations concerning elderly refugees are scarce, only UNHCR estimates their share in Poland at 8%. This is certainly an important missing item, as these people are potentially in need of either pension or social welfare support, many of them already retired and unable to undertake full-time employment.

Overall, the externally displaced Ukrainians were quite well educated. A survey in Czechia revealed over 40% of them had tertiary education (either bachelor or master), in Hungary the share was over 50%, while in Poland it exceeded 60%. This could be a good prognosis for their professional activity; however surveys among refugees show very low knowledge of local languages. In a general question, 17% of refugees in Czechia declared knowledge

of the Czech language, which was a favourable result compared to only 4% in Hungary and 5% in Poland (5% declared fluent knowledge of Polish and 25% – capacity to communicate in this language). This may make it very difficult to find a job, although a large group may be seeking employment in international corporations, as knowledge of English is much more widespread: 31% of refugees in Czechia, 22% in Hungary, and 55% in Poland (the last number concerns capacity to communicate and not fluent, professional level of knowledge). Small groups declared knowledge of German (6% in Poland and 4% in Hungary).

Concluding, the incoming refugees from Ukraine form a strongly feminised group, usually with minor children, representing rather an urban population of well-educated middle class. This poses both a challenge and a chance for the host countries' schooling and health care systems, as well as the labour markets.

### Plans and attitudes of refugees in V4 countries

Refugees from the war-stricken Ukraine, wherever they stay and whatever their individual situation is, are faced with dramatic uncertainty and forced to make decisions concerning their future without relevant knowledge and predictability. Yet, they have to make at least tentative plans to guide their decisions for the duration of the invasion as well as after the war. These plans were also a subject of multiple studies in Visegrad states. The results of these studies should be viewed with caution. Their limitations, as in the case of the refugees' profile, arise not only from the impossibility of surveying a representative sample of refugees but also from the flexibility of their intentions and the need for constant adaptation to changing circumstances.

A Hungarian study held between January and March 2023 (IOM, 2023c) showed equivocal attitudes, with refugees there divided virtually into two halves: when asked about their current plans, 46% declared their intention to stay in Hungary, while 36% wanted to move to another country. Further 10% intended to return to Ukraine, and 10% marked "I don't know". The most popular destinations outside Hungary were Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. In Czechia, estimations were very similar: that about 46% of Ukrainian refugees would be willing to stay in their current host country. These plans are affected by the situation in the part of Ukraine from where refugees come, their employment situation, and social network available in Czechia, including family and friends (Klimešová, Šatava & Ondruška, 2022, p. 38). In a Slovakian study, a majority of the surveyed refugees declared they had no clear plans and didn't know how long they would stay in their current location; however, over two-thirds wanted to return to their country of origin in a longer perspective. On the other hand, Slovakia, like Hungary, is perceived by many as a place of temporary stay while in transition to another state outside Ukraine, with Germany, Italy, Czechia, and Poland quoted the most often (IOM, 2022).

It should be stressed that the answer concerning plans for further relocation depends on the formulation of the question, too. In Poland, when asked what their plans are for the future – instead of current intentions – 42% of refugees stated that they wanted to go back to Ukraine as soon as possible, when the war ends, while 17% declared they intended to stay in Poland permanently; on the other hand 7% wanted to return to Ukraine immediately regardless of the military circumstances (Długosz, Kryvachuk & Izdebska-Długosz, 2022, p. 39).

In another study, 63% of refugees declared that they intended to work in Poland, either already employed or seeking employment (EWL, 2022). Similarly in Czechia, 59% declared they were employed or doing business, and only 10% declared they were unemployed (Klimešová, Šatava & Ondruška, 2022). The numbers were lower in the Hungarian survey (IOM, 2023c) – 17% employed and 16% looking for employment, but still they show that almost one-third of the refugees want to sustain themselves in the host country. This may be both a challenge and a chance for the local labour market.

Another important subject covered by surveys by the United Nations International Organisation for Migration involved self-identification of needs among the Ukrainian refugees (IOM, 2023b; IOM, 2023c; IOM, 2023d; IOM, 2023f). The timing of the survey varied slightly (between January and June 2023). The mentioned areas concerned the need for financial help, medical services, employment placement, as well as accommodation. Information needs ranked very high in all samples. Refugees in Hungary stood out, as the most frequently mentioned need involved transportation.

Psychological condition of the refugees may be a partial explanation of the reported need for medical care. The war trauma index among refugees in Poland was estimated at 73%. Most refugees (57%) declared that they were able to manage most of the issues they had at hand, but more than one in four (26%) could only handle some, while 5% declared that were unable to cope in most situations (Długosz, Kryvachuk & Izdebska-Długosz, 2022, pp. 34–36). This suggests a potential need for medical or therapeutical intervention.

## Conclusions

The presented data confirm that the Visegrad countries are faced with a dramatic challenge arising from the inflow of war refugees. There are various points that are in common in characterising the population of refugees from Ukraine in Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, but in analysing the practical functioning of these groups some key differences have to be taken into account, too.

The first feature that is common for all analysed countries hosting refugees from Ukraine involves difficulties in estimation of the actual number and profile of the incomers. It is especially notable in member states of the Schengen area, as refugees may move from one country to another. It is

therefore also difficult to verify their characteristics other than the basic gen-der and age data. All information on their education level, employment plans and possibilities, and knowledge of languages are estimations based usually on interviews on various samples. This lack of reliable information makes it very difficult to follow the situation of individuals and provide assistance as necessary, e.g., if children fall out of the education system.

Another factor that affects this uncertainty refers to the dynamic changes in the refugee population. As – contrary to other waves of refugees – they are not purposefully restricted to any kind of camps or detention centres, and at the same time few of them have a strong attachment to a specific place in the host country, they tend to be very mobile. They respond actively to new employment or accommodation possibilities, be it in the same or another European country. Apart from the professional and domestic stabilisation, factors that lead refugees to choose their final destination involve social net-work, either family and friends from Ukraine who had migrated earlier or new acquaintances. This may also be an effect of the work of social initia-tives, especially by non-governmental organisations.

That being said, clear patterns can be observed as far as selection of the destination is concerned. The most prominent tendency is the refugees choosing the biggest cities to settle in. This is probably due to economic factors on the one hand – it is easier to find a job in a city, there are more possibilities of accommodation to choose from, etc. On the other hand, there are also social factors affecting these decisions: cities offer a pos-sibility of settling with a larger group of migrants and building social networks that may lessen the trauma and cultural shock. It is also in cit-ies where there are more non-governmental organisations that may offer support to migrants.

As for the profile of the refugees themselves, there are some clear tendencies observable in all the analysed countries. Feminisation is one of them, as men either chose to stay in Ukraine or could not leave due to wartime provisions of law. Not only the wave of refugees incoming in 2022 were mostly women, but also some of the men who had migrated to Visegrad countries earlier left back for Ukraine. This has consequences, first of all, in the context of the labour markets in the host countries, but also in terms of organising care in single-parent families or families in which a member who requires assistance. And surveys show that most people who fled Ukraine did so in groups includ-ing young children, elderly people, and/or people with disabilities – those who are unable to fight during the war. They will also require relevant school and medical services. Medical assistance is needed also considering how many incomers were traumatised and/or victims of direct violence.

On the other hand, the incomers represent quite high social capital, with over-representation of people with university-level or secondary education, employed in Ukraine at specialist positions, and many of them well-paying. They bring in a lot of potential, but on the other hand, their insufficient knowledge of local languages and challenges concerning recognition of

diplomas and qualifications may lead to their finding jobs below their education, leaving them frustrated.

While the population of refugees did not fundamentally differ from one country to another, there were still big differences in migration patterns and attitudes of incomers between Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. A very important difference lies in the sheer absolute number of immigrants. As in summer 2023, Poland had almost one million of settled refugees and Czechia almost 400,000. This generated significantly bigger and more complex challenges, increasing also the risks of failed integration and ghettoisation. The number of Ukrainians staying in Slovakia and Hungary was much lower. The difference was not so big in relative numbers, as the proportion of new refugees to the overall population in Poland and Slovakia is similar, higher for Czechia and lower for Hungary, but this, too, can bear consequences, especially considering the high concentration of new inhabitants in some areas.

To some extent, this difference in numbers reflects the different roles played by the four Visegrad countries for the refugees. Especially Hungary, and Slovakia, too, to some extent, were treated as transportation hubs with a very large group of refugees entering those countries, staying there as the first safe stop after fleeing from the war-ridden Ukraine, and then moving on to places where they had family or friends, or where they expected better chances for functioning and settlement. Meanwhile Czechia and Poland were the final destination for a higher share of migrants passing through their territories. This signifies that Hungary had to address bigger challenges in terms of transportation, communication services, and information provision, while Poland and Czechia had to ensure services related to settlement and integration of the incomers.

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# 3 Legalisation of the Ukrainian refugees' stay

*Dorota Moroń*

## Introduction

Nowadays, granting protection to foreigners who have been forced to leave their own country due to persecution of which they were – or potentially could have been – victims and cannot count on the protection of their own country is not only a moral obligation carried out by non-governmental organisations or committed citizens but also a legal obligation of states, according to international rules in this field.

The United Nations and the European Union have adopted solutions that oblige Member States to provide – in legally defined situations – protection for foreigners and, within this framework, an appropriate range of support. The assistance system is clearly articulated in EU legislation, obliging states to pursue a policy of providing protection and support to enable protected persons to rebuild a dignified life in the country granting protection.

The countries of the Visegrad Group grant protection to foreigners according to national and international laws. In the case of these countries, due to their membership of the European Union, three systems regulating legal issues of protection of foreigners should be noted: two international systems, the UN system and EU legislation, and national law. Obviously, states implement international rules into national law, thus creating a coherent system governing the protection of aliens in need of assistance, but the specific legal solutions in individual states differ.

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the legal solutions concerning the residence of persons from Ukraine in the Visegrad countries. The international protection system that provides assistance to refugees and the protection system introduced in the European Union will be presented. In the case of solutions introduced by the European Union, particular attention will be paid to the temporary protection status, which – although incorporated into EU law in 2001 – was applied for the first time in connection with the war in Ukraine. The EU law not only laid down the rules for granting temporary protection, but also indicated the extent of support to be provided to beneficiaries of temporary protection. Following the activation of the temporary protection procedure, EU Member States were obliged to ensure that people leaving Ukraine could benefit from temporary protection and certain entitlements.

   The chapter analyses the legal regulations related to the protection of for-
eigners in individual Visegrad Group countries and pays particular atten-
tion to the naming of specific forms of protection, which in some countries
differs from the customary understanding of these concepts in English. The
introduction of solutions that provide temporary protection to people leav-
ing Ukraine is presented and the rights that people under temporary protec-
tion have received in the Visegrad countries are compared.

**International protection in the systems of the United Nations and the
European Union**

Today, the UN system is the key universal system that provides protection to
refugees. The basic documents are the 1951 Refugee Convention (The United
Nations, 1951) and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (The
United Nations, 1967). They sanction one type of status for which international
protection is granted: refugee status (Goodwin-Gill & McAdam, 2021). The
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was established for the task of
providing protection to refugees (Lewis, 2012; Simeon, 2013; Goodwin-Gill &
McAdam, 2021). Its role is also significant in supporting those leaving Ukraine.
   Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia acceded to the Convention and
the Protocol only between 1989 and 1993 and not immediately after their
adoption by the UN, due to their affiliation with the communist bloc.
   It is important to note that persons forced to flee their country of origin
as a result of an armed conflict – international or internal – are not usually
considered refugees. However, they receive protection under other interna-
tional instruments.
   From the perspective of this book, the second important system that reg-
ulates protection for foreigners is the European Union. The key – from a
refugee perspective – documents defining the protection of foreigners in the
European Union are:

• Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards
  for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of dis-
  placed persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between
  Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences
  thereof (the Temporary Protection Directive);
• Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of
  13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country
  nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection,
  for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary
  protection, and for the content of the protection granted (recast) (the
  Qualification Directive);
• Directive 2013/32/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council
  of 26 June 2013 on common procedures for granting and withdrawing
  international protection (recast) (the Asylum Procedures Directive);

- Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (recast) (the Reception Conditions Directive).

EU law sanctions three statuses providing protection to foreigners: refugee status, subsidiary protection status, and temporary protection. Refugee and subsidiary protection status are two forms of status for which international protection is granted. According to the Qualification Directive, refugee means a third-country national who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership of a particular social group, is outside the country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country, or a stateless person, who, being outside of the country of former habitual residence for the same reasons as mentioned above, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it. A person eligible for subsidiary protection means a third-country national or a stateless person who does not qualify as a refugee but with respect to whom substantial grounds have been shown to believe that the person concerned, if returned to his or her country of origin or, in the case of a stateless person, to his or her country of former habitual residence, would face a real risk of suffering serious harm (the death penalty or execution, torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict) and is unable or, due to such risk, unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country. A person may be excluded from refugee status or subsidiary protection if they are affected by situations specified in the Directive, such as, for example, committing a crime against peace, a war crime.

The Temporary Protection Directive, adopted following the conflicts in former Yugoslavia, introduced a special status: temporary protection. Temporary protection means a procedure of exceptional character to provide immediate and temporary protection to displaced persons, in the event of a mass influx or imminent mass influx of them. Displaced persons mean third-country nationals or stateless persons who have had to leave their country or region of origin due to war or endemic violence or systematic or generalised violations of human rights. This refers to the situation of a mass influx of people in need of assistance – either spontaneously or as part of a planned evacuation – where the asylum system will not be able to serve those in need. The procedure is triggered by the Council of the European Union's decision on a proposal from the European Commission and applies in the Member States to a specific group of persons. Temporary protection is introduced for one year, can be terminated earlier by the Council's decision, or can be extended (with a maximum duration of three years). As with international protection, persons may be excluded from temporary protection, e.g., when they committed a crime against peace, a war crime, and a crime against humanity.

    Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia became members of the European Union on 1 May 2004. They implemented EU legislation into national law, including the granting of protection to foreigners.

**The European Union guarantees the rights of temporary protection beneficiaries**

The Temporary Protection Directive contains obligations for host states of persons receiving temporary protection to provide them with certain rights and support. Two important areas can be distinguished in this context:

• Residence and movement rights;
• Social rights and social protection.

It should be noted that the Directive sets minimum standards, so the Member States may – at their discretion – decide on more favourable solutions.

    Persons in need of protection are provided assistance with respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and their obligations while respecting the principle of non-refoulement. Residence and movement rights relate primarily to obtaining a residence permit, that is, a permit or authorisation on the basis of which displaced persons can reside in the country. It should be stressed that the rights derived from temporary protection are only valid in the country that issued the residence permit. The possibility of moving within the European Union depends on the visa requirements for the country of origin of the displaced person.

    If entry into the country requires a visa, displaced persons should obtain such visas as a matter of urgency, free of charge or for a minimal fee. The documents that persons under temporary protection obtain should be prepared in a language that they understand and should clearly set out the rules applicable to them. EU Member States provide for the possibility of reuniting families that have been separated and have ended up in different countries, and when a part of the family has remained in the country of origin (residence). In the case of unaccompanied minors, states allow and supervise the care of minors by relatives or persons who took care of the children during the flight or, in the absence of such persons, provide care in foster-family or reception centres with special provisions for minors.

    EU countries receive persons eligible for temporary protection "in a spirit of Community solidarity". The most burdened countries may benefit from EU support. Transfer of persons is possible – with their consent – to another EU Member State.

    Introduction of the temporary protection does not deprive people fleeing to EU countries of the possibility to apply for refugee status under the asylum procedure. It is up to each country to decide whether temporary protection and asylum applications can be made at the same time or not. If a person eligible for temporary protection has not been granted refugee status

or subsidiary protection, he/she has retained the possibility of temporary protection.

States facilitate the return to the country from which they have fled for persons who are under temporary protection or where temporary protection has ended. Persons who have voluntarily returned to their country and resettled may be granted temporary protection again. In the event of termination of temporary protection, states must allow persons who, for health reasons, cannot undertake the journey to continue to stay. They may allow people displaced for humanitarian reasons to continue to stay, and they may also allow the families of school-going children to stay to complete a given period of schooling.

People fleeing armed conflict, violence, or human rights situations very often do not have the resources to function in the protected country. Often, women with children or the elderly flee and have limited employment opportunities. For this reason, it is important to ensure social rights and social protection that enable them to function in conditions that respect human dignity. The Temporary Protection Directive indicates certain rights and entitlements that should be provided to beneficiaries of temporary protection. However, it does not indicate the exact scope of these entitlements, e.g. specific types of benefit or amounts of benefit. This is left to the discretion of the Member States. At the same time, it should be added that EU countries differ in terms of the extent of social protection of their citizens, and this can also result in differences regarding the support of persons under temporary protection. People under temporary protection receive access to employment, suitable accommodation or housing, social welfare, medical care, and the state education system (for people under 18 years of age).

Beneficiaries of temporary protection have the right to take up employment or self-employment, taking into account the rules that apply to taking up employment in the so-called regulated professions (European Commission, 2023). It should be added that states may give priority to EU citizens and citizens of states of the European Economic Area and also to legally resident third-country nationals who receive unemployment benefit. Temporary protected persons are also covered by the rules on working conditions, wages, and social security – just like citizens.

Temporary protected persons are entitled to social assistance if they do not have sufficient means of subsistence. They are also entitled to health care, at least in terms of emergency treatment and basic treatment of diseases. Persons under temporary protection do not have to receive social assistance and health care to the same extent as citizens. At the same time, the necessary assistance should be provided to persons who have special needs, such as unaccompanied minors or persons who have undergone torture, rape, or other serious forms of psychological, physical, or sexual violence.

People up to the age of 18 years obtain the right to education on the same basis as citizens, except that the right to education may be limited to the state education system only. Adults can obtain the right to education in the general education system.

The guarantees introduced by the Temporary Protection Directive are of a rather general nature. In each case, they must be specified in detail by national law, precisely defining the rights and opportunities of persons benefiting from temporary protection.

**Forms of protection in the national law of Visegrad countries**

The countries of the Visegrad Group have implemented inter-country solutions into national law and have introduced solutions for inter-country protection and temporary protection.

The right to international protection is guaranteed in constitutions and regulated in detail in legal acts. The Constitution of the Czech Republic (Coll., 1993) indicates in Article 43 the possibility of granting asylum to foreigners who are being persecuted for the assertion of their political rights and freedoms. The Fundamental Law of Hungary (Hungarian Journal, 2011) indicates in Article XIV that Hungary grants asylum to non-Hungarian citizens being persecuted or having a well-founded fear of persecution. The Constitution of the Republic of Poland (Journal of Laws, 1977) in Article 56 provides the right to asylum and to obtain refugee status in accordance with international agreements. The Constitution of the Slovak Republic (Coll., 1992) in Article 53 indicates that Slovakia grants asylum to foreign nationals persecuted for upholding political rights and freedoms.

In all Visegrad countries, international protection can be obtained in the form of two statuses:

- Refugee status (in Hungary and Poland) or asylum (in Czechia and Slovakia) – the nomenclature (refugee status or asylum) is different, but the protection status is equivalent;
- Subsidiary protection status.

In each country, the law regulates the possibility of obtaining temporary protection.

In addition, Polish law provides for the possibility of obtaining asylum as a form of national protection. This solution is important, as the asylum or asylum procedure formula is commonly used to describe refugee status and the procedure for obtaining refugee status. The term asylum used in the Czech Republic and Slovakia is used precisely in this context. In Poland, however, asylum is a separate national protection procedure, independent of forms of international protection. This is already emphasised by the Constitution of the Republic of Poland (Journal of Laws, 1977), which indicates separately asylum and refugee status in accordance with international agreements. Asylum in Poland is granted to a foreigner at his/her request when it is necessary to provide him/her with protection and when an important interest of the Republic of Poland so warrants. Granting asylum is treated only as a sovereign right of the state (it is an entitlement, not an obligation) and not

*Table 3.1* Regulations on the protection of foreigners in the countries of the Visegrad Group

| Specification | Czechia | Hungary | Poland | Slovakia |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Act of law | Act of 11 November 1999 on asylum (Coll., 1999) Act of 26 June 2003 on temporary protection of foreigners (Coll., 2003) | Act of 2007 on asylum (Hungarian Journal, 2007) | Act of 13 June 2003granting protection to aliens within the territory of the Republic of Poland (Journal of Laws, 2023) | Act of 20 June 2002 on asylum and amendment of some acts (Coll., 2002) |
| International protection | Asylum subsidiary protection status | Refugee status subsidiary protection status | Refugee status subsidiary protection status | Asylum subsidiary protection status |
| Temporary protection | Temporary protection | Temporary protection | Temporary protection | Temporary protection |
| National protection | – | Asylum | –– | |

*Source*: Own work.

as one of fundamental human rights (Szwed, 2020; Kowalczyk, 2014). The laws regulating the granting of protection to foreigners and the forms of protection are summarised in Table 3.1.

The laws relating to the granting of temporary protection in the Visegrad countries, indicated in Table 3.1., refer to the situation of the declaration of temporary protection of foreigners by a decision of the Council of the European Union. They formulate the procedures concerning the procedure for granting temporary protection and the rules related to residence on the territory of the country concerned.

## Implementation of temporary protection for persons from Ukraine

The temporary protection procedure has been in EU law since 2001. However, it was not used until 2022. The Russian military invasion of Ukraine has created a situation of mass arrivals of displaced people from Ukraine. Due to the scale of estimated arrivals, the European Commission identified a clear risk that the asylum systems of EU countries geographically closest to Ukraine would be unable to process applications within the set deadlines. This would make it impossible to provide protection to those fleeing war. The European Commission on 2 March 2022 proposed to activate the Temporary Protection Directive. The Council of the European Union

took a decision on 4 March and introduced temporary protection for those leaving Ukraine. The Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382 of 4 March 2022 (Official Journal of the European Union, 2022) establishes the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine within the meaning of Article 5 of the Temporary Protection Directive and having the effect of introducing temporary protection applies to persons displaced from Ukraine on or after 24 February 2022, as a result of the military invasion by Russian armed forces. It relates to:

- Ukrainian nationals residing in Ukraine who have been displaced on or after 24 February 2022 as a result of the military invasion by Russian armed forces;
- Nationals of third countries other than Ukraine, who have been displaced from Ukraine on or after 24 February 2022, and who were benefitting in Ukraine from refugee status or equivalent protection before 24 February 2022;
- Family members of persons mentioned in the previous points residing in Ukraine who have been displaced on or after 24 February 2022.

The Council also recognised that it is necessary to provide for the protection of stateless persons and nationals of third countries other than Ukraine, who:

- Have a permanent residence permit in Ukraine;
- Resided in Ukraine and have been displaced on or after 24 February 2022;
- Are unable to return in safe and durable conditions to their country or region of origin.

These persons may be granted temporary protection or other protection under national law.

It is also important that temporary protection status is not, in principle, granted Ukrainian nationals who found themselves outside Ukraine before 24 February 2022, for example, having fled Ukraine shortly before 24 February due to a growing threat, having been outside Ukraine for work, study, holiday, family visit, or any other reason. However, the Temporary Protection Directive allows Member States to extend protection to additional categories of displaced persons who come from the same country (region) and have become displaced for the same reasons. The Council encouraged states to extend temporary protection to, among others, persons who left Ukraine shortly before 24 February 2022.

The Council also drew attention to stateless persons and third-country nationals who did not have the right of permanent residence in Ukraine but were there temporarily, e.g., studying and are unable to return in safe and durable conditions to their country (region) of origin. They should be assisted for humanitarian reasons, including assistance to return to their country (region) of origin.

In Communication from the Commission on Operational guidelines for the implementation of Council Implementing Decision 2022/382 establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine within the meaning of Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC and having the effect of introducing temporary protection 2022/C 126 I/01, the European Commission has also formulated guidelines for the provision of aid by Member States.

The European Commission has drawn attention to the special situation of children, including those deprived of parental care. Such children should have an immediately appointed legal guardian or appropriate representation.

Citizens of Ukraine and non-visa nationals have the full right to move freely within the European Union. They can choose in which country they want to benefit from temporary protection. For those in need of visas, the European Commission recommended issuing 15-day visas and not imposing penalties on carriers for transporting undocumented persons.

### Rights of beneficiaries of temporary protection in the countries of the Visegrad Group

Assistance to those fleeing Ukraine began immediately with their influx into the European Union. Countries directly bordering Ukraine have played a special role in this regard. Of the EU countries, these are: Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania. Assistance was provided by state and local authorities, as well as NGOs and individual citizens. However, the actual implementation of the decision of the Council of the European Union, the provision of legal residence, and assistance by public authorities required the introduction of legal solutions at the national level. These solutions were introduced in the Visegrad countries in March 2022. They were subsequently amended to adapt the legal regulations to the current situation. The legal acts regulating the situation of people fleeing Ukraine are summarised in Table 3.2.

The right to temporary protection has been granted to Ukrainian citizens and beneficiaries of international protection in Ukraine and their family members – according to the EU Council Implementing Decision (Official Journal of the European Union, 2022). The Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia also provide protection to persons with permanent residence in Ukraine. In Hungary, people with permanent residency in Ukraine had to apply for residency under general rules or for international protection.

Poland introduced complicated regulations to obtain temporary protection. Two separate procedures were created depending on citizenship, family ties, and possession of a Pole's card (a document confirming belonging to the Polish nation, issued by Polish consulates and provincial offices on Polish territory). A special procedure for obtaining temporary protection was created for Ukrainian citizens, their spouses who are not Ukrainian citizens and who are not citizens of Poland or another EU country, as well as Ukrainian citizens who have a Pole's card and their immediate family members. Other foreigners had to apply for temporary protection at the Office for Foreigners, which

*Table 3.2* Legal acts regulating the situation of persons from Ukraine

| Country | Legal acts |
| --- | --- |
| Czechia | Coll. (2022). Act of 17 March 2022 on certain measures in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of Ukraine caused by the invasion of the Russian Federation, 2022, no 65 (as amended). |
| | Coll. (2022) Act of 17 March 2022 on measures in the field of employment and social security in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of Ukraine caused by the invasion of the troops of the Russian Federation, 2022, no 66 (as amended). |
| Hungary | Hungarian Journal (2022). Government Decree 86/2022 of 7 March 2022 on the emergency rules for persons recognised as entitled to temporary protection and on the different application of the rules of Act CVI of 2011 on public employment and amending other acts related to public employment and other acts, 2022, no 44 (as amended). |
| Poland | Journal of Laws (2022). Act of 12 March 2022 on assistance to citizens of Ukraine in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of Ukraine, 2022, item 583 (as amended). |
| Slovakia | Coll. (2022). Act of 25 February 2022 on certain measures in connection with the situation in Ukraine, 2022, no. 55. |
| | Coll. (2022). Act of 22 March 2022 on certain other measures in connection with the situation in Ukraine, 2022, no. 92. |

*Source*: Own work.

deals with international protection. The act of 12 March 2022 on assistance to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of the country (Journal of Laws, 2022) in its first version also distinguished between persons by the manner of their arrival in Poland – directly or through the territory of another country. Support was guaranteed only to persons who came directly from Ukraine (except for persons holding the Pole's card). This solution was changed by an amendment to the Act on 23 March 2022.

None of the Visegrad countries introduced temporary protection for persons who arrived from Ukraine before 24 February 2022 and for persons who resided in Ukraine temporarily.

It should be emphasised that there were many Ukrainian citizens living in the Visegrad countries before 24 February 2022 who were studying or working. The situation of these individuals may have become particularly difficult due to the inability to return to Ukraine, the loss of income from Ukraine in the case of students, or the need to take care of family who fled Ukraine. These people were granted visa extensions and the right to legal residence but were not supported by those with temporary protection status. Persons who fled Ukraine before 24 February 2022 and people who fled after 24 February 2022 but were excluded from the right to receive temporary protection could apply for protection under the general rules for foreigners.

The Visegrad countries also provided assistance in returning to their country of origin to citizens of countries other than Ukraine who had fled Ukraine and had problems returning to their country. This included, for example, students or people working in Ukraine.

Obtaining temporary protection requires registration in the country's system. Each country has defined a procedure for registering with the national system and obtaining a temporary protection status.

In addition to regulating the right to stay and to obtain temporary protection, the legislation has defined the social support and entitlements of persons granted temporary protection. Two types of support can be identified here:

- Special humanitarian assistance for persons arriving on the territory of the state;
- Legal arrangements for the use of social protection and social policy solutions.

Special humanitarian assistance included the provision of accommodation – in collective accommodation facilities, in residents' homes or housing provided by residents – as well as the provision of basic hygiene and food supplies. It concerned people crossing the border and was intended to provide support primarily during the first period of stay. The legal solutions on the entitlements of persons under temporary protection concerned a wide range of social policies: social assistance, family benefits, health care, education, or the labour market.

During the period of the highest influx of displaced persons, this assistance was provided both by state authorities, local authorities, and NGOs, as well as directly by citizens. Stabilisation of the situation with regard to the influx of migrants also led to stabilisation of the situation with regard to the provision of aid. However, there are still three pillars of aid implementation – the national pillar and the local government and the NGO pillar. The chapter presents state solutions. While the variety of solutions implemented by local governments and NGOs makes it impossible to classify them, some of which are presented in the following chapters as good practices.

The solutions introduced by the state authorities have evolved since March 2022. Initially, the length of support was most often not specified, as it was assumed to be short-term. Due to the prolonged duration of the stay of displaced persons, humanitarian support was reduced in favour of support activities for the employment and empowerment of temporary protection beneficiaries.

### Assistance with accommodation

People from Ukraine who had nowhere to stay could be helped with housing. It was organised in collective facilities (including communal halls, day care centres, etc., adapted for these purposes) and in the homes of residents of the

country and the housing provided by them. Housing support consists of the provision of housing, with financial support from the state or, as in the case of Czechia as of 1 July 2023, a subsidy for housing costs paid to those under temporary protection as a humanitarian benefit. Housing assistance has been limited in time – Hungary provides the shortest period of assistance, only one month. At the same time, with the exception of Slovakia, where housing support is provided for all persons under temporary protection until 31 December 2023, groups of persons in a special situation have been identified, to whom assistance is provided indefinitely. The rules for accommodation support are summarised in Table 3.3.

*Social assistance*

Social assistance is a social policy institution that aims to help individuals and families overcome difficult life situations that they cannot overcome on their own. Displaced persons definitely find themselves in a difficult life situation. The Visegrad countries have applied various solutions here. In Poland and Slovakia, people under temporary protection are entitled to social assistance on the same terms as citizens. In addition, a small one-time benefit has been introduced in Poland. In the Czech Republic and Hungary, special benefits have been provided for persons under temporary protection. The rules for social assistance are summarised in Table 3.4.

*Family benefits*

Monetary family support benefits are designed to help families meet the expenses of raising a child, including childcare, and meeting the child's living needs. They can be directed to all families with children, or to selected families, such as low-income families, those with children with disabilities, etc. Only in Poland have those under temporary protection gained access to cash benefits to support the family. Therefore, they can benefit from a wide range of benefits, the most important and, at the same time, the highest of which is the benefit for bringing up a child, in the amount of PLN 500 for each child under 18 years of age (the "Family 500+" programme). Low-income families and those with children with disabilities can benefit from a catalogue of family benefits, and parents of young children from the family care capital supporting second and subsequent children aged 12–35 months, or from a nursery subsidy for the first child. This certainly helps families with children in Poland. In Slovakia, people under temporary protection can use selected benefits, e.g., protection allowance (for disabled people, people of retirement age, pregnant women, single parents taking care of a child up to 12 months of age), co-financing meals for children attending kindergarten and primary school, and child care allowance for a child up to three years of age or up to six years of age for a child with a long-term adverse health condition (only for gainfully employed people). In Czechia and Hungary, family support

Table 3.3 Assistance with housing in the countries of the Visegrad Group (legal status as of 1 October 2023)

| Accommodation | Czechia | Hungary | Poland | Slovakia |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Type of assistance | Subsidised housing costs under the humanitarian benefit | Free accommodation | Free accommodation and meals | Free accommodation |
| Support recipients | Persons with temporary protection for housing costs | Accommodation providers who provide accommodation for at least 20 persons (local governments and other providers, e.g., legal or natural persons, contracted by ministries, regional disaster management committees); support for employee housing can be provided to employers | Owners of flats and houses providing accommodation and meals | Owners of flats and houses providing accommodation |
| Duration of assistance | Max. 150 days | Max. 1 month | Max. 120 days | Until 31 December 2023 |
| Groups assisted indefinitely | – Children under 18 years of age<br>– Students under 26 years of age studying in Czechia<br>– Caregivers of a child under six years of age<br>– Pregnant women<br>– People over 65 years of age<br>– Disabled people<br>– Caregivers of disabled people | – Children under 18 years of age<br>– The parents of a child under six years of age<br>– Pregnant women<br>– People over 65 years of age<br>– Disabled people | – Children under 18 years of age<br>– Caregivers of a child under 12 months of age<br>– Single carers of three or more children<br>– Temporary guardians of minors<br>– Pregnant women<br>– Women over 60 years of age, men over 65 years of age<br>– Disabled people<br>– Caregivers of disabled people<br>– Persons in a difficult life situation which makes it impossible for them to contribute to the costs of assistance | |

| Amount of funding | Assistance for housing costs is added to the humanitarian benefit. The amount of assistance monthly: (1) residence registered: CZK 3,000 per person (max CZK 15,000 per five or more persons) and (2) unregistered dwelling: CZK 2,400 per person (max CZK 12,000 per five or more persons) | HUF 5,000 per person per day | PLN 40 per person per day | EUR 10 per person aged 15 and over per day, EUR 5 per person aged under 15 per day (for accommodation facilities intended for short-term and municipalities and self-governing regions EUR 12 and 6, respectively). Max. EUR 710 The maximum amount per room per month applies: EUR 710 for one room, EUR 1,080 for two rooms, EUR 1,430 for three rooms, and EUR 1790/ four rooms or more rooms |

*Source*: Own work.

*Average exchange rates of central banks as of 2 October 2023: EUR 1 = PLN 4.6091; CZK 24.460; HUF 387.43.*

*Table 3.4* Social assistance in the countries of the Visegrad Group (legal status as of 1 October 2023)

| Country | Benefits |
| --- | --- |
| Czechia | Humanitarian benefit. Each person has the full benefit regardless of income for one month. Obtaining benefits for the following months depends on income. The base amount of the humanitarian benefit (for a person with no income) varies and is as follows monthly: CZK 4,860 per adult for the first 150 days, then CZK 3,130, but for vulnerable people (students, caregivers of a child under six, people over 65, pregnant women, caregivers of disabled people) CZK 4,860, CZK 7,290 per disabled person, CZK 3,490 per child (CZK 5,235 per disabled child, 4,188 per child aged 6–10), lower after 150 days: CZK 3,130 per adult, CZK 7,290 per disabled person, CZK 3,490 per child (CZK 5,235 per disabled child, 4,188 per child aged 6–10). The amount of support for housing costs is added to these base amounts. The actual amount due to the person/family is calculated depending on the amount of income. |
| Hungary | Cash benefit monthly: HUF 22,800 per adult, HUF 13,700 per child. Cash benefit is not available if the beneficiary: refuses the job offer, enters employment and receives remuneration, receives pension either from Hungary or from Ukraine (and can access the pension from Ukraine). Free meals for your child in the crèche, kindergarten, and school for the first six months and thereafter if income in the family does not exceed HUF 200,564 per person per month. Beneficiaries of temporary protection are not entitled to any other social assistance. |
| Poland | PLN 300 per person at a time; social assistance is on the same terms as for citizens. |
| Slovakia | Social assistance is on the same terms as for citizens. |

*Source*: Own work.

benefits are not available to those under temporary protection. In Hungary, the exception is the possibility to receive maternity allowance (a single payment of HUF 64,125 or 85,500 in the case of twins).

### Access to the labour market, education, and health care

For the functioning of displaced persons from Ukraine in other countries, solutions that allow them to access the labour market, the educational system, and health care are extremely important.

In all Visegrad countries, solutions have been introduced to enable displaced persons to take up jobs, but legislation in Slovakia and Hungary does not allow beneficiaries of temporary protection to run a business (self-employment). It should be emphasised that this contradicts the Temporary Protection Directive, which provides for the right to self-employment.

The Visegrad countries provide access to health care on the same basis as for citizens. Not in all countries full access was guaranteed from the beginning of temporary protection. For example, in Slovakia, there was initially a right to receive urgent medical care and needed medical care, as defined

by the Ministry of Health. The right to publicly funded health care on the same basis as citizens was introduced for children up to the age of 18 from 1 January 2023 and for adults from 1 September 2023.

Children and young people under temporary protection were given full access to the educational system. In Poland, a solution was introduced in the form of preparatory classes for pupils who do not know the Polish language. Young people have the opportunity to pursue higher education free of charge – in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia in the national languages, and in Hungary in all available programmes.

## Conclusions

Legal procedures for providing protection to foreigners who are unwilling or unable to enjoy the protection of their country of origin due to persecution, the threat of the death penalty, torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, or threats to life and health due to violence against civilians in cases of international or internal armed conflicts are adopted at the international and national levels. They make it possible to ensure the safety and support of foreigners to function in a safe country.

The provisions adopted in the United Nations system relate to the granting of refugee status by states. Further, states may also grant other protection according to national law. The European Union has introduced a temporary protection solution, applicable to large groups leaving their country of origin due to armed conflicts.

The influx of a large number of displaced persons from Ukraine due to hostilities on its territory required measures to support refugees. To this end, the European Union launched the application of the temporary protection procedure for those who leave Ukraine in connection with the war. It was implemented by the Visegrad countries, making it possible to obtain temporary protection on their territory.

