Situation of Ukrainian refugees in Central Europe and the Balkans – comparative analysis and lessons learned

Border and Regional Studies Network

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Border and Regional Studies Network, established within the CEEPUS, is comprised of 19 universities located in 11 countries of Central Europe and the Balkans. The network joins partners whose research and educational interests are focused on border and regional issues. Its thematic framework addresses one of the crucial problems and challenges of the XXI century, like migrations, multi-ethnic societies, revitalization of regional identities, border crossing and border revitalization. The main objective of the network is to share and promote the high quality, up-to-date knowledge regarding border and regional studies among students and academics. More details about the network can be found on its official website: https://borderandregionalstudies.wnopiks.uni.opole.pl/

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Table of content

List of figures

List of tables

List of boxes

1. Introduction

This report is the result of the collective work of a team of 14 academics integrated within the Border and Regional Studies Network established within the Central European Exchange Programme for University Studies (CEEPUS). In January 2023, we agreed that the massive influx of the Ukrainian refugees into countries covered by our network should be analysed not only by focusing on a country specific process, but it is also important to take a more holistic and comparative approach to the situation of Ukrainian refugees in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. We believed that as academics who are located in these countries, who were already networked around the topics of border and regional studies, we should use our potential to compare the situation of Ukrainian refugees in our countries and present a more synthetic picture. This prompted us to apply to the International Visegrad Fund for the Visegrad + grant, which was a successful undertaking. Therefore, it must be acknowledged that this report is part of the project entitled ‚*Ukrainian refugees in Central Europe and the Balkans – lessons learned and policy recommendations*' supported financially by the International Visegrad Fund. The project is aimed at conducting comparative analysis and forming policy recommendations addressing the challenges generated in the countries receiving refugees from Ukraine.

The report presents a comparison of 7 countries that experienced, in different forms and degrees, influx of the Ukrainian refugees after the full-scale Russian aggression on February 24, 2022. These are the four Visegrad countries, plus Romania, Montenegro and North Macedonia. According to the UNHCR data, approximately two years after the aggression, there were the following numbers of refugees from Ukraine in these countries[1]: The Czech Republic (381 400 as for 31.01.2024); Hungary (66 135 as for 17.03.2024); Poland (956 635 as for 15.12.2023), Slovakia (117 265 as for 24.03.2024); Romania (77 250 as for 01.04.2024); Montenegro (65 105 as for 29.01.2024); North Macedonia (18 915 as for 22.02.2024). When working on the report, each country was represented and studied by two academics; thus altogether, 14 individuals were engaged in research tasks. The work was divided into several steps, which should be briefly described here as they allow for an overall picture of the activities of the research team. In June and September 2023, there were two online sessions devoted to discussing theoretical and methodological foundations of the comparison. These sessions resulted in building the analytical framework (see the annex) later used by each country team and applied to above enumerated countries. Next, 18-20 October 2023, there was an international conference in Skopje, North Macedonia. It gathered a research team, but also included experts from UNHCR and representatives of NGOs working with refugees. During the conference, 7 preliminary country studies were presented by country teams, and this was followed by separate brainstorming session aimed at building recommendations on the basis of the main findings from the country studies. The conference was an important step, because it allowed us to share preliminary

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[1] One clarification must be made at the very beginning concerning the definition of a Ukrainian refugee. As we are using data provided by the UNHCR we follow the agency's definition of Ukrainian refugees. These are those who have fled Ukraine after February 24, 2022 and 'were granted refugee status, temporary asylum status, temporary protection, or statuses through similar national protection schemes, as well as those recorded in the country under other forms of stay (from 24 February 2022)' (UNHCR, 2023 June 14).

results of the research, gave a comparative picture of the refugee situation and ensured feedback from representatives of the non-academic sector. Finally, in January and April 2024, there were other online meetings to discuss the structure of this report and operational aspects of preparing its content. Therefore, the findings and recommendations presented here are products of a multi-step process that included an international team of academics.

The main structure of the report is reflection of the methodology of comparison described in chapter 2. As this report was prepared by academics, we decided that some theoretical foundations for methodology of comparison must be briefly presented. Comparing 7 countries by academics located in different settings with different experiences of a Ukrainian refugee situation has been a challenge since the very beginning. Thus, some framework for comparison was needed to standardise our work, and we wanted to embed it in already-existing theories. This was aimed at demonstrating complexity and interconnections between different dimensions of a refugee situation, but at the same time, it simplified its picture for the sake of comparative analysis by reducing it to a few crucial dimensions to be compared. Therefore, this part might be skipped by those who are interested only in the essential comparative content. As for the next chapters, our intention was to grasp the main patterns of similarities between the countries included, balanced by articulating differences between each case or group of cases. Thus, when comparing, we constructed a more general picture which always brings a risk of losing details and peculiarity for each country, but, whenever possible, we tried to provide a more country-focused description. The task of comparing 7 countries with different geographic locations, demographics, histories, institutions and policies is always challenging and never perfect, however, we believe that it is worth making this effort to give a more general context for understanding each country. We are motivated here by a simple but notable point made by Seyomour Martin Lipset, who said that 'a person who knows only one country knows no countries'.

2. Conceptual and methodological embeddedness of the comparative analysis

One of the most important conclusions from investigating the emergence of the refugee studies as a separate field of research after World War II is that studying refugees was strongly intertwined with policy making by international and governmental organisations (Black 2001). These organisations created demand for studying specific groups of refugees, the result being undertheoretization of the field. Since its inception, the refugee studies have been dominated by policy-oriented research, rather than theory-based academic exploration. The negative result of the strong link between refugee studies and policy practitioners (including organisations commissioning the research) was a shortage of independent and critical reviews of the refugee policies, thus creating space and demand for academic feed-back (Ibid.). More than 20 years have passed since this diagnosis by Richard Black, and it seems that the field has significantly developed both in terms of recognition in academia and greater theoretical sophistication (Ager & Strang, 2008; BenEzer & Zetter, 2015; FitzGerald & Arar, 2018). The comparative analysis presented here is also aimed at forming policy recommendations, however, we would like to embed it in some crucial foundations provided by the United Nations and the academic community. Therefore, this part is focused on brief elaboration on the international and methodological frames of this analysis.

In 2018, the United Nations adopted two important documents demonstrating the political will and commitment of the global community in facing the issue of migration and refugees: 1. Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration 2. Global Compact on Refugees. These documents constitute an important point of departure and global framework for studying the 'refugee situation'. Both pacts present multidimensional solutions and a variety of stakeholders involved in approaching migration and refugees, but what is crucial for this study is stressing the importance of providing systematic and up-to-date knowledge about the phenomena under question. The first objective of the Global Compact on Migration is to 'collect and utilise accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies' (United Nations, 2018a, p. 7), while the Global Compact on Refugees envisage global academia as a facilitator of research and training, providing deliverables supporting its official objectives (United Nations, 2018b, p. 16). As the comparative study presented here is focused on refugees as a particular type of migrants, the second document's objectives set the scene for our analysis and its possible policy implications.

There are four objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees: 1) ease pressures on host countries; 2) enhance refugee self-reliance; 3) expand access to third country solutions; 4) support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity (Ibidem, p. 4). Although the document has the ambition to approach the problem of refugees globally, there is understanding that in order to prepare comprehensive response framework to a 'specific refugee situation'[2] a regional and subregional approach must be taken, because of the context-specific nature of a particular refugee movement (Ibidem: 11). This analysis corresponds with the above-mentioned postulate, because it is concentrated on a particular European region by connecting 14 researchers from these regions to explore the Ukrainian refugee situation after the full-scale Russian aggression of 2022. The findings of this research should mainly support objectives number 1 and 2, because the analysis will be aimed at presenting and comparing the situation of Ukrainian refugees within multidimensional

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2 Integral part of the Global Compact on Refugees is the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework which provides host states and international community with a set of guidelines and recommendations on how to react to large scale refugee movement. The Framework is aimed at protecting refugees and supporting host states in line with principles of international cooperation and burden/responsibility sharing.

environments of hosting countries. Therefore, the opportunities and threats for Ukrainian refugees and countries/regions hosting them will be demonstrated and addressed via policy recommendations.

Table 1: Three phases of the structured, focused comparative study of Ukrainian refugees

Phase 1: Design	
Steps within each phase	**the content of each step**
specification of the research problem, research question and theory/theories that might be useful for studying the selected phenomenon	Research problem: situation of Ukrainian refugees after the full-scale invasion of Russia on February 24, 2022 Research question: what does the Ukrainian refugee situation look like and how has it evolved in the first two years after February 24, 2022, in the selected countries?
specification of components that will be the main focus of comparison	a) reaction of the receiving country towards Ukrainian refugees and how it changed after February 2022 b) characteristics of the Ukrainian refugee community and how it changed after February 2022
selection of cases for comparison	7 countries located in Central Europe and the Balkans are selected as cases for the comparison: Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Montenegro and North Macedonia. The majority of these countries received a significant number of Ukrainian refugees, however, selection was also determined by willingness of the members of the Border and Regional Studies Network to join the project
formulation of general questions to be asked of each case in the comparison	Preparing the analytical framework derived from the research question and theories adapted in the preceding step. The analytical framework consists of dimensions to be focused on, with each dimension accompanied by a set of standardised guiding questions to be asked for each case. This should allow for structured and focused comparison in the phase 3
Phase 2: Preparing single case studies	
international group of 14 academics works separately on each case - 2 academics per case	- applying analytical framework to each case separately in order to prepare preliminary country studies to be presented during the conference in Skopje
Phase 3: Comparing cases and forming policy recommendations	
participation in the conference in Skopje (North Macedonia) organised on October 17-20, 2023. follow-up work on the research report	- sharing, discussing and comparing country studies conducted by 14 academics from 7 countries - working together on recommendations on the refugee policy, by engaging experts from the UNHCR and representatives of ngos - presenting synthesised, comparative picture of the Ukrainian refugees and proposing recommendations in the research report

Source: Own elaboration based on modified version of the method described in (George, 2019).