The analysis of legal regulations relating to the legal situation of refugees from Ukraine on the territory of Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia allows us to indicate the following conclusions:

• In all Visegrad countries, domestic law allows for applying for international protection in accordance with the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol. This is – depending on the country – refugee status or asylum. The status of subsidiary protection and temporary protection has also been implemented into national law.
• Refugees from Ukraine were accepted in Visegrad countries from the first day of the war. Legal solutions regulating the possibility of their obtaining temporary protection were adopted in March 2022.
• Regulations included providing refugees with social protection, access to the health care system, education, or the labour market, in accordance with the Temporary Protection Directive. It should be added, however,

that not all countries have implemented labour market access provisions as envisioned in the Temporary Protection Directive.

- Refugees from Ukraine have received various levels of social protection. In some cases, they were treated exactly like citizens, and in others support designed directly for them – treating them more preferentially (e.g., housing assistance and one-time benefits) or less preferentially (e.g., no access to full health care or family benefits).

- Regulations to support Ukrainian refugees have evolved over time. There is a reduction in assistance, granting benefits for a limited period of time, especially for those who can take up employment and support themselves. This is justified in connection with the prolonged stay of refugees in the Visegrad countries. At the same time, long-term support is provided to people in a special situation (e.g., the disabled, pregnant women, children, and parents with young children).

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# 4 Organising support for refugees from Ukraine

## The role of the state, local governments, and civil society

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### Introduction

The refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine is not the first in the EU countries in general, but this crisis is different and unique. For the V4 countries, this refugee crisis was the first natural refugee crisis they had to deal with. The unique characteristics of the Ukrainian refugee crisis are connected with several factors, as explained by Bird and Amaglobeli (2022), Garcés Mascareñas (2022), and OECD (2022). First, the exodus's size, speed, and geographical proximity are a noticeable distinctive feature: a far-off conflict differs from one on the continent. The second factor is cultural and social proximity. This is also connected with the atypical arrivals profile: it is highly skilled, primarily women with children leaving the country, and a higher share of arrivals are tertiary educated. The third factor relates to the recent migration history. The earlier migration of Ukrainian workers to the European Union, as well as the openness of the European Union to their movement, resulted in a strong presence of Ukrainian social networks across Europe, especially in countries close to the border, such as Poland. This presence was invaluable in the first days of the spontaneous response to the war and in the following weeks and months. Another fundamental difference is that the member states have maintained an open border policy this time. Member states have agreed to implement the Temporary Protection Directive, unused since its approval in 2001. Another difference is the widespread expectation that Ukrainians fleeing the war will return after its end. Furthermore, finally, in many respects, the response in receiving countries was also unique. The crisis attracted unprecedented political and public support from the host population, and there was an exceptional mobilisation of institutions, organisations, and individuals in the host communities, which went beyond friends and families. This expression of solidarity had not occurred in V4 countries before.

Before the Ukrainian refugee crisis, V4 countries lacked experience in hosting large-scale war and humanitarian refugees. They have also never had to deal with such many foreigners who do not speak their native language. V4 countries were also known for their longstanding, hardline policies against receiving migrants and refugees. The approach of V4 countries to the war in Ukraine was

different. Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia strongly support Ukraine with military aid and condemnation of Russian aggression. In contrast, Hungary maintains economic ties with Russia, refrains from military assistance, and has blocked financial aid to Ukraine. Slovakia's future stance remains uncertain, given potential pro-Russia inclinations after the 2023 elections.

Thus, despite many commonalities, there are also several differences in the approaches of V4 countries to the Ukrainian refugee crisis caused not only by different social, political, economic, and cultural contexts but also by geographical differences. First, the Czech Republic has no borders with Ukraine but has one of the highest numbers of registered refugees from Ukraine globally, both in terms of absolute number and per capita. The large Ukrainian pre-war diaspora, the country's dynamic economy with one of the lowest unemployment rates in the EU, and significant solidarity with refugees shown by the host community have led many Ukrainians to seek safety in the Czech Republic. Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia have around 730 kilometres long borders with Ukraine, while the border with Poland is the longest and has around 535 kilometres. The Ukrainian labour diaspora dominated the migration landscape in Poland for nearly a decade, so Poland also became the target country for many Ukrainian refugees and it is among countries with the highest number of new arrivals after the outbreak of the war. Borders with Slovakia and Hungary were crossed by more than 2.3 million refugees from Ukraine since February 2022. While most continued west, the number of those who stayed in Slovakia is still relatively high, especially compared to the local average of migrants in the previous years. The lowest number of refugees stayed in Hungary. It should be stressed that even those who eventually continued westward needed essential assistance during the first hours or days of their stay, be it food, water, health care, basic shelter, or transportation.

Examining the scale of help and support for refugees from Ukraine, one should also consider the stage and degree of advancement of the ongoing refugee crisis, as well as expectations concerning the predicted end of the conflict. The needs, their scale, how they are met, and the type of entities providing support vary at different stages. The information below reflects the stage of spontaneous assistance and, in part, the adaptation stage, which, depending on how the situation on the frontline develops and whether the refugees from Ukraine stay in V4 countries, will gradually turn into the integration stage. The spontaneous aid stage was dominated in all V4 countries by grassroots initiatives, an unprecedented, rapid social effort on a massive scale, and ad hoc support for these processes from local governments and the central authorities. Managing the beginning of the refugee crisis in all V4 countries took immense effort; it was speedy, flexible and based on cooperation among governmental structures, non-profit sectors, and volunteers, which can be considered a multilevel governance approach. This approach was based on multilevel governance as a reference to the interaction and joint coordination of relationships between different levels of government without the apparent dominance of one of them (Scholten & Penninx, 2016) and on

the involvement of multiple actors in managing migration flows and downstream mobility integration activities (Podgórska et al., 2023).

In the first stage, the priority was to provide clothes, food, and hygiene products and finance current expenses. Logistics was equally important: transporting refugees from the borders to towns in V4 countries or outside. Providing millions of refugees with accommodation was one of the biggest challenges. Refugees also needed basic information about their rights and options and, often, crisis psychological support. With time, the needs of Ukrainian refugees who decided to stay in V4 countries evolved.

At the adaptation stage, as stated by Baszczak et al. (2022), the state's role increases and civil society's role decreases. This is the stage at which refugees are incorporated into the state and welfare system. They are granted access to the infrastructure needed to access essential services within the existing public policy framework. Given that most of the refugees from Ukraine are women, children, or elderly people, they first need to receive access to health care, the education system, and the possibility to look for a job legally. This is also the stage at which, during the initial phase, the state could and should support the local authorities and non-governmental organisations helping refugees. Therefore, the second assistance stage requires other resources, institutional support, and much higher financial expenditure, which should be provided systematically, continuously, and in a controlled manner.

More than one and a half years after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the refugee crisis in V4 countries is in the integration stage. At this stage, all stakeholders at different levels are developing appropriate measures to enable the refugees' permanent and effective inclusion in the society, smooth integration at schools, public institutions, labour market, and other areas and reduce tensions between host communities and refugees from Ukraine. The aim of this stage should be to build a cohesive society in which people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds form a new whole, one that is based on their equal status.

We need to stress that in all V4 countries the crucial role in the first stages of the war and later in the process of the Ukrainian refugee integration was played by the civil society – its formal part consisting of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and the informal part built by volunteers, active citizens, and informal groups. Also, Ukrainians living in the V4 countries before the war had an essential role. The civil society in V4 countries filled the gap in the crisis and migration management systems and influenced the national policy and strategies in several cases. Despite this, we will follow the analyses of the actors involved in organising the support for Ukrainian refugees from the national level to the level of volunteers.

### The roles of the states in V4 countries in response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis

National laws and policies, operational frameworks, and legal tools are vital in ensuring the fundamental rights of migrants in each country. The relevant

policies include, for instance, laws that determine migrants' status and access to services and opportunities and policies that determine the role, structure, and obligations of different institutions responsible for delivering essential services (such as health, psychosocial support, food, and shelter) and their competences (Guadagno, 2016).

The flexibility of V4 states in providing support to refugees from Ukraine was particularly evident in the early stages of the war. In the short period after the outbreak of the armed conflict, legislative adjustments were made in the V4 countries to address the crisis and the need for integration support. The legislative issues are discussed more in Chapter 3. Still, here we will outline essential measures taken by the V4 states to address the acute crisis and support the integration of refugees from Ukraine. These are not identical from country to country, and the essence of government aid varies. However, they can be grouped into several areas described below. At the beginning of the war, government assistance focused on legislative changes to increase border crossings' capacity, define refugees' legal status in V4 countries, and make their first months in host countries easier.

- Defining the legal status of refugees. In the Czech Republic, for example, this was a temporary protection status (Coll., 2022a). Slovakia changed the status from refugee to temporary refugee (Coll., 2022b). In Poland, the question of how Ukrainian refugees could receive legal status and what benefits they were entitled to was resolved almost immediately. A new special law assisting forcefully displaced Ukrainian citizens went from draft form to take full effect in a mere 16 days. These legal acts in V4 countries have contributed to many official assistance grants and especially their financial compensation, which, until the adoption of these laws, were carried out on a purely voluntary basis. Thanks to this legal arrangement, Ukrainian refugees had access to the necessities as ordinary citizens with respect to access to health care, education, or employment.
- Securing help on the borders. Although ordinary people and non-governmental organisations mainly took up border assistance in the early stages, the state's role was equally crucial in coordinating the aid, registering refugees, and keeping the situation safe.
- Allowing free transport. In some countries (e.g., Slovakia and Poland), trains and buses were free on presentation of a valid passport.
- Provision of financial support for refugees. Again, these measures varied in form and amount across the V4 countries and represented minimal financial humanitarian allowance for refugees from Ukraine to cover their basic needs.
- Providing information. Providing essential information to people fleeing the war in Ukraine was, in some cases, also a role of the state. For example, in the second week of March, the Hungarian Government launched a 24/7 hotline in multiple languages and provided an email address for information requests. A similar helpline also worked in Slovakia. In Poland,

the government secured information and assistance desks (according to a report prepared by Wodzicki et al. (2022), more than 240,000 Ukrainian refugees have used information and assistance desks in Warsaw alone).

- Support for housing for refugees. This support was handled differently in each country. Firstly, by providing mass accommodation of a temporary nature, especially close to the border, but mainly by providing a housing allowance for people who have provided accommodation for refugees. The assistance amounts and conditions vary from one V4 country to another. More information is in Chapter 6 of this book.
- Support for entry into the labour market. There are several differences between the V4 countries in this area. In Poland, the integration of refugees into the labour market is one of the critical strategies to support them from the outset, as the country has had experience employing people from Ukraine for a long time and their resettlement is seen as an essential contribution to the country's economy; measures in other countries are not always fully open to the resettlement of refugees from Ukraine. For example, in Slovakia, the restriction for Ukrainian refugees to the labour market was lowered only since 1 January 2023 (cancellation of the requirement that third-country nationals be employed only in districts with an unemployment rate below 5% or cancellation of the labour market test requirement for those renewing a residence permit for employment). Unlike other V4 countries, the simplified employment procedure in Hungary does not exempt refugees from obtaining permits but makes them free of charge. Vacancies for refugees in Hungary are available only for those professions for which there is a labour shortage. Furthermore, refugees can only get a job for 20+ hours a week and one year with the possible extension of an additional year on request. More information is in Chapter 10 of this book.
- Access to health care. Every citizen of Ukraine legally residing in a V4 country is guaranteed access to the public health care system on the same basis as the citizens of V4 countries, excluding some special programmes like health resort treatment and rehabilitation. Still, the actual access to health care in V4 countries differs. Slovakia, for example, provides free access only to emergency and necessary care.
- Access to education. As children are among the large group of refugees from Ukraine, access to education is one of the critical measures. Nevertheless, the vast majority of refugee children do not attend school in the V4 countries for a variety of reasons. Instead, they continue their education online in Ukrainian schools or do not attend school at all. Innovative approaches such as facilitating the employment of Ukrainian citizens as teaching assistants (Poland) or distance learning in cooperation with the Ukrainian Ministry of Education (Czech Republic) have offered both economic and pragmatic short-term solutions (UNESCO, 2022).
- Government measures. Specific government measures aimed at Ukrainian refugees focus on free language courses, special social services, and

support for specific groups of refugees (children, elderly people, those with different disabilities, or Roma refugees).

- Coordination. The state provided management of the crisis in the individual countries by various coordinating bodies. It can be stated that all countries used their experience in managing the crisis gained during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, management of the crisis by the state depended on which responsible authorities and institutions had the issue of migration and refugees on their agenda. In Slovakia, the Central Crisis Headquarters, managed by the Ministry of Interior and Steering Committee on Migration, Integration and Inclusion of Foreigners, managed by the Migration Office of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, was responsible for managing the processes. The Hungarian Government established the National Humanitarian Coordination Council led by the Head of the Prime Minister's Office.

- Strategies and plans. In addition to specific laws, the V4 countries have adopted different types of strategies and plans related to the impact of the war in Ukraine. These plans were developed in close cooperation between the state, local governments, and NGOs in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In the case of Slovakia, for example, as noted by several NGOs, the need to address the crisis related to the refugee influx from Ukraine marked a new stage of cooperation with the state. Although both countries had existing strategies for integrating foreigners on their territory (the Concept of Integration of Foreigners and the State Integration Programme in Czechia and the Migration Policy of the Slovak Republic with a view to 2025), they adopted additional documents in response to the need to respond to the specific situation of the arrival of refugees from Ukraine.

- Financial support to local authorities and NGOs. Financial mechanisms to support activities directed to local governments and NGOs in V4 countries are another vital measure at the national level. In all V4 countries, humanitarian support to refugees in the early stages of the conflict, but in many cases also later, was secured through NGOs and local governments. However, they did not have the personnel, material, and financial capacity to provide support to the same extent. The state, therefore, played an essential role in their financial support. The allocation of financial resources from the EU has also helped to a large extent in this area. In Slovakia, for example, thanks to the EU funds, local governments and NGOs could refund their expenses connected with supporting Ukrainian refugees from 24 February 2023 until 31 December 2023. The Polish and Czech government also announced several calls to support initiatives related to refugee support from the state or EU budget.

- The last measure, although no less challenging, was the benefits from the V4 countries, except Hungary, going directly to help Ukraine and its people.

## The role of local and regional government in organising support for refugees from Ukraine

While the legal, political, and social determinants of the support for refugees from Ukraine from the regional and local governments show differences in the V4 countries, there are, nonetheless, essential similarities that are worthy of mention. As stated in the comparative analyses conducted in V4 countries (Soltész et al., 2021), the legal frameworks related to the competencies of local governments show considerable differences among the observed countries, but competencies of varying breadth and depth exist in housing, education, health care, and social care in all four countries. Before the Ukrainian refugee crises in V4 countries, the roles and tasks of local governments and local communities regarding refugee pre-integration and integration were unspecified. Only some local governments, in cooperation with non-governmental organisations, played an active role in this area and took actions to address asylum seekers, refugees, and other foreigners settling in their local communities.

A few days after the outbreak of the war, local governments started to get involved in the crisis, and they became the second central pillar of assistance (after NGOs and volunteers), especially in municipalities near border crossings. They organised help at border crossings and reception points using their funds and institutional and human resources. However, in most cases, they had problems with limited competencies, staffing, experience, and, last but not least, finances. The situation was different in localities close to the border, larger cities, and other localities in the V4 countries. In Slovakia, for example, the small municipality of Ubľa, with only 972 inhabitants and a border crossing point, had to cope with the arrival of refugees in the very first days. The municipality there started organising volunteers and humanitarian aid from all over Slovakia, setting up a refugee camp, and providing refugees with essential stuff and information. The refugee crisis lasted in Ubľa until the end of July 2022, during which time the population took care of more than 80,000 people fleeing the war in Ukraine. After the experience, the municipality is already prepared for a similar situation, and they could prepare a detention camp within two hours.

A good example within the V4 countries is shown by Poland, which has had experience in taking in refugees for several years. As stated by Kiss (2022), the humanitarian response in Poland was mainly organised and delivered at the municipal and local level. As each municipality and city council is different, the humanitarian infrastructure and coordination mechanisms depend on the region and the local actors. Local governments often arranged housing and social support, and they generally had a positive approach to collaborating with local and national NGOs. The adopted special law (Journal of Laws, 2022) transferred competencies from the central administration to regional representatives of the government. Progressive and exploratory committees and councils existed before the war in several Polish municipalities that

worked with foreign communities to improve social integration. Podgórska et al. (2023) find common success factors in humanitarian crisis response in the Polish border cities of Lublin and Lusk. These factors include previous local emergency response experience, empowerment of social actors, diverse stakeholder involvement, and effective management and coordination of individual efforts. The 2022 crisis prompted changes in local governance, particularly in local inclusion, integration policies, and the empowerment of third-sector organisations and their human resources.

The Municipality of Budapest established refugee coordinating meetings, which provided an effective platform for exchanging practical information and strengthening referral mechanisms. Online meetings open to the general public were held weekly, with approximately 30 organisations joining regularly. The Municipality also set up the help.budapest.hu website for those in need of shelter. As the Office of the Mayor of Budapest held a risk assessment meeting on 22 February, the Municipality opened a shelter on 24 February 2022 (Kiss, 2022).

Information from a follow-up survey carried out in municipalities in the Czech Republic in June 2022 (Jelínková & Hornek, 2022) shows that municipalities managed the reception of Ukrainian refugees despite significant differences, thanks to their deployment beyond the scope of their duties and thanks to a non-negligible degree of voluntary deployment. Moreover, municipalities repeatedly emphasised that having dealt with the pandemic, they had another challenging task in which they would need more support.

The size of the municipalities determined the nature of the assistance. Smaller towns logically could not provide comprehensive assistance, and thus, refugees often headed for large cities. According to Hungarian Interchurch Aid (2023), Budapest was a transit hub. Bratislava was similarly situated, with a direct link from the border. These cities had the character of a transfer station. Within the V4, Prague also had this character, but in Bratislava and Prague, many Ukrainians decided to stay. Warsaw was in a different situation. Due to its geographical location and as high number of Ukrainian citizens lived in it before the war, it was mostly a destination. Scholten and Penninx (2016) state that local governments, especially those in Europe's larger cities, have become increasingly active in developing their integration philosophies. From a sociological perspective, this development makes sense as it is at the local level that migrants meet others, find a job, have children, etc. It is also at this level that negative as well as positive aspects of diversity are experienced the most directly. Also, research shows that migrants identify much more with the city they live in than with the nation. In the case of V4 countries, hyper-diverse cities like Prague or Warsaw embrace diversity as part of the city's identity and as a positive anchoring point for local policies, sometimes despite their respective national models. Baszczak et al. (2022) state that most refugees living in Poland live in the most significant urban centres. This pattern of settlement and relocation decisions was primarily influenced by the greater chances of finding a job in major cities

and existing family networks and social ties between newly arrived refugees and Ukrainians already living there. The situation in other V4 countries is the same.

According to Gallová Kriglerová, Gažovičová, and Kadlečiková (2011), the successful integration of migrants relies heavily on local governments' response in cities and regions where foreigners settle. In V4 countries, local governments support refugees from Ukraine directly by organising services like shelters, integration programs, counselling, and helplines. Additionally, many municipalities provide indirect support by creating institutional and financial support for organisations, particularly NGOs, actively integrating foreigners within the city. The following can be considered as examples of good practice of support for refugees by local governments:

- Examples of very detailed mapping of the problems and needs of refugees from Ukraine in the contiguous territories, on which it was possible to build targeted measures.
- Different documents of strategy at the locality level are dedicated to supporting the integration of refugees from Ukraine (e.g., community development and integration strategy).
- Different committees and councils organised by local governments to coordinate support for Ukrainian refugees were set up before or after the war started (a stakeholder roundtable, a multidisciplinary team for integration, crisis committee).

### The role of non-governmental organisations in organising support for refugees from Ukraine

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are vital collaborators that engage in governance during crises, often serving as immediate responders and service providers. Traditional theories of the voluntary sector interpret the emergence of NGOs as a response to the absence of necessary social welfare and support not provided by public or private institutions during non-crisis times (Sandberg, 2015). NGOs serve as frontline responders during refugee crises because of their ability to act quickly and reactively by providing humanitarian aid and other social support, as well as engagement in the public sphere on behalf of refugees (Garkisch, Heidingsfelder & Beckmann, 2017). NGOs are crucial in bridging the gap between normative frameworks for refugee protection and the often reluctant or incapable state authorities. From loosely organised social movements to professionalised NGOs, various civil society networks are involved. Research acknowledges the ambiguous role of NGOs – they make a positive impact on refugee protection, but there is concern about their being overloaded with tasks that public authorities should handle. Additionally, studies highlight the diverse characteristics and arrangements of civil society engagement in this context (Pries, 2022).

NGOs play a critical role in supporting refugees from Ukraine in V4 countries, supplementing or substituting government efforts, as Mishchuk and

Vlasenko (2023) highlighted. As first-line responders, NGOs acted swiftly during the Ukrainian migration crisis, providing immediate support on the ground, especially when central governments were slower to respond. Their practical approach, networks, and expertise in managing crises and working with refugees have been advantageous. Bryan, Lea, and Hyánek (2023) emphasise Czech NGOs' collaborative and supportive role in the Ukrainian refugee crisis, citing their flexibility and agility, driven by pro-social values. While NGO dedication is valuable in crises, a sustainable governance system should not rely solely on this in the long term (Bryan, Lea & Hyánek, 2023; Mishchuk & Vlasenko, 2023).

NGOs in all countries were involved not only in humanitarian help on the borders, in information points or local communities, but they also facilitated housing, language instruction and education, and employment-related services and provided a variety of assistance and psychological and social help to Ukrainian refugees to help adapt and integrate into host societies. There are also many examples where NGOs' effort is focused on building a cohesive society, so activities are oriented not exclusively on Ukrainian refugees but also on the host society (see more about integration in Chapter 9). The specific NGOs which played essential roles were established by Ukrainians already living in V4 countries and/or refugees from Ukraine.

Many new actors started operations in these countries in response to the crisis (for example, IOM and UNICEF), supporting national organisations and groups. UNHCR and the respective governments set up the required coordination mechanisms. International organisations, meanwhile, are minimally involved in addressing the problems of migrants in Hungary as the government, which has turned its "anti-migrant" rhetoric into an ideological stance, has refrained from requesting help from these organisations for political reasons.

Despite the essential extent of the contribution of NGOs to the response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis and integration efforts, many of the organisations in V4 countries reported several challenges. As stated in a report by Kiss (2022), according to NGOs in Poland, volunteers had started to feel overwhelmed. They would soon risk not coping anymore while replacing volunteers with a professional workforce was challenging. All actors were finding it difficult to scale up, mainly because of lack of funding, challenges in recruitment, and organisational absorption capacities.

**Role of volunteers in response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis**

The V4 societies developed a strong initial solidarity response to the refugee influx, with ordinary citizens volunteering at border crossings and reception centres, providing spare rooms in their homes and donating money, food, and clothes to refugees. As stated by Byrska (2022), a vital role in providing support to war refugees from Ukraine was the mobilisation of Polish society and of Ukrainians staying in Poland before the war. A similar

situation was in Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. According to the Polish Economic Institute, in the first three months after the outbreak of the full-scale war, 77% of adult Poles got involved in helping war refugees by donating money, clothes, food, informal or formal volunteering, offering accommodation, helping refugees through employment or helping them find employment, providing or organising transport from the border for refugees, etc. (Baszczak et al., 2022).

Aid for sudden events such as the refugee crisis often emerges spontaneously, disorganised and involving creativity. In the initial phase, aid was spontaneous and very little organised (Baszczak et al., 2022). On 25 February, volunteers started to bring the first supplies of water, food, and clothing to the border crossings, but they also started to set up tents, which was inevitable given the time of year (HIA, 2023). In addition to humanitarian aid, money was also collected. These often served as pocket money for refugees who continued westward (Grzymała-Kazłowska, Downarowicz & Wydra, 2023). States bordering Ukraine also had to focus much more on internal transport to move refugees within the state and also to support and strengthen interstate lines (Madej, Myśliwiec & Tybuchowska-Hartlińska, 2023). An essential element, although very limited, was mainly the provision of at least basic information. The information concerned how and where they could travel, whether any accommodation was possible, etc. Over time, with the addition of legislation, accommodation, and other options, the information started to become more comprehensive. Also, many volunteers were Ukrainians who had voluntarily immigrated before the war and provided essential information and support. Volunteers could join NGOs or municipalities that operated on borders or at the local level.

As an example of grassroots assistance and NGOs in the one year since the outbreak of war in Ukraine, we present data from a report prepared by the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development in Slovakia based on data collection from 160 NGOs. During the monitoring period February 2022 to February 2023, the following is noted:

- The volume of financial collections totalled EUR 17,070,460;
- The volume of humanitarian aid totalled 13,782,71 tonnes;
- Number of man-hours of volunteer work: 497,599;
- Man-hours of integration activities: 676,925;
- Approximate total value of the work done by volunteers and integration experts: EUR 4,357,484.04 (calculated using the minimum wage coefficient of 3.71 Euro) (Gindlová, Miklian & Gono, 2023).

The support of volunteers continues in the integration phase of refugees. However, it is possible to state that their involvement is more through organisations, more managed, and volunteers are involved in various support programmes focused on integration.

**Lessons learned and recommendations**

States bear the principal responsibility for assisting and protecting migrants during emergencies. However, reducing migrants' vulnerability is a much broader endeavour, which depends on efforts by various actors, both governmental and non-governmental, in-home, host, and transit countries; and local, national, and international levels. Their work (or lack thereof) directly influences the level to which migrants enjoy fundamental rights and access essential services, resources, and assistance before, during, and after emergencies – and, therefore, determines whether and how they will be affected by hazards.

As the analysis has shown, the multilevel governance approach to crisis management has proven effective in many cases in the V4 countries. Nevertheless, the involvement of entities from various levels and spheres of influence can challenge the effectiveness of the governance mechanism, particularly during crises when the diverse array of actors is a defining characteristic of the response (Sahin-Mencütek et al., 2022). Without adequate coordination, there is a potential for a suboptimal response, and the envisioned multilevel governance structure may devolve into disjointed approaches at both central and local levels (Scholten & Penninx, 2016). Additionally, the persistent context in this scenario is the unpredictability and transience of actions, along with the risk that impromptu measures might be centrally implemented as targeted actions without proper planning, evaluation, and legal authority (Sahin-Mencütek et al., 2022).

Given the social and economic changes in the region, it is unrealistic to anticipate ongoing support for Ukrainian refugees from the V4 governments. The aid was already being reduced, and its duration was shortened, considering the constraints of limited resources and the intention to incentivise Ukrainians to participate actively in the labour market. However, governments must adopt a more proactive approach by simplifying procedures for recognising the qualifications of skilled professionals and ensuring broader access to essential services, including language courses, retraining opportunities, daycare facilities, or actual access to education for children. The vulnerable groups of refugees need to be tracked more specifically.

Many cities in the V4 countries have yet to take strategic action on integration at the local government level. According to Soltész et al. (2021), policymakers in local governments should be aware that the "equality on paper" for Ukrainians or any other refugees in national legislation is not enough for their successful integration. According to Jacková (2021), local governments in V4 countries must consider the diversity brought by Ukrainian refugees when developing strategic documents. They can create a separate strategy for integration or adopt culturally sensitive policies involving interdisciplinary advisory bodies like councils with refugee participation. Refugee integration should be integrated with broader social policies, addressing everyday needs among socially disadvantaged groups. Soltész et al. (2021) emphasise the

active role of local governments in crafting and executing national integration policies, highlighting the importance of incorporating unique city needs into broader strategies. Adequate funding from state and EU budgets is crucial for supporting local integration projects in municipalities with significant numbers of foreigners.

The response of NGOs to the immediate crisis after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine and their subsequent activities in supporting refugees from Ukraine proved crucial in the V4 countries. On the other hand, this response meant an enormous change for many NGOs. Thanks to the financial resources allocated to the projects;, many have increased their staff capacities significantly, which, however, requires financial resources to maintain in the long term. In V4 countries, NGOs struggled with financial stability and sustainability before the Ukraine war outbreak. If these organisations remain committed to supporting the integration of refugees from Ukraine, creating a stable financial environment is crucial. We agree with Bryan, Lea, and Hyánek (2023) that NGOs' resilience strategies during the Ukrainian crisis are temporary solutions to systematic problems. The findings strongly suggest that while NGOs can act resiliently in the short term, a more systematic response led by the government is required. Ansell, Sørensen, and Torfing (2021) argue that having foresight, protection, and resilience is insufficient in turbulent situations. They propose that in the face of turbulence, the public sector should employ robust strategies wherein creative and agile public organisations adapt to the emergence of disruptive issues by establishing networks and partnerships with both the private sector and civil society.

Meanwhile, what we might call "solidarity fatigue" begins in V4 countries. The cost-of-living crisis has hit low and medium-income families in host societies and created a context in which Russian propaganda could be more successful. Underlying problems in these countries, such as a lack of affordable housing or scarce childcare capacity, have been exacerbated (Eurostat, 2023). As stated by Mishchuk and Vlasenko (2023), based on the research of social attitudes toward refugees in V4 countries conducted in September 2022, even though the initial enthusiastic welcome of refugees by the societies now subsided, societal support for the reception/accommodation of Ukrainians in V4 countries generally remains strong. The majority of the region's population, apart from Slovaks, considers hosting Ukrainians fleeing the war to be the right move and believes it is necessary to continue supporting the refugees either in a total or reduced amount. A majority of Slovaks, for instance, believe refugee support should be slashed and/or discontinued. Factors like historical pro-Russian sentiment in Slovakia influence attitudes toward Ukrainians in V4 countries. Public opinions on refugees are shaped by respondents' education, finances (with lower income and education levels correlating with negative views), and information sources (criticism higher among social media and personal communication consumers). Political affiliation also plays a role, as sympathisers of anti-refugee parties tend to express more critical views, particularly noticeable in Slovakia.

Finally, based on the analyses, we agree with Mishchuk and Vlasenko (2023) that the region would be prudent to develop a more comprehensive and long-term policy approach. Ukrainians, indeed, will likely remain a part of V4 societies long after the war is over. On their part, Ukrainians could actively contribute to local societies and allow host communities to learn more about Ukrainian culture, values, and their struggle for freedom. Cooperation between the V4 governments and Kyiv can forge win-win solutions that benefit Ukraine's postwar recovery and provide a sustained link between the societies and economies even after some refugees return home.

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# 5 The first step

## Organising support at the location of refugees' temporary stay

*Pavel Hulec*

**Introduction**

The first hours in destination countries are usually critical for refugees. People fleeing their countries of origin can suffer from physical or psychological trauma, precariousness, and uncertainty about the future. The form of reception in new countries can affect not only the refugees' immediate well-being but also their prospects for future integration into the broader society. Assistance in the "first steps" of the refugees is thus a critical topic, and this chapter aims to contribute to this discussion and identify good practices in immediate support of the Ukrainian refugees after their arrival in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary. The "first step" practices describe measures focused on rapid adaptation to the environment in destination countries and smooth settling in, which were implemented in the first days and weeks after the start of the immigration wave from Ukraine. Good practices successfully helped the refugees to identify their rights and obligations after arrival or quickly facilitated decent living. The most common examples of good practices thus include mainly services providing essential information and schemes providing humanitarian aid.

Before the war, there were evident similarities in the political landscape and policy decisions in the V4 countries following the 2015 migration crisis. Unwillingness to integrate and assist refugees was a dominant political position in Central Europe. Overwhelmingly, the official state policy towards newly arrived refugees became either passivity or their detention in large facilities, which shared many characteristics with prison camps – "from the numbers of people living there in total dependence, to the presence of staff who provide both assistance and control, to the operating procedures that resemble those of a kind of military space, and so on" (Fassin, 2012, 150). The space of refugee integration vacated by the state administration had to be filled by the NGOs, who were also forced to work in uncertain and sometimes even hostile environments (Bryan, Lea & Hyánek, 2023). Ukraine refugee crisis in 2022, especially the nature of the emergency response and organisations of "first steps", clearly revealed the consequences of previous political decisions and the inadequacy of existing systems.

The following section describes the identified good practices and their dominant characteristics in all V4 countries. The text concludes with a brief discussion and lessons learned from the development of the organisation of support of the refugees.

**Organising support in the V4 countries**

The unexpected invasion of Ukraine by the Russian army triggered an unprecedented wave of refugees to the V4 countries. The states of the Visegrad Group and their inhabitants had to mobilise their resources quickly to soften the impact of the massive influx of people who were forced to abandon their homes, often without their identity documents, money, and necessary everyday items. As we can see below, the responses of individual states varied, but we can identify several important shared characteristics of systems of the initial aid. Similarities partly stem from the activation of the EU-wide Temporary Protection Directive on 4 March 2023. The Directive defines the obligations of EU countries towards the Ukrainian refugees. It grants an extensive range of rights to the beneficiaries of temporary protection, e.g., residence permits, access to social welfare, access to education, or access to medical care (European Commission, 2023). The "first step" policy in V4 countries and searching for good practices are influenced not just by international obligations but also by path-dependent processes and past (in)experience in managing incoming refugees, which V4 countries share.

In February 2022, the V4 countries reacted very similarly to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, although there were some notable differences, too. Czech politicians and most of the Czech population (Červenka & AVČR, 2022) voiced strong support for Ukrainian refugees coming to the Czech Republic. In March 2022, the first statistics showed that the Czech Republic hosts the highest number of refugees per capita (ČTK, 2023), but the distribution of Ukrainian refugees in the Czech Republic was highly uneven. The larger Czech cities in the western half of the country (Pilsen, Prague, Karlovy Vary) were especially overloaded with new arrivals from Ukraine (Kroupová, 2022). A high proportion of refugees in the Czech population created pressure to develop innovative practices to lower the burden on public infrastructure and aid refugees in their new environments as soon as possible.

Poland has quickly become the country receiving the largest number of refugees from Ukraine. Public infrastructure came under enormous strain, with the need to deal with the arrivals and provide essential services at the borders and the migrants' selected destinations. State officials supported Ukraine but did not implement state-wide measures to assist the refugees for three weeks (Byrska, 2022, 5). The brunt of the initial response was left, on the one hand, to civil society organisations and volunteers (Byrska, 2022), on the other hand, to municipalities, which set up their local systems of aid and assistance (for the case of the city of Lublin, see Podgórska et al., 2023).

Large cities were a significant agent responsible for much of the care of newly arrived refugees. Cities were introducing new measures to help them cope with the unprecedented arrival of migrants.

Slovakian authorities quickly supported Ukraine after the Russian invasion and took measures to take in war refugees. Slovakia offered temporary protection status to a broad group of people from Ukraine, including non-Ukrainian nationals, and partially opened its social security system to refugees. Despite the inclusive state policies, local and regional administrations with NGOs played the most prominent part in refugees' initial support. In some cases (e.g., housing), the state administration even lagged in fulfilling its obligations and providing necessary support for local agents (Pędziwiatr & Magdziarz, 2023, 355–358).

The situation in Hungary differed from the other V4 countries in several important respects. Firstly, the infrastructure for the integration of foreign nationals was practically destroyed after 2015, and secondly, the attitude of the ruling elites towards the situation in Ukraine was much more ambivalent. On the one hand, the public and, to a lesser extent, the political representation emphasised solidarity with the refugees. On the other hand, Hungarian politicians openly questioned sanctions towards Russia in the conflict (Pepinsky, Reiff & Szabo, 2023). The ambivalent position of the Hungarian government affected the response to the influx of refugees. The central governmental institutions did not adopt large-scale emergency measures or ad-hoc refugee policy. Korkut and Fazekas (2023) state that the official Hungarian policy towards the Ukrainians fleeing from war is characterised by passivity and the transfer of almost all responsibility directly to municipalities and civil society. "Hungary tacitly facilitated the Ukrainians' protection but did not put any institutions in place for their long-term reception" (Korkut & Fazekas, 2023, 23). The Hungarian government has not provided sufficient administrative or financial capacity to host the refugees. This was demonstrated by the fact that, unlike in other V4 countries, the disbursement of direct financial support to Ukrainian refugees was lengthy, taking in some cases up to 2 months to reach the beneficiaries (Pędziwiatr & Magdziarz, 2023, 357).

With the expected arrival of hundreds of thousands of refugees, processes of development of new aid mechanisms and modification of existing instruments began. Assistance was primarily provided in three areas: information, welcoming and support centres, and direct financial assistance. The chapter will describe good practices in these three areas. The last topic to be described in the chapter is good practices in the area of aid coordination in the early stages of the migration crisis.

### Providing Information

One of the first problems refugees are forced to deal with is orientation in a foreign environment. Ukrainian migrants came to countries with different

official languages, public administration systems, and public services. At the same time, the new arrivals had to legalise their stay on the territory of another state and obtain all the necessary documents in complex bureaucratic processes. Due to the large influx of people, ad-hoc information channels started to emerge to help obtain essential information about rights and obligations in the destination countries.

With specialised websites aimed at Ukrainian refugees, the internet has become the dominant source of information for refugees. One of the first ambitious Czech civil society initiatives to help the refugees was the internet platform "Stand with Ukraine" (Stojíme za Ukrajinou), started by the movement Česko.Digital (2023). The platform was intended to be a comprehensive and extensive source of information for newcomers to the Czech Republic. In the Czech, English, Russian, and Ukrainian versions, they could search for services in 13 categories, including education, accommodation, health care, and more. A unique feature of the Stand for Ukraine platform was the ability to upload help offers from volunteers. The intended goal was to directly connect actors offering a specific form of assistance with those who demand help. The authors of the platform (Česko.Digital, 2023) report that approximately 370,000 people sought help, and 217,000 people offered help. The site received broad attention from the Czech media and won the annual Crystal Magnifying Glass award in the Public Service category in 2022 (Internet Info, 2022).

The non-governmental organisations Mareena and Human Rights League were responsible for the launch of the website similar to the above-mentioned "Stand with Ukraine" called "UkraineSlovakia.sk" (Mareena & Human Rights League, 2023), which also served as a comprehensive source of information for Ukrainian refugees. The website offers information in six main categories: entry and residence, [emergency] services and contacts, health, finance; life events; education and work. Every category includes FAQs, short articles on relevant topics or recommendations, and useful contacts. The website is available in Slovak, Ukrainian, and English language. The website is still updated regularly at the time of writing this text. The authors regularly post relevant information for Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia and persons helping the refugees.

The internet was not the only potential source for quick orientation in a new environment. Essential information for newly arrived refugees regarding employment, temporary protection status, or social security was also available via phone on "Infoline" (Infolinka), operated by the International Organization for Migration Czechia (IOM Czechia, 2022). The telephone line was available every weekday from 9 am to 5 pm with operators speaking Czech, English, Ukrainian, and Russian.

Telephone lines were also extended in Poland, where a specialised Portal in Polish, English, Ukrainian, and Russian (To Proste Foundation, 2023) was created, which referred interested parties to telephone numbers offering different services. Polish NGOs operated mainly specialised helplines

offering psychological aid (provided, for example, by the Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę Foundation and the Orange Foundation), legal counseling (e.g., by the Nomada Association), or housing assistance. Public bodies typically operated more general-oriented helplines. The Polish Office for Foreigners (2023) established a Ukraine-only hotline available on weekdays. In addition, the website of the Office for Foreigners contains essential written information on temporary protection and legal aspects of arrival in Poland. Information is also available in short videos in Polish with English, Ukrainian, and Russian subtitles.

Polish local and regional administrations operate separate helplines and information services. Several voivodships (e.g., West Pomeranian Voivodship (2022) or Pomeranian Voivodship (2022)) offered their general information helplines, which assisted the refugees in diverse areas. Similarly, big Polish cities contributed their resources to creating their independent helplines in addition to other services (e.g., support centres, see below). The Capital City of Warsaw (Warszawa, 2022) launched its hotline almost immediately after the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and integrated the hotline into the system of assistance in the city.

An important prerequisite for successful refugee information provision is accessibility. Obvious, but not always fulfilled in the case of public administration, is the ability to provide information in the refugees' native language, i.e., Ukrainian or Russian. A clear advantage of website-based instruments is their immediate availability and repeatability of search. At any time of the day, the refugees can search the websites for relevant services. These qualities are difficult and often very costly to replicate in other information channels.

### Welcoming and support centres

The unprecedented number of refugees created an acute need to quickly manage hundreds of thousands of people arriving in the V4 countries. Either on the borders or in their temporary destinations, the refugees had to legalise their stay and obtain essential goods and services. Local agents set up contact centres to concentrate their resources and offer several services in one place to a large number of people simultaneously. These larger facilities often could not provide personalised services due to the scale of their operations, but they served as a clear destination and a guidepost to more specialised services.

First support centres began to function at the border crossings with Ukraine. A group of six church-affiliated NGOs set up "reception centres" on the Hungary-Ukraine border that were offering immediate aid, including temporary accommodation (1–3 days) in emergency shelters and repurposed containers (operated, for example, by the Hungarian Maltese Charity Service). The refugees received food packages, hot beverages, or clothing. Employees of the NGOs and volunteers also assisted the refugees with transportation and travel plans. Several reception centres are still in operation (e.g., in the town of Záhony operated by the Hungarian Reformed Charity Service).

In February, the first aid initiatives began emerging also on the Slovakia-Ukraine border. At the largest border crossing, Vyšné Nemecké, the non-governmental organisation Mareena started to provide "first contact services" (Mareena, 2022) on 26 February 2023. The refugees could obtain basic information about life in Slovakia and the rights and obligations arising from their stay in Slovak territory. Mareena staff also facilitated contacts with consulates and organised transport for migrants to Slovak cities. Additionally, active monitoring of the situation took place to prevent human trafficking and abuse of the vulnerability of refugees.

Local and regional authorities were most often responsible for the organisation of the support centres further inside the V4 countries. In the Czech Republic, the first steps of newly arrived Ukrainian refugees led to their nearest "Regional Assistance Centres for Refugees" (Krajské asistenční centrum pro uprchlíky, often called by its acronym "KACPU") set up by the Czech regional authorities ("kraje" in Czech) in cooperation with local NGOs and volunteers. A total of 19 regional centres (minimum one per region) have been established to assist in arriving refugees (MV ČR, 2023). The centres played a significant role in coping with the entire refugee wave and are still functioning today under the auspice of the Ministry of the Interior. With the help of KACPU, the refugees were to legalise their stay in the Czech Republic and obtain a certificate of temporary protection. In addition, they were to serve as a signpost with information. Refugees could only apply for humanitarian accommodation through KACPU. However, the specific range of other services offered directly at KACPU sites varied from region to region, e.g., humanitarian packages with food and basic needs, medical assistance, and basic psychological assistance were common but not a standard part of KACPU's operation. Different refugee expectations were also associated with different levels of services. The Ukrainian workshop participants described the KACPU as a place for processing necessary documents and chose to arrange other services elsewhere. However, basic administrative services and the legalisation of refugees' residence permits were handled well by the regional centres, and staff (including volunteers and employees of NGOs) managed to deal with requests in a timely manner.

Towns and cities became the dominant force behind the support centres. The MOST/MICT Integration Centre in Pilsen is a functional example of a comprehensive programme for war refugees. The local government provided a large building in the city centre, which has become a focal point for organising a local response to the migration crisis. Three local NGOs and a large number of volunteers, who were often part of the Ukrainian diaspora, were initially involved in running the centre. Since its opening, many Ukrainian citizens have frequented the integration centre. According to the employees of the organisation People in Need (Člověk v tísni), around 100 adult clients and tens of children visited the centre daily. The centre offered a broad spectrum of services, including "social counselling, psychologic support, assistance with the search for housing, jobs, medical doctors or nurseries

and primary schools […]. MICT also offers humanitarian help; it distributes clothing and basic hygiene products" (Burzová, 2022).

The city of Gdansk in northern Poland similarly set up a complex system of help for refugees from Ukraine. The Gdansk administration opened three specialised centres, each offering different services[1]. To streamline and monitor the assistance for Ukrainian refugees, the city of Gdansk issued the "Gdansk Helps Ukraine Card" (Gdansk, 2022b), which entitled its bearers to receive a relief package every two days for a maximum of 30 days without any additional documentation. The refugees could apply for the card online or in person at selected facilities. Gdansk Foundation (Gdansk, 2022a) also launched an extensive fundraising campaign to cover the costs of NGOs and volunteers assisting refugees in Gdansk.

Slovak municipalities were quick to pitch in to help, too. In the context of Slovak cities, the Assistance Centre Bottova (ACB) in Bratislava stands out in particular for its scope, which was set up with the cooperation of the municipality, state administration organisations, non-profit organisations, a private organisation providing space and several volunteers (Hlavne mesto SR Bratislava, 2023). The assistance centre was massive, with a pre-assumed maximum capacity of up to 2,500 refugees per day who could be provided essential services. The dominant part of the centre was the 25 foreign police stations where refugees could apply for temporary protection status. In addition, the centre also functioned as a rest and hygiene facility or a place for children to play. The centre offered legal advice and medical assistance, including acute treatment and other services. The centre's operators believe that the centre created a "systematic infrastructure for the long-term delivery of quality services for Ukrainians" in Bratislava (Hlavne mesto SR Bratislava, 2023).

Similar, smaller centres were established in other Slovak municipalities. In Košice, Michalovce, and Nitra, the Slovak Humanitarian Council with UNHCR and UNICEF established the "Blue Dots", which were presented as "safe spaces" for Ukrainian refugees (Slovenská humanitární ráda, 2023). Blue Dots offered a broad array of services, e.g., psychosocial aid, provision of information, and contact with medical specialists. The services were available for all refugees, but the Blue Dots were openly specialised in particularly vulnerable groups of refugees (e.g., lone parents, LGBTQI, and people with disabilities) and families with children. Blue Dots personnel offered service in Slovak, Ukrainian, Russian, and English.

Similarly, WroMigrant Infopoint in the city of Wroclaw in the southern part of the country became the central hub of initial refugee assistance (Wrocław Centre for Social Development, 2022). The Infopoint was established in 2020 near the busy city centre, but the demand for the Infopoint's services significantly increased after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The employees of WroMigrant Infopoint provide consultations for refugees in the field of necessary legal documentation, education and Polish language courses, housing, employment, or health care. Infopoint also offers specialised

workshops and other events besides the regular, day-to-day consultations. The workshops usually focus on a particular issue (e.g., legalisation of stay and job search) and provide in-depth information. WroMigrant Infopoint also released several multilingual publications in Polish, English, Ukrainian, and, in some cases, Russian language. Local stakeholders highlighted especially a guide to the city of Wroclaw for refugees, which includes a map of essential services in the city.

One of the largest Polish informal initiatives created in reaction to Ukraine's invasion also operated in Wroclaw. The volunteer group PKP Wroclaw started the "Centre for Refugee Support" (Centrum Wsparcia Uchodźców) initially to help refugees arriving at the Wroclaw railway station and provide direct material support and basic information (PKP Wroclaw, 2022). Since March 2022, the Centre has been managed by the Ukraine Foundation, which expanded available services. The refugees could receive legal advice, employment counselling and psychological support. The Centre's services constantly evolved due to the changing needs of the refugees (Fundacja Ukraina, 2022).

Besides the more general support centres, highly specialised and comprehensive services were already being developed to assist migrants in their place of residence shortly after arrival. An example of a specialised service centre was the DUMKA/ДУМКА programme run by the Agency for Migration and Adaptation AMIGA, which offered psychosocial support for refugees in Prague, focusing on coping with war trauma and the uncertainty of their new environment. At the same time, they also provided services to families with disadvantaged children, for whom a special educator or speech therapist was available (AMIGA, 2022).

Essential characteristics of the functional support centre for refugees are not just the structure of services it provides but also its capacity and physical layout. Without sufficient capacity for the centre's workers, the centres cannot meet the refugees' demands, leading to tensions, long waiting lines, and problematic situations. Overlooked aspects of the support centres are the buildings in which they are located. In the case of the Czech Republic, several regional assistance centres were located in buildings without barrier-free access. Given the composition of the refugee population, with a significant proportion of elderly people and mothers with young children, this factor may also have a substantial impact on the practical functioning of the support centres.

### Direct Financial Help

In most cases, the refugees who came to the V4 countries lost their source of income and found it challenging to manage their savings. Thus, besides material assistance, the actors prepared several forms of direct cash-based assistance to help the refugees settle, fulfil their more specific individual needs, and keep their dignity in difficult social circumstances.

To provide refugees with the necessities of life, the Czech government has approved the provision of the so-called "Humanitarian Benefit" (humanitární

dávka) for refugees with approved temporary protection in the amount of CZK 5,000[2] per month for one adult. Individuals could receive the benefit for a maximum of six consecutive periods of time[3], which was one of the most generous schemes of direct financial support in the V4 countries. (Pędziwiatr & Magdziarz, 2023, 356). The refugees were not eligible for the humanitarian benefit only if they received accommodation, food, and hygiene products for free (Úřad práce ČR, 2022). There was a massive interest in the humanitarian benefit, which was positively evaluated by the respondents. While it was possible to apply online, this required a Czech electronic identity document; most refugees had to apply for the benefit in person, and the Labour Offices could not provide the necessary capacity for an increased number of clients on short notice. The applicants were forced to wait several hours to submit the necessary forms.

Cash-based assistance was also provided by non-state agents. Hungarian Reformed Charity Service provided the refugees with cash-based assistance in the form of grants and "humanitarian vouchers". The refugees were eligible for grants up to HUF 30,000[4] based on an interview and the "vulnerability questionnaire" results. "Humanitarian vouchers" were similarly issued after the interview and completion of the questionnaire, which determined the number of received vouchers. Each voucher was worth HUF 50,000 and could be redeemed for any goods except tobacco and alcohol in more than 17,000 shops across Hungary. This voucher system was relatively widespread and was provided by several organisations, including IOM (Kiss, Hegedüs & Somogyi 2023, 50).

In any direct cash-based assistance, there is a risk of stigmatisation of the beneficiaries, which could undermine their integration into wider society. The benefits should be universal, i.e., without means-testing and other additional requirements and widely available (as in the case of the Czech Republic) to counteract the tendency towards stigmatisation.

### Organising volunteers and coordination

The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent migration wave elicit an enormous reaction from civil society in the central European countries. Organisations, groups, and individuals donated an unprecedented amount of material aid and provided thousands of hours of volunteer work. Coordination of the donations, professionals, and volunteers proved to be a challenge in itself. The actors in the V4 countries had to adopt effective mechanisms for coordination to avoid obstacles in delivering aid, often without the direct participation of the state governments. For example, the Czech government dedicated unprecedented funds to helping the Ukrainian refugees[5]. However, the state administration in the Czech Republic (as well as in other V4 states) was only minimally involved in the direct assistance. Most of the work was delegated to local and regional authorities, NGOs, and individual volunteers. Shortly after the Russian invasion, the Czech minister of

labour and social affairs made "an appeal to the people with good and honest heart" (Matoušek, 2022) to accommodate the refugees in their own homes. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs later implemented the "Solidarity contribution" (solidární příspěvek) that should compensate private providers of free accommodation for Ukrainian refugees (MPSV, 2022, see also the chapter on housing assistance). Due to state institutions' inactivity, most of the coordination had to be conducted on the local level.

The coordination issue became especially critical in Hungary because of the government's passive attitude. The absence of timely official government assistance led, almost immediately after the start of the conflict in Ukraine, to the creation of informal initiatives aimed at coordinating the provision of services for refugees and informing incoming refugees about basic needs. The most common form of this assistance was open groups on the social network Facebook (e.g., "Help in trouble #Debrecen" or "Segítségnyújtás (Ukraina, Kárpátalja)"), which had several hundred thousand members in total. Through these platforms, it was possible to connect volunteers offering assistance to individual refugees and share information on available assistance programmes, relevant legislation, and financial assistance. Members of the FB groups also helped citizens of Ukraine with translation, travel planning, or finding accommodation or specialised doctors. With the help of Facebook, informal collections for refugees were also organised. An example of an informal, individual-led collection was the initiative by Adam Barna, who used his bookshop to collect supplies for refugees. Facebook and other social networks have proved to be good tools, especially for organising collections of material aid. They allowed for better aid targeting, identifying items most needed, and distributing materials to the most affected areas.

The coordination of NGOs on the national level was also conducted informally, without any state institution. The International Organisation for Migration managed a working group consisting of the employees of the Red Cross, UNHCR, Baptist Charity Service, Association of Roma Women of the 21st Century, and EMMA Association. Representatives of the participating organisations met regularly once a month and discussed the ideal coverage of services for refugees, the distribution of medicines and other necessities of life, and case management of complex cases of arriving individuals and families. IOM had a dedicated funding pool that it provided to the other organisations involved in addressing specific, concrete problems.

Several of the platforms for coordination were established on previously existing initiatives and informal organisations. The Hlavák Initiative, which before the war had already been dedicated to helping refugees after they arrived at Prague's Main Station, also received media attention a few weeks after the invasion began. The volunteers of the initiative provide refugees with basic information about accommodation, interpretation, and administrative duties after their arrival in the Czech Republic, and the organisation came to the fore primarily in connection with Roma refugees from Ukraine who had no other means of relocation and were forced to stay at the Main Station in

unsatisfactory conditions. The volunteers of the Hlavák Initiative thus began to provide, in addition to basic "first arrival" information, humanitarian aid, especially food aid (Rychlíková, 2022).

Newly established local support centres (see above) often became hubs for organising volunteers and helping organisations. Local stakeholders involved in the MICT emphasised the importance of cooperation and coordination that was institutionalised with the integration centre's creation. The representatives of local administration and NGOs met regularly to discuss and coordinate effective responses to the changing needs of the refugees (Rychlíková, 2022). The MICT centre is in operation in late 2023, although in a more limited capacity.

The internet became one of the main instruments in coordinating and recruiting volunteers. Especially social networks proved to be an effective channel, an example being the presence in the first weeks of the war in the town of Záhony on the border with Ukraine, which was under pressure from refugees. Volunteers, in cooperation with the mayor's office, helped with the distribution of material aid and the preparation of refugee accommodation, but also with translation, as most of the police officers present did not speak English.

Many websites prepared to provide information to the Ukrainian refugees also provided an opportunity to publish individual offers of help. The website #KtoPomozeUkrajine (2023) is aimed primarily at potential volunteers in Slovakia. The website contains helpful information for refugees about essential services, including a map of services. However, most of the site's content is dedicated to individuals who would like to help and to organisations that have requested volunteer services. Volunteers were primarily requested in the areas of accommodation, transport, and assistance with contacting the authorities.

Effective coordination and participation of different types of agents was a crucial factor in providing all types of first-step services. Most of the coordination models used in the V4 countries successfully dealt with the challenges in the early phases of the refugee wave in early 2022. Most of the essential services were available for most of the Ukrainian refugees, which is more impressive considering the limited participation of the state administration in the provision of services.

## Lessons learned and recommendations

The above-mentioned examples of good practice contributed to improvement in the life of the refugees after crossing the border in one of the critical areas, e.g., housing, employment, legal assistance, and local language. In every topic covered in this chapter – providing information, support centres, direct financial help, and organisation of support – there are mechanisms that assisted in effective aid to Ukrainian refugees in the V4 countries and mitigated the risks of social exclusion.

There is one evident shared characteristic of the identified good practices – a minimal number of examples originating in the state administration. Good "first step" practices were developed by informal citizen initiatives, NGOs, and local and regional administration. NGOs, in particular, are often considered to be a typical source of new, innovative techniques in social integration or social work because of their narrower focus, direct contact with clients, and flexible work procedures. These qualities, which state administrations usually do not share, are especially beneficial during emergencies and other unexpected events when initial aid policies are essential. The identification of good practice primarily among the smaller, more informal groups is easily understood. Still, the design of migration policies of the V4 countries significantly contributed to the rigid and sometimes slow reactions of government agencies. Deliberately neglected development of the instruments of integration coupled with neoliberal austerity – either by choice or "by decay" (Saxonberg & Sirovátka, 2009) – is a clear obstacle to a more competent system of rapid response and integration.

Examples of efficient reactions to the needs of the refugees often show the importance of coordination and complementarity of different types of agents: volunteers, diasporas, NGOs, municipalities, international organisations, state agencies, and many more (Jelínková et al., 2023, 1–2). The relative success of the first response to the immigration of Ukrainians was largely the result of the spontaneous mobilisation of non-state resources, but answers to emergencies should be based on more robust foundations and clear commitment of the state institutions.

A crucial recommendation that emerges from the first-step practices in managing the 2022 refugee crisis is the purposeful building of assistance networks at different levels – national, regional, and local – that could be used in the event of a similar unforeseen event. In the future, it will not be possible to rely on the ad-hoc mobilisation of different actors; the state administration should actively advocate for creating and expanding aid networks and further motivate local governments to create their own networks.

The second recommendation concerns the continuous research of the needs of refugees and monitoring of their well-being. Scholars and universities in all V4 countries got immediately involved in exploring and evaluating the needs of refugees and support measures introduced. A good example of this practice can be found in the Czech Republic, where PAQ Research and the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences organised an extensive series of surveys titled "The Voice of the Ukrainians" (Hlas Ukrajinců; PAQ, 2022). The first written research report was the policy paper "Integration of the Ukrainian Migrants in the Czech Republic 2022+" (PAQ Research & České priority, 2022), which describes the capacities of the Czech educational, housing, and employment systems. The document also includes recommendations for a more effective integration policy. As part of the research, a panel of respondents was appointed during the spring of 2022 and asked about their experiences of the education system, employment, or

health care. Although not a form of direct refugee support, the research has become a source of relevant data that public authorities also draw on, and published research reports have always attracted much media attention. In the Czech context, it is a unique undertaking that has systematically mapped the lives of refugees in the Czech Republic since their arrival and captured their changing situation. It is crucial to start early with research to inform public policy, describe potential bottlenecks, and quickly identify good practices.

## Notes

1  The first centre offered medical care, psychological care, assistance with housing, or searching for employment. The second centre offered mainly temporary accommodation. The third centre specialised in the management of material help and voluntary donations.
2  Average exchange rate of the central bank as of 2 October 2023: EUR 1 = CZK 24.460.
3  After this period, the benefits were lowered by approximately one-third.
4  Average exchange rate of the central bank as of 2 October 2023: EUR 1 = HUF 387.43.
5  Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala publicly stated that the overall support for Ukrainian refugees in the Czech Republic exceeded CZK 38 billion (Fiala, 2023).

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# 6    Assistance with housing

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## Introduction

The exact scale of the largest population movement in Europe since the end of the Second World War is difficult to quantify. However, it is known that in one year more than eight million people have fled Ukraine to seek temporary or permanent asylum in other European countries. Organising assistance and meeting basic needs such as shelter has been complicated in recent months by the fact that most refugees are on the move due to the unpredictability of the situation. Some have crossed and returned, while others have used Ukraine's neighbouring countries as transit routes and the services offered there as a temporary solution. Regardless of whether V4 countries are treated as destination places or transit routes, provision of shelter and care for refugees is a key issue, especially given the significant number of people who have been here for a year and the number of people who currently have nowhere else to go.

Refugees typically choose their temporary or permanent destination based on personal connections (CrisisReady, 2022; UNHC, 2022), and in most cases these connections also determine access to housing, employment, or integration services. However, there is also a number of refugees who do not have a network of contacts and require support from the civil or public sector.

This chapter presents models of transitional and longer-term housing support for different social groups of refugees. It analyses the specific dimensions of their housing problems (quality, temporal, and spatial distribution of housing) as well as transitional and longer-term housing solutions for marginalised refugee groups (mainly Roma families). In particular, the analysis focuses on refugee groups who are unable to buy or rent housing on the open market and who have chosen to stay in the V4 countries for shorter or longer periods.

This chapter focuses on three types of housing challenges (temporary accommodation of refugees for 2–3 days, provision of temporary accommodation, permanent resettlement) and examines the different housing-related regulatory and service systems in the V4 countries. It provides a summary of basic services for refugees, analyses specific models of housing and shelter assistance, and presents best practices in addressing the housing situation of displaced persons.

The analysis of the housing situation is based on local signals scanning and interviews with representatives of aid agencies as the primary source of

data, but the chapter also presents the main findings of empirical research on the topic, as well as information available in the media and on social platforms.

## Background information on housing in Visegrad Group countries

Housing has been one of the most prominent social policy issues in the V4 countries in recent decades. The low stock of rental housing, problems arising from obsolete housing stock (e.g., lack of insulation), affordability challenges both in terms of access to housing and housing maintenance have been a constant challenge for decades, but global and geopolitical challenges that have intensified in recent years, such as the continuous migration flows since 2015, COVID, Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and the subsequent energy crisis, have further increased housing insecurity.

In the V4 countries, the housing trajectory shifted from state-organised housing policies to decentralised systems and individual solutions, while the stock of social rental housing provided by the state and municipalities shrank significantly (Spirkova, 2018; Hromada, Čermáková & Piecha, 2022).

Although the housing policies of the V4 countries face different conditions and challenges in many respects, the main features are the same: a distorted ownership structure dominated by the owner-occupied sector, an underdeveloped private rental market, and a social housing sector that has lost much of its importance and role due to privatisation after the regime change, making housing a major challenge for large sections of society.

Rising inflation and energy prices add to the problems of quantity and quality of the housing stock and maintenance of existing housing. In this rigid system of housing policy, addressing the issue of temporary or permanent housing for refugees was a major challenge.

The mass influx of Ukrainian refugees in Poland has had a particularly strong impact on the development of the existing housing market. The rapid growth of the urban population (15% in Warsaw and 23% in Krakow) led to a housing demand shock and significant price increases in the housing market in a short period of time. In a supply-constrained housing market, rents have risen even faster than house prices. As the Polish rental housing market is one of the least developed in the European Union (only 4.2% of all households rented on a market basis in 2019, compared to 22.2% in the European Union as a whole), there was certainly not enough supply to meet the sudden surge in demand (Trojanek & Gluszak, 2022; Łaszek & Waszczuk, 2022).

## Pre-existing infrastructure for hosting refugees during previous refugee movements

Before the Syrian refugee crisis, most countries had few reception centres. In Czechia, a refugee centre was set up in Bělá-Jezová to receive vulnerable

migrants, such as families with women and children. Hungary has adopted aggressive anti-immigration measures, and since 2018 the government has systematically dismantled the refugee support system, leaving it unprepared to receive and support people arriving from abroad (Habitat, 2022; Dián, 2023). In Hungary in 2021, the only open reception centre was in Vámosszabadi. In addition, there was a community centre in Balassagyarmat where foreigners under procedure could stay, and a reception centre in Nyírbátor for asylum seekers whose status was not recognised (or had been terminated) and who were already in detention (Pósfai & Szabó, 2022).

In Slovakia the main refugee camps are in Rohovce, Humenné, and Gabčíkovo. Originally, with the exception of Humenné, these camps were intended to be temporary shelters in times of international crisis. Gabčíkovo (a former technical university) was designated in a bilateral agreement with Austria for the 2015 mange crisis, but only for two years (Vatráľová, 2017).

At the beginning of 2021, Poland had ten reception centres, but during the year one of them – for women and children, in Warsaw – was closed, and two – in Biała Podlaska and Czerwony Bór – were temporarily placed under the command of the Border Guard and served as detention centres. In mid-2022, the latter two centres were returned to the administration of the Office for Foreigners and again served only as reception centres (AIDA, 2023).

As a result of the anti-immigration policies of the last decade, the V4 countries have not had significant infrastructure to absorb large numbers of refugees and provide temporary or permanent shelter. This has also posed a major challenge for their governments (Bauerová, 2018).

## Crisis care and short-term accommodation (2–3 days)

Some of the refugees who arrived in neighbouring countries after the outbreak of the war already had contacts with the local population. According to our interviews with key actors, the majority of people fleeing Ukraine in the first few weeks stayed in the private homes of friends, family, acquaintances, and local people, who offered them a place to stay out of courtesy. The first wave of refugees therefore made use of these informal contacts, especially in the first few months.

The strength of family and kinship ties is also indicated by a survey conducted in Hungary, where 29% of refugees stated that friends and family were the main factors in their migration. This finding is confirmed by UNHCR (2022) research in Hungary, where 34% of refugees cited family ties as the main reason for wanting to leave Hungary for another country (CrisisReady, 2022).

Prior to the war, Poland received a significant number of economic migrants, mainly from Ukraine, of whom more than 500,000 stayed for more than three months. In addition to economic refugees, Ukrainian minorities living in the host countries, in many cases with family ties to the

refugees fleeing the war, also played an important role. For example, according to the 2011 census, Ukrainians were the seventh largest ethnic minority (7396 persons) out of 13 historical national minorities in Hungary (Ukrajna Magyarországi Nagykövetsége, 2022).

In addition to informal helpers, state, municipal, and non-governmental organisations also played an important role in crisis management and the organisation of temporary accommodation.

Crisis shelters were the first to be set up, mostly run by the national civil protection services under the direction of the relevant ministries, or by municipalities or NGOs in municipalities in border regions or in the capital and/or some priority cities (Poland – Wroclaw, Hungary – Záhony). Temporary shelters for new arrivals have been set up in railway stations, airport terminals, public buildings (schools, gyms, leisure centres, etc.), and in previously disused buildings (BOK Hall – Budapest/Hungary; Wroclaw railway station – Poland, Bratislava, Kosice, and Presov railway stations – Slovakia, National Assistance Center for Ukraine in Prague – Czechia).

In the crisis shelters, mostly volunteers and members of NGOs welcomed the refugees ("Sign of hope", Slovakia), helped organise meals, interpreted, looked after children, distributed daily necessities from the camp, and organised onward travel or transport to the temporary accommodation.

In Hungary, six charitable organisations supported by the Hungarian state played the main role in crisis management in the crisis centres set up: the Catholic Charity, the Hungarian Reformed Charity, the Hungarian Maltese Relief, the Ecumenical Relief, the Baptist Relief, and the Hungarian Red Cross (HCC).

From 21 March 2022, the member organisations of HCC provided crisis accommodation for refugees from Ukraine in the BOK Hall[1] (sports hall) in Budapest. Free transport was organised from the border to the BOK Hall and occasional transport was organised from the border to the crisis areas. Upon arrival at the BOK hall, the refugees were divided into two groups: those who would stay for only 1–2 days and then travel on to another country, and those who would stay for a longer period. Those who wanted to stay longer were accommodated by the Civil Defence, mostly in one of the temporary shelters run by the six major NGOs in cooperation with the state. The members of the HCC received HUF 500 million[2] each for their work, a total of HUF 3 billion, through special government support.

There were other NGOs actively helping Ukrainian refugees. They did not receive state funding, but they organised various forms of assistance from their own resources or international donations. In Budapest, Migration Aid converted a former workers' hostel on Madrid Street into a shelter for 300 refugees (Tóth & Bernáth, 2022; Tóth, 2023).

In Poland, municipalities played an important role in the crisis management. The community centre in Krakow – known as Open Place Krakow (OPK) – is the most recent and one of seven across Poland supported by UNHCR. In partnership with UNHCR and jointly with 12 Polish NGOs, OPK is providing inclusive protection services through the community

centres and mobile outreach activities in five major urban areas in Poland. The seven community centres are in Warsaw (2), Gdynia (1), Lublin (2), Wroclaw (1), and Krakow (1). Civil society actors are supported by OPK in the daily management of the centres and get help to facilitate services here – from accommodation to legal aid and psychological support.

Besides local authorities, civil society organisations were also actively involved in Poland. The Sue Ryder Foundation worked with private individuals involved in relief initiatives to organise the transport and emergency accommodation of refugees in the early stages of the war. They worked with a hotel and a transport company to transport refugees from the border to the emergency shelters and to help them settle temporarily in Poland. The Foundation provided 180 places and meals for the refugees (Refugee Hub, 2022).

## Temporary accommodations, max. six months

It soon became clear that most of the refugees had not arrived in Hungary, Czechia, or Slovakia, but had stayed in these transit countries for a short time. However, it is highly likely that a significant number of those who travelled on to other countries remained in transit countries for longer than planned due to a lack of documentation and reliable and accessible information on their legal and social rights, including access to housing and integration prospects in general, in the destination countries (CrisisReady, 2022; Habitat for Humanity Magyarország, 2022). This has led to an increased need for temporary accommodation in host countries.

In accordance with the right to asylum, refugees had to be provided with housing for the duration of their temporary stay. As the first six months of refugee status were crucial for refugees in deciding whether to move on to another host country, return to Ukraine, or stay in the first host country, it was considered important to focus on housing options during this cycle. Four main types of accommodation appeared to have stabilised during the first six months.

* Private (family) networks;
* Private housing market;
* Subsidised housing market;
* Extended stay on the community shelters.

### *Private networks for longer stay*

A significant number of families from Transcarpathia who came to Hungary had connections before the war. According to one survey[3], over a fifth of respondents had come to Hungary to work, and a quarter of them had a partner who worked here. A typical situation was that the father, who worked in Hungary as a guest worker in the construction industry, was joined by family members who had fled after 24 February. In most cases, these families were able to find cheaper accommodation on the open housing market, although it was considerably further away from available jobs

(Zakariás et al, 2022). The informal network of former economic migrants was similarly important in organising temporary accommodation in Poland, where the number of former economic migrants from Ukraine was close to half a million.

*Private housing market*

Despite the fact that the increase in demand has in many cases led to a substantial increase in rents in the cities concerned, many refugee families rented on the open market. According to a survey published in July 2023, in Poland, for example, 38% of refugees rented their own accommodation, 9% lived in provided hotels or hostels, 10% stayed with relatives or local families, 29% used subsidised housing, and only 3% of refugees lived in accommodation provided by employer (UNHCR, 2023). To pay the rent, 63% of respondents have their own income; 30% have a pension from Ukraine; and 19% are supported by family members (husbands), relatives, and friends from Ukraine (UNHCR, 2023). Also, according to data published by the International Organisation for Migration in summer 2023, 55% of refugees in the Czech Republic are working, i.e., have their own income (IOM, 2023). In many cases, therefore, despite higher rental prices, the problem is not primarily one of ability to pay, but of mistrust in the host country's housing market. It seems that mistrust of refugee tenants is not a country-specific phenomenon. Hungarian researchers report even middle-class Ukrainians in Budapest often face difficulties in finding a sublet, with some landlords who advertise their property considering it too difficult or risky to rent to refugees. In the case of Roma, refusal is quite common, even if there are no large families applying, but only a mother and her child (CrisisReady, 2022; Kolozsi, 2022).

In addition to financial support, special services are therefore very important in the open housing market.

The "Help Ukraine" platform (Czechia) brings together accommodation providers and refugees from Ukraine. For security reasons, the accommodation offers are not publicly available. Only employees of about 600 so-called helping organisations (NGOs, charities, or municipalities) that provide accommodation for refugees have access to them.

There are also several other platforms supporting temporary accommodation for refugees in the V4 countries, as well as Europe-wide networks. However, many of these do not provide the service described above or provide it in a limited way (UkraineTakeShelter.com, EU4UA).

*Subsidised housing market*

As the European Union is in the process of developing common rules to support refugees, we see different forms of housing support in different countries.

One of the most complex good practices in supported housing was the "Welcome and Help – Accommodation" project in Poland. This programme

was aimed at local aid organisations providing assistance to refugees, as well as local government units. In cooperation with programme participants, Biedronka Foundation provides free temporary (up to 30 days) accommodation for people arriving in Poland because of the war in Ukraine. The programme was organised from April 2022 to 31 August 2023. Each qualified local government and aid organisation has access to a booking platform that allows them to book accommodation in several thousand facilities across the country. The organisation or local government unit verifies the refugee's details and needs, decides whether to provide assistance, then checks the availability of accommodation on the booking platform and makes the reservation. This scheme offered subsidised accommodation only for one month, and in most cases a longer period would be needed.

We see a similar model in another project in the Czech Republic, but here the duration of the subsidised accommodation is much longer. IOM Czechia, the Ministry of Regional Development of the Czech Republic, organised the project Rent with Guarantee Independent Housing Support in the Hradec Králové region and in the Pardubice region. The project aims to activate unused housing, increase the availability of rental housing, and provide a safe home for those in need. The project motivates owners of unoccupied apartments to rent them out on a long-term basis. Research carried out by the Ministry of Regional Development of the Czech Republic in October 2022 revealed that landlords were reluctant to rent due to concerns about the risks involved, lack of experience or worries associated with renting out an apartment. However, up to 50% of landlords expressed their willingness to rent to refugees from Ukraine or people in need of housing if certain guarantees or securities were provided. Under the pilot housing project, landlords receive a financial bonus of CZK 30,000[4] for renting an apartment, along with comprehensive rental management by a specialised company. The project also covers the necessary administration and the payment of an initial deposit to ensure a smooth transition for the future tenants – refugees from Ukraine.

The fifth amendment to Lex Ukraine in the Czech Republic (which came into force on 1 April 2023) regulates refugee support and has introduced important changes to the government's humanitarian benefits for refugees. Free emergency accommodation is now limited to 150 days, except for vulnerable persons. Subsidies for housing refugees in private accommodation have been abolished, with the state directly reimbursing housing costs for refugees with no or very low income (between EUR 101,4 and EUR 127 per month). Humanitarian assistance to cover basic needs is now the subsistence minimum (EUR 205,6) for the first 150 days after temporary protection is granted. Thereafter, the benefit is based on the refugee's income and may be linked to the subsistence minimum (EUR 132,5), except for vulnerable refugees.

In Hungary, the National Directorate General for Disaster Management is responsible for the distribution of refugees in the public accommodation system. Refugees are not obliged to use the public accommodation system

and many turn to NGOs or seek accommodation themselves with private hosts and landlords. In government decree the Hungarian Government established a funding scheme to compensate costs of accommodation and other costs (food, social, and psychological services) for municipalities and private organisations that can host at least 20 people (Hungarian Journal, 2022). The amount of compensation was previously HUF 4,000/person/night but has been increased to 7,000 HUF as of 1 November 2022. Both municipalities and private individuals are required to report monthly the number of persons and nights to the county disaster management organisations, which verify the validity of the reports in case of concerns, but the reimbursement is ultimately approved by the competent Ministry of the Interior.

In many cases, the level of social assistance provided by the state does not cover market rents, and in other cases, as seen above, landlords do not sign rental contracts with certain groups of refugees even when there is solvent demand. In this case, a longer-term solution is needed, and community hostels, initially designed for a few days' accommodation, have an important role to play.

With the states' limited involvement in the long-term care of refugees in Hungary, NGOs have an important role to play. The organisation Habitat for Humanity Hungary (HHH) and its five partner organisations have filled significant gaps in the care of families fleeing the war. One of HHH's main partners, Street to Home! Association (ULE) has arranged housing for 402 people. The Association (ULE) was awarded with the NIOK[5] Special Civil Award 2023 for its activities.

In Slovakia, the housing allowance for persons granted temporary refugee status is regulated by Government Decree No. 218/2022. The allowance was paid by local authorities to accommodation providers from funds transferred by the Ministry of the Interior until 31 December 2023. Owners of flats and family houses hosting refugees will receive an allowance of EUR 10 per person per night if the hosted person is over 15 years of age, and EUR 5 per person per night if the hosted person is younger. The maximum monthly amount of the allowance varies between EUR 710 and 1,790, depending on the number of rooms.

If they are not private persons, but so-called short-stay accommodation establishments, provided that they do not engage in accommodation services; municipalities and higher territorial units, if they provide accommodation free of charge directly or through their budgetary or contributory body/ may also benefit, from 1 October 2022, from an accommodation allowance amounting to EUR 12 per person per night (EUR 6 per person per night for a guest under the age of 15). A similar form of support was also available in Poland.