We are guided by the method of structured, focused comparison developed by Alexander Gorge (George 2019), which seems to be a useful path to follow when developments in seven countries/cases are under investigation. The method of structured, focused comparison is a qualitative one designed for studying a small number of cases. The comparative analysis is 'focused' because it selects only a specific example of a wider phenomenon for exploration (a refugee communities

worldwide), which is the Ukrainian refugee community bounded both in time and space. Whereas it is 'structured' because all the cases selected were analysed according to the standardised set of guidelines/questions directing the process of data collection. As George puts it, when describing the general idea behind this method, the 'task is to convert lessons of history into comprehensive theory that encompasses the complexity of the phenomenon or activity in question' (Ibidem, p.192). Thus, it must be noted that our usage of the method proposed by George is modified because, for George, development of theory is the last phase of the research process, while our goal is to form policy recommendations resulting from the synthesised, descriptive, comparison-based knowledge. Nevertheless, we still find this method a useful tool for orderly comparative research; however, taking into account the nature of our project, it must be modified, especially in the last phase, which originally was devoted to drawing theoretical implications from the case studies. Thus, we can distinguish three phases of our comparative study: 1 design; 2: conducting single case studies; 3: comparison and forming the policy recommendations. Table 1 presents a brief synthesis of each phase.

In order to give a better understanding of the data provided in this report, the design phase seems to be especially important, as it was the foundation for having the comparative analysis structured and focused. Thus, this section elaborates on that. The main research problem of this study is the situation of Ukrainian refugees after the full-scale invasion of Russia on February 24, 2022, in the following countries: Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Montenegro and North Macedonia. **We planned to compare what this situation looks like and how it has evolved in the first two years after February 24, 2022.** This general research question must be further elaborated in order to introduce the precision necessary for data-based comparison. The main subject matter to be studied is a refugee situation; thus, it takes us to the question of what is meant by a refugee situation? In this study, the refugee situation has two crucial components:

a) reaction of the receiving country towards Ukrainian refugees and how it changed after February 2022
b) characteristics of the Ukrainian refugee community and how it changed after February 2022

These two crucial components might be framed in a more theoretical manner, thus directing our attention towards two strands of theoretical reflection on migrations: theories of immigration policy (Meyers, 2000; Money, 2018; Natter, 2018) and theories on international migrations (Richmond, 1988; Massey et al. 1993; de Haas, 2021). The first strand of theories refers to how states and their agencies react to the immigration movement, while the second one focuses on initiation and perpetuation of the migration movement itself. Of course, these two bodies of theoretical scholarship overlap (as immigration policy is a factor behind dynamics and perpetuation of migration movement), however, they approach migration from different angles which is of importance when trying to find some theoretical background for structured and focused comparison.

In the review of theories explaining immigration policies conducted by Eytan Meyers, we can find seven different theories, but three of them seem especially useful for us: the national identity approach, the domestic politics approach, and the globalisation theory (Meyers, 2000, p. 1251-1268)[3]. This is because the paths of explanation proposed by these theories, at first glance, direct our attention towards relevant dimensions of the complex reality of accepting immigrants in the countries to be

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3 The four other theories elaborated in the Meyers review are: Marxist approach, institutional and bureaucratic politics approach, realism and neorealism, liberal approach.

compared.

According to the national identity approach, the unique history, and tradition of each country determine how the concept of national identity and citizenship are interpreted/debated in the public discourse, thereby influencing the level of inclusiveness/exclusiveness of immigration policy (Brubaker, 1995; Lewin-Epstein & Levanon, 2005). In this case, these are not external or situational factors that determine immigration policy, but historically determined experiences with nation-building and state-building that shape collectively shared or conflicting interpretations of the concept of national identity/membership. It means that the way in which national identity and national culture are defined/constructed has an impact on the perception of immigrants. If national identity is interpreted in an exclusivist, ethno-cultural manner and cultural homogeneity is expected ideal, there will be a less tolerance for immigrants and inclusiveness. While more inclusive, a civic conception of national identity and acceptance for cultural diversity should have the opposite effect. These regularities have been verified by using survey data for 34 countries, and it was found that defining national belonging in an "achievable" manner (civic-based) is conducive to support for multiculturalism (Goodman & Alarian, 2019). However, this picture is more complicated because the study of Germany during the refugee crisis 2015-2016, aside from confirming the regularities mentioned above, has shown that there is a segment of the population with a mixed conception of national identity (both ethno-cultural and civic). This part of the public expressed volatile and hesitant attitudes towards immigration, thus paving the way for elites to 'shape public opinion by highlighting or downplaying one or both conceptions of the nation'' (Lindstam et al., 2021, p. 110). It has been shown that rhetoric used by political elites in developed democracies regarding notions of national belonging shapes mass attitudes towards nationhood, especially if the rhetoric articulates exclusive conception of identity (Helbling et al., 2016). Thereby, the national identity theory and empirical findings also imply that historically determined definitions of national identity provide cultural resources which might be used/instrumentalized in systematic manner by different socio-political forces to propagate different models of immigration politics[4]. In this perspective, ideas surrounding and defining national identity not only provide a frame and justification for immigration policy but might be actively and selectively harnessed in favour of different solutions[5].

The second theory in explaining immigration policy important for this comparative study is the domestic politics approach (Meyers, 2000, p. 1257-1259). In this approach, immigration policy is a product of pressures and compromises between different social interests. The state apparatus is under influence of groups interested in different models/solutions for immigration. Two categories of actors are important here: interest groups and political parties. Interest groups put pressure on parties, legislators, and the administration to adopt a specific policy. These might be ethnic minorities, non-governmental organisations and employers, who usually have a more positive attitude towards immigrants, or trade unions and nationalist groups being blocking forces. Political parties are crucial

[4] We can also observe links between politics of memory and how democracy is framed in a given country. Study by Schmidtke concludes that collective memory of Central European nations is harnessed by nationalist-populist forces to interpret democracy and freedom as something secured by independence from foreign influence and giving voice to unified, culturally homogenous nations expressed by the 'patriotic' elite. Such understanding of democracy is not without influence on how immigrants are framed (Schmidtke, 2023).

[5] Aside from different understandings of national membership articulated by discourse controllers, the language used to describe immigrants is also of great importance in shaping mass attitudes. Study conducted in the Czech Republic has shown that labels like "foreigner", "migrant", "refugee" activate different image of people crossing borders accompanied by ascribing them different motivations and moral status (Božič et al., 2023).

drivers of immigration policy as they implement their programmes when gaining power, sometimes making migration an important issue on their electoral platforms. Thus, immigration policy might be shaped by populist anti-immigration parties, as demonstrated by various studies of using xenophobia and fear-mongering in electoral politics (Fennema, 1997; Dennison & Geddes, 2018; Kende & Krekó, 2020; Hutter & Kriesi, 2022). However, studies also show that in liberal democracies, there might be internal pressures towards more inclusive immigration policies, because of the inherent features of liberal democratic regimes. These are political constraints imposed by organised pro-immigrant groups, human rights axiology neutralising ethnic discrimination and the rule of law, ensuring protection for immigrant rights (Freeman, 1995; Joppke, 1998). This perspective directs attention to studying institutionalised socio-political actors within the political system, as they are an important driver behind immigration policy.

The third theory is the globalisation theory which articulates international forces as an important factor behind immigration policy (Meyers, 2000, p. 1267). Simplifying the picture, there are two dimensions of the globalisation process important in understanding immigration policy: internationalisation of economy characterised i.a. by stronger mobility of people (especially labour force) accompanied by the creation of transnational migratory communities and the emergence of an international human rights regime supported by international organisations advocating for its implementation (Sassen, 1996, Castles, 2002). The debate around the impact of global forces on immigration policy is very often framed in terms of the decline of state sovereignty caused by limiting a state's capacity to control its own borders (Guiraudon & Lahav, 2000; Dauvergne, 2004). However, scholars argue that despite the pressure of global forces, the nation-state maintains its effective control over borders and the management of migratory flows, having even more powers to control entrance into its territory (Freeman 1998, Joppke 1998; Mitsilegas, 2012)[6]. It does not mean that global economic pressures and the international regime do not impose any restrictions, but one should rather look at how specific nation-states react to these constraints. Thus, this theory directs analytical attention to the possible influence of international organisations, norms promoted by them, and how they interact with domestic politics.