### Extended stay on the community shelters for vulnerable groups

Although "collective accommodation" is in most cases only a form of crisis accommodation, disadvantaged groups have often been unable to find accommodation outside free or almost free public/civic collective accommodation

*Table 6.1* Current accommodation forms of the displaced persons, June 2023 (%)

|                     | Czechia | Hungary | Poland | Slovakia |
|---------------------|---------|---------|--------|----------|
| Rented              | 33      | 34      | 38     | 28       |
| Collective site     | 30      | 37      | 28     | 13       |
| Hosted by relatives | 15      | 9       | 10     | 15       |
| Hosted by others    | 9       | 4       | 5      | 23       |
| Hotel by government | 9       | 10      | 9      | 8        |
| Hotel by employer   | 4       | 4       | 3      | 13       |
| Others              | 1       | 1       | 8      | 1        |

*Source:* UNHCR, 2023.

and are permanently "stuck" in these institutions. The empathy and support that accompanied Ukrainian refugees in Hungary was mostly not extended to Roma, who often experienced prejudice and discriminatory treatment, whether they were Hungarian (dual citizenship) or not. They are the least likely to receive better accommodation (see Table 6.1).

The Romaversitas Foundation presented the results of a three-month study and found that 70% of the Roma surveyed had been housed in community shelters and that a significant number of them had remained there because they were unable to move (Eredics, 2022).

In these shelters municipalities provide free meals three times a day and organise education for children.

The state-run refugee shelters are reception centres in rural areas that were closed in recent years after the 2015 refugee crisis and have now been reopened due to the war in Ukraine. In practice, they have largely housed Roma from Transcarpathia, far from work or other opportunities (Zakariás et al., 2022; Müller, 2022; Pálos, 2023).

### Permanent settlement and integration

Temporary protection for refugees from Ukraine under EU asylum law (EU, 2022) is currently valid until 4 March 2024, with two possible extensions in justified cases. One of the pillars is a durable solution to the housing problem. There is a need to develop longer-term forms of protection and to promote the integration of migrant groups and families remaining in the country.

Collecting and analysing information on housing for refugees staying in the host country on a long-term basis is a major challenge, as some of the reception centres and shelters are run by local authorities and others by private organisations, making it difficult to list and map these facilities and to analyse gaps. The population of Ukrainian refugees permanently residing in the host country varies greatly from country to country, and housing

needs vary accordingly (Hromada, Čermáková & Piecha, 2022; Łaszek & Waszczuk, 2022; UNHCR, 2022; Hegedűs & Somogyi, 2023).

Considering these challenges, the study assesses three aspects of aid for long-term residence and community integration: (a) housing options and best practices, (b) funding options for open market housing, and (c) services that accompany housing and integration into the community.

### Forms of housing and good practices

In the case of long-term housing, we tend to see complex programmes that address a wide range of needs, not only for housing but also stable integration. There are six main types of housing available for refugees wishing to resettle or remain in the host country on a long-term basis.The large influx of refugees into the V4 countries, where the existing housing stock was very limited, has led to a significant price increase in the rental market. This makes it extremely difficult for refugees to find medium/long term accommodation on their own in the open housing market. Another problem is that as the crisis drags on, previously existing savings that could have been used for housing are being steadily depleted. In June 2023, just over a third of refugees arriving in the V4 countries were able to pay market rents. The situation was the worst in Slovakia, where only 28% of respondents lived in market rented accommodation. Although the proportion of renters in the Czech Republic is relatively high, 25% of respondents said that they would have to leave within three months because they could not afford this form of housing (Poland 7%, Slovakia 11%, Hungary no data) (Habitat for Humanity & IOM, 2023). Of the men who remained in Ukraine at the beginning of the war, many were able to support the fleeing family financially, but with increasing financial problems (rising rents, drastic increase in energy costs), the community shelters and supported housing of charitable organisations are becoming more important (Dorkász, 2022).

Collective centres are "dormitory-style" facilities where displaced people find medium to long-term (over six months) accommodation. These facilities include social institutions, hostels, social hotels, and converted non-residential buildings. They have a separate room per family, but other facilities (toilets, kitchen, etc.) are shared. Collective hostels are managed by public authorities and/or non-governmental or private organisations. Marginalised social groups are housed in collective accommodation provided by the state or NGOs (social institutions, refugee camps for long-term accommodation, subsidised accommodation in social rented housing). Hungary has the highest proportion of people living in this form (37% – see Table 1). This is probably related to the fact that a significant proportion of the refugees in Hungary come from Roma families in Transcarpathia.

Staying with relatives, friends and acquaintances was particularly common in the first period after arrival. As the months go by, the resources of volunteers and relatives seem to be exhausted and the share of voluntary solidarity-based accommodation in the V4 countries decreases significantly,

and market forms gain ground for long-term solutions, which would require government support.

Slovakia and the Czech Republic have the highest rates of hosting relatives and other persons (See Table 1.) probably also due to a well-designed support system that includes private households and not only collective accommodation with larger numbers of people.

The municipal/government supported hotel is in most cases a substitute for social housing. Its relatively high share can be explained by the fact that the social housing sector in the V4 countries shrank relatively during the 1990s and 2000s. And in most cases, the hotel subsidy provided by employers was used as accommodation for workers, including the families of Ukrainian guest workers who had already worked for the company, especially in the first months after the outbreak of the war. While the possibility and level of state support for hotels is centrally regulated, municipalities and employers adapt the level and forms of support for hotels to their own financial resources.

### Funding opportunities for open market housing to support displaced persons

Financial support is an important pillar of housing security. It has developed in many forms in the V4 countries. Financial support can come from international organisations (UN, UNICEF, Migration Aid), NGOs, and governments in host countries, as well as from local authorities. Financial support from the host government may be targeted directly at the refugee or at the host. The type of the supported host also varies considerably. While in the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia support can be given to private individuals, in Hungary support is given to accommodation facilities hosting at least 20 persons (see Table 6.2).

In Hungary, short and long-term accommodation for Ukrainian refugees is only available on the private rental market, as the public housing sector is very limited. However, this solution can only be used by those who are able to maintain independent housing on the private rental market (i.e., those with sufficient income), as there is basically no adequate system of housing provision or rent subsidies. Furthermore, there is no compensation system for landlords who accommodate refugees in the private rental sector (Hegedüs, Somogyi & Teller, 2023). Only local governments and private organisations with more than 20 employees (the latter through individual contracts) are entitled to compensation for accommodation costs from the Hungarian government; private individuals and NGOs are not. Refugees arriving in Hungary from Ukraine with an issued refugee status document are entitled to general assistance from the Hungarian state, such as free public transport and health care, and receive a subsistence allowance of HUF 22,800 per month for adults and HUF 13,700 for minors. This is clearly not enough to pay rents on the open market.The Czech model of Solidarity Allowance (Solidární příspěvek) aimed to expand long-term housing opportunities for Ukrainian refugees by including private housing. Subsidies for private accommodation providers were intended for households offering

*Table 6.2* Forms of housing assistance support in the V4 countries in 2022

| Country | Publicly funded reception housing (type and duration) | Compensation for private households/providers | Assistance with the housing transition (including financial support) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Czechia | Yes (temporary shelter for 30 days and hotels for up to 90 days) | Amount received by households hosting refugees: CZK 3,000 per person accommodated in a given month for more than 16 consecutive days. Maximum of CZK 12,000 for four or more accommodated persons | Housing allowance is provided after 90 days |
| Hungary | Yes (reception centres and private housing) | No | There is no specific housing aid, but job seekers may access a support subsidy of HUF 22,800 per month, and support subsidy for minors is HUF 13,700 per month per minor |
| Poland | Yes (reception centres set up for BTPs[6]/ private home) | Maximum 60 days with extension possible in justified cases. Provision of accommodation and meals to Ukrainian citizens set at PLN 40/ person/day | One-time support of PLN 300 to cover basic needs, including housing |
| Slovak Republic | Yes (overnight stays in provisional tents, then transition to asylum centres and state accommodation facilities) | EUR 7 per person per night of accommodation to a person with temporary protection over the age of 15; EUR 3.5 for such persons under the age of 15 | Allowances may exist based on family situation, but BTPs do not have access to the housing allowance within the system of assistance in material need |

accommodation free of charge to foreigners enjoying temporary protection. The amount of the subsidy was CZK 3,000 per person per month (up to CZK 12,000 for four or more persons) (OECD, 2022).

In Slovakia, significant state support is provided for the accommodation of persons with temporary refugee status in the private sector. A single form of rent subsidy has been introduced, which stipulates that the cost of housing

refugees is covered by the state and that the landlord cannot charge additional fees to refugees. The government of the Slovak Republic guarantees rent subsidies for refugees until 31 December 2023. In apartments and family houses, the landlord receives EUR 10/adult/day (EUR 5/child under 15/day). For non-business accommodation, the amount is EUR 12/adult/day (EUR 6/child under 15/day). This allowance does not apply to hotels, guesthouses, and hostels. However, the landlords' reluctance to rent their accommodation to refugees is significantly influenced by the uncertainty surrounding the refugees' stay duration, coupled with the limited compensation duration provided by the state to landlords (until 31st December 2023).

In Poland, Ukrainian refugees who have been granted asylum are entitled to the same social benefits as Polish citizens. Housing benefit is one of the most important. When applying for this benefit, the applicant must provide proof of income for the three months preceding the application. The current income threshold is PLN 1,698.76 for multi-person households and PLN 2,265.01 for single-person households. The application must also include receipts (for rent and utilities). The decision is taken by the municipality office responsible for the place of residence.

However, since the spring 2023, the rules have been gradually tightened for refugees in collective accommodation (e.g., in state-funded hotel rooms or school dormitories). From 1 March 2023, refugees staying in Poland for more than 120 days and using collective accommodation will have to pay half of their accommodation costs, up to a maximum of PLN 40 per day. From October 2023, refugees staying for more than 180 days will have to pay 75% of the cost (up to PLN 60 per day) (Krzysztoszek, 2023).

### Services and good practices to facilitate integration of displaced persons into the local community

As well as financial support, refugees from Ukraine are in need of a range of additional services in order to secure housing. Providing information about available support or housing can be as important as organising contact and communication between actors, providing equipment (mattresses, furniture) to improve the quality of housing, or organising transport to reach accommodation.

Many forms of support for the integration of migrants have already been developed in the V4 countries in previous years and have now been expanded.

In the Czech Republic, the "Refugees Welcome" project was launched in 2014 with the aim of providing adequate accommodation for refugees with private individuals and protecting them from targeted segregation in collective centres. The key is to allow refugees to live with local people, thereby facilitating and supporting their integration into society. The aim is to make a constructive contribution to the public debate by taking a comprehensive view of the living conditions of refugees.

In April 2022, due to the large number of people arriving in Poland from Ukraine as a result of the outbreak of war, the Habitat for Humanity Poland

Foundation launched a project similar to the "Refugees Welcome" project in the Czech Republic. The name of the Polish project is "Housing Hotline". The main purpose of the project is to provide up-to-date information to Ukrainian refugees looking for accommodation in Poland, especially in the two cities where the Foundation operates (Warsaw and Gliwice), as well as to those who host Ukrainian citizens or are interested in offering such assistance. The hotline has access to a database of non-profit organisations operating in Poland that offer free accommodation to Ukrainians or help them to find accommodation. On a daily basis, the Hotline advisors update the database of organisations with contact details that can help callers find alternative solutions to their various housing problems. The Hotline team is constantly supported by a legal expert, so the staff are always up to date with the latest legal changes. By calling the Hotline, it is possible to find out about Habitat for Humanity Poland's current assistance programmes, the scope of which is constantly expanding. The Housing Hotline also liaises with other non-governmental organisations and institutions that wish to cooperate with Habitat for Humanity Poland Foundation in providing housing for people from Ukraine (Habitat for Humanity & IOM, 2023).

Another programme is run by the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta and funded by the national Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and UNHCR. The programme provides housing (usually in private rented accommodation) and complex services to help integrate refugees into local communities: tailored social support and mentoring to help them integrate into the community, build social networks, find employment and training if needed, and enrol children in school are central to the one-year programme, which can be extended by six months. By 2022, 500 families participated in the programme. Other longer-term service solutions are the rent subsidy programmes for refugees living in the private rental sector. (Habitat for Humanity, 2022).

The focus of refugee housing support services has been primarily on the provision of information, mediation and guarantees between refugees and housing providers. However, the ever-increasing cost of housing and the need to increase the ability of refugee families to pay for housing require additional types of services. These are social services which, on the one hand, support access to social benefits in the host country and, on the other hand, help refugees to enter the labour market, improve their employability and effectively contribute to the acquisition of sufficient independent income to meet basic needs (food, housing). However, this range of services goes far beyond housing assistance and requires much more complex support for refugees.

## Lessons learned and recommendations

The protracted crisis is putting refugees and the people and organisations helping them to the test. After an initial enthusiastic response, the slow depletion of resources has gradually brought to the fore the question of who,

whom, and how to help manage the crisis. In many cases, the V4 countries have used a similar model to help refugees. After the outbreak of war, crisis centres were set up to receive groups of refugees, mainly women and children, mainly in border settlements and around major railway stations, with the help of volunteers, NGOs, and government organisations (emergency services). The involvement of the different actors in the process of assisting refugees was not the same in the V4 countries, even at the initial stage. While in Poland the municipalities of the most affected cities played a dominant role, in the Czech Republic and Slovakia the government coordination was the dominant actor. In Hungary, on the other hand, in the face of government delays, volunteers and NGOs took it upon themselves to meet basic needs and organise accommodation for shorter or longer periods.

Although the European legal order guarantees refugee status to those in need for one year (renewable twice for 6–6 months), which in addition to protection also covers basic needs, including housing, health care and access to education for minors, the framework for free care for refugees, especially housing, is not yet in place.

However, as the war has dragged on, a number of housing issues have arisen for displaced groups forced to remain in the host country on a longer-term basis:

- Resources for displaced persons/families are exhausted, resources from Ukraine are dwindling or non-existent;
- The use of accommodation offered as a favour (by relatives, friends, or even strangers) has become more limited, the informal support system is exhausted;
- Crisis centres have closed or reduced the number of people they can accommodate;
- Community accommodation, which used to be free, has become increasingly expensive.

Although in the more than one and a half years that have passed, many have returned home, others have left the V4 countries, there are still large numbers of refugees. Among them, there are Ukrainian women and children who want to survive the war by staying close to their husbands and male family members who remain in Ukraine. They tend to come from the regions most affected by the fighting and are in constant contact with the daily life of war through the relatives they have left behind. Although these families have settled for the long term, they would like to return to Ukraine one day. In their case, the solution to their housing needs is longer term, but certainly not permanent. Their integration into local society is also temporary.

Another group of refugees who remain in the host country plan for the long term and organise their resettlement. Some of them have no problems integrating because of their language skills, cultural community, and financial background. For another group, however, integration is not easy. One

large group of the refugees remaining in the host countries are Roma families from Transcarpathia, whose lives were already marked by generations of extreme poverty, early school leaving, and unemployment before the out-break of the war. They plan to remain in the host countries on a long-term or permanent basis. Some of the male members of these families have been working in the host country for years, mostly in the informal economy. After the outbreak of the war, the women and children followed them, but their integration, even if they speak the language of the host countries, faces many obstacles (prejudice, exclusion).

Resettlement and housing in the host countries is not an easy problem to solve, even for families with a better status than the Roma, as the supply of subsidised housing for long-term settlement (more than one year) is increasingly limited and the housing market in the V4 countries is becoming more expensive, with market rental housing not offering a real alternative to meet housing needs safely. This is particularly true following the surge in demand caused by the migration wave and the upward impact of the energy crisis on prices. As the availability of social rental housing is very limited in all countries, state or local government support for housing is of paramount importance.

The models of governmental and non-governmental support, information brokerage, and other good service practices to address housing issues presented in this study indicate that the temporary or long-term integration of Ukrainian individuals and families displaced to the V4 countries into local society can be effectively supported, even though ensuring housing security is not an easy task and will be a key priority in the host countries in the coming years.

## Notes

1 The BOK hall closed on 1 August 2023 because the service was less and less used. This task has been taken over by the government offices at the two largest railway stations in the capital (Keleti Train Station and Nyugati Train Station).
2 Average exchange rate of central banks as of 2 October 2023: EUR 1 = HUF 387.43.
3 Quantitative survey of forms of assistance in Hungary based on a representative sample of 1,000 people (Zakariás et al., 2022).
4 Average exchange rate of central banks as of 2 October 2023: EUR 1 = CZK 24.460.
5 NIOK (Non-profit Information and Training Centre), a highly respected organisa-tion, has been working to strengthen and develop the civil sector for almost 30 years.
6 BTP= Beneficiaries of Temporary Protections.

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# 7 Teaching local languages to foreigners

*Nataliya-Mariya Mochernak*

## Introduction

Knowledge of the language of the host country is essential for refugees, both for communication in everyday life and in various other aspects such as employment, education, and visions of long-term residence in the country. Beyond practical matters, knowledge of the language also helps refugees deepen their ties with a particular country, understand its cultural identity, and feel a sense of belonging to its citizens. Deepening knowledge of the local language is an essential part of countries' integration policies. The conditions for providing language training are enshrined in the host country's national strategic documents, such as migration and integration strategies or action plans.

Integration success should lead to "equitable access to opportunities and resources, participation in the community and society, and feelings of security and belonging in their new homes" (Hynie, 2018, 267). The level of language proficiency in the host country is influenced by many factors, including the level of education the refugee has received in the country of origin, the refugee's age, or the specific place of origin. Refugees who have completed an integration course or received education in the country of origin and refugees who want to stay in the country of asylum for a long time also tend to have better skills in learning the local language (Tubergen, 2010, 530–532).

Alastair Ager and Alison Strang in their 2008 study *Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework* work with a particular model of integration. They identify four key areas affecting the success rate of integration:

> 1. success and access across sectors such as employment, housing, education, and health; 2. assumptions and practices related to citizenship and rights; 3. processes of social connection within and between groups within a community; and 4. structural barriers to connection related to language, culture, and local environment.
>
> (Anger & Strag, 2008, 166)

In the context of this chapter, the last area mentioned is crucial, but the essence of the study is their interconnectedness. Lack of language proficiency may present barriers to refugee integration in the remaining areas. "Being

able to speak the main language of the host community is, for example, consistently identified as central to the integration process" (Anger & Strag, 2008, 183). The level of language proficiency can strongly influence economic integration. In European countries, migrants, on average, have lower wages than natives (Shekhar et al., 2016, 15). This fact is particularly evident for migrants who stay in a country for a shorter period. As language skills improve, the income gap between migrants and natives decreases (Shekhar et al., 2016, 15).

The situation of a refugee must be distinguished from that of other types of migrants. Fleckenstein et al. (2012) point out that more studies on local language acquisition focus on immigrants who migrated for economic or family reasons. Refugees are usually not prepared to leave their country of origin. Thus, the likelihood of knowing the host country's language upon arrival is very low (Hynie, 2018, 266). On the other hand, assistance from host countries is more significant in the refugee context, with states responding to the need for local language training and often providing it free of charge to refugees to support integration. Other migrants, contrarily, have to face most of the obstacles themselves, including the language barrier, depending on the nature of the arrivals.

Assisting in learning local languages depends on the integration policies of each country. Some countries provide full integration support to refugees, while others condition their assistance or leave the agenda to the non-state sector. Elizabeth Ferris conducted research in 2020 on how host country governments seek to implement integration policies. Ferris focused on three critical points of integration: security, economics, and language. She found that despite the importance of language learning for refugee integration in the selected countries, "the relationship of language to cultural/national identity varies" (Ferris, 2020, 213). For example, English language proficiency is not required to the same extent in the United States as in Germany. In the US, language acquisition is less strongly linked to national identity, and in the refugee context, the emphasis is more on self-sufficiency in the economic sphere. "Given the importance of learning the language of the host country for integration, the fact that language instruction is either lacking or administered on an ad hoc basis in about half of the countries is a cause for concern" (Ferris, 2020, 214).

Similarly, Wolffhardt, Conte, and Huddleston's 2019 report, *The European Benchmark for Refugee Integration*, presents a comparative analysis evaluating refugee integration frameworks in the context of 14 EU countries. The report touches on three main dimensions: legal integration, socio-economic integration, and sociocultural integration. The latter dimension includes education, language courses, social orientation, and bridge building. Among the evaluation indicators, the authors included access to publicly funded host language instruction, the length of language instruction, and the quality of the instruction itself. They found that in most countries studied, there was access to free local language courses (Wolffhardt, Conte & Huddleston, 2019, 101). However, some countries make the completion of

language courses a condition for maintaining integration benefits (e.g., Spain or France, Lithuania, and Poland). There are no publicly funded language courses for refugees in countries such as Greece or Hungary. In these cases, teaching local languages remains the responsibility of NGOs.

As regards the quality of local language teaching, the report finds that the quality criteria are not sufficiently fulfilled. Of the countries mentioned, only Latvia and Sweden are involved in ensuring sufficient quality teaching that responds to the refugees' needs while being led by qualified professionals (Wolffhardt, Conte & Huddleston, 2019, 102). Most of the time, the problems are related to the heterogeneity of language levels within groups, which leads to the generalisation of teaching without subsequent focus on the specific needs of individuals. This is also related to the insufficient length of the courses provided. Half of the countries mentioned have a fixed number of teaching hours to which refugees are entitled. The lack of individual assessment regarding the length of courses leads to many refugees' need for more proficiency in the local language after completing the courses (Wolffhardt, Conte & Huddleston, 2019, 102).

This chapter will focus on the presentation of good practices regarding teaching local languages in the V4 countries in the context of the arrival of Ukrainian refugees after February 2022. Good practices were identified based on a search of four working groups (one from each country).

## Strategic documents and references to language instruction therein

Thus, individual countries differ significantly in providing integration and language courses outside and inside the European Union. This is related to the fact that the integration policies of EU member states are not harmonised and are mostly based on the percentage of migrants in each country. The differences are evident if we focus specifically on the V4 countries – the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary.

With its significance to efficient integration and enabling functioning of immigrants in the host country, learning the local language is frequently included in migration strategies and legal regulations concerning incomers. Three out of four Visegrad countries have implemented such provisions, too.

In its *Migration Policy Strategy of 2015* issued by the Ministry of the Interior, the Czech Republic commits to ensuring effective measures to prevent negative consequences associated with migration. The document calls for the promotion of integration in terms of information and counselling and the provision of Czech language courses. The country sees the support of state and educational institutions that focus on helping to overcome the language barrier as an essential point. At the national level, the Czech Republic is committed to "a successful integration policy including support for the inclusion of foreigners with respect for their dignity and the prevention of security risks and negative social phenomena, including social exclusion" (Ministerstvo vnitra ČR, 2015).

One of the tools to achieve this objective is the possibility of introducing mandatory participation of newly arrived migrants in adaptation and integration courses (Ministerstvo vnitra ČR, 2015). These are one-day courses that familiarise newly arrived foreigners with their fundamental rights and obligations during their stay in Czechia. They also include the provision of contacts to relevant organisations that migrants might miss. From the point of view of the migrants themselves, these are "successful and necessary" courses (Ministerstvo vnitra ČR 2016, 11).

However, despite the high interest in learning the language, many migrants find it difficult to balance attending courses with work and family life. *The Concept for the Integration of Foreigners* issued by the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic in 2016 calls for the need to respond to this issue:

> It is absolutely necessary to significantly strengthen the capacity of Czech language courses for adults at all levels of proficiency, to ensure their qualified level, the possibility of continuity of individual courses according to the level of Czech proficiency and the offer of tools for self-study of Czech.
>
> (Ministerstvo vnitra ČR 2016, 13)

Unlike the Czech Republic, Poland has no national integration strategy. The country assists with integration through so-called Individual integration programmes, which, however, concern only a specific group of migrants, namely, asylum seekers, refugees, or holders of subsidiary protection (Koss-Goryszewska & Pawlak 2018, 170).

In Hungary, the establishment of the EU Asylum and Migration Fund (AMIF) in 2014 led to the creation of the *Hungarian Migration Strategy* (2014–2020) to facilitate the integration of migrants into Hungarian society. The new integration system was to include in particular the integration of refugees and holders of subsidiary protection (Soltész & Vadasi, 2022, 29). This was to be done through a so-called integration contract, the signing of which would give the refugee the legal right to state assistance for up to two years (Belügyi Alapok, 2014, 70). In connection with the 2015 migration crisis, the integration system in Hungary was cancelled, and all previous state assistance to refugees was discontinued.

In 2012, the Polish government adopted its first migration strategy, entitled *Poland's Migration Policy – Current Status and Postulated Actions*; however, after the Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) party, which had long used anti-immigration rhetoric, won the 2015 parliamentary elections, the strategy was cancelled (Koss-Goryszewska & Pawlak, 2018, 171). Thus, there is currently no document in Poland addressing the issue of migrant integration. "As of today, Polish integration policy is fragmented and dispersed, and its specific aspects/components fit into the areas of various policies concerning the labour market, housing, healthcare, education, and social security" (Sobczak-Szelc et al., 2020, 21). The absence of integration

policies towards other migrant groups is problematic given that knowledge of the Polish language is a condition for obtaining a residence permit (Koss-Goryszewska & Pawlak, 2018, 180).

The conditions related to providing refugee assistance are laid down in the Regulation of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy of 9 March 2009 on providing assistance to foreigners who have obtained refugee status or subsidiary protection in the Republic of Poland. The provision of assistance focuses on "supporting the integration process based on an assessment of his/her living situation and that of his/her family" (Journal of Laws, 2009). Depending on the residence, the refugee should report the need for support to the assistance centre, which establishes a list of specific institutions and the scope of their activities for implementing the programme. The integration process is then monitored by the assistance centre's social worker, who determines the immigrant's integration progress based on three specific areas:

- Language skills – the level of acquisition of the Polish language;
- Professional functioning – the ability to become economically independent;
- Social functioning – level of participation in social, cultural, and public life.

If the foreigner does not make sufficient progress in these areas, the social worker should modify the programme to adapt it to the refugee's individual needs (Journal of Laws, 2009). The regulation also includes the amount of funding, which, in addition to living expenses, includes the cost of learning the Polish language.

The official document entitled *Migration Policy of the Slovak Republic with a view to 2025* states:

> Integration measures are expected to lead to the existence of coordinated and interconnected instruments and measures that will enable foreigners to integrate into the labour market, to master the national language, to have access to education, health care, social services, housing to enable their participation in civic and political life, and may eventually lead to the granting of Slovak citizenship.
>
> (Ministerstvo vnútra SR, 2021, 8)

The Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic lists the following as the primary objectives of its migration policy in the area of integration: to "ensure quality education for children of foreigners and teaching Slovak as a foreign language to foreigners" (Ministerstvo vnútra SR, 2021, 8) and to "introduce a mechanism of linguistic and cultural orientation for foreigners" (Ministerstvo vnútra SR, 2021, 9). However, unlike the Czech Republic, Slovakia has not introduced mandatory integration measures, e.g., adaptation-integration courses (Bargerova, 2023, 71).

*The Integration Policy Strategy of the Slovak Republic of 2014* targets all types of migrants: "migrants who have entered, temporarily live or permanently settle in the territory of the Slovak Republic, all age groups of migrants, including children who are citizens of the Slovak Republic" (Ministerstvo práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny SR, 2014, 9), with a special emphasis on holders of international protection. The document calls for the availability of Slovak language instruction for foreigners (Ministerstvo práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny SR, 2014, 11). Free Slovak language courses were provided only by NGOs and intergovernmental organisations (Ministerstvo práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny SR, 2014, 25).

*The Action Plan of the Integration Policy of the Slovak Republic for 2017–2018* commits to (1) compiling and subsequently offering standardised Slovak language courses for foreigners with the possibility of obtaining a certificate of language proficiency; (2) making available the necessary teaching materials for learning the Slovak language; (3) creating a working group to organise the courses; (4) creating a system to finance the courses (Ministerstvo práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny SR 2017, 10–11). However, it is not possible to assess the implementation of these measures, and this is because the obligation for ministers to submit an annual report on the implementation of the set objectives was cancelled in 2018 (Bargerova, 2023, 63).

With the exception of Hungary, migration regulations in all Visegrad countries impose an obligation for the migrant to learn the local language, while also ensuring that the state enables relevant learning conditions and courses. Despite differences, the provisions are similar in that they refer rather to objectives to be achieved by migrants instead of the process itself. Therefore, the states' responsibility for organising courses has been blurred, which is in line with their overall approach to migration. Meanwhile, the practical aspect of accessibility of local language courses is key to the successful implementation of these strategies.

### Teaching local languages in the Visegrad Group countries

*State-organised courses*

Integration policies themselves operate in line with integration strategies. Regarding the national integration policies of the Visegrad countries, language courses are currently provided by the public sector in three of the four countries.

The provision of integration services to holders of international protection in the Czech Republic is provided by the General Integration Service Provider. In ensuring the availability of integration services, the General Provider cooperates with several other actors, which are individual ministries, municipalities, NGOs, churches, volunteers, or employers (Ministerstvo vnitra ČR, 2023). The education and language barrier removal area focuses on language and cultural courses and is implemented by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. Refugees are provided with the possibility of a free language course

(400 hours), which lasts between 6 and 12 months and ends with an examination followed by a certificate of completion (Ministerstvo vnitra ČR ,2023a).

Assistance to refugees in Poland is based on the Minister of Labour and Social Policy Regulation mentioned above, according to which every refugee in Poland is entitled to free language tuition for 12 months (Koss-Goryszewska & Pawlak, 2018, 181). However, individual integration plans have been criticised for setting permanent conditions, which are not individually based on the needs of refugees. For example, assisting for 12 months may be restrictive for some migrants (Koss-Goryszewska & Pawlak, 2018, 171). Language course attendance has also been problematic in recent years. Data from 2015 indicate that course attendance averages around 35% (Sobczak-Szelc et al., 2020, 81). The reasons for such low participation are that many refugees find balancing work and family life with attending courses difficult. Courses often took place during working hours, in a remote location, and without the possibility of organised childcare (Sobczak-Szelc et al., 2020, 82). Criticism is also directed at the lack of state funding for Polish language courses. For this reason, a large part of the agenda had to be carried out mainly by non-profit organisations funded by the European Union (Sobczak-Szelc et al., 2020, 82).

Hungary had a "fragmented integration system" until 2014 (Szabó, 2018, 225). This system included financial and material assistance to refugees in health, education, and social integration, including free Hungarian language instruction. As part of the social integration support, refugees were entitled to up to 520 hours of free Hungarian language courses (Budai, 2022, 147). However, a weakness of the integration system was its structure, whereby assistance in each sphere was to be provided separately (Szabó, 2018, 232). Although the new integration policy system gained significant improvements in financial contributions for refugees, it neglected other areas of integration, including the provision of language courses, which it left to the non-profit sector (Szabó, 2018, 232). Thus, there were no language courses organised at the state level. NGOs and church organisations provided all initiatives related to Hungarian language teaching (Budai, 2022, 147). There are currently no integration programmes and Hungarian language courses financed by the state budget (Németh, 2022, 66).

Slovakia already offers language courses for refugees during their stay in the integration centre. It should be an introductory course in the Slovak language, which should succeed in integrating the refugees into Slovak society. These courses are organised by the Ministry of the Interior, and refugees who have not stayed in an integration centre also can participate in the course if they request it (Marczyová, 2018, 124).

Both refugees and other migrants are subsequently offered integration services in the form of Slovak language lessons, also voluntarily. This type of service is financed with the support of AMIF. The disadvantage is that the course teaching is limited to only two cities – Bratislava and Košice (Sekulová & Hlinčíková, 2018, 47–48). However, criticism is directed at the quality of

the courses, which are mostly delivered by volunteers and do not take into account the diversity of participants (Sekulová & Hlinčíková, 2018, 44). In addition, refugees do not receive a certificate of language proficiency upon completion of the courses (Sekulová & Hlinčíková, 2018, 47).

The International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2023) also organises Slovak language courses. The free Slovak language courses are intended for all kinds of migrants. They are primarily aimed at adult migrants and are recommended for beginners. Courses run twice a week (1 meeting approx. 90 min.) in both face-to-face and online formats for three months. The Slovak language lessons are mainly in the form of conversational exercises and are aimed at helping foreigners to navigate everyday life (shopping, doctors, work, etc.).

Besides Hungary, three of the four Visegrad countries currently provide free courses for refugees. The format of these courses is time-limited and aimed at beginners in all the examples mentioned. Thus, assistance with local language learning is limited to newly arrived refugees who are expected to acquire the language within a certain period. Courses provided by the state sector are often criticised for insufficient flexibility, which can be limiting for refugees. The limited form of the courses may cause low attendance and, therefore, dysfunctional integration policies.

*NGOs' involvement*

Non-governmental organisations are essential in providing language courses in all V4 countries. In contrast to the state-organised courses, the non-state sector provides language teaching in different forms, considering the possibilities of those interested while focusing on several types of migrants.

Multiple NGOs have long provided free language courses for migrants in the Czech Republic. The first example of good practice is the Click with School project, which is run by META. META is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation that focuses on supporting foreigners in education and work integration (META, 2023). The target group of this project was foreigners who had graduated from primary school. The aim of the Click with School project was the intention to "create a new type of course that would combine language teaching with the primary school curriculum. This was to facilitate the possibility of subsequent employment in secondary school" (Inkluzivní škola, 2022).

The course is organised in the same way as the primary school, with students attending classes five days a week and spending approximately six hours in school. The course is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on teaching the basics of the Czech language (A0 level), during which students should mainly acquire basic skills such as writing, speaking, and listening. At the end of the first part of the course, students should have acquired knowledge at an advanced level (A2). The first part is therefore concluded with a final exam that verifies this knowledge. A similar type of learning

continues in the second part of the course with a difference in the level of learning. Part of the second section of the course is also an effort to familiarise students with the Czech education system. Subjects from primary education combined with the Czech language are included in the teaching. At the end of the second half of the course, the students again take a B1-level verification exam. At the end, the student receives a certificate indicating the level of Czech language proficiency.

Another initiative is the Conversation Clubs project, which is represented by the Czech NGO People in Need (Člověk v tísni, 2023). The initiative's primary goal is to help Ukrainian students with Czech language tutoring and preparation for the Czech school entrance exams. However, it is an online open space for all those interested in tutoring. The portal offers conversation materials on everyday topics such as sports, hobbies, and movies, which are intended for teenagers but can also be used by adults. Ten topics in total do not interact with each other in any way and can thus alternate in the order preferred by the students. Each course lasts an hour and a half, and the student is provided with materials in the form of worksheets beforehand.

The involvement of NGOs in language teaching for refugees in Poland is reflected in the initiative of Wrocław Integration Centre (WCI). WCI is a local government unit that implemented the Wrocław na językach świata (Wrocław on the Languages of the World) project. The project aims to help foreigners improve their Polish language skills with the help of the involvement of the residents of Wrocław. The project helps organise meetings between Wrocław residents and foreigners. WCI has even set up an online platform for interested individuals to register for the programme. The partners in the programme are non-governmental organisations (associations, foundations), churches, public institutions (e.g., libraries and universities), and private entities. The assistance mainly involved facilitating the venues where the courses took place. These contained more than 60 venues, including restaurants, NGO headquarters, university premises, churches, and others (WCI, 2023).

In the case of Hungary, as already mentioned, the activities of the non-governmental sector play a crucial role in teaching the Hungarian language. After 2015, along with the abolition of the integration system, the AMIF, the largest source of refugee support in Hungary, was also discontinued, resulting in NGOs losing financial resources and being unable to fund integration activities themselves. "The political position of the governmental parties necessarily led to the dismantling of every integration tools. Not only financial support and progressive projects were terminated but, through these, professional knowledge and experience gathered became useless" (Szabó, 2018, 235).

Even though Hungary's response to the arrival of refugees from Ukraine has been more welcoming, the organisation of language courses was still handled by the non-governmental sector. A non-profit NGO called Tabula

Plaza Foundation assisted refugees with Hungarian language instruction, which focuses primarily on community development and social welfare for vulnerable populations. The initiative aimed to develop the language skills of the refugees. The courses were aimed at helping both children (supporting integration into the Hungarian education system) and adults (improving language skills for the labour market). The Foundation offered a course with 300 hours of instruction, with lessons taking place up to three times a week. Even so, this was a flexible course timetable with an attempt to consider the needs of the refugees, with the possibility of individual courses offered in specific cases (e.g., due to working hours).

Another example is the Hungarian language courses developed in cooperation between the Life without fear Foundation and the Honorary Consulate of Ukraine in Siófok (Félelem Nélküli Élet, 2022). It was a group of children and adults, meaning that siblings or mothers with children could attend the courses. Classes were held twice a week (about 2.5 hours each time) with a proficient teacher in both Ukrainian and Hungarian. An interesting feature was organising a trip around Hungary with a bilingual guide. The advantage was again the flexibility that allowed mothers to attend classes without having to arrange childcare for the children.

In Slovakia, the NGO Mareena offered assistance with the integration of Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia (Mareena, 2023). This organisation's priority is assisting foreigners in their integration into Slovak society. Mareena offers free Slovak language courses in both face-to-face and online formats. Courses are held twice a week and always in the evening in several cities (Bratislava, Nitra, Košice). The organisation's initiative also includes a form of language cafés. These are friendly conversational meetings between native speakers and foreigners, during which foreigners can practice their Slovak language.

This section shows that the non-profit sector covers much refugee integration assistance in all four countries. Individual initiatives present many creative and flexible ways for migrants to learn the local language. However, the heavy burden on the non-profit sector (especially in Hungary) remains a problem. Also, insufficient funding within the non-profit sector affects the quality of the courses. Most teachers are volunteers not sufficiently qualified to teach the local language.

### Buddy programmes

In recent years, buddy programmes have become a widely used form of language teaching for foreigners. These initiatives involve citizens of the host country voluntarily helping by teaching the local language to refugees. This section presents examples of buddy programmes that have taken place in the V4 countries.

In the Czech Republic, an initiative called Buď můj druh (Be my buddy) was established in Brno, which aims to help young people fleeing the war in Ukraine to cope with their difficult situation by finding a buddy. This

buddy would help with language lessons, orientation in the city, and general integration into life in Czechia. The project involved mainly high school students who knew Ukrainian and were interested in participating. The NGO NESEHNUTÍ Brno led the initiative, which has been running buddy programmes for foreigners since 2016 (Nesehnutí, 2022).

In Poland, a similar programme has been initiated by the Polish Migration Forum Foundation (PFM). PFM supported creating an initiative called Chodź na słowko (Come on for a word), which focused on teaching the Polish language using a conversation between a foreigner and a native speaker (PFM, 2023). The classes would occur once a week for three months and could be online and face-to-face. Involvement does not require pedagogical training; it is mainly a volunteer activity through which Polish citizens can help refugees.

In March 2023, a project called Buddies for Ukrainians (Buddici, 2023) was established in Slovakia. It is an initiative of volunteers to help Ukrainian refugees. The project works on the principle of pairing Slovak volunteers (called Buddies) and Ukrainian refugees. The Buddies' task is to converse with their Ukrainian counterparts according to pre-prepared materials. The subject of the conversation is mainly related to practical matters and should be helpful in everyday communication. Participation in this type of language learning is flexible, depending on the agreement between the pair (at least one hour per week is recommended). Anyone can join the project using the form on the project website.

A huge advantage of buddy programmes is their flexibility – meetings can be arranged to suit the individuals' time and take place online. In addition, communicating with a native speaker can contribute to a significant improvement in language skills. However, this form often requires a combination of other teaching methods. Buddy programmes focus primarily on pronunciation and communication in the local language and may, therefore, neglect the development of other basic language skills, such as writing and reading.

### Role of schools and universities

Educational institutions also play a significant role in language teaching. However, these usually focus on a specific group of refugees (children, adolescents). In all four countries, such institutions responded to the need to teach language to refugee children.

Migrants, who are staying in the Czech Republic, perceive the lack of knowledge of the Czech language as a significant obstacle to integration (as many as 59% of the surveyed migrants who have temporary residence in the Czech Republic said this) (Ministerstvo vnitra ČR, 2016, 9). Ensuring equal opportunities for child migrants in education is particularly problematic. Due to the increase in the number of migrants, there are obstacles to integrating newly arrived children into Czech schools (Ministerstvo vnitra ČR, 2016, 12). In addition, communication between parents and schools is also problematic, mainly because the number of schools that use the services of interpreters or teaching assistants is very low (Ministerstvo vnitra ČR, 2016).

Good practice also includes assistance from universities. The Institute of East European Studies, Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, has provided Ukrainian language courses for staff and students (Fakulta filozofická UK, 2023). The University's efforts are primarily to respond to newly arrived academic staff and students from Ukraine. Courses will run from Spring 2022, once a week for different language levels. Another initiative of Charles University is a project by a research group from the Institute of Formal and Applied Linguistics (Faculty of Mathematics and Physics) (ÚFAL, 2022). It is an application called Charles Translator for Ukraine, developed by language processing experts to help refugees from Ukraine cope with the language barrier. Refugees can thus use the app free of charge in cases related to everyday life (in offices, shops, work, etc.). This is another possible way to overcome the language barrier and enable Ukrainian refugees to communicate with the local population, especially after arrival when it is most problematic.

In Poland, in the context of child refugees, there is an opportunity to participate in free supplementary Polish language classes in schools. Assistance in this sphere is provided for 12 months by a teaching assistant, who must be proficient in the child's mother tongue. In addition, adaptation preparatory classes are also available for child migrants. These focus on helping refugee children adapt to the Polish culture and education system for one year, with the possibility of extending the stipulated period (Koss-Goryszewska & Pawlak, 2018, 181).

In Hungary, there is also a concept of preparatory classes for child refugees. This means that foreign children are separated from Hungarian children until their level of Hungarian is sufficient for integration into regular classes. However, only a small number of institutions provide the option of preparatory classes. The primary reason for this is that most schools do not have the expertise to provide these services (Asylum Information Database, 2023).

Special basic and then extension courses in the Slovak language are organised for children of foreigners (Marczyová 2018, 129). However, as far as education is concerned, schools lack a methodology for teaching migrant children. The absence of teaching Slovak as a foreign language in schools and the inclusion of migrant children in classes lower than their age category refers to the unpreparedness of the Slovak education system for the implementation of the integration strategy (Sekulová & Hlinčíková, 2018, 48–49).

Assistance with language teaching by educational institutions must be solved in most countries mentioned. Only a few institutions have sufficient capacity (e.g., teaching assistants) to provide all the necessary conditions for teaching foreign children. The lack of capacity to teach migrants is associated with the unpreparedness of the V4 countries for the influx of large numbers of refugees.

### The specific practice of cooperation of the state and NGOs in the form of integration centres

In the above chapters, we have focused on the role of the state and non-state sectors in providing local language teaching. Both sectors have particular

positives and negatives. For example, while the non-profit sector is very active in providing flexible language courses, it needs qualified teachers. In contrast, in the case of the state sector, the courses provided need to be more flexible to meet the needs of refugees. In this context, cooperation between the two sectors could be a solution to ensure the quality and flexibility of the teaching offered. Such cooperation occurs between integration centres and NGOs within the two countries.

The Centres for Supporting the Integration of Foreigners play a crucial role in the integration of migrants in the Czech Republic. They are located in each of the 14 regions of the Czech Republic and were established by the Administration of Refugee Facilities. The functioning of the centres is financed by the European Fund for the Integration of Foreigners from Third Countries. Their agenda includes social and legal counselling, Czech language courses, sociocultural courses, interpreting, or the aforementioned compulsory adaptation-integration courses (Ministerstvo vnitra ČR, 2023, 3). In their activities, CPICs cooperate with NGOs that play a partnership role or are direct implementers of specific projects (Ministerstvo vnitra ČR, 2016, 10).

However, the activities of NGOs in the integration of foreigners have faced a long-standing problem – their activities are mostly limited to larger cities, which leads to many difficulties due to the uneven provision of integration services across the regions of the Czech Republic (Ministerstvo vnitra ČR, 2016, 11). After 2022, due to the increased need for integration activities, the CPIC network has been expanded. The centres were integrated into the functioning of the Regional Assistance Centres for Refugees, and subsequently, the number of CPICs was increased (Správa uprchlických zařízení Ministerstva vnitra, 2023, 13).

Cooperation between integration centres and NGOs also took place in Slovakia. NGOs in cooperation with the Migration Office of the Slovak Republic also provide integration services for refugees (including language instruction). Refugees are entitled to financial support of EUR 300 per month for six months. If receiving financial support, refugees are obliged to attend free Slovak language courses.

The cooperation between integration centres and NGOs in the countries mentioned represents good practice in such partnerships. Deepening and expanding the cooperation between the non-state and state sectors in other V4 countries could significantly contribute to making the integration process of foreigners more efficient.

## Lessons learned and recommendations

In the context of this chapter, the final discussion will focus on three critical points identified as the most problematic concerning the provision of local language teaching.

The first is the flexibility of the courses – compulsory attendance, time constraints, and the uneven provision of integration services in different

regions. As mentioned, it is difficult for refugees to attend courses regularly due to work and family load. This problem leads to frequent changes in the composition of the groups attending the courses, where it is impossible to maintain the continuity of teaching time.

The second problem is related to the insufficient number of courses offered – most courses are already fully booked on the first day after registration is announced. As a result, many refugees did not get the opportunity to attend the courses, which led to them not attending or having to pay for any language course. However, the amount of money to provide courses has increased sharply with the arrival of many refugees, so many refugees have been unable to pay for the courses.

A final issue identified is the poorly qualified volunteers who often provided the teaching. So, even after completing the courses, many refugees still need help overcoming the language barrier and integrating into local society. The lack of more qualified institutions providing courses also means that refugees do not receive certificates of completion. This can lead to difficulties when trying to obtain employment or education because some universities and employers require a certificate of local language proficiency for admission.

However, several initiatives have been developed in the last two years to address these problems, particularly by making courses more flexible. Projects have been set up in the V4 countries to communicate with native speakers. More of these initiatives should be developed to avoid capacity problems. Increasing the number of courses offered while focusing on flexibility could lead to equitable assistance for all interested parties and thus to sustainable integration of refugees.

The central issue remains the need for greater involvement of state institutions, which could particularly improve the quality of the courses provided. Despite the many initiatives developed, the NGO sector remains under tremendous pressure, mainly due to the large number of newly arrived migrants whose demands it cannot respond to. Increased cooperation between the state and NGO sectors could improve all three areas discussed.

As mentioned in the introduction, a lack of knowledge of the host country's language causes difficulties for migrants in many other areas of integration. National governments should respond to these problems by addressing migration and integration policies at the national level in cooperation with the non-governmental sector and other countries to improve conditions for migrants. Greater integration of migrants could lead to improvements not only for migrants but also for the host country (e.g., economic growth).

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# 8 Inclusion of children and youth in the national education system

*Marlena Piotrowska*

## Introduction

The Visegrad countries have adopted several legal solutions for joining a school, especially as new pupils arrived during the ongoing school year. According to UNESCO, migrant children and teenagers may enrol in the national education system at all levels in Poland, Hungary, Czechia, and Slovakia and have access to free public education on the same basis as nationals (UNESCO, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2023d). Access to the education system by itself does not complete the needs of children and youth. Language, psychological, and teaching support is important, too, as well as the opportunity to continue education at a higher level. Some children and teenagers who had left Ukraine continued their education by distant means. It is important to note that distance learning is not an ideal scenario either – although it enables the fulfilment of compulsory schooling in the Ukrainian education system and maintaining contact with Ukrainian colleagues, it also creates challenges and barriers. Therefore, many parents applied for their children to be admitted to schools and preschools.

The concept of inclusion is explained in opposition to social exclusion, as observed by many researchers. Social inclusion is the process by which one exits from social exclusion. It is achievable by "creating opportunities for people at risk of social exclusion to obtain the opportunities and adequate resources needed to participate fully in economic, cultural, and social life and to reach a standard of living regarded as normal in a society" (Sobczak, 2016, 55). For this purpose, social inclusion should be analysed in three dimensions: political, civic, and economic (Sobczak, 2016, 55–56). The issue of inclusion is often discussed in the literature in the context of including people with disabilities in the education system. However, as Bąbka and Nowicka note,

> There has been a trend in recent years to move away from the idea and practice of including only pupils with disabilities in mainstream education to the inclusion of a wider group of children and young people with so-called special educational needs.
>
> (Bąbka & Nowicka, 2019, 19)

According to the Polish Ministry of Education and Science, a school where inclusive education is applied "is able to recognise the needs of each pupil and adapt the educational process so that all can succeed, though each to the extent of his or her abilities" (Ministerstwo Edukacji i Nauki, 2023).

The chapter will present solutions implemented in relation to the inflow of children and teenagers from Ukraine to schools in the V4 countries. Education is among the most significant instruments of integration of foreigners in the host countries, so it is worth to explore good practices in this area. The chapter attempts to answer the question: what good practices can we identify in the inclusion of children and youth in the national education system? The chapter is based on official data and official information published by educational institutions, organisations, and initiatives (on their websites, social media, etc.). Due to the sheer breadth of topics, it will present initiatives addressed mainly to school-age children. Due to the enormous number of Ukrainian pupils who have arrived in Poland, many examples presented in this chapter will relate to Poland.

## Children and youth from Ukraine in the Visegrad Group countries

The total number of children enroled in schools in V4 countries is more than 253,000 – in Poland: 181,770, Czechia: 51,281, Slovakia: 15,000, Hungary: 4,965 is able to recognise the needs of each pupil and adapt the educational process so that all can succeed, though each to the extent of his or her abilities data for the school year of 2022/2023 (UNESCO, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2023d). Both the differences in the number of refugees and in the age of children under compulsory education affect the challenges for the host countries.

Other important points that determine the inclusion of Ukrainian children in national education are the legal conditions regarding the age of compulsory education. The age of compulsory education is different in the V4 countries. In Hungary education is compulsory between the age of 3 and 16 and in Czechia: between 6 and 15. Interestingly, children in Czechia are required to start compulsory school attendance within three months of arrival. Preschool education is compulsory both in Slovakia and Poland. In Slovakia it begins for children who are five years of age by 31 August. Compulsory education applies to children aged 6–16, but education is not compulsory for refugee children with temporary protection status. In Poland, a distinction is made between compulsory primary schooling and compulsory education. Children in Poland at the age of six are required to have one year of preschool education and education in Poland is compulsory until the age of 18 and applies also to non-citizens. Both the differences in the number of refugees who have arrived in a country and the differences in the age of children under compulsory education affect the challenges for countries (European Commision, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2023d).

### Legal and formal conditions for the inclusion of children and youth in the Visegrad Group countries

According to the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), member states, including the Visegrad countries, recognise a child's right to education, which is also a fundamental human right contained in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (United Nations, 1948). The right to education is also regulated by regional organisations as well as individual countries, and an analysis of this area could be a stand-alone study. The groundwork for the V4 countries and other EU member states to grant temporary protection to persons displaced from Ukraine and thus ensuring the right to education at the same level as citizens was the Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382 of 4 March 2022 establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine within the meaning of Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC and having the effect of introducing temporary protection. Each country has transposed the directive into the national legal framework (UNESCO, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2023d).

Pupils from Ukraine were able to choose different forms of education, which took the following variants:

- Children who study only in educational institutions abroad and do not study in educational institutions in Ukraine;
- Children studying both in educational institutions abroad and in Ukraine in an individual form of education (home-based education);
- Children studying in educational institutions abroad and in Ukraine in the form of distance learning;
- Children who study remotely only in Ukrainian schools and do not study in institutions in the host country.

The existing alternatives have contributed to the significant challenges stand-alone as the choice of different education options also means the possibility of not going to school. In September 2023, UNHCR published an Education Policy Brief, addressing the issue of children not entering education. There is undoubtedly a disparity in the enrolment of primary and secondary school students - the latter are enroling less frequently in the host country's education system. (UNHCR, 2023). Understanding the reasons for the participation or the non-participation of refugees from Ukraine in the education system., e.g. in Poland, is also the subject of separate, advanced researches (Herbst & Sitek, 2023).

### Good practices in the field of education system

Good practices in the field of education are variable: employment of teacher assistants, language support for children and parents, and the development of educational integration models that integrate children and young people from Ukraine into the education system. These practices include initiatives by states, NGOs, and citizens' initiatives. Very often these are

the results of cooperation between different sectors: public, private, and non-governmental.

Good practices in the field of the education can be divided into several areas:

- Access to education (educational institutions);
- Educational materials (textbooks and other learning materials, including learning through entertainment, e.g., television or web portals for children and youth);
- Equipment;
- Support in learning national languages;
- Psychological support;
- Peer support;
- Possibility to take high school exams and continue studies at the university;
- Support in cultivating the Ukrainian language and traditions;
- Supporting non-formal initiatives.

*Access to education*

A good practice in the area of inclusion of children and youth in the national education system is a teaching assistant, often Ukrainians who had already lived in the V4 countries before the war, or who previously knew the official languages of these countries, and who decided to start working in schools after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Such people, if they did not have experience and competencies in the education field, could receive additional training. In the Czech Republic, for example, it was organised by the Educational Institute of the Central Bohemian Region (VISK) in cooperation with other regional educational institutions and UNICEF. Importantly, thanks to UNICEF support, the training was free of charge for Ukrainian and Czech participants (UNICEF, 2023). In Poland in 2022, according to the education law, the position of teacher's assistant could be taken up by non-Polish nationals who have knowledge of the Polish language, both spoken and written, to the extent that they could assist a pupil who does not know Polish or knows it at a level insufficient for learning. Due to the high need for employment of teacher's assistants, such persons were not required to have documents confirming their knowledge of the Polish language. Ukrainian nationals could be also employed at schools as teachers. Moreover, the person did not have to fulfil all qualification requirements, but only the relevant preparation. Whether such a person had adequate preparation was decided by the school director (Ministerstwo Edukacji i Nauki, 2022b).

A wide range of initiatives for preschool children have also been implemented, e.g., a programme called SPYNKA (Ukrainian: *back of the chair, backbone*) provides childcare and educational groups for Ukrainian and Polish children. The classes are run by qualified Ukrainian and Polish-speaking

caregivers. The project has been implemented since April 2022 by the Comenius Foundation for Child Development (Fundacja Rozwoju Dzieci), in partnership with UNICEF, Plan International, World Childhood Foundation, and other international charities, and in cooperation with local governments, NGOs, and institutions. It is being implemented in more than 20 Polish cities (Spynka.org, 2023). The partner of the facility in Kraków is IKEA, which has equipped it with all necessary furniture and accessories. In this city, according to the project implementers, 75 Ukrainian children aged 2–6 years benefit from care every day (FINE.ngo, 2023b).

NGOs are also involved in the organisation of the work of intercultural assistants. One example is the Ukraine Foundation, based in Wrocław, which provides long-term support for the adaptation and education of pupils in Polish schools. For this purpose, it employs around 50 intercultural assistants in more than 30 schools in several towns in the Lower Silesian Voivodeship. Among the tasks provided by intercultural assistants, there are supporting pupils in the process of cultural adaptation, helping with their homework (e.g., translating the content of homework into a language understood by the pupil), participating in school lessons to support the pupil in his/her studies, or acting as an intermediary between the school and parents/guardians (Fundacja Ukraina, 2023).

The preparatory classes (or welcome classes) are also ideas for inclusion in the field of education. They are organised for students who do not speak the language of the host country or who do not speak it sufficiently to undertake education in an "ordinary" class. The number of students in a welcome class in Poland may not exceed 25. Preparatory classes take different forms depending on educational needs and the possibilities of the school authorities: a school preparatory class, an inter-school preparatory class, or an inter-communal preparatory class (Ministerstwo Edukacji i Nauki, 2022a).

Various websites have been created to help children from Ukraine and their parents find out about the education system of the host countries and find an appropriate educational institution. Often, these websites also contain information addressed to teachers from Ukraine who could work at schools (Ministerstvo školstva, vedy, výskumu a športu Slovenskej republiky, 2023). Information about education was disseminated on dedicated information portals or sub-sites devoted to helping people from Ukraine, e. g., Bratislava for Ukraine (Bratislava, 2023) or UAINFO (Civil Közoktatási Platform, 2023). The Polish Ministry of Education and Science has also launched a chatbot providing information in Polish and Ukrainian. This enabled children and parents to find out more about, for example, enrolment in school (Ministerstwo Edukacji i Nauki, 2022c). There was also an interesting "spontaneous initiative" of schools ScioŠkola and the Brno-based software company Ximilar, who have created the Shkola platform. Its aim is to help Ukrainian families find a kindergarten, primary school, or secondary school in Czechia. The website includes a map showing schools that have free places and are ready to enrol children (ScioŠkol & Ximilar, 2023). Importantly,

such websites are not only maintained in the national languages (Czech, Slovakian, Hungarian, or Polish) but also in Ukrainian and often in Russian, making it easier for parents and legal guardians of children to understand information on the host country's education system. Access to information on educational services for Ukrainian children and young people has also been provided through other channels: in institutions and organisations aiding people, as well as during extraordinary events. As an example, it is worth mentioning a conference in September 2022 in Hungary titled, "Who, what, how: Ukrainian Refugee Children in Hungarian Public Education" (Ki, mit, hogyan: Ukrán menekült gyermekek a magyar közoktatásban). The meeting was translated into Ukrainian, which was undoubtedly an advantage for non-Hungarian speakers (United Way, 2022a, 2022b). The usefulness of this type of initiative is illustrated by the fact that, one year later, United Way organised another conference and workshop on helping refugees from Ukraine. One of the topics discussed was the education and integration of children and young refugees (United Way, 2023).

The importance of communication between parents of pupils and the school is also recognised by local authorities responsible for the functioning of diverse types of schools. One example of communication is the brochure "Starter Pack" ("Pakiet Startowy"), published in Wrocław in Polish, Ukrainian, and English. Its publisher was the Wrocław Center for Social Development (Wrocławskie Centrum Rozwoju Społecznego) in cooperation with the Department of Education of Wrocław City Office (Departament Edukacji Urzędu Miejskiego Wrocławia). The brochure has an unusual format, with the first half addressed to parents and the second half to children. The first part includes information on what to do before enroling a child in school, information explaining how the education system in Poland works, what everyday life is like at school, as well as what the school expects from parents. Sample documents may also be important: excuses, consents, and dismissals from lessons. The second part of the publication deals with topics close to pupils, including information on where they can get support when they need it, explaining the differences between diverse types of schools or what to do in a crisis. The brochure also contains a glossary, explaining education-related terms. The publication is also available in an electronic version. Its first revised edition was produced as part of a UNICEF-funded project (Tarasewicz-Gryt & Kosior, 2022). The 2023 edition does not mention external funding (Adamiec et al., 2023).

The war in Ukraine resulted in the creation of new educational institutions in the V4 countries. In Slovakia, the Ukrainian School in Evacuation (USE) has been inaugurated within the project "Creation of Ukrainian community centres for supporting education, integration and protection of Ukrainians who received temporary protection in Slovakia". The project operates in cooperation with UNICEF and with support from Cambridge International School in Bratislava. Importantly, in addition to providing teaching opportunities for pupils between seventh and 11th class, the school offers employment

to people from Ukraine who have temporary protection. These include both teachers and administrative staff (SME SPOLU, 2023). A similar project has been implemented in Poland. The kindergarten Tiny Land (Maleńka Kraina) was inaugurated in October 2022 in Szczecin. Its initiator is the YOUkraine Foundation, founded by two sisters, Ukrainian women, who had lived in Poland for 20 years. The kindergarten is attended by 75 children, and the institution employs people from Ukraine. Relatives of preschoolers also join the community by volunteering (YOUkraine, 2022). This provides an opportunity for Ukrainian children to continue their preschool education but also enables persons from Ukraine to work in Poland and their relatives to fulfil their need to belong in action for the benefit of the community. Educational institutions created for children from Ukraine, offering jobs for refugees from this country, are especially important; they create and keep relationships and cultivate Ukrainian traditions, but their functioning carries the risk of social hermetisation of foreigners. Consequently, this can be a barrier to inclusion.

The Slovak company Soficreo has developed a Ukrainian language equivalent of the Temeea education platform called SchoolToGo. The platform enables Ukrainian pupils to receive online education, psychological support, and various learning formats and, moreover, to stay in touch with Ukrainian-speaking colleagues and teachers. It is worth mentioning that Soficreo has already made a name for itself in pro bono work when it made the Temeea platform available free of charge to Slovak primary and secondary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic for remote learning purposes. This type of solution creates good opportunities for pupils who have problems adapting to schools abroad or who, due to special educational needs, have to spend more time in learning (School To Go, 2023).

However, the above examples relate to opportunities for Ukrainian children and youth to learn among their compatriots (both on-site in host countries and online), which can also have negative consequences. If such individuals do not engage in activities outside educational institutions, there will be a limited opportunity for their integration in the host country. Consequently, such actions hinder the formation of social networks and ties and make it difficult to participate in the community as a full member.

### Educational materials

In policy recommendations on the education of refugees from Ukraine, UNHCR indicates that "education systems in Europe should build enough capacity so they can provide every refugee child with a place in school" (UNHCR, 2023, 21), which also applies to access to teaching materials. It is therefore worth discussing the educational materials prepared for refugees.

Among the materials for learning the Polish language, it is important to mention the "Handbook for learning to read for Ukrainian children. First steps in learning Polish" – a textbook that can be used by both teachers and parents. This graphically attractive book contains exercises to practise

listening, repeating, understanding, talking, and reading. The Polish language is learned using a variety of methods and activities, including cutting out and pasting (Błasiak-Tytuła, 2022). The project was created as one of the initiatives of FINE – Foundation of Initiatives for New Education (Fundacja Inicjatyw dla Nowej Edukacji), "an organisation that serves the purpose of developing the skills and attitudes of the future" (FINE.ngo, 2023a). Since June 2022, the foundation has been operating under the official umbrella of UNICEF (Błasiak-Tytuła, 2022, 130).

Some publishing houses made Ukrainian-language books, colouring books, and other materials available for free (e.g., for a limited time, after registration). In addition, new initiatives were created for Ukrainian children and young people. Psychologists from the University of Wrocław and SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities (in collaboration with students, an illustrator, and a graphic designer) prepared a therapeutic fairy tale "Ola, Boris and their new friends". The creators received funding from Amazon Fulfillment Poland, as well as support from their universities and the Zaczytani Foundation (Fundacja Zaczytani). The books were donated to institutions and organisations helping people from Ukraine (Uniwersytet Wrocławski, 2022). The book can also be downloaded from the website in Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, and English (Centrum Interdyscyplinarnych Badań nad Zdrowiem i Chorobą, 2022).

Educational materials are not only learning materials for pupils, but also developed tools and materials for teachers. Among grassroots activities, the Centre for Civic Education (Centrum Edukacji Obywatelskiej, CEO) in Poland has developed a model of educational integration, which addresses the need to include Ukrainian children in the education system and adapt the school to function under new conditions. The solution is aimed at educational experts, school managers, and teachers. According to the CEO, "educational integration is an ongoing process that allows a school to equally support the educational success of all students regardless of their nationality and diverse needs" (Centrum Edukacji Obywatelskiej, 2022). This model can be seen as a universal way of including all pupils with migration experience in the educational system. Among the students' needs, the authors of the model highlight needs that are specific to Ukrainian pupils, such as the need to cope with separation, trauma, or loss. The material was created within a project funded by the Norwegian Refugee Council (Centrum Edukacji Obywatelskiej, 2022).

Public television, implementing its mission, which includes offering not only informative but also educational programmes, has prepared video materials, for example, public television in Czechia has prepared materials for Ukrainian-speaking children to help them learn the Czech language. The website also includes videos in Ukrainian for different age groups and on different subject areas, e.g., mathematics or history (Česká televize, 2022). From March 2022, Polish Television has broadcast cartoons and programmes in Ukrainian three times a day on the children's channel TVP ABC 2. In addition

to broadcasting on this channel, all cartoons and programmes developed in Ukrainian were successively uploaded to a special section on the TVP ABC website and on TVP's Video On Demand service (Telewizja Polska, 2022).

*Equipment*

The learning process would be hindered not only without textbooks but also without equipment. Many institutions, companies, and NGOs have donated IT equipment for schoolchildren and teachers from Ukraine. Pupils arriving in the V4 countries could be helped by various organisations, which provided them with equipment to support their education. Toyota Motor Manufacturing Czech Republic has donated at least 140 laptops to Ukrainian pupils and teachers so that they can participate in classes via the internet, and also be in contact with their Ukrainian family members and friends (Toyota, 2022). In 2022 in Hungary, HP donated 7,000 laptops to Ukrainian children and their families, as well as to supporting organisations and educational institutions (Partners Hungary Foundation, 2022). In June 2022, pupils residing in Poland received computer equipment within the "School for You" ("Szkoła dla Was") campaign implemented on the initiative of the Ministry of Education and Science, GovTech, the Cyfrowa Polska Association (Związek Cyfrowa Polska), as well as the Polish Post Office and the Freedom and Democracy Foundation (Fundacja Wolność i Demokracja) (Ministerstwo Edukacji i Nauki, 2022d).

In Slovakia in 2023, a programme has been launched to provide 20,000 pupils from Ukraine with digital equipment. Support is granted in the form of vouchers with a value of 350 Euros, which can be used to buy a digital device. According to the initiators, the project can help motivate Ukrainian children to attend schools in Slovakia, ensuring not only continuity in the learning process but also contributing to social inclusion. The initiator is the Digital Coalition – National Coalition for Digital Skills and Professions of the Slovak Republic (Digitálna koalícia – Národná koalícia pre digitálne zručnosti a povolania Slovenskej republiky), and the project is funded by the European Union – the Operational Programme European Structural and Investment Funds, Integrated Infrastructure (Digitálna koalícia, 2023; Krištofičová, 2023). Compared to programmes aimed at retrofitting Ukrainian students with electronic equipment for remote learning in the Ukrainian education system, the project implemented in Slovakia is distinctive and can contribute to the inclusion of Ukrainian students in the Slovak education system.

*Mental health*

Psychological support is an essential element in the inclusion of children and young people in national education systems. In the context of war trauma and other mental health problems, especially among pupils, it is also worth mentioning programmes for young people that deal with mental health. The National Institute of Mental Health in Czechia has initiated the project "Supporting the

mental health of children, parents and teachers in the Czech Republic affected by the war in Ukraine" for pupils aged 10–14 in Czech primary schools. The project involves child and adolescent mental health specialists with support from UNICEF and WHO (National Institute of Mental Health, 2023). Among the good practices, there were also valuable information campaigns to help in coping with a crisis situation, consisting of educational material in the form of infographics (e.g., information aimed at people experiencing trauma) or brochures, but also specialised webinars, addressed to parents and teachers, about how to talk to children about war (Česká odborná společnost pro inkluzivní vzdělávání, 2023).

A project entitled "Supporting the Psycho-Social Well-Being of Ukrainian Children in the Hungarian Education System" has been initiated in Hungary. Its aim is to facilitate the school integration of Ukrainian children, as well as to support the mental health of children and their parents. The project is organised by the Hungarian Association for Migrants – Menedék, which has many years of experience in the social integration of immigrants arriving and departing from Hungary. The project runs from the first of March 2023 until the end of this year. The project is supported by the International Rescue Committee. Within the project, Ukrainian pupils can look forward to, among other things, individual counselling focusing on their special needs, after-school group activities for children from Ukraine, community-building classroom activities in classes where Ukrainian children study, summer camps, and day camps. Parents of children from Ukraine can also receive assistance with, for example, translation or intercultural mediation, and school professionals who deal with children fleeing from Ukraine can participate in workshops or individual consultations (Menedék, 2023).

The work of helplines for children and youth is also important. One such example is the helpline for children and young people operating in Poland (the number 116 111). In June 2022, the service was broadened to a free anonymous helpline for children from Ukraine, thanks to the Orange Foundation (Fundacja Orange) and the Empowering Children Foundation (Fundacja Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę). Children were able to speak to psychologists from Ukraine from Monday to Friday between 2.00 pm and 6 pm (Fundacja Orange, 2022). Currently, the hotline in Ukrainian and Russian is open daily from 2 pm to midnight (Fundacja Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę, 2023).

It is extremely important to implement projects focusing on short-term psychological support or the functioning of helplines; however, it is more important to introduce a long-term strategy for the psychological support to children and young people with refugee experience.

*Peer support*

In the process of inclusion of pupils with a migrant or refugee history, it is important to build social networks among pupils at school, which will

facilitate their access to social resources: symbols, things, and feelings (Orłowska et al., 2022, 92). In Slovakia, a "Peer Support Program" ("Program Rovesníckej Podpory") has been implemented, whereby a Ukrainian pupil is assigned a local school friend willing to help and provide support at the beginning of education. This type of initiative, spread around the world as the Buddy Program, serves to support new students in meeting their responsibilities and helps them to integrate into their new school environment. In addition, it can develop the intercultural competences of both local students and newcomers from Ukraine. What is important in the relationship is that both sides (the experienced pupil and the newcomer) join the programme voluntarily. On the website of the National Institute of Education and Youth, students can find methodological material about the project in both Slovak and Ukrainian, information posters, and other materials (Národný inštitút vzdelávania a mládeže, 2023).

A similar idea of peer support was implemented in Poland but initiated by a high school student from Warsaw. The project has been called "You've Got a Friend in Me" ("Druha We Mnie Masz") and, through an online platform, paired people aged 16–25 from Poland with someone from Ukraine. After filling in a special form on the website, volunteers matched interested people into pairs, which opened the possibility of making new friends. Several thousand Polish and Ukrainian young people participated in the activity (Druha We Mnie Masz, 2022a). In May 2022, the organisers announced that they had also launched the project in Hungary (Druha We Mnie Masz, 2022b). Unfortunately, they did not present more information about the scale of project realisation in Hungary. The Warsaw high school student was supported in her project by the association MożeMy!, as well as Polish students studying at European universities. The project also received promotional support from dozens of people within the Ambassador Programme (Druha We Mnie Masz, 2022c).

## Challenges in education and inclusion of children and youth in the national education system faced by the V4 countries

UNICEF and UNHCR published data show that more than half of Ukrainian children are not enroled in the Polish education system (Kacprzak, 2023). Poland is, of course, not the only country struggling with programmes to include children and young people in the education system. Other countries, especially those that have not had much experience in integration, face similar problems. First, it is difficult to clearly estimate the number of Ukrainian pupils in Visegrad countries, because some of them are educated online and outside the national education systems. Consequently, it is difficult to research the needs of children and young people and to prepare response projects. Further, education and upbringing not only take place in schools but also outside them, so teaching in school alone does not ensure the whole education of children and young people.

Previously, it was mainly economic migrants who came to the V4 countries from Ukraine. After the war broke out, people with different economic and life situation arrived, and consequently, they had different needs than those who arrived before the war. Anna Młynarczuk-Sokołowska and Katarzyna Szostak-Król, based on the analysis of the literature and their own experiences, indicate that often the process of inclusion of children of economic migrants proceeds differently than the process of integration of children with refugee experience (Młynarczuk-Sokołowska & Szostak-Król, 2019, 280–281). The Visegrad countries were not prepared for such a scenario and therefore – especially during the initial period – extraordinary solutions had to be devised and extraordinary resources need to be allocated. Despite the many good cases of supporting children and young people from Ukraine in the field of education in the V4 countries, we are also able to identify the educational barriers faced by pupils in this area. Unquestionably, among the most significant challenges faced by children and youth in the education systems is the inadequate knowledge of national languages, which makes it difficult for them to function at school (Madej et al., 2023, 145). It is worth mentioning that classes have many pupils and there are also observable problems with adequate numbers of teachers and assistants. Language barriers in education in V4 countries are still a problem. It is worth emphasising that proficiency in the host countries' languages influences the process of integration into society, as well as providing opportunities for education, development, study and work, or participation in cultural life. It is thus important that host countries are offering opportunities for people from Ukraine to learn their national languages. The war in Ukraine is a long-term conflict, so both host countries and refugees must make efforts in language learning. Additionally, the challenges are psychological issues, e.g., war trauma. Another crucial point is cultural differences, which can be a problem for students and their parents as well as teachers and school management.

Another problem is the insufficient number of places in preparatory wards relative to needs, as well as the insufficient number of teaching assistants. The qualitative background of the people teaching should also be highlighted. A significant problem may be the inadequate background for teachers to teach foreigners. Education materials for pupils and teaching materials for teachers working with these pupils are another challenge. Materials are fragmented, which can make it difficult to access them and cause teachers not to use it. The problem is also the implementation of relevant educational services for children with special educational needs, due to, among other things, an insufficient number of specialists (Ercse, 2023, 74).

People from Ukraine were concentrated in urban centres because there were more opportunities in the cities. As we have been able to observe by examples, most of the innovations in the field of education have been located in urban areas. It should also be pointed out that although school education in all Visegrad countries belongs to the public sphere, not only public institutions, but also international organisations, companies, individuals, or NGOs

have been involved in funding projects concerning education. It seems that without a lot of financial support from outside the public sector, it would be difficult to identify so many good practices.

The insufficient number of intercultural assistants relative to needs is also reflected in research conducted by Amnesty International Poland (Amnesty International Polska, 2023a). The organisation conducted a year-long research project, including a four-month monitoring of Polish schools, as well as the "School for All" campaign to draw attention to the difficulties and unequal treatment faced by students with refugee experience in Polish schools. However, it is worth pointing out that Amnesty International focused on the diagnosis of the situation of Ukrainian pupils in primary schools, which may give an inadequate overview of the problems and challenges they face in the Polish education system (Amnesty International Polska, 2023b).

## Lessons learned and recommendations

Katarzyna Woźniak points out that there are two models for the inclusion of children and young people in host country schools – integration and separation. In the integration model, it is important that children participate in school lessons on an equal basis with children from the host country and that they learn the language of this country as an additional subject. In the second model, on the other hand, separate classes are created for pupils with migration experience (Woźniak, 2017, 155–156). We could observe in the examples cited earlier that both models are applied in the Visegrad countries. The first takes the risk of not adapting the teaching content to the special educational needs of the students, while the second separates them from their colleagues in the host countries.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in the education field has necessitated a rapid response, grassroots involvement, and adaptation of existing institutions and mechanisms to meet needs, as well as the creation of new tools that have not been used so far. The good practices identified in the article also allow us to recognise educational needs and problems in this area that have not yet been fulfilled. It would be important not to forget that in the case of inclusion in the field of education, one-off events, and actionability, cannot solve problems and fulfil educational needs. The initial chaos and grassroots initiatives, resulting from the scale of the crisis, should be replaced with systemic solutions. The war in Ukraine is long-lasting, so temporary and one-time ideas must be replaced by long-term actions. In this case, systemic changes are essential. First, more teachers of national languages as foreign languages are absolutely required. Secondly, psychological care should be provided for pupils and training courses must be organised for teachers to work with students who have experienced trauma. Previously, teachers have mostly had the opportunity to work with children of labour migrants from Ukraine. However, working with students who have experienced trauma is challenging for teachers. Adequate training is therefore necessary for teachers who, in

their daily work, are in regular contact with children who have experienced war. Mechanisms for resolving conflicts between pupils should be popularised and implemented in the Visegrad countries. Another necessary solution is the popularisation of both school and peer mediation.

As can be seen from the examples cited earlier, many initiatives have been implemented, thanks to the activities of NGOs and external financial support (e.g., UNICEF). However, in the context of systemic change, cross-sectoral cooperation (science, business, public administration, and social organisations) would appear to be crucial. Grassroots initiatives addressing the needs of children and young people from Ukraine living in different areas – both urbanised and rural – should be supported. A desirable scenario would be the decentralisation of education services in response to the educational needs of children and young people, with an increased funding from central sources.