The brief summary of the theories above referred to one of the two components of the refugee situation to be studied. The second component is the characteristics of the Ukrainian refugee community and how it changed after February 24, 2022. This component directs our attention to the second strand of theoretical reflection on migrations, which are theories on international migrations focused on the initiation and perpetuation of the migration movement itself. There is a rich body of theories here[7], but what seems to provide an important understanding of the Ukrainian refugee community is a network theory. This theory assumes that international migration flow can be facilitated by existing personal connections (networks) between immigrants in a receiving country and would-be migrants in the sending country. Such networks might be based on kinship, friendship, or a shared community origin, facilitating migration because they allow for reducing costs and risks entailed by migration to another country. Thus, these networks constitute a form of social capital that can be used by individuals to make international movement easier and more predictable, because the migratory flow between two countries occurs within an already institutionalised system of connections (Choldin, 1973; Fawcett, 1989). This theory is less aimed at explaining initial forces

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6 For 'conceptual classification of factors affecting state capacity to implement restrictive immigration policy' see (Massey, 2009, p. 36-37).

7 For overview see: (Richmond, 1988; Massey et al., 1993).

behind migration, focusing rather on the social forces responsible for the perpetuation of migratory flows, their growing dynamics and geographic directions (Massey et al., 1993). In this context, a phenomenon of diaspora plays a central role, especially in the era of intensifying globalisation when a diaspora becomes a transnational community, which means a migrant community spanning at least two nations (Kearney, 1995). A diaspora constitutes an important foundation for the emergence of international networks shaping directions, dynamics and composition of the new waves of immigration.

The network theory directs our attention to the fact that already before the full-scale invasion against Ukraine, there was a significant Ukrainian diaspora in Europe[8] and the culture of migration among Ukrainians. The culture of migration might be understood as an existence of collective experience of migration, accompanied by social networks built around migratory patterns and beliefs facilitating migration (Cohen 2004; Lloyd & Sirkeci, 2022). Various studies on Ukrainian emigration show that decades before 2022, Ukrainians lived in an environment of insecurity, which was a driving factor for emigration. After 1991, these insecurities were mainly of an economic nature like poverty, economic inequalities and widespread corruption (Lapshyna, 2014; Fedyuk & Kindler, 2016). The survey conducted between 2010-2013 (age of respondents 18-39) in four Ukrainian regions showed that 49% of respondents expressed their willingness to emigrate (Düvell & Lapshyna, 2015). The 2014 armed conflict in eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea created an environment of political insecurity, resulting in a new wave of forced migration (both internal and international) accompanied by an increase in asylum applications, with a majority of them being rejected on the grounds of "internal flight alternative" (Solodko & Fitisova, 2016). That is why, following Lloyd and Sirkeci (2022), we assume that the recent wave of refugees triggered by the full-scale invasion should take into account the already existing legacy of Ukrainian immigration to the countries under analysis. This means that some basic characteristics of the Ukrainian diaspora before 2022 must be taken into account, as well as how they might have shaped the situation of the refugee community after 2022.

The four theories briefly presented above provide 5 general theoretical guidelines constituting the foundation of the analytical framework for structured and focused comparison. These are the following guidelines:

1. Historically determined ideas surrounding the national identity of the receiving country are still relevant as a factor behind immigration policy. **That is why it is important to study cultural patterns of defining national identity/membership, their dynamics, selection and articulation in the public discourse around refugees from Ukraine.**

2. Immigration policy is shaped by a variety of domestic socio-political groups with different agendas, especially interest groups and political parties. **That is why it is important to identify the main socio-political groups within the political system reacting to refugees from Ukraine, describe their position towards the refugees, and describe interactions between these groups.** 3. Cultural patterns of defining national membership constitute symbolic resources that might be referred to/instrumentalized by different socio-political groups in order to shape public opinion and legitimise different policies towards immigrants. **That is why it is important to study the involvement of organised groups in the debate around Ukrainian refugees and observe how**

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[8] In 2021 there were 1.57 million Ukrainian citizens with a residence permit in the EU countries. This was the third most common non-EU citizenship for the total number of residents with non-EU citizenship (citizens of Morocco and Turkey being the largest groups). Between 2013-2021 we observed an upward trend in residence of Ukrainians in the EU with 845 thousand of those with residence permits in 2013 (Eurostat, 2022).

public opinion fluctuates around the topic.

4. Immigration policy is under influence of external forces like global mobility of labour force and international organisations promoting norms and providing resources to deal with immigrants. **That is why it is important to identify the role of international organisations in the political system receiving the Ukrainian refugees and how domestic socio-political groups interact with these organisations**

5. A diaspora constitutes an important foundation for the emergence of international networks shaping characteristics of the new waves of immigration. **That is why it is important to study the already existing legacy of Ukrainian immigration and how it might have shaped the Ukrainian refugee situation.**

The above-mentioned theoretical guidelines served to determine the selection of dimensions to be focused on, the questions to be asked when focusing on a specific dimension, and the order in which they are integrated into one coherent, multidimensional picture. Thus, they have been broken down into more specific elements integrated into an analytical framework (see the table in the Annex) being a standardised tool used by country teams when analysing each country.

This report is based on secondary data. We have used already existing academic literature, policy papers, reports and statistics published by governmental and non-governmental organisations (including international ones), public opinion polls and media reports. The data provided by NGOs and the media often provide a critical picture of the refugee situation, so they seem to be of great importance. Two observations can already be made at this point regarding the collection of sources. The first one points at limited access to comparable data covering all 7 countries, because two of them, namely North Macedonia and Montenegro, do not belong to the EU. We see, for example, that it is much easier to find comparable statistical data between the EU states, than between the EU and non-EU states located in Europe[9]. However, the fact that these two countries have association agreements with the EU and cooperate with the block, results in their occasional inclusion into the EU data collections (example being some Eurobarometer data also used in this report). The second observation is about the differentiated volume of data published in each country regarding the situation of Ukrainian refugees, which seems to be connected with the size and importance of the Ukrainian community, but also the number of knowledge producers within the academic, media or NGOs sector. In countries with a huge influx of Ukrainian immigrants (not only refugees), like Poland, the sources are in abundance, allowing for quite comprehensive analysis, while in the countries where the influx of Ukrainian immigrants did not have significant transformative impact, like in North Macedonia, the sources available are scarce. Obviously, such observation is marked by banality, but it shows the challenges faced by the authors of this report, and it indicates unequal interest in the situation of Ukrainian refugees, even though a small number of them in some countries still constitute research and policy issues.

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[9] This lack of comparable data can be reflected in media coverage of the Ukrainian refugees in Europe. On March 25, 2024 'Politico' published an analysis where only data for the EU countries (and non-EU Iceland, Switzerland, Lichtenstein, Norway) were presented thanks to the Eurostat. The map titled 'Ukrainian refugees scattered across the continent' showed no data for the non-EU Western Balkans. A map including those countries could be prepared on the basis of the UNHCR statistics, however, authors focused only on the countries covered by the Eurostat (Cokelaere & Caulcutt, 2024). This demonstrates how accessibility of data might distort the picture of refugee flows as presented by the media, with 60 thousand of them in Montenegro (according to the UNHCR data) constituting probably the highest share in total population of any European country.

3. Immigration policies in the studied countries – comparative view

By immigration policy, we understand rules and procedures governing the selection and admission of foreign citizens, together with the conditions provided to resident immigrants (Meyers, 2000, p. 1246). The massive influx of Ukrainian refugees should be placed and analysed in the wider context of already existing experiences with immigration in the studied countries. This should give a better perspective for evaluating the reception of Ukrainian refugees, the challenges faced by receiving countries and the refugee community, and prospects for their integration and well-being. Therefore, this chapter is focused on the general characteristics of immigration policies in the selected countries.

Figure 1: The Migrant Acceptance Index value in 2016 for the 7 countries (scale 0-9 where 9 means the highest level of acceptance)
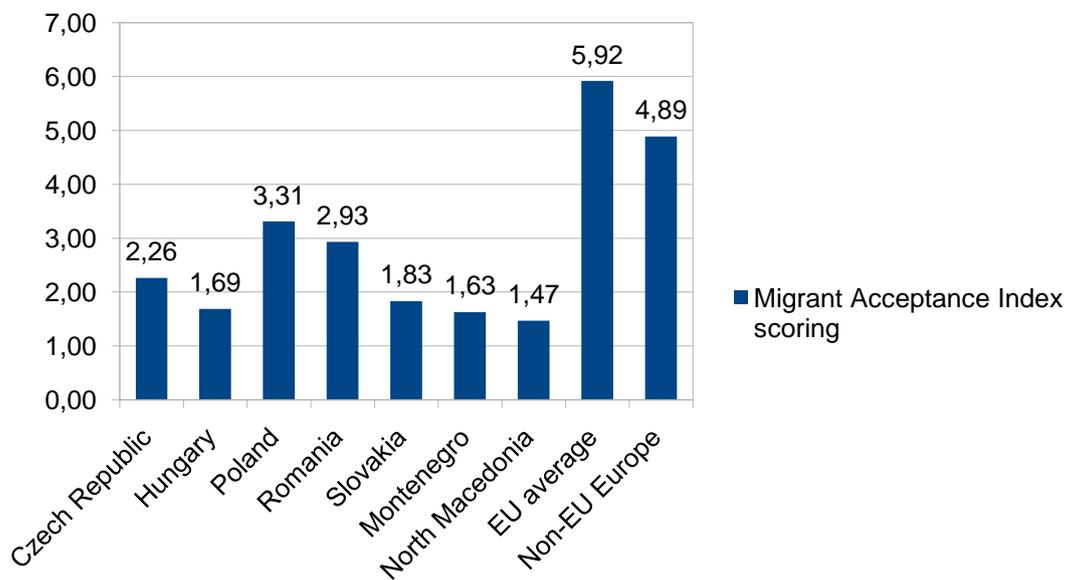
Source: Esipova N., Fleming J., & Ray, J. (2017). *New index shows least, most accepting countries for migrants*, Gallup News. [10]