In conclusion, it should be underlined that some solutions, although responding to educational needs (e.g., providing remote learning opportunities for children to work in the Ukrainian education system), do not lead to the integration of these persons into the host country and may even result in their exclusion, which may give rise to serious social problems in the future. As Zdzisław Wołk describes:

> For the social inclusion of refugees and their integration into the local community, it is essential to know and understand each other. This involves everyone in the local community – hosts and visitors – regardless of whether they stay permanently or temporarily.
>
> (Wołk, 2022, 204)

Enabling direct contacts for both pupils from the host countries and pupils coming from Ukraine would seem to be just the same essential as creating the appropriate educational tools and conditions for learning. This should be reflected in the process of developing systemic solutions.

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# 9 Integration instead of ghettoisation

## Integrating refugees with the local communities

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### Refugee integration models

The integration of refugees is the subject of attention in policy measures at different levels; it is also a research area and includes different practical programmes. Pennix and Garcés-Mascareñas (2016, 14) define integration as "the process of becoming an accepted part of society". Esser (2004) defines integration as including individual actors in existing social systems. Heckmann (2006) sees integration as a generation-lasting process of inclusion and acceptance of migrants in the core institutions, relations, and statuses of receiving society. These definitions emphasise the process character of integration rather than defining an end situation.

Integration is a two-way process in which refugee communities and the receiving society come to know and influence each other. When we speak of integration, we mean creating an integrated, i.e., cohesive society. In such a society, people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds form a new whole, one that is based on their equal status. This requires living side by side and, above all, genuine coexistence. Integration is based on reciprocal respect for the rights and obligations of refugees and the majority of society.

A country's immigration policy and welfare state influence the level of integration of immigrants into society. Currently, different countries apply different models of integration (Bolečeková, 2011; Bírešová, 2016):

- Traditional models of refugee integration focusses on measures for rapid societal inclusion.
- The multicultural model prioritises preserving immigrants' cultural identities and fostering multicultural entities.
- The assimilationist model emphasises immigrants fully adapting to the dominant identity, often at the expense of their own culture.
- The exclusionist model, marked by restrictive immigration laws, confines migrants to specific societal spheres, assuming a temporary stay.
- The integration model, in a narrower sense, seeks a two-way adaptation, encouraging migrants to contribute to a shared culture while upholding diversity and individual civic integration.

EU Member States still differ considerably in their approach to refugee integration. These differences are rooted in historical backgrounds, social models and traditions, and migration routes. For many years, during communism and socialism, the V4 countries were rather emigration countries. Since the 1990s, they have also gradually become destination countries for refugees and migrants, but to a greater extent, this has been the case in the Czech Republic and in the case of migrants from Ukraine, Poland. The Slovak Republic was one of the countries with a low proportion of migrants and refugees.

### The basic framework of refugee integration

In order to establish a basic framework and determine the direction and content of Member States' integration policies, the European Commission adopted in 2005 the Common Basic Principles on Integration Policy (European Commission, 2005). The European Commission defined integration in its 2005 *Communication "A Common Agenda for Integration Framework for the Integration of Third Country Nationals in The European Union"* as "a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States". This means that not only immigrants but also receiving societies have to change; at the same time, receiving societies have the task of creating opportunities for immigrants to participate fully economically, socially, culturally, and politically.

The second of the basic principles is about what is expected of immigrants. It is respect for the fundamental values of the European Union. At the same time, political liberalism gives priority to integration over assimilation – the European Union's common basic principles include respect for the language and culture of immigrants.

Immigrants' access to institutions, and public and private goods and services, to the same extent as guaranteed to citizens and in a non-discriminatory manner, constitute the last of the basic principles of immigrant integration. However, this principle is formulated as a recommendation to the states and not as an obligation for them.

In the renewed European Agenda for the Integration of Third Country Nationals, the principle of country-of-origin involvement was added, and integration was introduced as a three-way process. (European Commission, 2011).

The majority of society often expects refugees to adapt to the host culture and way of life entirely, relinquishing their original identity. It is assumed that for the local societies to consider them integrated, they must wholeheartedly embrace local customs, language, faith, and beliefs. In such a case, however, we are not discussing integration but assimilation. Assimilation is not only unjust but also impossible. One can never rid oneself of the culture in which one grew up because it largely shapes their identity. Integration means that we can be fully part of the society even if we are different, but the crucial aspect is mutual respect for our differences.

**Dimensions of refugee integration**

Integration is generally referred to as integrating a person into society. This process has different dimensions. Esser (2001) speaks of four dimensions: cultivation (similar to socialisation), location (position in society), interaction (social relations and networks), and identification (belonging). Heckmann and Schnapper (2003) distinguish between structural integration, cultural integration (or acculturation), interactional integration, and identification integration. Pennix and Garcés-Mascareñas (2016) discuss integration in terms of legal-political, socio-economic, and cultural-religious dimensions. Concentrating on these dimensions shifts the emphasis from immigrants to their interactions with the host society. It is not just about what immigrants do, who they interact with, and how they identify but also about whether they are accepted and positioned within these three dimensions.

Pennix and Garcés-Mascareñas (2016) describe these dimensions as follows:

- The legal-political dimension involves assessing immigrants' residency and political rights, focusing on whether they are considered full political community members. Immigrants' degree of integration spans from irregular immigrants, not legally part of the host society to those who become national citizens. The considerable variety in between has grown due to European states' efforts to regulate international migration and the introduction of new statuses and rights through the EU migration regime, including distinctions between EU nationals and third-country nationals.
- The socio-economic dimension examines residents' social and economic standing, regardless of their national citizenship. This involves immigrants' positions and access to essential domains crucial for all residents, such as equal access to institutional facilities for employment, housing, education, and health care.
- The cultural-religious dimension involves perceptions and practices of immigrants and the receiving society, along with their reciprocal responses to diversity. If newcomers view themselves as different and are perceived as culturally or religiously distinct, they may seek recognition in these aspects. The receiving society may accept or reject cultural and religious diversity, from complete assimilation to embracing ethnic identities, cultures, and worldviews in pluralistic systems. Between these extremes are various positions, including partial acceptance of diversity in private rather than public spheres.

It is essential to realise that these three dimensions are not entirely independent. The legal-political dimension may condition the socio-economic and the cultural-religious dimensions.

**Local integration of Ukrainian refugees**

The mentioned dimensions of integration are sought to be fulfilled by receiving states through various guidelines and measures. However, a significant part of the refugee integration process occurs in specific localities (communities or broader regions) where refugees come into contact with many actors. These actors can significantly influence how refugees become part of existing social relationships. Therefore, the most significant potential for ensuring a successful integration process lies in working with the local community, encompassing the refugee minority and the local majority.

Creating relationships and connections between Ukrainian refugees and the community in which they live is a crucial part of integration. During this process, refugees encounter various barriers that they must overcome, and the support available to them in overcoming these barriers is essential for integration. Refugees arriving in a new society need assistance in navigating the new conditions. To lead a satisfying and fulfilling life, they must familiarise themselves with the given society's language, culture, values, and rules and align them with what they bring from their native country. At the same time, they need to understand how life functions in the new country and city. They explore the new country through everyday life in this environment – encounters with local people and observations of life in the local community.

Ukrainian refugees in this area require even more support than other foreigners because they left their country involuntarily, often without the opportunity to prepare for living in a specific country or place. They often found themselves in a city without choosing it or having any prior information about it. In the case of Ukrainian refugees, it frequently happened that they arrived in a city where there were currently available accommodation capacities. They knew nothing about their new residence and had to start entirely new lives.

This is precisely why the local government and community play an indispensable role in integration. They are closest to people's everyday lives and have the best tools, so-called practical policies and measures, to create a space for a content life for everyone.

It is essential for local governments to actively strive for equal access to services and activities for refugees. This could include social services, education in kindergartens and primary schools, cultural and sports events, community activities, and more. However, equal access does not mean no one is prevented from participating in activities or requesting a service. Different population groups face different barriers to accessing individual activities and services. For example, refugees may not even know that a particular service exists, that they are entitled to it, and that the local government provides it because it functions entirely differently in their country. They may also not understand information often only available in the national language or is formulated very professionally. Ultimately, the service may be inaccessible to them because interpretation is unavailable during its provision.

It is also crucial for refugees if their city recognises them as part of the local community, allowing them to feel welcome. A tool that local government can use is external communication not only towards refugees but also communication about them towards the majority population. This is called symbolic policy because it is not a specific strategy that deals with the organisation of observable processes (such as providing services) but a policy of creating values and symbols that can connect.

For the benefit of social cohesion between the receiving communities and refugees from Ukraine, preparation for the long haul should mean formulating a clear, transparent, and long-term integration and communication strategy with a strong emphasis on supporting initiatives to promote inclusive and welcoming societies as soon as possible. This should include a robust, sustained, multi-stakeholder focus on combating xenophobia, racism, and discrimination (Ariner, 2022).

Integration is primarily about mutual understanding and building relationships between refugees and the majority population. This dimension is referred to as social integration. The term "integration" might suggest that integration has a beginning and an end, that a refugee begins to integrate on the day they enter the territory of the immigration country. One day, it will be possible to say they are fully integrated. Integration in the context of national measures and support systems focuses on labour market participation, obtaining housing, etc. Local-level integration focuses on establishing relationships with people from the majority society, friendships, and other connections with residents (Gallo Kriglerová et al., 2023).

## Dual-intent integration approach of Ukrainian refugees

As the conflict in Ukraine extends into its second year, communities are seeking effective ways to provide enduring support for displaced Ukrainians. However, the conventional practices for integration may not fully align with the unique circumstances, as many Ukrainian refugees intend to return home once conditions permit.

Given the uncertainty surrounding future developments and timelines, adopting a dual-intent integration approach becomes crucial. This approach aims to prepare for the possibility of refugees staying indefinitely and the potential return to Ukraine. Operating within the framework of dual-intent integration involves implementing measures and activities that facilitate the socio-economic inclusion of Ukrainian refugees. The goal is to empower them to attain self-sufficiency, rebuild their livelihoods, and enhance their human capital, thereby improving their prospects for the future, regardless of their ultimate place of residence. Simultaneously, this approach deliberately seeks to minimise obstacles to a potential return in both host countries and Ukraine. (OECD, 2003) This approach can address what has been referred to as a waiting dilemma (European Commission, 2023), where various parties, including

the refugees themselves, hesitate to engage in integration activities due to anticipating the imminent return of Ukrainian refugees. People who fled tend to keep an eye on their home country and want to return as soon as it is safe, making it difficult to decide whether to start learning a new language, embark on more severe training or education programmes, or integrate children into the education system of the host country.

## Community work in the process of integration of Ukrainian refugees

One of the tools for integrating refugees without the dual creation of isolated subcultures or communities is community work. Each person is a member of several communities. In most cases, communities represent a place where individuals, their needs, values, and interests come together and are realised. Therefore, a community represents a grouping of individuals with something in common. When working with a community, it is impossible to consider the individual in isolation from their surrounding world. We always consider the individual as part of the community, with all the ties that it creates or that surround it (Šiňanská & Šlosár, 2020).

Community work is one of the methods of working with people, which historically arose mainly because of migration consequences. The aim of community work is the development of the whole community and its strengthening. The content of community work is to promote the empowerment and motivation of an existing community or to build a newly emerging community (Šiňanská & Šlosár, 2020). Community work focusing on interconnection and cooperation between communities can help achieve social inclusion and reduce stereotypes and prejudices. Such community work is essential not only for minority communities but also for the majority community, as it contributes to diversity, tolerance, and social cohesion in society. Cooperation and understanding between communities can lead to mutual benefits and harmonious coexistence. (UNESCO, 2001)

Community work focuses on building relationships and other contexts of life that strengthen the community and make it easier to embrace change. Community work and connecting communities as such (Gallo Kriglerová et al., 2003; Šiňanská & Šlosár, 2020):

- Enable the various subcultures that exist in the community to maintain their identity and participate in the social life of the whole community;
- Enable different groups to develop mutual understanding and to actively address changes, conflicts, and problems that arise in the community and its subgroups;
- Use a shared value base that affects all members of the community, all institutions, and all processes in the community;
- Improve the coexistence of the town's inhabitants;
- Prevent polarisation of society;
- Develop the potential of communities in the city;

- Help in the integration of refugees by creating new bonds and friendships;
- Strengthen the voice and participation of refugees;
- Send a positive signal to all city residents that everyone has a place in the city.

Community work is a vital tool for integration, encompassing planning, organising, and development activities to enhance people's quality of life and prevent exclusion. It collaboratively addresses various aspects defined by the community and holds the potential for promoting intangible cultural heritage, particularly relevant for refugees from Ukraine. Intangible cultural heritage, including personal rituals and celebrations, aids newcomers in adapting to a new country, coping with trauma, and building resilience at individual and community levels (Centrum pre výskum etnicity a kultúry et al., 2022).

In community work with refugees from Ukraine, community activities in the V4 countries are mainly organised by non-profit organisations involved in community work with refugees and other minorities for a long time. Informal groups of active people, which have been significantly activated due to the war in Ukraine and include members of foreign communities themselves or organisations that bring together primarily Ukrainian citizens, play an important role in integration.

The principles of community work, as outlined by Grundělková et al. (2022) and Brozmanová Gregorová et al. (2022), highlight its unique contribution to refugee integration:

- Community-based approach: community work starts with mapping the real needs of the community, ensuring integration activities are tailored to the specific context, population, and infrastructure of the locality;
- Community empowerment: the community, including majority and minority members, determines goals and actions, fostering a sense of responsibility among individuals involved in designing and implementing tasks;
- Utilising internal resources: community work actively involves community members and utilises internal resources, making the community proactive in addressing integration challenges;
- Empowering, not providing: community work is a collaborative process, emphasising an enabling approach rather than simply assisting. All parties involved are considered active change makers;
- Holistic impact: change initiated through community work affects the entire community, even those not directly involved. With long-term and sustainable results, individuals become community members organically through their daily lives and activities.

Community work is an opportunity to enhance living conditions and empower and activate the community. This empowerment involves strengthening

community members' competence, knowledge, and confidence. In essence, community work serves as a means to develop the organisational, human, and social capacities of the community, enabling individuals to address challenges using their acquired skills and knowledge (Stanková & Bindasová, 2022; Gojová, Gojová & Stanková, 2020).

### Presentation of good practices examples from the Visegrad Group countries focused on the integration of the Ukrainian refugees into the local communities

As part of the signals scanning, we have identified several good practices in the V4 countries that focus on integrating refugees locally at different stages of arriving refugees from Ukraine. According to Gallo Kriglerová et al. (2023), we differentiate stages into the humanitarian, integration, support, cooperation, and coexistence.

The humanitarian stage represents the first period immediately after arrival in the new country. In this phase, it is essential to encourage the participation of existing communities, voluntary associations, and various non-profit organisations that can provide support to the newly arriving refugee group or active individuals. Information about this stage and examples are included in Chapter 4. Examples of activities include help on the borders with Ukraine, which was crucial in the war's first stages and humanitarian aid consisting of food, clothes, groceries, and basic living. In the orientation in the first stages, an essential role is played by information points in which refugees can find support and basic information about living in the country. Examples of such information points are The Blue Dots Safe Spaces, created with the support of UNHCR, UNICEF, and other local organisations in several countries: Bulgaria, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. They offer safe spaces, immediate support, and services to all persons, women, men, and children of all nationalities fleeing Ukraine. The Blue Dots are provided with trained caregivers able to provide updated and verified information about accommodation, travel, and services. They can guide refugees about their rights and entitlements under temporary protection status and asylum procedures, as well as on family reunification and tracing of family members. (Blue Dot, 2023).

Another element in the process is the integration or support stage. In this stage, the local community should already have well-set cooperation with all relevant actors. In integration, it is vital that the different communities in the city (or town) are connected but also have a separate space and support in their activities. The local community can actively create offers for refugees' self-fulfilment, support them financially, or involve them in existing activities. Activities include education, housing, employment, language teaching, social services, and community work. Examples of good practices can be found in the separate chapters of this book and below.

In the coexistence or cooperation stage, a system of support and cooperation is established with the different expatriate communities in the city.

Refugees should be a regular part of life in the city and actively participate in it. The local population should have sufficient contacts and good relations with the refugees through the activities that take place in the city. Refugees should not be isolated; they should be able to create a sense of home in the city and participate in its development.

Good practice in the field of community work focused on integration can be divided into several categories of community work. These are often the result of cooperation between stakeholders acting in the public, private, and non-governmental sectors. The categories are:

- Cultural exchanges;
- Intercultural workshops and trainings;
- Creating safe and inclusive places;
- Joint community actions;
- Mentoring programmes;
- Involvement in volunteering;
- Focus on disadvantaged groups of Ukrainian refugees.

### Cultural exchanges

The first category of activities is the organisation of cultural events and exchanges that enable people of different cultures and communities to share their traditional values, food, music, and other customs. This can create a space for mutual understanding and mutual respect. The examples of activities in this category can vary from one-day events to regular meetings and activities.

In Poland, the non-profit organisation Opole Cultural Association (Stowarzyszenie Kulturalne Opole) organised OPO VECHORNYCI series of integration evening meetings aimed at the Ukrainian community and residents of Opole. The meetings were initiated by a group of Ukrainian cultural animators, some of whom came to Poland after 24 February 2022. The main idea of the events was the adaptation and further integration of Ukrainians into the Polish society. The meetings took place almost every Tuesday at the social club café OPO, with an occasional travel event to Głuchołazy. The purpose of the evenings was to create a friendly, hospitable atmosphere for refugees from Ukraine to get to know Ukrainian and Polish cultures, lifestyles, traditions, rituals, music, songs, etc. and raise awareness of common cultural features. VECHORNYCI is a long-term project, which was supported by city institutions and NGOs by providing prizes for competitions, equipment, space for holding events, etc. Activities during the evenings included concerts, film screenings, quizzes, and integration games. (Stowarzyszenie Kulturalne Opole, 2023)

### Intercultural workshops and training

Another type of community integration activity is organising intercultural education programmes to help people better understand different

communities' cultures, history, and challenges. These can help reduce stereotypes and prejudices and increase mutual awareness and respect. Some examples of activities in this category focus on children's and teenagers' education; some can be focused on adult people, and a specific category is an education focused on professionals.

The organisation in Poland Polskie Forum Migracyjne implemented workshops at schools for 4–8 grades titled "The whole world in our class". The aims of the workshops were focused on the emotional support of young people in connection with the war in Ukraine and the emergence of new colleagues at school, sensitising students to the situation of refugees from Ukraine, strengthening the attitude of respect for cultural and linguistic diversity and openness to contact with refugee children and immigrants from different countries, and developing the ability to analyse information and disinformation about refugees and phenomena migration consciously. Polskie Forum Migracyjne, in cooperation with municipalities from Izabelin, Marki, Podkowa Leśna, and the Foundation for Freedom, also implemented the programme Welcome Neighbour (PL: Witam sąsiada). The project aimed to integrate and counteract the exclusion of migrants living in the three suburban municipalities of Marki, Izabelin, and Podkowa Leśna. These municipalities are often chosen as a more affordable housing option for refugees who at the same time take up employment in Warsaw. Within the project, there were organised intercultural workshops for students and teachers and also trainings for local government officials responsible for migration (Polskie Forum Migracyjne, 2023).

### Creating safe and inclusive places

Creating safe and inclusive places where people can openly discuss their experiences and concerns can help resolve conflict and build community trust. A sense of acceptance is vital for people arriving in a new environment. It is also created by engaging in different activities and having safe spaces where they can realise themselves and at least partially return to everyday life. Safe places are places or spaces where refugees can meet each other. For example, Community activities can occur in contact/information points. However, they can also be in urban and other spaces where various cultural, social, and other events are already occurring. For example, schools, libraries, leisure centres, community centres, and old people's homes are often suitable spaces for such activities.

Several examples represent the principles of co-creation in building safe spaces, and an active role for Ukraine refugees has been vital in many initiatives. The concept of "user involvement" in designing spaces and community activities has long been praised for improving various services' quality, targeting, and uptake. Rather than being offered to them, services can be co-created based on actual needs and empowerment processes. The example of this co-creation can be seen, for example, in the integration centre in Botova

Street in Bratislava, Slovakia, where people from Ukraine are helping others by becoming – or pursuing their careers as – community interpreters, service providers, carers, or legal advisers.

Another example is the Ukrainian Centre established in March 2022 on the premises in Brno – Muzeika. The city hall provided a place in the very centre of the city for the self-organisation of Ukrainians. Since then, the centre's team has been working on several services and products designed to promote the integration of Ukrainians into Czech society and the presentation of Ukraine in the Czech Republic at various levels. The centre is engaged in activities such as:

- Czech language courses;
- Activities for children and exciting classes for adults – creative workshops, a club of interesting logic and mathematics, a film club, a choir for adults and children, individual piano lessons, groups and individual lessons for preschoolers and children of primary school age, and many other interests;
- Interpretation during a visit to Czech institutions – a telephone line for those who want to receive an interpretation during a visit to all necessary Czech institutions;
- Psychological and emotional support – experienced psychologists for children and adults work in the centre. Psychologists work both in an individual format and are invited to group meetings/classes (Ukrajinská Iniciativa, 2023).

Ukrainian Woman in Poland is an information platform for women who have left Ukraine. The organisation organises regular meetings for Ukrainian women who live in Lower Silesia and in Wroclaw itself, supporting the process of their integration into a new country (Fundacja Ukrainka w Polsce, 2023).

### Joint community actions

Organising joint events between the majority community and refugees, such as cultural festivals, exhibitions, workshops, concerts, dinners, picnics, and neighbourhood meetings, facilitates sharing of cultural aspects and traditions. These activities benefit Ukrainian refugees, fostering a sense of welcome in the local population and promoting understanding of residents from diverse backgrounds. This integration benefits the entire city, fostering community and breaking down stereotypes. The city plays a crucial role as a communicator, using its channels to inform about activities involving foreigners/refugees and contributing to the city's overall development. Community events create a friendly environment, providing a safe space for diverse groups to interact, establishing connections between communities, breaking down stereotypes, and involving foreign communities in planning and identifying needs. There

are several proven formats of those activities that are organised in the V4 countries in the framework of community activities.

Language Cafés or Clubs are an open, informal space for all to sit at tables where conversation with participants is led/moderated by people communicating in their mother tongue. In this way, organisations offer to improve language skills. In Slovakia, for example, Mareena organises language cafés regularly in different cities and involves people from different language backgrounds. In Czechia, in the border region with Germany, the National Volunteer Association has managed two "clubs" for displaced people from Ukraine. The first is for those who are sure they want to stay. It offers language courses, training, and exchanges with locals. The second club focuses on the Ukrainian language for those unsure – or still too emotional to think about it. Moves between clubs are frequent, but it shows how to cater to the longing for the motherland and, at the same time, create the conditions for smooth integration into a new community.

Community brunches, picnics, or dinners offering foreign food are also an attractive event format for the local community. Collaborative food preparation is also a way to support a disadvantaged group or individuals.

The gastronomic festival Naše chutě (Our tastes) has been offering people in Tábor in the Czech Republic an opportunity to taste selected delicacies from Tábor restaurants for many years. In 2022 and 2023, the festival joined forces with the Help to Ukraine Tábor group and offered visitors the opportunity to taste Ukrainian cuisine. It was a charity event of the Taste of Ukraine, the proceeds of which went to support war-affected areas in Ukraine. Specifically, it involved the purchase of material aid such as medical supplies, baby food for children's homes, and defence and tactical equipment.

Café "city" is a concept of creating a space for discussion on a particular city or country, where table hosts – discussants present at their table a particular aspect of the city (e.g., cultural life in the city, political situation, and women's life). People interested in the topic can take turns at the tables individually or move as a whole group and thus cover "travel" the whole city. The event should be complemented by thematic refreshments, for example, teas typical of the locality.

*Mentoring programmes*

Another type of community activity promoting refugee integration developed even before the arrival of people from Ukraine for refugees from other countries is mentoring programmes. These programmes connect Ukrainian refugees with local mentors who can help them adapt and integrate into their new environment. Mentoring programmes work on the one-to-one relationship. Mentors help refugees orient themselves in accommodation, education, health and social care, labour market, etc. Their help may include support in finding a job, orientation to the place, and advice on common problems. Mentors can guide Ukrainian refugees through the process of coping with

culture shock. There are examples of mentoring programmes targeted at adults but equally at children and youth.

A volunteer mentoring programme for foreigners in Slovakia, for example, is implemented by the non-governmental organisation Mareena, which has a system for working with volunteers and also many valuable materials that coordinators can use in the development and implementation of such a mentoring programme (Mareena, 2023).

The Stand by Me programme is a mentoring initiative to support young people fleeing the war in Ukraine. This comprehensive "buddy" programme facilitates the self-realisation and integration of children and youth, creating an equal and friendly school environment. The project, operating in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Romania, focuses on providing a safe space for young individuals to connect, collaborate on small projects, and build relationships under the guidance of a mentor. The programme targets children and youth aged 13–24, including those from Ukraine, speakers of different mother languages, newcomers, and those facing various challenges, such as special needs or psychological issues (DofE, 2023).

*Involvement in voluntary activities*

Involving refugees in volunteering activities is another strategy that promotes social inclusion, strengthens interactions with the local community, and is a means of developing refugees themselves as volunteers. Volunteering is a form of social participation in which refugees play an important role as active citizens. Involving them in volunteering activities enables them to mobilise and change their image as mere aid recipients. Involvement in volunteering activities can be seen in terms of participation of the people from Ukraine in the creation and provision of services by others to refugees from Ukraine but also in terms of the participation of refugees in projects to support the local community and their involvement in volunteering activities together with volunteers from the majority community.

An example of self-help activities is the Shelter Association in Hungary. People from the interior of Ukraine (Donetsk) who live scattered in the Szabolcs-Satmár-Bereg county are brought together, e.g., the Meski people to the people of Mariánské Lázně. They cook together dishes according to their traditions. The same organisation also organised craft workshops in several municipalities. For example, a group of elderly refugees from the interior of Ukraine travelled to Mierk, where they prepared together for Easter in the nursing home. In addition to the usual traditions, they cooked cottage cheese, etc. (Menedek, 2023).

*Support for specific groups of refugees*

Specific categories of integration activities are aimed at disadvantaged groups of refugees. These groups face specific challenges in their inclusion in their home country; they have specific needs that blanket measures may not address

at the national or local level. It is, therefore, important to reflect these needs in integration activities and to create opportunities for the inclusion and participation of disadvantaged groups.

Among the refugees there was a group which, as was gradually becoming clear, was discriminated against not only in peacetime but also during the period of flight. The problem, therefore, arose of discrimination, sometimes overt and sometimes latent, in support of refugees of Roma origin. In response to this situation, the Civic College Foundation in Hungary has tried to bring together all the NGOs involved in supporting refugees of Roma origin to take joint action against this particularly unfair discrimination. They have set up a coordination and cooperation group to address the problem and advocate for the rights of this group of refugees. At the border, at the Tiszabecs border crossing point and the Záhony railway station, members of the Gypsy Minority Foundation (full-time staff and volunteers together) actively assisted in the reception of Roma refugees by providing information, managing cases, providing meals, and distributing donations (CKA, 2023).

Romaversitas Foundation, Hungary helps pregnant women or refugee women – mainly Roma. They focus mainly on supporting refugee women accepting the differences between the Ukrainian and Hungarian systems of antenatal care, awareness of the differences in other health regulations, and providing information to staff in the Hungarian health care system on caring for pregnant mothers with refugee status and administrative difficulties. In many cases, the lack of basic needs is often the focus, while issues related to pregnancy/reproduction are neglected. Information about the situation of Roma refugees from Ukraine coming to Hungary is also reflected in the report (Eredics, 2022).

Another group of people who need to overcome specific obstacles in the integration are families with members with disabilities. To assist in the integration of these target groups, since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, activities have been carried out mainly by non-governmental organisations, which have provided assistance and services in this area to the majority population. As an example, we mention an organisation from Slovakia – the Platform of Families of Children with Disabilities, which also provides its services to families with a member with a disability from Ukraine. Its website informs about the possibilities of assistance in the Slovak system but also offers a helpline in the Ukrainian language and lay counselling for parents (Platforma rodín, 2023).

### Lessons learned and recommendations

Community work activation processes focused on refugees from Ukraine should be oriented towards mutual agreement, participatory and inclusive. It is essential for community work aimed at integration that not only all those affected by a given social problem but also the rest of the public are invited to participate (Gallo Kriglerová et al., 2023). Activation can be a manifestation of active citizenship. Both refugees and the host community engage with

each other and society in voluntary associations, religious groups, or politics. Active citizenship occurs here, and participation in joint efforts contributes to integration. While in service delivery, more attention should be paid to barriers to service provision for all and how to remove them, a focus on active citizenship highlights skills and recommends ways to make the most of them for the benefit of both refugees and the society (Huddleston & Niessen, 2009).

As in other areas, when organising community activities, it is essential to know what activities the intended target group is interested in. Different people may have different needs or interests, so it is a good idea for the local government to not only create events and activities that it identifies as beneficial or essential but also to consult and co-create them with the people they are targeting. Needs can change over time, as can the make-up of people from different countries in a city, so it is crucial to do mapping continuously. Many people from Ukraine have found help from their compatriots who were already living here before the outbreak of the war. Therefore, it is crucial to actively support these activities, have mapped different actors – organisations, associations, and active individuals – and coordinate and inform about what services they can provide (Gallo Kriglerová et al., 2023).

Active participation and ownership of Ukrainian communities in implementing activities, identifying problems and their solutions, and setting policies are vital in activation. However, the principle of participation should not remain only at the declarative level. Everyone is welcome to get involved. It is also necessary to eliminate barriers that practically exclude many people and communities from shaping life and society. For example, it is vital to use languages or channels of communication that convey information to the people we want to reach. It is also essential, for example, to consider the time and space availability of activities, etc.

The vast majority of services that support the integration of refugees from Ukraine in the V4 countries are organised by NGOs. However, since in the V4 countries, there are no stable conditions for the functioning of these entities and their financial sustainability, it is necessary to set up a system of systematic financial support for organisations at the national and local level that provide these services, whether they are organisations that have been providing these services for a long time or emerging initiatives that come from active citizens or foreigners, in order to sustain these activities. The recommendations summarised in the policy paper *Proposals for Solutions* (Centrum pre výskum etnicity a kultúry et al., 2022) as a result of the cooperation of organisations with long-standing experience and know-how in the area of the integration of foreigners and the provision of humanitarian aid stated that when setting the financial-administrative framework, it is vital to support communities in their functioning, self-realisation, and development. Through platforms of foreigners or cooperation with intercultural workers, a critical link can be established between the community on the one hand and the municipality or various institutions on the other hand, reflecting the needs of both sides.

In preserving living heritage, it is necessary to offer people from Ukraine (not only physically) a space where they feel comfortable and can express their identity through living heritage in its diverse forms – to offer a culturally sensitive and respectful understanding of integration. This includes mapping living heritage conservation needs, considering them, and facilitating access to ongoing practice.

Connecting the Ukrainian refugee community with the local majority community can ensure integration and support for these people. These activities can be tailored to the specific needs and interests of local Ukrainian refugees and the local majority community. Working with local organisations, NGOs, and institutions is vital to implement these activities effectively and achieve positive integration and mutual understanding.

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# 10 Ukrainian refugees on the labour market

*Judit Csoba, Andrea Diebel, and Katalin Ábrahám*

## Introduction

At a time of general labour shortages in most European countries, humanitarianism is only one aspect of thinking about refugees from Ukraine. Alongside humanitarianism, the dominant idea is that the arrival of refugees is seen as labour market capital and economic benefit (Zakariás et al., 2022; Maracska, 2022). Ukrainian refugees have helped fill labour shortages in many areas of the labour market and in some cases have generated budget revenues in host countries that even exceed government spending on refugee assistance (Mishchuk &Vlasenko, 2023).

The aim of this study is to examine the employment situation of Ukrainian refugees in the V4 countries and to present best practices to promote labour market integration.

The study focuses on the forms of labour market participation; the role of refugees in the world of work; and the innovative activities of public, market, and civil society organisations to promote the integration of refugees into the labour market in the short and long term.

The first part of the chapter provides a brief overview of the participation of Ukrainian workers in the V4 countries in the pre-war period, based on available databases and studies. The second part of the chapter examines the legal framework under which refugees applying for temporary protection can be employed on a temporary or permanent basis.

The third part of the chapter attempts to explore the proportion of refugees working in the V4 countries and the conditions under which they do so, as well as the barriers to employment and labour market integration. In the fourth part of the paper, we present some good practices, projects, and services that help migrants to overcome barriers and integrate into the labour market. The paper concludes with a summary of experiences and lessons learned.

As national statistics on the employment situation of displaced persons from Ukraine in EU Member States are rather scarce and incomplete, the study also draws on data from international aid agencies and analyses of the situation of refugees.

**Pre-war labour market situation: Ukrainian workers in the V4 countries**

Following Ukraine's declaration of independence in 1991, the emigration of minorities living in Ukraine (Poles, Hungarians, Jews, Russians, etc.) began. This process, which intensified as a result of the poor economic situation in the country, led to a situation in which the number of emigrants exceeded the number of immigrants from 1994 onwards. Until the early 2000s, around 150,000 more emigrants left the country each year than entered (Molnár et al., 2023). Since the 1990s, Ukraine has experienced seasonal labour migration on a much larger scale than earlier migration. This tradition dates back to the Soviet era, when masses of people left the country in the summer for seasonal agricultural and construction work in Russia. Following Ukraine's independence, job losses, easier travel, and better earning opportunities attracted even more people to work abroad. Over the past two decades, the political, social, and economic crisis in Ukraine has deepened, the Ukrainian hryvnia has been devalued, wages have barely increased, while the prices of utilities and food have risen many times over. In this situation, an increasing number of Ukrainian citizens chose to work abroad as a survival strategy (Düvell, 2006; Kovály & Ferenc, 2022). The main destinations for emigration were Western European countries offering a higher standard of living, but because of common cultural and linguistic roots, many people also turned to neighbouring countries, especially Poland (Leontiyeva, 2005, 2016; Nekorjak, 2007; Jaroszewicz, 2015; Kindler, 2016; Kovály, 2016; Kulchytska, 2019).

On the other hand, labour shortages in many sectors in the host countries have facilitated the integration of motivated and skilled economic refugees from Ukraine into the labour market. In particular, construction, agriculture, tourism, and hospitality, as well as public services (care of the elderly, nursing, etc.) were open to economic migrants entering the legal and illegal labour market (Gromadzki & Lewandowski, 2022; Allinger, 2023).

The accession of the V4 countries to the European Union in 2004, followed by the emergence of an open labour market and the subsequent east-west migration of mainly young and skilled workers, has contributed significantly to the restructuring of the V4 labour markets (ageing workforce, different structure of labour supply and demand) and to increasing labour shortages. This is the main reason why Ukraine's role as a potential source of labour for the V4 countries had been steadily increasing in the decades before the war.

It is difficult to accurately estimate the number of Ukrainian workers in the V4 countries due to the informal economy, but many estimates/data are available from studies carried out in previous years. Before the war in 2022, about 1.35 million Ukrainians lived in Poland, but there were also 100–150 thousand Ukrainian workers in the Czech Republic, and tens of thousands of Ukrainians worked in Slovakia (10–15,000) and Hungary (30–50,000) in

both the legal and illegal economy (Duszczyk & Kaczmarczyk, 2022; Kovály & Ferenc, 2022; Molnár et al., 2023).

Among the Visegrad countries, Poland and the Czech Republic also pursued active policies to attract human resources from Ukraine before the outbreak of the war (Tátrai, Erőss & Kovály, 2016; Tátrai et al., 2018).

In the case of Poland, the introduction of the Pole's card was the main factor in facilitating access to employment. It allowed Ukrainian citizens of Polish origin to work, study, or start a business in Poland (Jaroszewicz, 2015; Kovály & Ferenc, 2022). In addition to easier access to employment, Ukrainian students can also study for free in higher education through a number of scholarship schemes. According to a report by International Students in Poland, nearly 39,000 students of Ukrainian nationality were studying in Polish higher education institutions in the 2020/2021 academic year (Zdziebłowski, 2022).

Many Ukrainians in the Transcarpathian region have a long and intensive history of migration, not only as a border region but also as a former part of Czechoslovakia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the new generation of emigrants from Ukraine arrived mainly for economic reasons, and their numbers gradually increased. As a result, Ukrainians went from being temporary foreign workers in the Czech Republic to becoming one of the largest minority groups. The number of officially registered Ukrainian citizens at the end of 2015 was 106,019 (MoI, 2015), a significant decrease compared to the official figure at the end of 2008 when the number of Ukrainians residing in the country was around 132,000 (CZSO, 2015). Although their actual number is estimated in a wide range – 100–150,000 persons – their role in society was already significant before the outbreak of the Ukrainian war (Nekorjak, 2007 citing Leontiyeva, 2005, 2016; Gromadzki & Lewandowski, 2022).

While the Czech Republic does not have a similar measure to the Pole's card, it also offers a number of scholarship programmes for a targeted group of workers, and Czech is taught as a second foreign language in several schools in Transcarpathia, with financial support from the target country (Kovály & Ferenc, 2022).

In Hungary in 2020, the number of Ukrainian workers officially registered by the National Employment Service in Hungary was 13,411 (NFSZ, 2021). Including those working in the informal sector, experts estimate the number of Ukrainian state employees working in Hungary at 30–50,000 (Nagy, 2022; Pálos, 2022).

In order to increase the number of Ukrainian workers in the last decade, the Hungarian government has also introduced a number of measures. Since July 2016, Ukrainians, who were previously considered third-country nationals in Hungary, have been included in the legal category of "citizens of a neighbouring country". They do not need a work permit in shortage occupations, and the time limit for processing applications has been reduced from 30 to 5–15 days. From 2017, in addition to the visa exemption, Ukrainian workers did not need to apply for a residence permit if the employer reported the worker (Élő, 2016;

Kovály & Ferenc, 2022). The changes in the legislation on Ukrainian citizens have had a significant impact on the number of foreign workers registered in Hungary. According to official statistics, while the number of Ukrainian workers was 3,246 in 2017, it soared to 37,000 in 2018 and 44,000 in 2019 (Kulchytska, 2019; Szurovecz, 2019a, 2019b).

Despite all this, the Hungarian labour market has been the loser of migration due to the subsequent opening of the borders, as Ukrainian workers who had previously worked in Hungary continuously left for the West. The number of new Ukrainian workers declared by employers has been steadily decreasing in recent years (26,4011 in 2019, 13,411 in 2020, and 4,539 in 2021) (NFSZ, 2021).

The number of job vacancies also in Slovakia has risen steadily over the past decade, which has contributed to changes in the legal framework for foreign workers. Even before the war, Ukrainians could work in Slovakia without a work permit in certain situations, for example, if they had the status of a "foreign Slovak" and were staying in Slovakia on a temporary basis. In this case, the person/employer only needs to fill in a so-called "information card" to notify the Central Labour Office of a new work situation within seven working days (Kulchytska, 2019).

At the end of 2018, according to the data of the Presidency of the Slovak Police, 24,913 Ukrainian citizens had a valid stay in the Slovak Republic. This number increased significantly in the following years, but they are not registered thanks to the 90-day entry permit. In 2018, there were 11,842 Ukrainians working in Slovakia. This data includes the number of workers with and without work permits.

The social networks and labour market patterns that developed before the outbreak of the war, based mainly on economic migration that has intensified since the turn of the millennium, play a prominent role in the labour market integration of Ukrainian refugees in the V4 countries. The spatial distribution of refugees after the outbreak of war was quantitatively and qualitatively similar to the distribution of Ukrainian economic migrants before the war. As the above brief summary shows, the V4 countries, especially Poland and the Czech Republic, had already received large numbers of economic migrants before the outbreak of the war and had taken a number of measures to facilitate employment in order to alleviate the shortage of human resources in the domestic labour market with the arrival of Ukrainian guest workers. After the outbreak of the war, the role and successful labour market integration of economic migrants who had previously arrived in the V4 countries provided an important bridge for refugees in their economic and social integration.

**The legal framework for refugee employment in the V4 countries after the outbreak of war**

Until 2008, the vast majority of employed Ukrainians in the V4 countries did not have free access to the labour market and had to apply for a work

permit, usually issued for a maximum of one year and assigned to a specific employer, job, and region.

The first significant step in labour market mobility was the Visa Liberalisation Regulation (EU 2017/850) adopted by the Council on 17 May 2017, which allows Ukrainian citizens to travel to the European Union without a visa for up to 90 days in any 180-day period. As a result, the movement of Ukrainian workers to EU countries has increased since before the war (EU, 2017). The possibilities for labour market mobility under the visa regime were extended after the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war with the renewal of the Temporary Protection Directive.

Within days of the outbreak of the war, the European Union activated the Temporary Protection Directive, which entered into force on 4 March 2022 for the first time since its adoption in 2001. The Directive gave EU Member States the right to provide displaced persons with a residence permit, work, adequate housing, social and health care, and education.

According to Article 12 of the Temporary Protection Directive, beneficiaries of temporary protection must be given the opportunity to engage in an activity as an employed or self-employed person, in accordance with the rules applicable to the professions or vocational training. Article 15 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU states that third-country nationals holding a work permit in a Member State have the right to working conditions equivalent to those of EU citizens. The European Commission's Communication of March 2022 stressed the importance of ensuring that TPD beneficiaries are treated on an equal footing with other workers as regards pay and other working conditions, and that they are supported with language courses, counselling, and basic training or help to set up their own business. (FRA, 2022)

In adapting the Council Decision, the V4 countries followed the common guidelines: they created a special legal framework for the employment of refugees, simplified the obligation for employers to declare their employment relationship, and in several cases provided for the possibility of employing refugees even if they lacked documents proving their qualifications. In many respects, however, the V4 countries created different conditions for refugees from Ukraine to enter the labour market.

On 12 March, Poland introduced a special law (Journal of Laws, 2022) allowing refugees from Ukraine to apply for a newly created status valid for 18 months from the date of arrival (with the possibility of extension). From 1 April 2022, Ukrainian refugees residing in Poland may apply for a temporary residence permit (karta pobytu) if they have a Polish identification number (PESEL UKR), arrived in Poland after 24 February 2022, and work in the country.

A simplified procedure for issuing temporary residence permits is available for those whose main purpose of stay in Poland is to work in highly qualified jobs (blue card) (scientists, engineers, IT specialists, etc.) or to run a business. If the refugee meets all the requirements, a residence permit for a maximum of three years can be issued. If the person does not meet the

above requirements, but the purpose of his/her stay is to work, he/she may be granted a residence permit for one year only.

In the first months of the crisis, Poland introduced a law to cut red tape for people who were displaced from Ukraine and seeking work in Poland. Employers simply have to register the new worker with the local labour office within 14 days of hiring the worker (EC, 2022a, 2022b). This legal framework has significantly shortened the time to work and contributed to an increase in the number of people in employment. Like Poland, the Slovak Republic and later Hungary have explicitly facilitated the entry of health workers into the labour market by reducing the bureaucracy associated with their employment (OECD, 2022).

In the first few months, the Slovak Republic set a relatively strict framework for Ukrainian refugees' access to the labour market and was only open to facilitating employment in a few areas where there was a critical shortage of labour. However, due to the protracted nature of the crisis and the prolonged stay of refugees, some restrictions were relaxed as of 1 January 2023. Many of the requirements for employing third-country nationals (e.g., the labour market test for renewing a work permit) have been abolished and foreign nationals are allowed to continue working while their permit renewal is under review (Mishchuk & Valsenko, 2023). Under the current Employment Services Act, employers may hire third-country nationals who have been granted temporary protection. In such cases, neither a certificate on the possibility of filling the vacancy nor a work permit is required. According to the Employment Services Act, the employer is obliged to submit a report to the competent labour office within seven working days of the start or end of the employment. The report must be accompanied by the employment contract and the temporary asylum permit of the person to be employed. Persons with temporary refugee status may work full-time or part-time but may not be self-employed.

Until 2008, foreigners with a work permit in the Czech Republic had to apply for a residence permit in order to work. During the economic recession, restrictions on third-country workers were introduced, which were only eased in 2014 with the introduction of the worker card. However, the worker card allowed long-term residence if the purpose of the stay was employment. This card replaced the visa (a permanent residence permit issued for the purpose of employment) and was valid for up to two years for all types of employment, regardless of the level of qualification required (Kovály, 2016; Kovály & Čermáková, 2016; Mishchuk & Vlasenko, 2023). After the outbreak of the war, laws were promulgated allowing Ukrainian citizens who had fled to the Czech Republic in connection with the conflict in Ukraine to work in the Czech labour market (Coll, 2022a, 2022b). These decrees were amended in the second half of 2023 and the temporary protection of Ukrainian refugees was extended until 31 March 2024.

From 1 April 2023, employers are required to register all temporarily protected workers with the Czech Social Security Administration (CSSA).

The employer is obliged to check the status of the jobseeker and the validity of the asylum registration before hiring. There are no further restrictions in the area of employment, but rather a trend towards facilitating employment. For example, in the case of refugees, the recognition of qualifications in the absence of documentation has given beneficiaries of temporary protection the same opportunities as recognised refugees.

In contrast to other V4 countries, Hungary was less flexible in opening its labour market to Ukrainian refugees. For example, the simplified employment procedure did not exempt refugees from obtaining permits but only made them free of charge. No special permit is required for persons with Ukrainian–Hungarian dual citizenship.

In Hungary, refugees have mainly been offered jobs in professions where there is a shortage of labour. Asylum-seekers are entitled to work in shortage occupations without a permit, but work in non-shortage occupations requires a permit. The permit is valid for a maximum of 90 days. The employer is obliged to notify the Department of Employment, Labour and Occupational Safety, and Health of the Government Office before starting work. In all cases, Ukrainian citizens must contact the Regional Directorate of the National General Directorate for Foreigners and apply for a residence permit in the case of unauthorised employment (shortage occupations) and a residence and work permit in the case of non-shortage occupations.

The list of shortage occupations is published by the Employment Service (OIF, 2023). Employers wishing to employ Ukrainian workers faced an important additional requirement: refugees had to be provided with accommodation at the employer's expense, for which the employer could claim state subsidies (Mishchuk & Vlasenko, 2023).

### The labour market status of refugees after the crisis

The integration of Ukrainian refugees into the labour market of host countries is influenced by a combination of factors. One such factor is the duration of their stay. Although there is still much uncertainty in this regard, it has become clear that the prolongation of the war and the exhaustion of available financial resources have made labour market integration a necessity for an increasing number of refugees. According to Boston Consulting Group (BCG) research, the need to look for a job arises after the first 1–3 months (BCG, 2022), and several data collections show that about half of working-age displaced persons in the V4 countries had taken up work within six months of the outbreak of war (IOM, 2023; OECD, 2023; FRA, 2023a). More than half of male respondents reported having a paid job (56% in Slovakia, 54% in Poland, and 54% in the Czech Republic) (UNHCR, 2023).

The employment rate of those arriving in 2023 is significantly lower than that of those arriving in 2022, so that the employment rate in 2023 is less than 50% (Figure 10.1).[1]
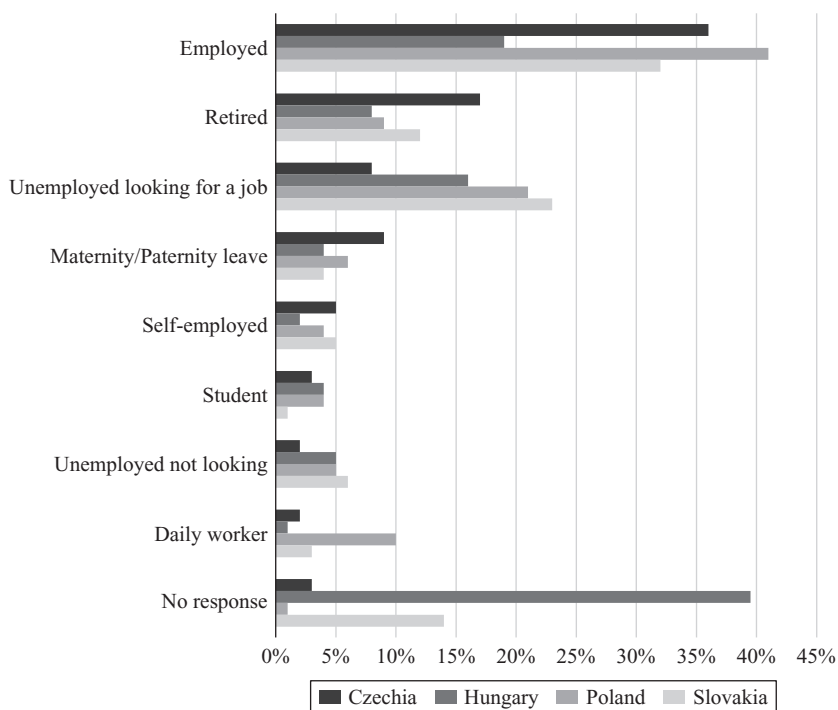
*Figure 10.1* Labour market status of the displaced persons in the V4 countries (6 January 2023).

*Source:* Developed by the authors based on IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (2023).

Research also shows that employment occurs much more quickly than for other refugee groups. Rapid job placement comes at a price, with a significant proportion of jobs exhibiting the characteristics of a vulnerable labour market (World Bank, 2017). For people displaced from Ukraine, opportunities were most readily available in the seasonal labour market, as well as in construction, hospitality, retail, and agriculture, although these jobs required significantly lower qualifications than those of jobseekers (EC, 2023), where irregular/temporary jobs predominate. One reason for this is that many displaced people saw work in the host country as temporary (in the hope of returning home soon) and sought easily available jobs that did not necessarily match their qualifications.

Another problem is that 75% of respondents had a white-collar job before the crisis and had at least a university degree. This level of education contrasts with the needs of the labour market in Central and Eastern Europe, where the majority of available jobs are for low-skilled and seasonal workers (Crisis Ready & Harvard University, 2022). In addition, the fact that the majority of refugees are women (60–80%), and thus find jobs mainly in

sectors with a high proportion of women (services, seasonal work), low prestige of the work performed, and low disposable income, plays an important role in the creation of precarious jobs.

In all these circumstances, displaced people face many obstacles in finding suitable work.

Displaced persons face many obstacles in finding (decent) work in host countries. According to a survey carried out in the second half of 2022, 42% of respondents in Hungary, 51% in Poland, 54% in Slovakia, and 58% in the Czech Republic reported one or more problems in finding a job (FRA, 2023a):

- Eligibility: they have to be registered to work and can only work in the country of registration;
- Language barriers: jobs are only available in the language of the host country, few jobs accept other languages (e.g., English) when applying for a job;
- Accommodation: there are no jobs in rural areas where accommodation is easier to find, and cheap accommodation is not available in larger cities;
- Childcare: there is little or no childcare available;
- Insecurity: they hope to return as soon as possible and therefore do not look for (suitable) work;
- Health: psychological and physical trauma of war;
- Expectations: past experiences and stereotypes – refugee work requires manual labour and other physical skills. There is a significant mismatch between supply and demand for jobs;
- Exploitation: informal economy and below-market wages or no wages (BCG, 2023; FRA, 2023a).

The most significant barrier in all V4 countries is the lack of language skills. Displaced people do not speak the language of the host country: in Poland 54%, Slovakia 65%, Czech Republic 71%, Hungary 80% (FRA, 2023a). Another major problem is that among displaced people looking for work, almost one in four respondents reported finding irregular work in the host country (EC, 2023). In addition, one in five respondents said that they did not know how to start looking for a job and who to turn to for help, while others said that their qualifications were not recognised (16%) or that there was too much bureaucracy (15%).

A number of good practices have been identified in the V4 countries to overcome key barriers. Some of these are presented in the next section.

### Presentation of good practices in the field of employment and labour market services

The integration of displaced people into the labour market depends to a large extent on the removal of barriers to employment. Summarising the results of

previous research (FRA, 2023a; UNHCR, 2023b; IOM, 2023), four broad categories of needs have been identified:

- Lack of information (working conditions, available jobs, information on personal life situation);
- Lack of specialised services (language learning, childcare to help women into work);
- Lack of financial support (financial support for employers and employees);
- Representation and protection of workers' interests;
- Best practice programmes and initiatives to address these needs are presented below in the context of eight types of services.

**General information points**

In the host country, refugees first need help to cope with the existential crisis (food, shelter, basic needs). According to BCG research (2023), the first questions about employment tend to arise after a month in the country, when it becomes clear that refugees need to organise their lives in their new circumstances for a longer period of time.

The information points can be either online portals or face-to-face information points where refugees can obtain general information on employment. The most common topics covered by information points are:

- Conditions for taking up a job (e.g., duration, legal status of the refugee, and form of employment as employee or self-employed);
- Documents required for employment (registration, permits, qualifications, and exemptions);
- Other organisations and services to contact in order to find a job: legal portals, job search advice, legal advice on employment contracts *(PROHUMAN "safeinhungary.hu", Hungary)*;
- General information and news about the labour market in the host country ("pracujINFO", Poland; "TERENDO", Hungary; "Ius laboris", Slovakia; "HR portal", Hungary).

General information points may operate as online portals or as personal information services, e.g., as one of the services of a complex service provider, and may be provided by a governmental organisation (e.g., Office for Foreigners, Poland; Ministry of the Interior, Hungary; and Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, Slovakia), a professional agency (e.g., a job placement agency), an international (e.g., IOM, FRA, and UNHCR) or national organisation (e.g., Menedék, Hungary; ACACCE, Czechia; and Fundacja Ukraina, Poland).

The human resources services of governmental and non-governmental organisations also provide information material on how to access professional portals, employment agencies, and counselling services, where jobseekers can already find targeted information on employment.

For example, the Prohuman (Hungary) service "safein hungary.hu" provides a Ukrainian-language helpline and Viber contact for interested refugees. Information was also provided in person at the BOK hall in Budapest, where refugees are accommodated, and at the 24-hour helpdesks in the Ukrainian border settlements (Záhony, Beregsurány, Tiszabecs).

### Online job search portals (information and placement platforms)

Job search portals provide both a database of available jobs and a way for jobseekers to register.

In most cases the portals are organised by ministries or specialised agencies, but in many cases there are also small and non-profit organisations in the job placement system that provide information specifically for refugees. These portals are mainly aimed at jobseekers and operate databases containing key information about the jobs on offer. The main criteria for online interfaces and information materials and documents (e.g., forms) are that they are available in Ukrainian as well as in the language of the host country and that they are clear, simple, user-friendly, and free of charge.

In June 2022, Poland launched its "Work in Poland" ("Praca w Polsce") portal to help Ukrainians find jobs that match their qualifications. Ukrainian refugees can use it to provide information about their education, qualifications, and previous employment, which is then anonymised and made available to Polish employers. Ukrainian citizens can set up a trusted profile free of charge together with a PESEL number. By November 2022, there were more than 250,000 job offers on the platform.

In Slovakia, the "TREXIMA Bratislava" portal is managed by a market company and organises a constantly updated database of more than 20,000 job vacancies, which is accessible to jobseekers free of charge. The portal contains the most important information about the vacancies in the database: job requirements, salary, and working hours.

In Hungary, the Prohuman recruitment agency also has a large database and many years of experience in recruiting Ukrainian workers to Hungary. This recruitment agency lends workers to employers who mainly need short-term work. As the employer is the lending organisation, it provides considerable assistance to jobseekers in obtaining employment-related documents.

The "Jobs4UA" portal is a targeted job portal supported by CzechInvest in the Czech Republic. The portal helps Ukrainian refugees enter the labour market with targeted job offers by presenting job vacancies from state-controlled employers across the Czech Republic. In just a few steps, the website helps jobseekers find jobs that match their skills (qualifications, preferred working hours) and opportunities (regional location, shift schedule).

In addition to official tools, many ad-hoc matching sites have also emerged on social media, where private individuals and business owners offer job opportunities to Ukrainian refugees (e.g., AdeccojobsforUkraine,

jobaidUkraine, JobsforUkraine, and EU4UA), but the quality of information is often difficult to assess.

### Counselling and other services

Job-seeking counselling is mostly provided face-to-face, although online counselling is not excluded. The advantage of face-to-face counselling over other forms of service is that it is not a simple information provision, but it is interactive, focused on individual needs and adapted to the refugees' current life situation. In many cases, face-to-face counselling is also necessary because jobseekers do not have the tools to access digital platforms or are not well informed about them. Sometimes they are not familiar with this "bureaucratic language" and need help to understand the content. Guidance is the most common type of service provided by support organisations. Personal counselling is mainly provided by networks of NGOs, but in most cases public organisations have also set up a special counselling service for refugees.

The range of topics and forms of employment counselling can be very wide. The most common is *employment counselling*, where the conditions and possibilities of employment are discussed: registering and searching on job portals and at the employment office, checking and applying for job search assistance (e.g., transport assistance) or checking and matching specific job offers, organising peer learning group meetings, sharing experiences and improving motivation, and preparing for a job interview ("Mareena – Job counselling", Slovakia).

Among the forms of counselling, career counselling is often used to explore opportunities beyond the current situation. In most cases the counselling will include the development of a career plan and an overview of the conditions needed to achieve it. Career guidance for Ukrainian refugees *(*Kariérového poradenství pro uprchlíky z Ukrajiny) at Masaryk University (Czechia) is one of the successful projects. The target group for counselling are migrant students. The Career Centre provides free services to students from Ukraine who want to develop their professional skills and careers. As of June 2022, 320 students have benefited from this service.

The third main type of counselling is when jobseekers want to discuss with the counsellor how to overcome obstacles to employment (lack of language skills, transport difficulties to get to work, childcare facilities, etc.). This form of counselling is in most cases embedded in a complex service where several forms of counselling and services are provided at the same time. Such a complex counselling service is provided by "Job Point" of the City of Karlovy Vary (Czechia). "Job Point" is located in the Regional Assistance Centre for Ukraine Refuge's in Karlovy Vary and was established by the Karlovy Vary Regional Chamber of Commerce and combines a number of services, including job offers. At the beginning of March 2022, the Assistance Centre approached employers in the Karlovy Vary region to ask if they would consider offering jobs to Ukrainian citizens. As a result, more

than 500 jobs were found for Ukrainians. Most of them were specifically for women.

For this form of counselling, the Hungarian government has signed an agreement with the six largest charitable organisations and is providing financial support for the operation of the counselling service. All six organisations – Catholic Charities (Katolikus Karitasz), Hungarian Reformed Charity (Magyar Református Szeretetszolgálat), Hungarian Maltese Relief (Magyar Máltai Szeretetszolgálat), Ecumenical Aid (Ökumenikus Segélyszervezet), Baptist Aid (Baptista Szeretetszolgálat), and the Hungarian Red Cross (Magyar Vöröskereszt) – have counselling services throughout the country where individual counselling is possible. In addition to information, comprehensive counselling includes retraining and language courses, psychosocial support, health and legal counselling, community events to strengthen the social capital of refugees, accommodation close to the workplace, and many other services.

### Supporting employers to employ refugees

The good practices include a number of programmes to support employers in expanding employment and employing refugees. The analysis of good practice programmes identified three forms of support/cooperation: (a) providing financial support, (b) providing services to employers, and (c) strengthening cooperation between the market, public, and non-profit sectors.

In Hungary, for example, according to Government Decree 96/2022, an employer is entitled to state aid if he employs Ukrainian citizens who fled Ukraine after 24 February 2022. The aid is granted on condition that the employment takes place in Hungary, on a fixed-term or open-ended contract and for at least 20 hours per week. The aid is granted at a rate of 50% of the employee's accommodation and travel expenses, up to a maximum of HUF 60,000[2] per month per employee and HUF 12,000 per month per child living in the same household as the employee. The allowance can be claimed for a period of up to 12 months after the conclusion of the employment contract, for a maximum of 12 months after the application is submitted, which can be extended once for a maximum of 12 months.

In Poland, the "Model for Professional Activation of Ukrainian Citizens" ("Model aktywizacji zawodowej obywateli Ukrainy") provides support to employers who employ refugees. The programme provides employers with professional information on legal issues related to the employment of refugees and methods of effective integration. In addition, the Labour Office of the City of Warsaw has also provided support to employers employing refugees.

The project "Employment of refugee women in Tesco store (HU)" was initiated by Tesco Trading Company in Hungary. Tesco and the Hungarian Ecumenical Aid Organisation (Magyar Ökumnikus Szeretetszolgálat, MÖSZ) aimed to increase the employment of female refugees from Ukraine. According

to a press release issued by Tesco on 10 March 2022, the company offered 385 job opportunities. The first aim was to recruit refugee women supported by MÖSZ. Tesco produced information leaflets in Hungarian and Ukrainian, which were distributed by MÖSZ to the refugees they supported, and provided contact details for the refugees, including in Ukrainian. A language course was also organised for applicants who did not speak the language. (Maracska, 2022).

*Supporting Ukrainian small entrepreneurs or helping people to become entrepreneurs*

Entrepreneurship is another tool for the effective economic integration of refugees. The V4 countries do not use the opportunity to support refugee entrepreneurship in the same way. Good practices in this area can be found mainly in Poland and the Czech Republic.

The first form of support is "life support" for existing businesses in the case of Ukrainian entrepreneurs displaced by the crisis. "The Coworking for Ukraine" is a European network programme that supports Ukrainian small and medium-sized entrepreneurs who left Ukraine due to the war. The agency "One Coworking" provides coworking spaces in Warsaw, Krakow, Budapest, Bratislava, Prague, and Ostrava for Ukrainian entrepreneurs, allowing small and medium-sized businesses to relocate to the V4 countries. The agency offers free office space with the necessary infrastructure for three months, which can be extended if necessary (onecoworking.com).

In Poland, refugees can also get free advice on setting up a business. One such centre is "Diia.Business" in Warsaw. It advises Ukrainian SMEs on legal, accounting, tax, audit, recruitment of qualified staff, and all other issues related to doing business in Poland.

Another form of support for entrepreneurship is the provision of specific training and courses to prepare workers to run their own business or the business they are setting up in the host country. For example, the Czech government offers Ukrainian refugees the opportunity to participate in training or self-employment to support their business (Mishchuk & Vlasenko, 2023).

*Recognition of professional qualifications*

Recognition of professional qualifications is key to finding the right job. More than half of the refugees arriving in the V4 countries from Ukraine have tertiary education (IOM, 2023), but they are in jobs with a significantly lower status in the host labour market. One reason for this is that there are many obstacles to the recognition of qualifications. Not only those who arrive without documents are in a difficult situation, but also those who do not have a consensus platform for the recognition of their professional qualifications.

Therefore, speeding up the procedures for recognition of qualifications/diplomas in host countries would be very important, especially for young

people. The European Commission's initiative to compare the European Qualifications Framework with the Ukrainian National Qualifications Framework is an important step in this direction, but the results are still to be seen (EC, 2022b, 2022c), so the Member States will apply the rules of the recognition procedure according to their own recognition systems and labour market needs.

The ENIC/NARIC network initiative also aims to support the process of recognition of professional qualifications. This network of international information centres for the academic recognition of qualifications, a network of 55 countries, has launched a joint website to facilitate the exchange of information on Ukrainian qualifications, at the joint initiative of the European Commission, the Council of Europe, and UNESCO (UNESCO, 2023). The website aims to provide up-to-date information to assist interested organisations and individuals in the recognition of qualifications.

There are good initiatives in the V4 countries, particularly in labour market shortage areas, where the recruitment of refugee workers is not based on the recognition of qualifications but on professional skills (especially in some shortage occupations, e.g., health, IT, and education).

### Support for language and vocational training

Language skills are important when looking for a job, especially knowledge of the language of the host country. According to FRA surveys of refugees (2023b), almost half of respondents in Poland speak the national language to a high or intermediate level. This is followed by Slovakia, where more than a third of respondents speak Slovak at some level. The proportion of respondents speaking the language of the host country was below 20% in Romania, Germany, and Hungary. It is interesting to note that older people tend to be more proficient in the language of the neighbouring country. Younger people, although better educated and mostly tertiary educated, do not speak the language, so despite having a higher level of skills, they are less likely to start working in the host country (FRA, 2023b). But there are some great initiatives to overcome language barriers.

A good example is the adoption of a law in Slovakia in 2022 requiring applicants in the health sector to speak Slovak or English (FRA, 2023a). This will make it much easier for the younger generation to enter higher segments of the labour market. The use of another foreign language (e.g., English) is not possible when applying for a job in Hungary, but the website of the National Directorate General of Aliens Police in Hungary informs that free language courses are available for all arriving refugees (OIF, 2023). In the other V4 countries, free language courses are offered by various public and civil organisations (Alfavit Foundation – Hungary, Hungarian Maltese Relief – Hungary, HelpUkraine.sk – Slovakia, UkraineSlovakia.sk, – Slovakia, Centre for Foreigners – Czechia, Integracni Centrum Praha – Czechia, Jagiellonian University in Krakow – Poland).

In addition to language training, vocational training can also facilitate effective labour market integration.

Major labour market organisations have organised integration, vocational, and language training for new recruits from Ukraine. In most cases they provided their own resources to cover the costs of the training (IKEA "Job Klub", Hungary; Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) "IT skills trainings", Poland; PortaOne- Czechia). In many cases (re)training support is also subsidised by the government. In the Czech Republic, for example, employers are entitled to a subsidy of up to 85% of the costs of retraining workers, as well as a subsidy for the wages of retrained workers (Allinger, 2023).

### Protection and representation of workers' interests

Research conducted over the past two years has raised a number of concerns about the labour market status of Ukrainian refugees in the V4 countries. The most prominent problem is the vulnerability and precariousness of workers. A significant proportion work in the informal economy, many without contracts and social protection. Part-time and seasonal employment is also widespread, increasing workers' precariousness in the labour market. A survey of Ukrainian refugees in 2023 shows that working hours were often too long (16%), that they did not have a work contract or that the work contract did not cover all the details, e.g., did not regulate working hours (8%), or that they were not paid for the work they did (10%) (FRA, 2023a).

In all these circumstances, programmes that focus on protection against abuse in the workplace are particularly important. A number of information materials have been produced in the last two years by international organisations (European Labour Authority "European Platform to enhance cooperation in tackling undeclared work", ILO (2021) "Extending social protection", Hungarian Helsinki Committee (HHC, 2023) "Labour exploitation..."), but many grassroots NGOs also carry out their daily awareness-raising work to ensure the legal framework for employment. The Shelter Association (Menedék Egyesület – Hungary) organises information sessions for displaced persons on the following topics: exploitation and abuse in the labour market, workers' rights, contracts and occupational safety. Diakonie West for Ukraine (Diakonie Západ pro Ukrajinu – Poland) organises counselling to prevent abuse in the workplace and illegal work in the Pilsen region. The service aims to identify victims of human trafficking and exploitation, as well as people at risk of these phenomena. It provides information, assistance, and support in resolving situations in order to become independent and return to a normal life. One focus of its activities is protection against harassment at the workplace.

### Lessons learned and recommendations

A significant number of Ukrainian workers were present in the V4 countries before the outbreak of the war. The basic difference between those

who arrived before the outbreak of the war and those who were displaced after is that the latter group has significantly higher skills. In most cases, this potential is not used by the host countries. A high proportion of the displaced are either unemployed or working at a level below their qualifications, and their human capital is of limited use in the labour market of host countries.

With the war dragging on into the second half of 2023, the labour market situation of displaced workers in the V4 countries has changed significantly. As the economy slowed down, the number of (quality) jobs steadily decreased, which had a particularly negative impact on Ukrainian displaced persons who were still on the margins of the labour market in the host countries.

This situation also has a profound impact on the long-term plans of refugee groups. There is increasing evidence that underemployed or precarious (part-time, seasonal) displaced persons from the V4 countries are moving to Western European countries or Canada.

Research over the past two years has identified needs that can significantly improve the labour market integration and job satisfaction of displaced persons. There are also a number of good initiatives in the V4 countries to address these needs by introducing innovative, complex, and personalised services. These good practice models show that the widespread promotion of free language courses, the development of a rapid recognition system for qualifications, the availability of general (legal, psychosocial) and employment counselling, and the provision of day care for children are essential to strengthen local and labour market integration.

In addition, it should be borne in mind that investment in the education, training, and cultural and professional capital of refugees returning home after the war can also be important, as strengthened human capital will support Ukraine's post-war reconstruction.

### Notes

1 According to IOM data, the employment rate of Ukrainian displaced persons in all host countries between January and March 2023 is 33% compared to 70% for those arriving in the first half of 2022 (immediately after the start of the war) (IOM, 2023).
2 Average exchange rate of the central bank as of 2 October 2023: EUR 1 = HUF 387.43.

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# 11 Business sector for Ukrainians

## A form of support or profit-seeking?

*Agnieszka Makarewicz*

### Introduction

After the war in Ukraine began, the Ukrainian refugees chose to escape to the countries that were geographically and culturally similar to Ukraine. The Ukrainian refugees could count on the compassion of the majority of populations of the V4 countries and their involvement in providing essential goods and services, such as housing, food, clothes, and financial support. Then, initiatives related to language learning and labour market participation appeared. Before the governments of the V4 countries managed to introduce their aid programmes ensuring access to limited social services according to EU Directive 2011/24/EU, many representatives of the private sector had already become aware of the needs and offered corresponding support.

The chapter presents the private sector's initiatives introduced on the national level in the Visegrad Group countries and focused on supporting the Ukrainian refugees. The activities involved direct financial and material support, but also services for Ukrainian language-speaking customers and employees, as well as organising courses in the hosting country's national languages. The main purpose of the chapter is to indicate good practices in the forms of assistance offered to refugees from Ukraine by the private sector and to answer the main research question whether, from the perspective of entrepreneurs, the proposed solutions are elements of corporate social responsibility, social marketing, or cause-related marketing.

The analysis covers all the Visegrad countries; however, the majority of signals regarding private-sector initiatives for migrants and refugees from Ukraine, were received in Poland and Czechia. It was most difficult to find signals of such support in Hungary. The United Nations International Organisation for Migration (IOM) organised the First Roundtable on Employment of Migrants and Refugees in Hungary in June 2023 and its observations were not optimistic. The presentations and panel discussions indicated numerous obstacles the Ukrainian migrants face in Hungary. The IOM's insights presented in the subchapter on the scope of the private sector support for the Ukrainian refugees in V4 countries indicate why it was so challenging to identify good practices of the private sector towards Ukrainians in Hungary (IOM, 2023).

When analysing the forms of support proposed by entrepreneurs, the question arises about their motivations. Are these socially responsible, not profit-orientated activities or forms of marketing, and if so, is it social marketing aimed at publicising the problem, setting an example and changing attitudes, or the cause-related marketing focused on multiplication of the donor's resources? These phenomena will be analysed in the first subchapter. Next, the forms of support offered to Ukrainian migrants and refugees by the private sector in V4 countries will be presented and compared. The analysis of private sector initiatives will allow the determination of what business strategy they correspond with and whether they can be considered effective solutions.

The research methods and techniques applied in the chapter include: desk research, official documents analysis, and analysis of the collected signals on the private sector's support initiatives (information found in the media, social platforms, during discussions, and workshops). The most significant forms of the Ukrainians refugees' support identified include:

- Donations and collections of funds – often with the help of the volunteers, and cooperation with non-governmental organisations;
- Shopping discounts;
- Programmes for Ukrainian employees;
- Information and communication support;
- Professional activation support;
- National language courses and improving language skills.

**The entrepreneurs' motivations to support the Ukrainian migrants and refugees**

Referring to the described forms of assistance, it will be possible to carry out an analysis aimed at identifying good practices and, within the selected theoretical framework, to determine which initiatives are implemented as corporate social responsibility – without the expectation of any benefits by the entrepreneurs, which bear the features of social marketing including an expected impact of social and aid activities on the company's image, and which activities are assumed to bring material benefits to companies and can be categorised as cause-related marketing.

According to Archie B. Carroll, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has to encompass the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary (largely philanthropic) expectations that society has of organisations at a given point in time. The author claims that the economic and legal expectations are required of business by society and that the ethical responsibility is expected, while the discretionary/philanthropic is desired of business by society (Caroll, 2015, 90).

The European Commission defines CSR as the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society. It concerns actions taken by companies over and above their legal obligations towards society and the environment. Certain regulatory measures create an environment more conducive to enterprises

voluntarily meeting their social responsibilities (European Commission, 2011).

CSR has been a relevant business issue at least since the Industrial Revolution and contributed to ensuring of decent working conditions, housing, and healthcare provision. It also concerns charity activities that many of the early industrialists in Europe and the US were involved in. Nowadays, there is a growing number of CSR standards, watchdogs, auditors, and certifiers aiming at institutionalising and harmonising CSR practices globally (Crane, Matten & Spence, 2013, 4).

The main aspects of CSR which are still debated are as follows (Crane, Matten & Spence, 2013, 9–11):

• CSR is seen as voluntary activities that go beyond those prescribed by the law;
• CSR involves considering a range of interests and impacts among a variety of stakeholders;
• Alignment of social and economic responsibilities – how firms can benefit economically from being socially responsible;
• Practices and values: CSR is about a set of business practices and strategies that deal with social issues; however, it also involves a set of values that underpins these practices;
• CSR is about more than just philanthropy and community giving; it involves all the core business functions (production, marketing, human resource management, finance) and their impact on society.

CSR works on the principle of self-regulation, although there are specified guidelines and standards that organisations can follow. Among the main CSR standards is the ISO 26000, which was first raised by the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) in 2010. The ISO 26000 standard provides voluntary guidelines to help an organisation assess its strategy and progress on its social responsibility initiatives (Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu, 2023).

The term social marketing was first coined by Kotler and Zaltman in 1971 to refer to the application of marketing to solve social problems. Since marketing campaigns have been successful in encouraging customers to buy products, it was assumed that it could also encourage people to adopt behaviours that will enhance their lives, as well as, the lives of the rest of the citizens (MacFadyen, Stead & Hastings, 2002).

According to Andreasen, "social marketing is the application of commercial marketing technologies to the analysis, planning, execution, and evaluation of programmes designed to influence the voluntary behaviour of target audiences in order to improve their personal welfare and that of society" (Andreasen, 2003, p. 296).

Social marketing is defined as an approach to understanding and facilitating the voluntary application of beneficial behavioural decisions. It draws

attention to factors beyond the individual level and is a way of communication that can affect social conditions (Storey, Hess & Saffitz, 2015, 411–413).

According to Gerard Hastings and Kathryn Angus, any social marketing or corporate social responsibility campaigns must be focused first and foremost on the success of the business and the enhancement of the shareholder value. Any broader public benefits are subjugated to this core purpose (Hastings & Angus, 2011).

Cause-related marketing is an intermediate form between commercial marketing and social marketing (often confused with the latter). It is a tool for corporate social responsibility. In socially engaged marketing, companies support a specific social goal, while improving their image and contributing to strengthening their position on the market. According to D. Maison and P. Wasilewski, CRM is an area between pure business and philanthropy. On the one hand, it is a philanthropic action for a given cause; however, at the same time it is a business for all parties involved in the matter (Maison & Wasilewski, 2002).

CRM is a phenomenon between corporate philanthropy and sales promotion. CRM jointly with sales promotion tools such as cents-off coupons and refund offers , provides an economic incentive to motivate consumers to engage in exchange relationships with the company and to emphasise the the costumers' contribution to the revenue-producing process. CRM is a useful tool for a broad range of corporate objectives, including gaining national visibility, enhancing corporate image and/or thwarting negative publicity, generating incremental sales via promoting repeat and multiple unit purchases, increasing brand recognition, and broadening the customer base by reaching new market segments and geographic markets (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988).