As already signalled in chapter 2, an immigration policy and the attitudes towards immigrants are shaped by historically determined patterns of defining national belonging. From this perspective, we can point out some historical similarities between the countries included into the comparison. All of them experienced the nation-building and state-building processes under the political domination of the multiethnic empires (whether Habsburg, Russian or Ottoman), which locates them within the 'Eastern' ethno-cultural model of nation within the civic-ethnic distinction (Kohn, 1994). It must be noted that this distinction is criticised for carrying normative baggage, its theoretical simplicity, and

[10] The scoring of the Migrant Acceptance Index is based on answers to three questions asked in surveys conducted in 139 countries. The wording of these questions is as follows: 'Now, I would like to ask you some questions about foreign immigrants - people who have come to live and work in this country from another country. Please tell me whether you, personally, think each of the following is a good thing or a bad thing: 1. Immigrants living in this country 2. An immigrant becoming your neighbour 3. An immigrant marrying one of your close relatives'. There were three options for answers, each bringing points: 'A good thing' (3 points), 'it depends' or 'I do not know' (1 point), 'a bad thing' (0 points).

reliability in light of empirical studies showing that both orientations might be shared by the same individual or different segments of the same society (Zubrzycki, 2001; Janmaat, 2006; Piwoni & Mußotter, 2023). However, there are studies showing that Central Europe and the Balkan states have a stronger attachment to the ethno-cultural understanding of nationhood (embedded in language, religion, customs and common descent) and that this mode of understanding was mobilised strongly by elites there, with the collapse of the communism, emergence of the new nation-states and the so-called 'immigration crisis' of 2015 being important facilitators (Čolović, 2011; Larsen, 2017; Brubaker 2017; Vangelov, 2019; Koprivica et al., 2021). If we take into account this pattern of defining national belonging in the studied countries, we can conclude that there is a cultural potential for a rather exclusionary immigration policy and anti-immigration attitudes. This is strongly reflected by the 2016 Migrant Acceptance Index constructed by the Gallup Institute, presented in Figure 1. The index shows acceptance of immigrants on the scale from 0 to 9, with 9 being the highest level of acceptance. The data for 2016, collected for 138 countries, put our cluster to the group of countries with the lowest acceptance of immigrants globally, scoring also far below the average for both the EU and non-EU European countries. The index found that the least accepting countries are geographically and culturally clustered, however, these are not only historically determined patterns of culture that influence the acceptance of immigrants, but also traditions of immigration, education, income and urban-rural divide. Nevertheless, the history of conflicts with neighbouring countries and the fact that some of these countries (like North Macedonia and Hungary) were at the frontline of the 2015 immigration crisis have contributed to negative attitudes towards immigrants (Esipova et al., 2017).

It must be added that despite historically embedded inclination to ethno-cultural understanding of national belonging, the constitutions of these countries refer to civic-based ideas of nationhood. If we compare their preambles, we see that 'civicness' is an important value, however, the strength of its articulation differs as demonstrated in Table 2. It shows that these are Montenegro and North Macedonia that, at least declaratively, stick especially strong to civic-based order. These are the only countries in our cluster that have clearly enumerated and named their national minorities in the preambles, with Montenegro claiming to respect multiculturalism (North Macedonia uses the formula of 'ethnic equality'). This seems to be a result of the exceptionally high (compared to five other countries) national diversity of these countries and awareness of risks entailed by poor management of ethno-cultural pluralism in the region of Western Balkans. Thus, Montenegro, since its establishment as an independent state in 2006, has introduced the civic-based model of multiculturalism. However, the model shows that it is predominantly adapted for national minorities rather than immigrant communities. Thus, the state can declare civic orientation while at the same time a restrictive citizenship policy towards immigrants and a lack of a well embedded participatory political culture. Although certain elements that facilitate inclusion of national minorities can also be transposed to immigrant communities, this is reflected in the relatively high score of Montenegro in the Migrant Integration Policy Index presented later in this chapter (Vuković-Ćalasan, 2018).

Table 2: The issue of multiculturalism, recognition for national/ethnic minorities and civic-based statehood as articulated in the preambles of the constitutions of 6 countries

Country	Is there any clear reference to multiculturalism as a constitutional value in the preamble?	Is there any clear recognition of national/ethnic minorities in the preamble?	Is there any clear declaration of civic-based foundation of the state?	Is there any reference to civicness of statehood?
Czech Republic	No	No	Yes 'As a free and democratic state founded on respect for human rights and on the principles of civic society'	Yes 'We citizens of the Czech Republic'; 'homeland of free citizens';
Slovakia	No	Yes 'together with members of national minorities and ethnic groups living on the territory of the Slovak Republic'	No	Yes 'We the citizens of Slovak Republic'
Montenegro	Yes 'the basic values are freedom, peace, tolerance, respect for human rights and liberties, multiculturalism, democracy and the rule of law';	Yes 'The determination that we, as free and equal citizens, members of peoples and national minorities who live in Montenegro: Montenegrins, Serbs, Bosniacs, Albanians, Muslims, Croats and the others, are committed to democratic and civic Montenegro;	Yes, 'The determination that we (…) are committed to democratic and civic Montenegro'	Yes 'The decision of the citizens of Montenegro'; 'The commitment of the citizens of Montenegro';
North Macedonia	No	Yes 'Macedonia is established as a national state of the Macedonian people, in which full equality as citizens and permanent co-existence with the Macedonian people is provided for Albanians, Turks, Vlachs, Romani and other nationalities living in the Republic of Macedonia'; 'the provision of peace and a common home for the Macedonian people with the nationalities living in the Republic of Macedonia'; 'the guaranteeing of human rights, citizens, freedoms and ethnic equality'	Yes 'the establishment of the Republic of Macedonia as a sovereign and independent state, as well as a civil and democratic one'	Yes 'freely manifested will of the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia in the referendum'
Poland	No	No	No	Yes 'We, the Polish Nation - all citizens of the Republic'; 'Desiring to guarantee the rights of the citizens for all time'
Hungary	No	Yes 'We proclaim that the nationalities living with us form part of the Hungarian political community and are constituent parts of the State'; 'We commit to promoting and safeguarding our heritage, our unique language, Hungarian culture, the languages and cultures of nationalities living in Hungary'	No	Yes 'We hold that the common goal of citizens and the State is to achieve' 'We, the citizens of Hungary'

Sources: Own elaboration on the basis of the Comparative Constitutions Project: https://www.constituteproject.org/countries[11]

The picture of immigration policies in the cluster must take into account another similarity. It must be noted that before the 2015 immigration crisis, the public and professional discourse about immigration and the situation of refugees was rather limited and marginal in all countries of Central Europe without any particular impact on the value and ideological preferences within the populations

11 Romania does not have a preamble to its Constitution of 1991, however, in its first chapter with general principles there is article 4 describing Romania as a 'homeland of all its citizens regardless of race, ethnic origin…' (See: https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Romania_2003.pdf).

as well as political narratives introduced by political leaders (Matyja et al., 2015; Bargerová, 2016; Hlinčíková & Mesežnikov, 2016). These countries were traditionally countries of emigration, with the process accelerating in the 1990s when the collapse of communism created opportunities (opening borders) and pushing factors (economic hardship and war) to emigrate. They were not considered countries attracting immigrants, and they did not have both capacity for and experience with the reception and integration of them. However, in the same period, these countries slowly experienced growing numbers of immigrants, with the EU entrance in 2004/2007 (in the case of V4 and Romania) and the 2015 immigration crisis being important critical junctures for the majority of them. EU entrance made them more attractive for the global labour force, while the 2015 immigration crisis made the topic of immigration politicised. The politicisation of immigration means that the issue is referred to by political parties competing for votes, which also makes the topic an integral part of the public agenda. This process was especially visible in the case of V4 countries, where governing parties presented immigrants from the Middle East and Africa as a security threat, which was accompanied by rejection of the EU's mandatory quotas on the acceptance of immigrants (Strnad 2018). This refusal resulted in a lawsuit by the European Commission against Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic for violating EU law (Stojanov et al., 2022).