In cause-related marketing, a selected social problem serves as a pretext for a socially justified purchase, which means greater profit for the company. Among the most significant factors affecting cause-related marketing, there are competitive advantage, improving organisations' financial performance, consumer loyalty, and enhancing employees' database (Jaisingh & Madan, 2017).

Despite the fact that all of the above forms of corporate support bring benefits to stakeholders and shareholders of the enterprises involved in helping, CSR is the most effective strategy in the context of social profits. The analysed examples of socially responsible initiatives focused, in the initial phase of providing assistance, mainly on the immediate material assistance needed by refugees. After the stabilisation phase, it was time for support aimed at empowering refugees in their new place of residence and in the labour market.

### The scope of the private sector support for the Ukrainian refugees in the Visegrad Group countries

A study conducted by the Polish Economic Institute shows that 53% of Polish enterprises support in various ways the Ukrainian refugees who have come

to Poland. A survey of Polish enterprises carried out as part of the Monthly Business Index in early May 2022 on a sample of 500 enterprises diversified by size and industry showed that every second company was involved in supporting the Ukrainians, and depending on the size of the enterprise, this percentage ranged from 40 to 86. The percentage of companies involved in assistance was the highest among large enterprises (86%) and the lowest among micro-enterprises (40%). The companies most involved in aid were trading companies (57%), service companies (56%), and manufacturing companies (55%).

Among the various forms of assistance, in-kind assistance was the most popular. Financial aid from the company's resources was provided by every fourth enterprise. Such aid was more often provided by small companies (36%), while only 19% of large companies transferred their own funds to Ukraine. Every fifth company helped financially through collections organised by their employees. However, this form of assistance was more frequent in large enterprises. Every third large company organised collections among employees, but only 15% of micro and small companies.

The most popular form of providing assistance was material assistance. Companies organised material collections among employees (38% of responses) or purchased necessary items from company funds (27%). 56% of large companies organised collections of food, medical products, and clothes and handed over the collected items to points organising help for refugees. Similar actions took place in only 22% of small enterprises. Small companies, in turn, financed in-kind assistance with company funds more often than large ones – 36% of small companies compared to 19% of large companies (PIE, 2022).

In the case of material collections among employees, the companies were only a platform for the implementation of the philanthropic activities of employees. Philanthropic acts are individual in nature and their scope depends on the will and resources of the individuals. Therefore, such actions should not be considered as corporate's acts.

Other forms of help include providing services or offering products free of charge (17% of responses). In particular, transport companies (35%) provided transport services for refugees from the border to their final destinations. Another form was free provision of rooms (13%), which was most often indicated by service companies (18%). Help in the form of organising corporate volunteer groups (3%) or events from which the income is donated to help Ukraine (2%) was much less common (PIE, 2022).

Importantly, organised corporate volunteer groups and employee volunteering are two different activities. The first, organised form is supervised by the enterprise, and often employees perform this activity during working hours, paid by the employer. In the case of employee volunteering, we are dealing with individual acts of volunteerism that can be identified with individual philanthropy.

The organisation People in Need and its partners, including the private sector representatives, have supported more than 1,000,000 Ukrainians in Czechia with aid worth over EUR 97,000,000, and hundreds of thousands of people have benefited from material help. The organisation provided 27,585 Ukrainians with legal and psychosocial assistance, 11,599 people with medical consultations, and 82,027 people with educational assistance. The direct financial support was granted to 38,229 individuals (People in Need, 2023).

The Czech Republic is also opening its market for the new Ukrainian entrepreneurs. By the end of the third quarter of 2023, 4,904 Ukrainians had started their own business in the Czech Republic, which gives an average number of 476 Ukrainian entrepreneurs registered per month. 1,733 of the Ukrainian entrepreneurs started their business in Prague, which is 19% of the total number of new individual entrepreneurs in the capital city. The most common business sectors in which the Ukrainians have registered were those connected with the construction industry – 1,919 companies (Visit Ukraine, 2023).

Although in Slovakia, apart from the government involvement, civil society organisations provide the most significant support regarding sharing information for new arrivals on legal options, available supportive measures, accommodation facilities, transport options, and psychological support. The business sector also provides humanitarian help through the provision and collection of financial and material support, offering accommodation and transportation free of charge, as well as job vacancies to the Ukrainians that have been granted temporary protection (European Commission, 2022).

In order to be able to implement and evaluate support programmes for the Ukrainian refugees, the Slovakia Refugee Coordination Forum was established. The RCF, in consultation with other actors and stakeholders involved in the refugee support in Slovakia, carried out the 2023 Slovakia Multi-sectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA). The MSNA was to identify the most pressing needs in different areas such as protection, health, education, and accommodation. The MSNA's efforts are focused on the coordination of different humanitarian actors' initiatives, volunteer groups, and other local responders to address the refugees' needs in the most efficient way. The assessment was conducted between July and August 2023, based on a quantitative approach that reached 819 households in Slovakia, representing a total of 1,853 Ukrainian refugees (Reliefweb, 2023).

According to the collected signals, Hungary offered the least support. The IOM report mentioned in the introduction indicated the following hindrances for the Ukrainian migrants in professional activation in the Hungarian labour market: over-representation in dangerous industrial jobs, language barriers or lack of support and knowledge of the local labour laws, labour exploitation taking many physical and/or psychological forms, and employers not being well acquainted with refugee Temporary Protection Cards. The recommendations given by IOM included:

- Reducing the level of politicisation of the issue;
- Taking action against illegal recruitment and exploitative practices;
- Providing psychological support for workers;
- Tackling deceitful job advertisements and taking action against the practices of illegal recruitment agencies;
- Multi-stakeholder discussion, development of a strategy for the integration, and free language courses for workers and their family members;
- Companies should take into consideration that remuneration higher than minimum wage and better living condition reduce the workers turnover;
- Companies should take responsibility for ensuring that their management and staff are duly prepared for the reception of migrant workers and facilitate their social integration (IOM, 2023).

### Donations, fundraising, and cooperation with non-governmental organisations

One of the activities carried out especially by the transnational companies was the collection of funds and donations in kind, often engaging the employees and customers. In many cases, the companies established foundations or cooperated with NGOs in allocating the collected funds. The Portuguese Jeronimo Martins Group operating in Poland, which owns the Biedronka grocery discount chain, also got involved in the assistance. According to Biedronka's director of communication and sustainable development, the chain and its customers, together with the Biedronka Foundation and the Jeronimo Martins Group, have allocated a total of over PLN 65 million[1] to support Ukraine (Błaszczak, 2023).

One of the foundation's activities, which has been experienced by the grocery discount Biedronka customers, has been the fundraising from customers combined with the payment system. Before paying for purchases, the card payment processing system asks the customer whether they would like to support the campaign for Ukrainians. Activities that involve the largest group of store chain's stakeholders – the customers, undoubtedly contribute to organising much greater aid resources. Such socially responsible activities strengthen also the relationship between the company and its customers, as well as, indicate the mutual trust – on the part of the company that customers will respond positively to such an action, and on the part of the customers that the money collected will actually be spent on the declared purpose.

Lidl Polska company has taken numerous actions to support Ukrainian citizens in the refugee crisis. The Schwarz Group, which includes, among others, Lidl Polska allocated support worth PLN 47,000,000 to help Ukrainian citizens. Lidl Polska constantly donates products to NGOs in Ukraine, including Caritas Ukraina. In Poland, the network provides products and financial support to organisations such as Caritas Polska, the Federation of Polish Food Banks, and the Polish Humanitarian Action. Lidl Polska stores are constantly collecting food for the Federation of Polish Food Banks and Caritas Polska.

There were 1,113,585 kg of food and essential products already donated by 2022 (Lidl Polska, 2022). In Hungary, the Schwarz Group has cooperated with various aid organisations since the beginning of the crisis and made cash and in-kind donations totalling EUR 10,000,000 (HR Portal, 2022).

The hypermarket chain Tesco has joined forces with several retailers from the Slovak Alliance of Modern Trade (SAMO). As a result of this cooperation, in February 2022, a Tesco truck brought much-needed aid to the border to Uble – over 40 tons of food and hygiene products for people fleeing the conflict in Ukraine. Tesco also donated €1.2 million to the Red Cross Crisis Appeal to help Ukraine (touchIT, 2022).

The global value of material and financial assistance provided by IKEA and the IKEA Foundation is estimated at EUR 45,000,000. In 2023, IKEA continues long-term projects to help refugees gain employment, learn the language, and integrate and stabilise their life situation in Poland (Błaszczak, 2023).

Nationale-Nederlanden (NN) Group has donated approximately EUR 1,000,000 in humanitarian aid through various international and local non-profit organisations, including in Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, and Romania, to help refugees with housing, food, and health care. NN continues to work closely with the non-profit sector to identify additional needs. NN Slovakia also donated EUR 40,000 to local umbrella organisations to help Ukrainians. The company financially supported the establishment of the Health Line for Ukraine (www.ua.diagnose.me), which provides rapid health consultations in Ukrainian for refugees with health problems. NN Slovakia supported its employees in their charitable activities (Nationale-Nederlanden, 2022).

The ESET Foundation has created a fund to help Ukrainian citizens, in which it has already invested EUR 500,000. These funds will be allocated for direct aid and as donations to non-governmental organisations by the INTEGRA Foundation and UNICEF. The company has also launched a fundraiser for employees and encourages its employees to volunteer in humanitarian activities. For this purpose, it provides them with space during working hours. Further, the company provides assistance to employees of the Ukrainian business partners and their families by providing accommodation and financial support (Business Leaders Forum, 2022).

COOP Jednota, a Slovenian supermarket chain, helped Ukraine directly at the border through its consumer cooperatives in eastern Slovakia. Shortly after the outbreak of the war, in consultation with local authorities, it allowed the mayors of municipalities that provide accommodation for refugees to purchase food in their stores completely free of charge. COOP Jednota supported three charities with a total amount of EUR 30,000. The network remains in close contact with the crisis team of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic and other state authorities, municipal authorities, charitable organisations, logistics centres, and suppliers (Business Leaders Forum, 2022).

Plzeňský Prazdroj opened an employee collection for the People in Need and People in Danger organisations. Each donation was at least doubled

by Plzeňský Prazdroj. So far, the company has allocated over EUR 120,000 for this purpose. Volunteers helped distribute material aid, as well as translate and distribute refreshments at the refugee registration centre in Pilsen. Volunteers could take two days off to volunteer based on the collective agreement. Dozens of pallets with soft drinks were delivered to the Food Bank in Czechia and Slovakia (Business Leaders Forum, 2022).

The Generali Insurance company, together with Generali Česká pojišťovna, supported organisations helping people coming from Ukraine to Slovakia and to the Czech Republic with EUR 600,000. Generali also provided financial assistance to employees and businessmen from Ukraine so that they could take better care of their families (Business Leaders Forum, 2022).

The American transnational company – BioTechUSA Group operating in Hungary, donated almost two tons of muesli and fruit bars to the Hungarian Charitable Service of the Order of Malta, which constantly serves people fleeing to Hungary and supports the distribution of products. The company also donated HUF 10,000,000[2] to support the work of the Charitable Service working on the border with Ukraine (BioTechUSA, 2022).

**Shopping discounts**

As a gesture of solidarity with refugees from Ukraine and with Poles involved in helping those in need, a special discount system has been implemented in selected Lidl stores near the border. Within this project, a special discount system was introduced in selected Lidl stores in border regions, allowing customers to purchase the most necessary products at a 30% discount. The action was carried out only in stores located near the border to support people living in the border areas, as well as Ukrainians who came to Poland (Lidl Poland, 2022).

Thanks to reduced prices, refugees from Ukraine and other residents of the border regions could save money on purchases, which was important, since they were often in a difficult financial situation. This project also aimed to alleviate difficulties related to social and economic adaptation for refugees and migrants who come to Poland in search of better living conditions. As part of this campaign, customers were offered the opportunity to purchase a wide range of food products and other necessities, such as hygiene products and cleaning products, at a lower price. It is worth noting that this action was carried out in cooperation with non-governmental organisations and local authorities, which identified the communities most in need and people who could benefit from this initiative. Thanks to this, the project was well organised and targeted at those who needed support the most. The introduction of a special discount system in Lidl stores also had a positive impact on the local community. Customers of Lidl stores appreciated the initiative and willingly participated in the campaign by purchasing products at a lower price. In this way, the local community could also express their support for refugees and migrants (Lidl Poland, 2022).

The same initiative – a 30% discount in border areas, was also introduced by the discount chains Kaufland and Biedronka. It might seem that the price reduction procedure is a typical cause-related marketing tool aimed at increasing sales and achieving a higher profit related to the increased sales. However, in this case, the discount was too high to consider this initiative as profit-orientated. Therefore, in this case too, the corporate action was applied, which was socially responsible towards stakeholders. Additionally, in this particular situation, the beneficiary is a complex group of stakeholders. The clients include both Ukrainian refugees and Poles supporting refugees; however, another separate group of stakeholders could be recognised here. In the CSR theory, the local community was identified as a stakeholder; in this case, through support directed to Ukrainians coming to Poland, as well as for to Poles involved in aid, the mentioned food discount stores relieved, at least partly, the Polish border communities from the financial burden.

### Programmes for the Ukrainian employees

The entrepreneurs' programmes for their stakeholders include support for Ukrainian employees. One of IKEA's priorities in Poland was to ensure the safety of employees from Ukraine and their families directly affected by the conflict. As part of the multidimensional aid package, a fund was launched for non-repayable financial support, intended for organising family transport from the border, psychological assistance, covering the costs of accommodation in Poland, and paying for the costs of treatment and legalisation of stay (IKEA, 2023).

The Polish Polomarket chain also launched assistance intended for Ukrainian employees who are part of the crews of individual stores and logistics centres. The scope of assistance is individually tailored to the needs of employees and their families, including, financial, material, legal, psychological, accommodation, and logistics support (Wiadomości Handlowe, 2022).

The signals regarding actions taken for refugees and migrants by enterprises in the Czech Republic indicate that the Ukrainian employees or the future employees were the main addressees of support, and therefore, in the context of considerations regarding corporate social responsibility, among the main stakeholders of the enterprises. The main concern of the companies in terms of their Ukrainian employees was to secure them and their families in case they need to return to Ukraine for military training or to participate in the war.

In response to the Russian invasion and the problems with communication with the occupied areas, Continental Automotive offered one-time funding in the form of a remuneration in advance to its Ukrainian colleagues and provided phones and SIM cards for calls to Ukraine. In cooperation with the JOBka company, they launched an online application for their Ukrainian employees, which regularly provides them with information about the situation, and through which they too can send suggestions for specific steps or

help in their native language. In the first days, the company immediately had 70 accommodation beds ready. A team of volunteers was also assembled to help in many areas: transport and accommodation, provision of nurseries and schools, organisation of material collection, etc. Before the crisis, the company had open positions in various departments (production, warehouse, engineering, etc.), and currently, a large number of these vacancies have been filled by family members of their employees. Continental also launched an employee fundraiser in cooperation with People in Need, where their employees managed to collect a respectable amount to support adaptation groups for Ukrainian children in Brandysk (Byznys pro společnost, 2022).

All major retail chains and other important stores would pay at least 50% of wages to all employees from Ukraine in the event that they have to fulfil their military service and interrupt work in Czechia due to the war. The companies want to prevent the employees' families from being exposed to another difficult life situation due to a lack of funds. In addition, they already provide food aid for refugees seeking asylum in the Czech Republic and also sent tens of tons of food donations directly to Ukraine. Moreover, retail chains guarantee re-employment upon return to any employee from Ukraine who would have to go to Ukraine. The obligation to pay 50% of the salary should last for three months, and if necessary, this term can be extended. In addition to standard leave, the retail chains also provided the Ukrainian employees with fully paid time off to take care of family matters, such as picking up family members from the border and settling them in the Czech Republic. The following retail chains and major stores participated in the above-described support of Ukrainian employees: Albert, Billa, dm drogerie markt, Globus, Kaufland, Košík.cz, Lidl, MAKRO Cash & Carry ČR, Penny, and Rohlík. cz, Tesco (SOCR ČR, 2022). In Slovakia, Tesco provided already employed co-workers of Ukrainian nationality who decided to return to their country with paid leave of 12 weeks and a guarantee of the possibility of returning to work (touchIT, 2022).

Heineken donated over EUR 1,000,000 of support, which went to local non-governmental organisations primarily in Slovakia, Poland, Romania, and Hungary. The company decided to directly support its own employees who actively help refugees from Ukraine. Employees may receive the following allowances and days off: one-time support of EUR 1,500 to cover the costs related to the relocation of family members in Ukraine and five additional days off needed to assist with relocation, one-time support of EUR 500 to cover the costs of housing refugees in their own property and two days off, and two days off for volunteer activities for all willing employees (Business Leaders Forum, 2022).

### Information and communication support

Another very important area of support, especially in the first days of the war and the refugee exodus, was information and communication resources.

In cooperation with UNHCR and UNICEF, IKEA designed and equipped Blue Dots. These are support centres in Poland and other countries located along main border crossings and transit routes, which provide people fleeing the war in Ukraine with protection and access to necessary information. Blue Dots were opened in Rzeszów, Przemyśl, Medyka, Warsaw, Poznań, Wrocław, Gdynia, Kraków, and Nadarzyn (IKEA, 2023).

Umapa has been a very useful tool offered to the refugees in the Czech Republic. The community map project, its web version, and its application were created by combining the forces of expert volunteers from the Czech community, Digital, and Mapotic companies. It is a spontaneous initiative that aims to help Ukrainians get to know their new (temporary) home in a foreign country. The goal of Umapa was to display all important and useful places, services, and information that people coming from Ukraine might need in order to find their way in their new homes more easily and in one place. All the essential locations are there, and their number is constantly growing - from doctors and lawyers to kindergartens and food banks. Most sites feature additional information such as speciality, phone numbers, and language availability. From the beginning (1 March 2022), the map was created as a community map. Various types of services and places are being gradually added to the map, which can help to build the foundations for a new stage of the Ukrainian community abroad. The first version of the map works for the territory of the Czech Republic; however, it is constantly being developed and expanded so it could include new types of services, functionalities, and countries (UMAPA, 2023).

In Slovakia, the mobile network Orange provided Ukrainians with a Prima Voľba starter package with a new SIM card and prepaid services for free. The starter includes 10 GB of data, 60 prepaid minutes of calls to Ukraine, and bonus credit worth Euro 2, which can be used for calls and SMS. Prima Voľba was available at any Orange store by showing any kind of Ukrainian personal document (UkraineSlovakia.sk, 2023).

Mobile operator Yettel provided over 40,000 prepaid SIM cards to people fleeing Ukraine, thanks to which they could obtain the following services: unlimited access to mobile internet in Hungary, 50 minutes of domestic calling, free international calls to Ukrainian numbers, and free roaming within the territory of Ukraine (HR Portal, 2022).

**Professional activation support**

In 2022, IKEA launched the "Skills Count" internship programme, which aims to help in acquiring skills in the labour market. The programme was launched with the substantive support of the Ocalenie Foundation, and the second edition of the project involves IKEA stores in Gdańsk, Kraków, Łódź, Targówek in Warsaw, and Janki near Warsaw. IKEA invited 46 participants to the programme, who started their six-month internships in March (IKEA, 2023).

The companies in the Czech Republic also offer Ukrainians training to improve their skills and increase their chances of finding employment. The hybrid online/in-person learning programme was financed by Google company and advertised among the migrants in 2022. The programme aimed specifically at Ukrainian women who were interested in upskilling and additional education in the field of IT. For UA migrants, it was free of charge with only a refundable deposit upon course completion. In order to participate in the programme, the ability to communicate in Czech was required, and English was highly recommended. The enterprise offered three specific courses – data analyst, software tester, and web developer. The graduates received an official certificate. The students also participated also in intensive Czech language courses and were eligible for financial contributions for a babysitter if they had small children. The participants were also provided with a Ukrainian or a Russian-speaking assistant. Most of the lessons were organised in the evenings so that the participants could reconcile it with work and family responsibilities (Czechitas, 2023).

The trainings have also been also offered to the Ukrainian entrepreneurs. The DoToho! (GoForIt!) educational programme is a private sector initiative under which the top Czech business mentors provide support to the future entrepreneurs or managers of small and medium-sized enterprises. The project was launched primarily for people affected by the war in Ukraine and was open to Ukrainian citizens interested in starting a business in the Czech Republic. It was free of charge and could be completed online in both Czech and Ukrainian languages. The main objective of the programme was to provide the participants with knowledge about conducting economic activity in the Czech Republic. The project gave opportunities for further education and also to get in touch with the Ukrainian entrepreneurs in the Czech Republic, since the Czech entrepreneurs willing to share their business experience apply as well to be part of the project (European Commission, 2023).

The latter initiative shows that the private sector in the Czech Republic is not afraid of market competition from arriving migrants; on the contrary, by equipping them with managerial skills, it encourages them to start their own economic activity. It is also worth mentioning that this is a solution that takes into account long-term effects. For the reason that when the war ends and refugees want to return to their homeland, these trainings will facilitate their professional activation. Business and management skills will not only strengthen their position in the labour market but may also make them take the risk and become employers themselves.

A separate category of support is assistance in finding employment. Organisations associating business representatives, among others, are involved in this form of support for refugees. Thus, the Federation of Polish Entrepreneurs informed in a statement on 1 March that it already had 250 jobs for Ukrainian citizens. The federation launched a dedicated hotline, helpful in searching for employment. The organisation called Employers of Poland encouraged entrepreneurs who had job vacancies, especially for women, to report this fact by phone

or e-mail. They offered assistance in completing all technical issues related to connecting a specific employer with an employee.

In order to support Ukrainian citizens in their job search, Lidl has adapted its official recruitment platforms to reach them with job offers as widely as possible. Selected recruitment advertisements are published in Polish and Ukrainian. All self-service checkouts in Lidl Polska stores also have a Ukrainian language function. Selected brand advertising spots have captions in Ukrainian (Lidl Polska, 2022). In Slovakia, Tesco has introduced a recruitment process for Ukrainians in their native language, and information about vacancies available in Ukrainian is also available on the chain's website (TouchIT, 2022).

One of the companies in this industry that declared its willingness to employ refugees was the already mentioned Biedronka discount chain. More than 1.8 thousand Ukrainian citizens already work there. The chain announced that it would simplify the procedures for employing Ukrainians in its stores and distribution centres. The Wrocław-based pharmaceutical company Hasco-Lek declares on its website that it will help refugees find work and obtain appropriate permits. Work for the refugees is also available at the Arche Group, a company from the development and hotel industries.

The giant of the Polish cosmetics industry, the Inglot brand, is also creating jobs. The company announced that due to the war, people coming from Ukraine who want to work at Inglot will take part in a possibly shortened recruitment process. The company also guaranteed coverage of housing fees for the first month after hiring new employees (Anagnostopulu, 2022).

## National languages courses and improving language skills

To ensure integration of the refugees into everyday Czech life, the private language schools have organised the Czech language courses. The Academic Grammar School and the Language School of the Capital of Prague launched two intensive Czech language courses for Ukrainians aged 15–19, which are provided either for free or with a significant discount. Many language schools have offered free courses; however, they also count on the state's subsidies in the long run covering the teachers' salaries (Nattrass, 2022).

In the context of newly hired and potential employees from Ukraine, the language barrier is an important issue. Therefore, large companies have decided to invest in human resources and to offer the Czech language courses as well. Skoda, one of the largest Czech employers, offered free of charge Czech language lessons for its new Ukrainian employees. Lessons were organised in the afternoon with a focus on basic grammar and conversations in common everyday settings. Thanks to a large number of employees participating in this project; there was a large number of graduates (Škoda Auto Vysoká škola, 2022).

Polish Language Centre VARIA in cooperation with the Internationaler Bund Foundation, the Kraków City Hall, and the UNICEF organisation

organised free Polish language courses for teachers and intercultural assistants, as well as for children and youth aged 9–24 fleeing the war in Ukraine. The company offered stationary and online classes, which took place from December 2022 to July 2023. The course included 120 hours in the form of lessons and workshops. The classes were conducted at various language levels and adapted to the skills of each group. A total of 150 people took part in the courses (Centrum Języka Polskiego Varia, 2023).

**Lessons learned and recommendations**

The conducted analysis indicated that although all the Visegrad Group countries were involved in supporting refugees from Ukraine, not all of them were involved to the same extent. The fewest signals regarding good practices were collected in Hungary. As the research has shown, the main reason for not only the lack of involvement of the private sector but also for a significant number of abuses was the political climate prevailing in Hungary.

Financial and material assistance with the greatest monetary value was provided by transnational companies, and many signals came from transnational chains of discount stores and hypermarkets. Transnational companies also offered support in the form of their own services – this was the case, for example, with mobile network operators. However, small and medium-sized national enterprises were no less involved in the same activities and types of support. Both large and smaller companies organised employee volunteering.

The most signals of support were collected in Poland and the Czech Republic. In terms of forms of support, most initiatives were related to donations, fundraising, promoting, and supporting volunteer activities, including employee volunteering. The second most represented area of support was programmes dedicated to employees from Ukraine and, due to the incoming waves of refugees, future employees. Activities facilitating refugees' movement in labour markets were also important. Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia provided support in this respect. The activities included facilitating access to the national labour markets of the V4 countries, such as simplifying recruitment processes – often conducting the recruitment in Ukrainian, creating databases with available jobs, offering training to improve professional skills and entrepreneurship. In the context of supporting entrepreneurship, many different solutions were proposed by entrepreneurs from the Czech Republic – trainings, internships, and mentoring. In terms of providing Ukrainians with language skills, private language schools have become involved in organising free courses in the national languages of the host countries. In some cases, these companies covered the entire costs of the language classes for refugees, and in other cases it was with partial support from local governments. In the context of easier access to information and communication, all V4 countries have mobile operators who offered free telecommunication services to Ukrainian refugees. Access to information was also facilitated by the initiative of regularly updated electronic maps.

The analysis and interpretation of the collected signals regarding support for Ukrainian refugees and migrants by enterprises in Visegrad Group countries showed that the assistance offered by the private sector has been a part of the implementation of the Corporate Social Responsibility strategy. The strategy assumes the responsibility of enterprises for their impact on society and the responsibility of organisations for the impact of their decisions and actions on society and the environment.

Enterprises conducting their economic activity in V4 countries have proposed initiatives that address the different needs of different stakeholders. It should be emphasised that the beneficiaries of the forms of support were all the stakeholders' groups – internal and external ones, starting from customers and employees, through non-governmental organisations, local communities, and finally the governments, which, especially in the first months of the war, did not cope effectively with the organisation of aid. The gathered signals indicate that the enterprises operating in the Czech Republic focused mainly on one group of stakeholders, namely, Ukrainian employees and potential job candidates from among the incoming refugees. Therefore, the help they offered mainly focused on activities aimed at facilitating their functioning in the work environment and supporting employees' families.

It is encouraging that the analysis did not reveal a cause-related marketing approach, which means that entrepreneurs were not looking for profit in the implemented solutions. What is missing, however, are the hallmarks of social marketing, i.e., a broader vision that would highlight the problem of refugees and economic migration in the broad sense, without necessarily referring to a specific nation forced to leave its country. Social marketing campaigns initiated in the context of refugees from Ukraine would contribute to sensitising both societies to this social issue and allow for a more holistic view and evaluation of the implemented initiatives.

Nevertheless, it should be admitted that the identified and analysed initiatives referred to various areas where support was required: from strictly existential issues, such as organising shelter or providing food and other necessities, through learning the languages of the receiving countries and assistance in finding employment, ending with the development of skills and empowerment. The analysis of the collected signals showed that the majority of the business solutions dedicated to refugees and migrants from Ukraine bear the hallmarks of good practice and are coherent with the Corporate Social Responsibility strategy. The presented initiatives could become an inspiration for the business sectors of the V4 countries, which should still increase their efforts and improve activities on behalf of refugees.

## Notes

1 Average exchange rate of the central bank as of 2 October 2023: EUR 1 = PLN 4.6091
2 Average exchange rate of the central bank as of 2 October 2023: EUR 1 = HUF 387.43.

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# Conclusions

## Lessons learned and recommendations on the basis of the best practices in supporting Ukrainian refugees in the Visegrad Group countries

*Judit Csoba, Małgorzata Madej, and Dorota Moroń*

The initial aim of the book was to summarise the experiences and analyse the best practices that have been initiated in recent months by different actors in the V4 countries to help Ukrainian refugees after the outbreak of the war. In presenting the best practices, the authors did not aim to provide step-by-step instructions on how to manage a crisis but rather to stimulate reflection and suggest ways to cope with unexpected situations to ensure the right balance between humanitarian assistance and promoting the empowerment of Ukrainian refugees.

In addition to presenting the current situation of Ukrainian refugees in the V4 countries, the chapters of the book analyse the main areas of crisis management (housing, work, education, local integration), highlighting the specificities, responses, and actions of each country and, from a comparative perspective, drawing a number of common lessons.

In the summary, we focus on these common lessons and raise a number of questions about the consequences of the protracted crisis and the future of the refugees.

### The main actors

Among the general experiences of dealing with the refugee crisis, the first thing to highlight is the delayed reaction of the governments of the V4 countries. The lack of mobilisation of government resources and the delays in intervention, especially in the first days after the outbreak of the war, are fundamentally linked to the lack of a comprehensive national policy on migrant integration, clear objectives, and adequate means of implementation to initiate effective action. In addition to a clear strategy, there is a lack of public funding to implement the integration of migrants. Neither the state nor the regional and local authorities have sufficient resources for this purpose.

The gap left by state actors in assisting refugees has been filled by the activism of local actors and civil society. Informal support networks and volunteers were organised through social media, but in many cases, due to the spontaneity of interventions and the diversity of actors, there was little or

no coordination between them, which hindered the displaced people's equal access to necessary services and benefits.

It should be also noted that assistance to refugees with special needs (people with chronic illnesses, people with disabilities, minority groups, etc.) was also provided through targeted forms of assistance organised by NGOs, as the large government programmes that had begun to emerge focused on average cases and were not suitable for addressing special needs.

In addition to informal helpers and NGOs, local and regional authorities have played a much greater role than central governments. They have been involved in many forms of crisis management (organising provision of information, providing facilities and temporary care, extending the reach of specialised services, etc.).

It should be stressed that many of the best practices identified were implemented in a collaborative way. This can be cross-sectoral (e.g., between NGOs and local authorities, and between NGOs, local authorities, and businesses) or within a sector (e.g., between several NGOs). Maintaining and developing cooperation increases the value of the activities carried out.

To summarise the experience in terms of actors, most of the best practices identified were initiated and implemented by non-state actors, mainly NGOs. However, this situation creates uncertainty about the continuity of activities due to the limited resources of NGOs and also raises capacity problems.

### Factors supporting and hindering effectiveness of assistance

The analysis confirms that language and cultural proximity are prominent factors supporting faster integration. Where the proportion of speakers of the host language was higher and the two languages and cultures were closer (Poland), support and integration into local society was faster and more effective. Where language barriers were more significant (Hungary), the number and proportion of registered applicants for assistance and planned settlers were also significantly lower.

In the host countries, the organisation of assistance is also facilitated by the fact that the V4 countries are home to a large number of people who arrived from Ukraine in previous years: legal and illegal workers, students, dual citizens living in border settlements. They welcomed and supported family members and relatives arriving from Ukraine in the first weeks. These people were an important link for those fleeing the war in the early stages, but as the crisis continued they often found themselves in a difficult situation. Some of them were overwhelmed with prolonged obligations to support their families living in Ukraine or fleeing Ukraine, and some lost the support they had obtained from families in Ukraine before the war (e.g., students).

As the crisis dragged on, the effectiveness of inclusion of refugees in the labour market depended increasingly on the willingness of market actors, national or multinational production, and service companies to support

activation of refugees. This support concerned not only employment but also provision of training, education, and housing during their stay in the country. This support has been particularly important in sectors where labour shortages have increased over the past decade.

In time, as refugees' financial resources dwindle, income generation and labour market integration become crucial. Displaced people tend to be highly skilled, so finding a job in the host labour market should not be a problem, especially given the widespread labour shortages of the past decade. However, the education background of refugees is structurally different from the labour market demand in host countries. Integration is therefore not smooth. The main obstacles for refugees in finding skilled jobs include recognition of Ukrainian qualifications in host countries. Another challenge lies in low levels of knowledge of the host country's language and difficulties in access to local language courses. Finally, it has to be stressed that the majority of the refugees arrive with minors, so the organisation of an efficient system of care and schooling is among the prerequisites of the inclusion of immigrants in the labour market.

Many professionals supporting refugees were recruited among Ukrainians living in the V4 countries before the war and those who fled Ukraine after the start of hostilities. Public services noted the need to recruit specialists in, inter alia, education, health care, psychological support, or social assistance, especially those who spoke Ukrainian and Russian as well as the language of the host country. The ability to recruit such people to work is definitely a factor supporting the provision of effective assistance.

The V4 countries' governments, although belatedly, have responded to the refugee crisis, too. This involved spending additional resources to organise support, public services (e.g., in education) and benefits for those leaving Ukraine. Initially, benefits were granted indefinitely; but as hostilities lasted, countries began to reduce and limit access to benefits, with an emphasis on encouraging refugees to take up employment. Support was retained for people in special situations who were unable to start working, e.g., elderly people, pregnant women, people caring for young children, people with disabilities, and their care-providers. Budgetary constraints are definitely a factor that hinders the implementation of aid measures, both from the state and local governments.

## Some of the characteristics of the best practice models

Although the best practice models vary widely in terms of the subject matter of the support and services, the actors involved, the way in which they are funded or the form in which they are delivered, some defining characteristics can be clearly identified.

In crisis situations, immediate assistance is of paramount importance for people in crisis, as there can be no delay in meeting their basic needs (protection, food, shelter). It is not possible to wait days for solutions. This is especially true when there are many children or elderly people among the

refugees. That's why the first-step initiatives, although frequently chaotic and uncoordinated, had a key impact for further outcomes.

Many activities, especially those carried out at the beginning of the war, relied on strong citizen participation. These "grassroots" models strengthen social solidarity, make society open to cooperation with displaced persons, and ensure the active participation of citizens of host countries in the integration process. Many of the best practices identified are implemented through cooperation between actors.

A significant number of best practices address specific needs, complementing or filling gaps in mainstream care systems. The development of services is co-created with the participation of the target group. Services are personalised, build on high levels of trust, and manage processes rather than one-off encounters.

Successful best practice models effectively combine the advantages of modern online technological tools (database creation and querying, interactive platforms, constant availability) with the form and possibility of personal contact (higher level of trust, greater flexibility, more targeted advice and service).

In addition, best practices provide both an opportunity to preserve the Ukrainian identity and heritage, enabling refugees to return after the war (education of children, language, cultural and religious traditions, etc.) and to integrate into the host society (integration into the labour market, integration into the local community, building a network of contacts, access to services, etc.).

### Challenges for the future

At the beginning of the war, the reception of Ukrainian refugees in the V4 countries was generally positive. Many activities and forms of support relied on strong citizen participation, especially at the beginning of the war. Basic goods (e.g., food, clothing, and hygiene products) were donated, refugees were hosted, and volunteers worked in refugee services. Over time, this commitment has weakened considerably, and there have been more and more negative voices about the reception of refugees. These forms of support will be sorely missed in the future due to the decline in civic activity, and alternative sources are difficult to identify.

At the same time, the extended presence of Ukrainian migrants has drawn a reaction of nationalist and extremist milieus. All studied countries witness incidents of hate speech and anti-Ukrainian behaviour and acts. Those attitudes arise naturally from the pre-war anti-migrant rhetoric and are increasingly used by right-wing parties in V4 countries. So far, the positive, pro-help attitudes prevail, but the risk of growing anti-involvement and xenophobic movements should be monitored and counteracted.

In recent months, a number of best practice models for supporting refugees have emerged, involving citizens, civil and professional organisations

and public service systems. However, these best practices are generally not widely known and applied. In the future, it would be important to promote and disseminate the solutions identified as best practices. On the other hand, regardless of how well-known and recognised best practices are, and even though the need for these services is recognised, the lack of financial resources does not allow for their widespread use. Countries are not interested in introducing the solutions identified as good practices as widespread social policy measures, mainly for financial reasons, but also due to the lack of full awareness of the specificity of the refugee integration process.

As the crisis drags on, resources become scarcer, both in terms of the reserves of the displaced persons and in terms of the resources available for assistance in host countries. Demands for a return to "normal life" are growing, but the prospect of this is becoming increasingly remote. This situation raises an important question about the future of refugee assistance. The key challenges relate to the end of the temporary protection introduced by the European Union. Temporary protection guaranteed access to basic benefits and assistance in EU countries for those who had left Ukraine due to the war. The termination of temporary protection, in the absence of the possibility (or willingness) to return to Ukraine, will give rise to further difficult situations in the lives of displaced persons.

## Recommendations

An analysis of the refugees' situation in V4 countries and of good practices in humanitarian assistance and refugee empowerment allows key recommendations to be made.

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**Strategic considerations**

Establishment of a good national and international strategy for managing migration crises.
Strategic decisions concerning the future of temporary protection.
Increased responsibility of government actors in the coordination, organisation, and funding of assistance programmes.
Ensuring effective coordination between stakeholders.

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**Resources**

Ensuring core support and availability of resources for support services, including for NGOs involved in providing support.
Facilitating recognition of qualifications and ensuring local language instruction to support inclusion in the labour market.
Making full use of online platforms to provide information and services.

**Prioritising**

Better targeting of assistance and services to displaced persons.
Giving greater priority to supporting education (for children and adults) and integration activities.
Giving high priority to psychological support for refugees from war zones, alongside material support in the service system.

**Preventing negative tendencies**

Prevention and counteracting anti-migrant sentiments and behaviours. Increased support to human rights organisations to combat illegal employment and labour market abuses and to protect workers' rights. Development of a medium and long-term strategy to support displaced persons in the event of a protracted war.

# Index