When it comes to Romania, the study of selected European countries found that, compared to Poland and Hungary, the immigration crisis was not politicised during the 2016 parliamentary elections (Hutter & Kries 2022, p. 365), and the further scoring of the Migrant Integration Policy Index shows that the Romanian government was reluctant in using anti-immigration rhetoric. North Macedonia and Montenegro have already had experience with refugees as a result of the war in Yugoslavia (1992-1995) and Kosovo (1998-1999), so the issue was present in their public space before 2015. However, in 2015, it took on a new dimension especially in North Macedonia (at that time still the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) which was in the centre of the so-called Balkan Route for irregular immigrants trying to reach the EU. It is estimated that more than 1.2 million people made their way to the European Union via the Balkans (Glied, 2020). Suddenly, the territory of North Macedonia became a transitory path for hundreds of thousands heading up north, and the country found itself under pressure from the EU to improve border control. The state of emergency was imposed on the borders, and a special act was adopted by the government allowing migrants to register their 'intent to seek asylum' when entering the country and receive a 72-hour temporary permit to stay – it was based on the assumption that they would further leave for the EU. In 2014 1 289 asylum applications were submitted (with 13 positive decisions), while in 2015 this number increased to 435 907 (3 positive decisions) then decreased to 89 152 (with 6 positive decisions) – the numbers show the scale of sudden rise of immigrants (Greider, 2017). In the case of Montenegro, the country was not under such immigration pressure as North Macedonia. However in 2018 the irregular migration was put on the public agenda for a while. It happened after Hungary and Croatia strengthened the control of their borders, causing a change of migratory routes – the 'old smuggling route' going through Albania, Montenegro and Bosnia to Croatia was re-established, which caused border control authorities to detect significant increases in the numbers of immigrants (Bakota, 2018).

Another important common characteristic of the cluster is the need for a labour force, especially in the EU member states, which is the result of the outflow of the working population to better developed EU countries, population ageing and economic growth (Fihel et al., 2023; Incaltarau & Simionov, 2018). This pressurised governments to open their labour markets for economic

immigrants as one of the crucial conditions for maintaining economic growth. In Romania, the labour shortage was already a problem in the mid-2000s, and one of the noticeable measures implemented by the Romanian government to address it was to encourage the return of Romanian citizens working abroad[12]. The desperate need for labour in Romania is also revealed by the evolution of work permit requests for foreign workers made by the private sector, which increased 24 times over the last 6 years, reaching 138 thousand in 2022. The requests overreached the annual quota of work permits for immigrants admitted to the labour market set by the Romanian government (100 thousand in 2022, and the same threshold was adopted for 2023). The Czech Republic started to support regulated work immigration already in 2000-2004 with a project enhancing the immigration of qualified workers from Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, and Croatia (Stojarová, 2019, p. 101). Also, the Slovak Republic introduced a mechanism of preferential immigration and integration policies by implementing concepts of controlled economic migration, integration policy and the migration of a qualified labour force (Přívarová et al., 2022). When Poland adopted in 2012 its first document (since the 1989) formulating priorities of the Polish migration policy 'Migration Policy in Poland – current state and postulated actions', it highlighted the need for opening labour markets to foreigners in order to reduce labour shortages in the sectors of agriculture and construction (Ministry of Internal Affairs of Poland, 2012, p. 8-9). The document was annulled in 2016 by the new government of the United Right, however, the need for importing a labour force was even stronger and reflected in the growing number of economic immigrants. According to the data from the Ministry of Family and Social Policy after 2015, we can observe a dynamic increase in issuing work permits for non-EU citizens: 2015 - 65 thousand, 2016-127 thousand, 2017-237 thousand, 2018-329 thousand, 2019 – 445 thousand, 2020 - 407 thousand, 2021- 504 thousand (Józefiak, 2023). Similarly, in Hungary, there was a strong need for labour immigration, and before 2010, those who immigrated to Hungary came mainly as ethnic Hungarians from neighbouring countries, primarily from Romania. Interestingly, the law on Hungarian citizenship passed by the parliament in 2010 radically transformed the migration data, as Hungarians across the border working in Hungary were considered citizens from then on and were excluded from the migration statistics (Kováts, 2016). However, recent years have shown that the Hungarian government encourages the immigration of non-EU labour migrants (primarily Ukrainian, Southeast Asian, Philippine), with the Ministry of Economic Development determining the annual limits of residence permits for guest workers. The limit additionally assumes that the proportion of foreigners with the same nationality cannot exceed 25%. According to Hungary's Central Statistical Office (KSH), the number of non-EU workers has grown: in 2020, this was around 60-70 thousand, in 2022, it was around 80 thousand, while in September 2023, it was around 95 thousand (Kusnyerik, 2023). Also, North Macedonia's government's strategy for the migration policy for 2021-2025 clearly points to the high emigration of qualified staff as a reason behind the labour shortage, especially in specific profiles like programmers, engineers, doctors, computer scientists, technologists, construction and electrical technicians, and nurses. At the same time, foreign workers in North Macedonia constitute a relatively small group, consisting of mainly qualified professionals from the countries who are the largest investors (Turkey, Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and Germany). The strategy underscores however, that attracting economic immigrants is necessary not just for the development of specific sectors, but for securing the country's overall development (Government of North Macedonia, 2021, p. 277-279).

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12 See the Emergency Ordinance no. 187 of 20 February 2008 concerning the approval of the Action plan for encouraging the return of Romanian citizens working abroad.

As a result of the increase of immigration, (either economically or politically motivated) these countries have become both emigration and immigration societies confronted with the problem of integrating immigrants. In order to compare the integration policies of immigrants in the seven countries, we used data from the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) published by the Migration Policy Group[13]. The MIPEX measures three general dimensions of a country's overall approach to the integration of immigrants: 1. Basic rights (enjoying comparable rights as nationals), 2. Equal opportunities (enjoying comparable opportunities as nationals), 3. A secure future (enjoying long term settlement and a secured future in the receiving country). They are broken into 8 integration policy areas, which are evaluated on a scale from 0 to 100 by using a set of indicators – the evaluation of each dimension taken together as an average gives an overall score for the country. Then countries are classified into specific categories depending on their scores (100 means

Figure 2: Migrant Integration Policy Index – overall score in 2019 for 7 countries
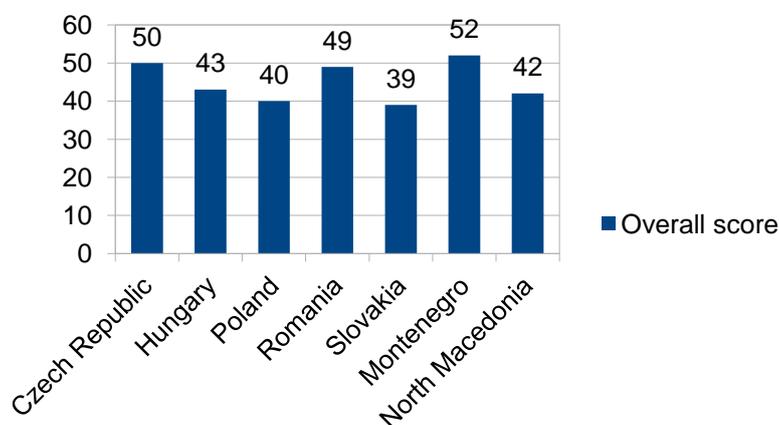
Source: Own elaboration based on: Huddleston, T., & Solano, G., (2020). *Migrant Integration Policy Index 2020,* Barcelona/ Brussels: CIDOB & MPG; Huddleston, T., (2016) *Regional MIPEX assessment for the Western Balkans*, Migration Policy Group.

highest standards of integration). Figures 2, 3 and 4 present the evaluation of our cluster from different perspectives[14]. The overall score for each country shows rather low standards of integration policies, with the majority of countries being classified as providing 'equality on paper'. The 'equality on paper' means that a given country provides immigrants with some basic rights, but they do not enjoy equal opportunities. Such a country also goes 'halfway' with providing them with long-term security. However, there is some differentiation within these countries, as they were additionally classified as ensuring equality on paper with 'halfway favourable' conditions (Romania), 'halfway unfavourable' (Hungary, North Macedonia) or 'slightly unfavourable' (Poland, Slovakia). Romania was evaluated as providing better standards for long-term security and encouraging the general public to see immigrants as equal. It is also reflected in the further pathway adopted by Romania embracing a motto aiming at tolerance and integration ('Migration is a process to be managed and not a problem to be solved') together with a national immigration strategy for the period 2021-2024 (Government

13 See the website of the Migrant Integration Policy Index: https://www.mipex.eu/
14 The data for each country and its categorization are in the Annex.

of Romania, 2021). While in Poland, Hungary and Slovakia the governments' policies towards immigrants created a risk of treating them as strangers. Czech Republic and Montenegro were classified as offering 'comprehensive integration-halfway favourable', which means that these countries did the minimum in all three dimensions as their policies go only halfway towards providing immigrants with equal rights, opportunities and a secure future[15].

The evaluation of eight integration policy areas for each country is presented in Figure 3. We see that all of them performed quite well when it came to anti-discrimination standards, but they scored very poorly when it came to ensuring political participation. This might be the result of some ease of adopting anti-discrimination framework, being embedded both in the constitutional principles of each country and its international obligations as EU countries or EU-aspiring countries. However, it leads to a question of how well these anti-discrimination standards are implemented as even the best standards always demand enforcement mechanisms and the empowerment of those who are covered by them. Figure 4, which ranks the average score for each integration area in the whole cluster, shows very weak political participation, access to education or to nationality for immigrants, which might be treated as a proxy indicator of their empowerment.

Figure 3: Migrant Integration Policy Index – scoring for each dimension in 2019 for 7 countries
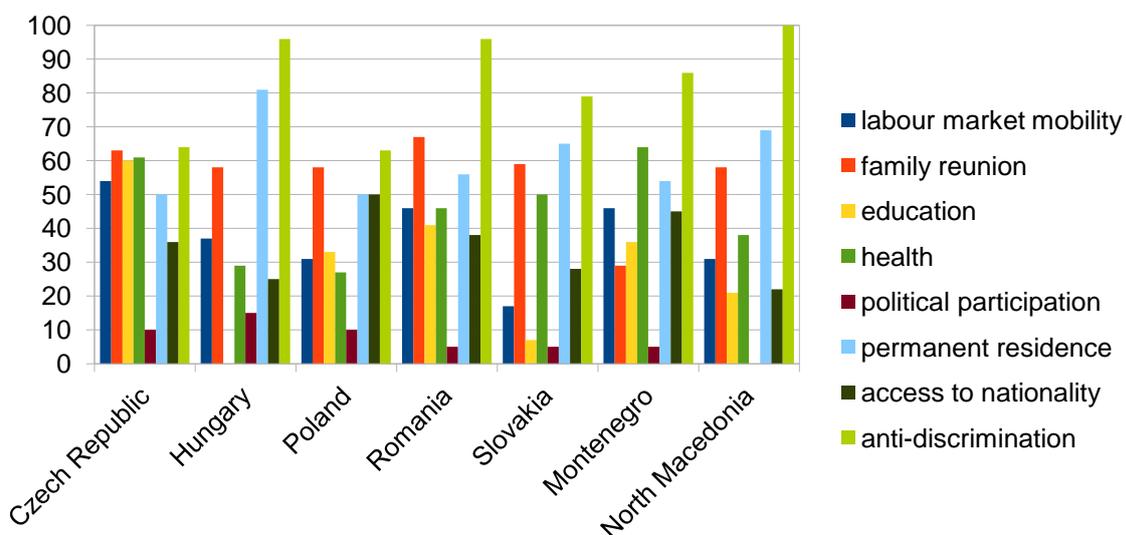
Source: Own elaboration based on: Huddleston, T., & Solano, G., (2020). *Migrant Integration Policy Index 2020,* Barcelona/ Brussels: CIDOB & MPG; Huddleston, T., (2016) *Regional MIPEX assessment for the Western Balkans,* Migration Policy Group [16]

Thus, it might be concluded that pretty good anti-discrimination standards enshrined in the normative frameworks are accompanied by weak empowerment of immigrants, if we interpret access to political power, education and citizenship as instruments improving their leverage and capacity to defend their rights.

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15 However, it is worthy to note that the Czech Republic, together with Poland, Hungary, Israel and the United States, belonged to just five countries in the world voting against the United Nations Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration in December 2018.

16 The data for Montenegro are from 2015 (Huddleston, 2016).

Figure 4: Migrant Integration Policy Index – ranking of average score for each dimension in 7 countries
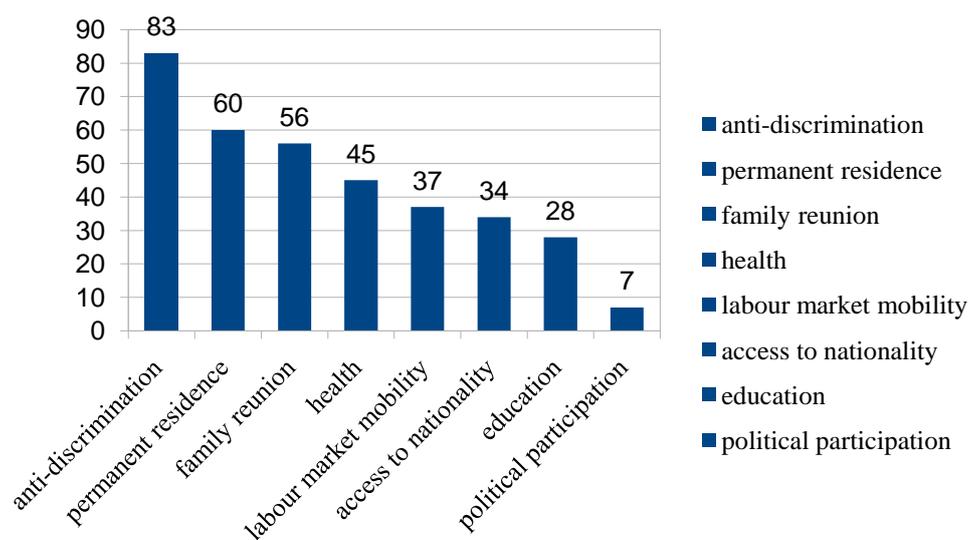
Source: Own elaboration based on: Huddleston, T., & Solano, G., (2020). *Migrant Integration Policy Index 2020,* Barcelona/ Brussels: CIDOB & MPG; Huddleston, T., (2016) *Regional MIPEX assessment for the Western Balkans,* Migration Policy Group.

If we take a look at refugee policy as a specific dimension of immigration policy, we see that (Table 4) all the countries adopted the most important international document concerning the protection of refugees – the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. In the process of EU accession, the V4 countries and Romania had to harmonise their asylum laws with the EU regulations. The European Common Asylum System, established in 1999, and subsequent directives being part of it, was the main framework for harmonisation of such policies, however, nowadays it is undergoing reforms under the headline of the Pact on Asylum and Migration[17]. North Macedonia and Montenegro intensified their cooperation with the EU on asylum procedures in the time of immigration crises of 2015. The EU's 2015 European Agenda on Migration assumed stronger cooperation with the Western Balkan countries as the main transitory route to the EU, but it was border control and tackling irregular immigration that were the main areas of cooperation, with Frontex providing support for these countries becoming protectors of the EU external borders (Kamberi, 2020). Since that moment, bilateral agreements have been signed with the EU, and road maps have been drawn for the implementation of EU regulations monitored by the European Union Agency for Asylum.

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17 On April 10, 2024 the European Parliament approved the new Migration and Asylum Pact (composed of 10 legislative documents), the move causing criticism from Poland's, Hungary's and Slovakia's prime ministers. For example, the Polish Prime Minister rejected the relocation scheme within which immigrants from the frontline countries would be transferred to other EU countries. He suggested that Poland will find a way to be exempted from it. Slovakia's prime minister called it a 'dictate', criticising the principle according to which not accepting asylum-seekers within the relocation scheme must be compensated by financial contribution (Chiappa, 2024; Baczynska & Lopatka, 2024).

Table 3: Strategic documents on migration, the main institutions responsible for migration management and the legal foundations of the refugee status in 7 countries

Country	Was the immigration policy based on some well articulated/formulated strategy or not (as for February 2024)?	Which institution is responsible for migration management?	What are the legal foundations of the refugee status? (max two most important acts)
Czech Republic	*Asylum and Migration Law (no. 314/2015 Coll.)/ The Foreigners Integration Concept – in Mutual Respect* adopted in 2016 and annual implementation plans/ Strategy on Migration Policy of the Czech Republic adopted in 2015	Ministry of Interior/Department for Asylum and Migration Policy	Act of 1999 on the Residence of Aliens in the Territory of the Czech Republic; Act of 1999 on Asylum
Hungary	No	Ministry of Interior / National Directorate-General for Aliens Policing	Act of 2007 on Asylum; Act of 2007 on the admission and residence of third country nationals
Poland	No	Ministry of Interior/ Office For Foreigners	Act of 13 June 2003 on granting protection to foreigners within the territory of the republic of Poland/Act of 12 December 2013 on foreigners
Romania	Yes - *National immigration strategy for the period 2021 – 2024* and two subsequent Action Plans (2021-2022 and 2023-2024)	Ministry of Interior/General Inspectorate for Immigration – Directorate for Asylum and Integration	Emergency ordinance of 12 December 2002 on the regime of foreigners in Romania; Act of 4 May 2006 on Asylum
Slovakia	Yes - *Migration policy of the Slovak Republic with a view to 2025.*	Ministry of Interior/Bureau of Border and Foreign Police of the Presidium of the Police Force	Act of 2002 on Asylum; Act of 2011 on Residence of Foreigners
Montenegro	Yes- Strategy on Migration and Reintegration of Returnees in Montenegro for 2021–2025	Ministry of Interior/Directorate for Administrative Affairs, Citizenship and Foreigners	Act of 30 December 2016 on International and Temporary Protection of Foreigners; Act of 14 February 2018 on Foreign Nationals
North Macedonia	Yes - *Resolution on Migration Policy for 2021-2025 and the Action Plan for its implementation*/National Strategy for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration for 2021-2025/ *Strategy for Integration of Refugees and Aliens (2017-2027)*	Ministry of Interior/Department of Border Affairs and Migration	Act of 2018 on International and Temporary Protection; Act of 2018 on Foreigners

Source: Own elaboration on the basis of accessible on-line data of the public institutions in each country

From the point of view of this analysis, it is important to point to the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) adopted by the European Union in 2001, with the aim of simplifying the asylum procedures and providing shelter (including subsistence) for those escaping war and trying to get to the EU territory. Originally it was designed in response to those displaced because of the 1998-1999 Kosovo War. TPD provides the model for the reception of the 'mass influx of the refugees' (Carrera et al., 2022). The provisions of this directive are transposed into domestic laws of the EU member state, but North Macedonia and Montenegro also have them incorporated. In the case of North Macedonia, it is prescribed in the Act of 2018 on International and Temporary Protection of Foreigners (chapter VIII), while Montenegro has it in the Act of 2016 on International and Temporary Protection of Foreigners (article 5).

Table 4: Acceptance of the selected international regulations concerning migration by 7 countries

Country	Adoption of the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951	Position towards the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration during voting on December 2018	Position towards the Global Compact on Refugees during voting on December 2018
Czech Republic	Yes - succession in 1993 after Czechoslovakia, which had signed it in 1991	Against	In favour
Hungary	Yes – accession in 1989	Against	Against
Poland	Yes – accession in 1991	Against	In favour
Romania	Yes – accession in 1991	Abstained	In favour
Slovakia	Yes - succession in 1993 after Czechoslovakia, which had signed it in 1991	Non-voting	In favour
Montenegro	Yes – succession in 2006 from Serbia, which had succeeded it from the former Yugoslavia	In favour	In favour
North Macedonia	Yes – succession in 1994 from former Yugoslavia, which had signed it in 1951	In favour	In favour

Source: UNHCR: https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-are/1951-refugee-convention; United Nations Digital Library: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1656414; UN Press: https://press.un.org/en/2018/ga12107.doc.htm

However, the immigration crisis of 2015/2016 was a real testing ground for the European Common Asylum System and the Temporary Protection Directive, showing their inefficiency and lack of political will to implement its provisions. Each member state, contrary to guidelines by the European Commission, did not apply a common approach and reacted individually, for example suspending the Dublin rule (Petracou et al., 2018). In the situation of the massive influx of refugees from Syria, the Temporary Protection Directive was not activated, and the EU countries conducted their own asylum policies, with visible division into the Central and Eastern European countries that joined the EU in 2004 and Western European states (Trauner, 2016). In this context, we could observe similarities in the V4 countries and growing cohesion between their governments when it comes to refugee policy, strongly characterised by the securitization of immigration as a strategy for attracting electoral support. The Visegrad 4 countries and their ruling parties (ANO2011, Smer-SD, Fidesz-KDNP, PiS) began to use similar elements in their communication after 2015 and with comparable political successes. As already mentioned, these countries rejected the temporary relocation scheme for 40 thousand asylum-seekers based on quotas to be accepted by each member state till the end of 2017 - the mechanism designed as an instrument of EU solidarity and burden-sharing with countries like Italy and Greece facing the highest influx of asylum-seekers (Petracou et al. 2018, p. 10-11). Presenting immigrants from the Middle East and Africa as a security threat, fear mongering campaigns and xenophobic rhetoric proved to be an efficient instrument of consolidating power (Szalai & Gőbl, 2015; Schmidt, 2016; Krzyżanowski, 2020).

The case of Hungary is quite important here, because it shows that this country's reaction to the 2015 immigration crisis was, to different degrees, replicated in few other countries of our cluster. Out of the five EU countries within our cluster, it was Hungary which experienced the greatest immigration pressures on its border with Serbia and Croatia. If we trace data for asylum applications

between 2012-2018, we see a sharp increase in numbers between 2014-2015, however, the upward trend was already visible in 2013. While in 2014 there were 42 thousand asylum seekers, in 2015 this number increased to 177 thousand (see Table 5). This pressure was used by the governing party, Fidesz, to present itself as a protector of the EU borders, with clear reference to the historical concept of 'Hungary, the Fortress of Christianity' and the 'Bastion of Europe', which

Table 5: Number of asylum seekers in Hungary between 2012 and 2018 and different categories of international protection granted

category	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
asylum seekers	2157	18900	42777	177135	29432	3397	671
granted refugee status	87	198	240	146	154	106	68
granted subsidiary protection	328	217	236	356	271	1110	281
granted tolerated stay	47	4	7	6	7	75	18

Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office, https://www.ksh.hu

are strongly present in Hungarian political thinking (Pap & Reményi, 2017, p. 240). The Hungarian Prime Minister called himself a *'captain general of the borders'*, defending not only Hungary but in general the Christian world against a 'Muslim invasion'. Issues of accepting refugees and the EU policy on that matter were used in May 2015 in national consultations on 'immigration and terrorism', when Hungarians were asked 12 different questions with anti-immigration bias in questionnaires sent by post. According to official figures, 1 million 254 forms were returned to the government, and almost 58,000 people gave their views electronically. The results showed that respondents had similar views on the 12 questions, with a minimal negative response rate, and those who returned the consultation questionnaire were clearly in favour of stricter regulation against immigrants (Juhász, 2017, p. 40).The national consultation played an important role in shaping and legitimising the Hungarian position towards immigration, including building a 170-km-long razor fence along the border with Serbia on September 2015 (extended next month along the Croatian one). In October 2016, the national referendum in Hungary was held, in which Hungarian citizens with the right to vote could express their opinion on whether the EU should be allowed to impose the resettlement of non-Hungarian citizens into Hungary without the consent of its parliament. The referendum was invalid as less than half of those entitled to vote cast a valid vote, however, more than 98% of those who voted said no to the question (Glied & Pap, 2016; Pomarański 2017). As presented in Table 4, Hungary is the only country in our cluster to reject the Global Compact on Refugees in 2018, however, in the case of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, there was a general negligence to accept it among the V4 and Romania.

The Hungarian strategy and rhetoric on the field of immigration policy has become a point of reference for many other radical-right parties in Europe, and we observed similar developments in the V4 countries. The Law and Justice party in Poland, which became the ruling party in October 2015, also harnessed the myth of Poland as the bulwark of Christianity, protecting culture and society against refugees portrayed as a threat. This strategy was accompanied by a significant shift in attitudes towards refugees from the Middle East and Africa. In May 2015, 20% of those surveyed were against them,

while in April 2017 74 % expressed their negative attitudes when asked about accepting refugees from the Middle East and Africa (Cywiński et al., 2019, p. 7). In 2022, the Polish government, clearly demonstrating inspiration from Hungary, erected a 180 km long fence along the border with Belarus in order to fight undocumented immigration arranged by Aleksander Łukaszenko's regime. Humanitarian organisations that monitored the situation on that border pointed to violations of international law, because immigrants were refused humanitarian help, the right to asylum and respect for the non-refoulement principle (Czarnota & Górczyńska, 2022). The idea of the Hungarian referendum was also replicated by the Polish government by organising a referendum on the election day of October 15, 2023, with two, out of four, questions concerning immigration and border security (Pachocka, 2023). The securitization discourse on immigration emerged in Slovakia, when the governing party SMER used the slogan 'We protect Slovakia' during the February 2016 parliamentary elections. The country's prime minister put on a par immigration with a terrorism threat, criticised multiculturalism, and pointed at the impossibility of integrating people who 'have another way of life, way of thinking, cultural background and most of all, religion' (Cunningham, 2016). Consequently, Slovakia's integration model resembles assimilation, which practically generates negative prejudices and stereotypes regarding immigrants (Liďák & Štefančík, 2022; Androvičová, 2015, p. 329-330). Similarly, in the Czech Republic, we could observe a prioritisation of security and economic benefits, over accepting refugees - the position also expressed by voting against the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, together with Hungary and Poland. The migration was securitized at that time both by politicians, like the country's president, who using anti-Islamic language, presented refugees as a terrorist threat (Valuch, 2018), and various initiatives, including, e.g. Block against Islam (Blok proti islámu) (Zogata-Kusz, 2020, p. 182-183). The idea of fence building was also incorporated in North Macedonia. In November 2015, the country finished fencing its border-crossing with Greece in Gevgelija, while in February 2016, it erected a 30 km long, razor topped, fence along the border with Greece (Sabić &Borić, 2016). In July 2018, Viktor Orbán, visiting Podgorica, offered Montenegro (for a second time) a donation for building a fence along its 26-kilometre-long border with Albania, however, its prime minister was not interested ('For now, there are no reasons for that'). This was the time when the Montenegrin government decided to deploy military troops along the border with Albania because a significant increase in irregular migrants heading to Croatia was detected along Albania, Montenegro and Bosnia ('Montenegro to Deploy Troops', 2018).

Consequently, if we look at the UNHCR data for 2013-2021, we see that the number of refugees in our cluster was low (see Figure 5 and input data in the Annex)[18]. In countries like Czech Republic, Poland, Montenegro, and North Macedonia, these numbers even dropped (in some cases significantly), while in Hungary, Romania, Slovakia we see increases (with Hungary's and Romania's refugee population doubled), but these are still small numbers if we take into account the general population of these countries and the growing size of labour immigration.

18 The time frame chosen is determined by developments in Ukraine – the year preceding the 2014 annexation of Crimea which marked a real beginning of the war with Russia (being a pushing factor for emigration) and the year preceding the full scale invasion of 2022.

Figure 5: Refugee population in 7 countries between 2013-2021 according to the UNHCR data
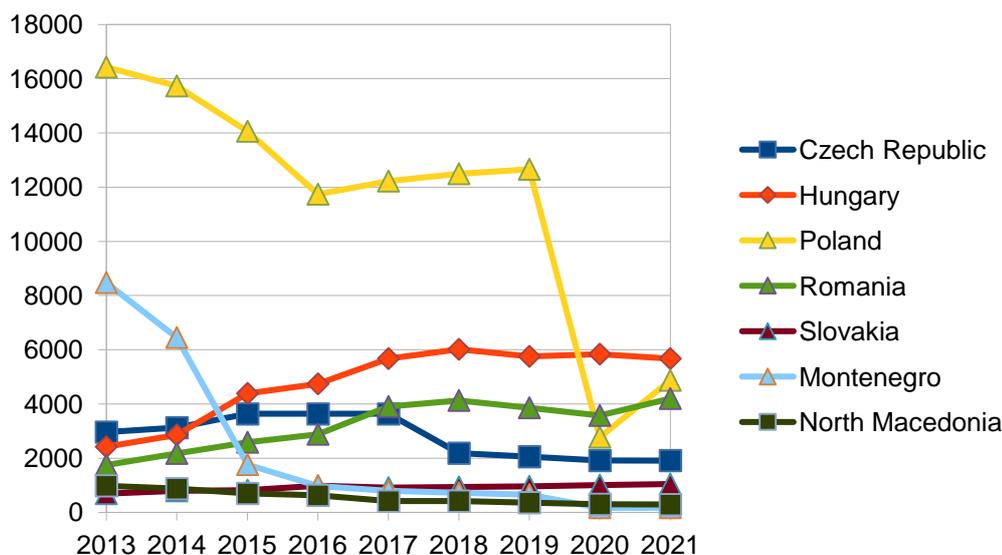
Source: Own elaboration on the basis of the data from the United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees: https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download/ [19]

However, in order to evaluate the acceptance of asylum seekers by governments of these countries, it is more important to compare the number of asylum applications submitted and the number of decisions granting international protection between 2013-2021 (see Figure 6). As already presented, it was Hungary where the highest number of such applications were submitted (with the heyday in 2015), the next being Poland, Romania, Czech Republic, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Slovakia (altogether approx. 416 thousand submitted, while in the whole of Europe it was 9,5 million according to the UNHCR data). At the same time, only a small number of decisions granting international protection were issued (altogether approx. 20 thousand), with Romania issuing 7601 (the highest number), while North Macedonia issued 41 (the lowest number).

The asylum recognition rates (percentage of decisions granting protection to asylum applications submitted) presented in Table 6 show the reluctance of governments to grant international protection[20]. The average value is 4,8%, but there were significant differences if we consider specific countries. Those who submitted applications in Romania and Slovakia had higher chances to get protection, while in Montenegro such chances were the lowest. The general picture shows that getting international protection was rather exceptional.

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19 According to the UNHCR methodology the refugee population includes: individuals recognized under 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, those recognized in accordance with the UNHCR Statute, individuals granted complementary forms of protection and temporary protection, people in refugee-like situations. In the case of our cluster majority of those included are people recognized under the 1951 convention and those with complementary forms of protection.

20 It must be noticed that, when calculating asylum recognition rate, we are dependent on available statistics, which include only registered/submitted applications. We do not know how many asylum applications have not been submitted because of governments' actions aimed at making it difficult to submit applications by those expressing such intent (and thus denying them their basic rights). For example, there are reports from the Polish Ombudsman Office, showing that it was a deliberate policy of the Border Guards not to receive asylum-applications from those staying in 2021 on the Polish-Belarusian borderland (Okrasa, 2021).

Figure 6: Number of asylum applications and decisions granting international protection between 2013-2021 according to the UNHCR data

Source: Own elaboration on the basis of the data from the United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees: https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download/
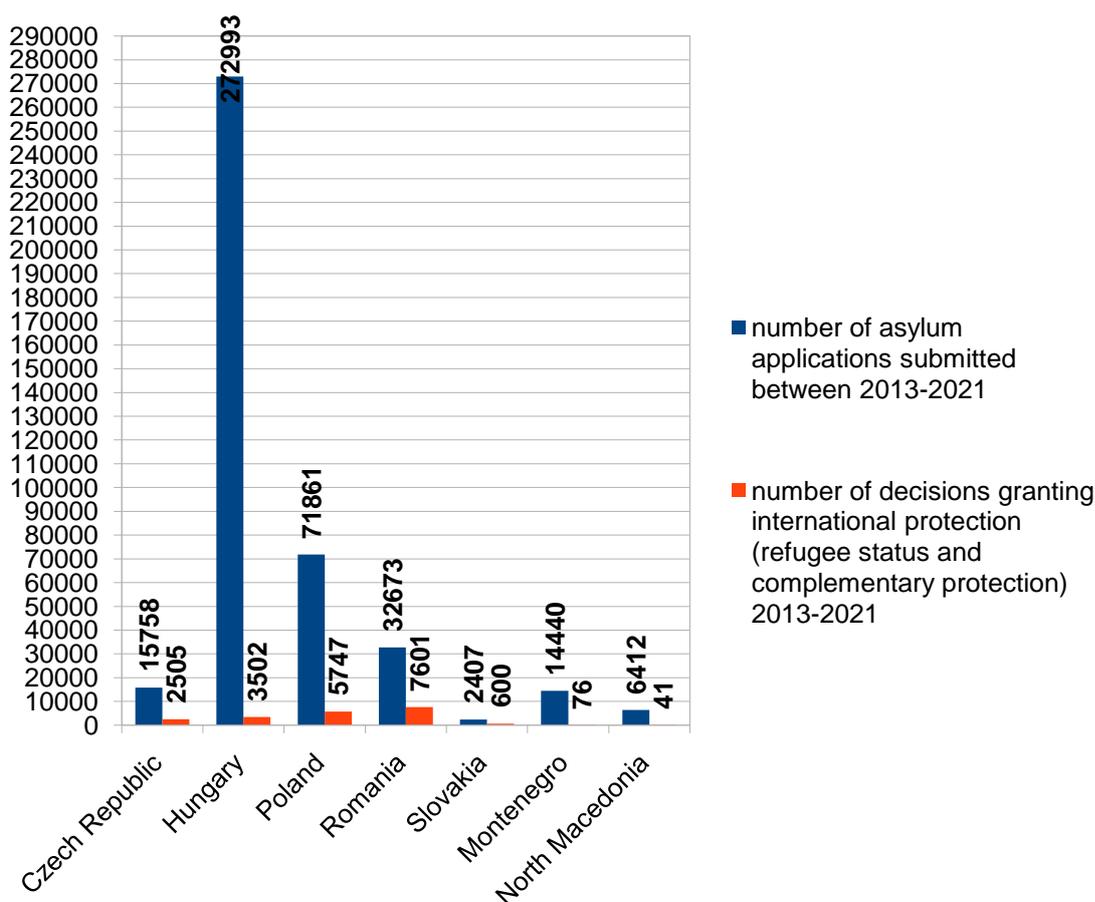
Table 6: Asylum recognition rates between 2013-2021: all applications and applications submitted by Ukrainian citizens

Country	asylum recognition rates for all applications submitted in 2013-2021 (%)	asylum recognition rate for applications submitted by Ukrainian citizens in 2013-2021 (%)
Czech Republic	15.9	12.52
Hungary	1.23	9.9
Poland	8	6.05
Romania	23.26	31.88
Slovakia	24.93	19.35
Montenegro	0.53	0
North Macedonia	0.64	0
Average	4.82	8.37

Source: Own elaboration on the basis of data from Figures 6 and 7

Within the total number of 416 thousand applications submitted between 2013-2021, Ukrainian citizens constituted only a small fraction of 12 836, with Poland and Czech Republic being the main recipients. The average recognition rate was higher as compared to all applications submitted, but still, this was a total of 1074 individuals who were granted international protection. These data also demonstrate that Ukrainians sought protection mainly on the EU territory. Only 28 applications were submitted to Montenegro, while in North Macedonia, no single application was submitted. We can confront these data with general numbers for the EU, provided by Eurostat. Between 2013-2021, approx. 82 thousand asylum applications were submitted by Ukrainian citizens in the EU countries, with 16 thousand decisions granting asylum status, which gives an approx. 19% recognition rate (Eurostat, 2022). The increase in asylum applications after 2014 was accompanied by the majority of them being rejected on the grounds of 'internal flight alternative', which meant an opportunity to find a safe place in the regions of Ukraine not affected by war (Solodko, Fitisova, 2016). Therefore, before 2021, a very small proportion of Ukrainian citizens in the EU were considered refugees. In 2021, 57% had their residence permit because of employment reasons, 20% because of family reasons, 2,5% because of education and only 0,6% had refugee or subsidiary protection status (Eurostat, 2022).

Figure 7: Number of asylum applications from Ukrainian citizens and decisions granting them international protection between 2013-2021 according to the UNHCR data
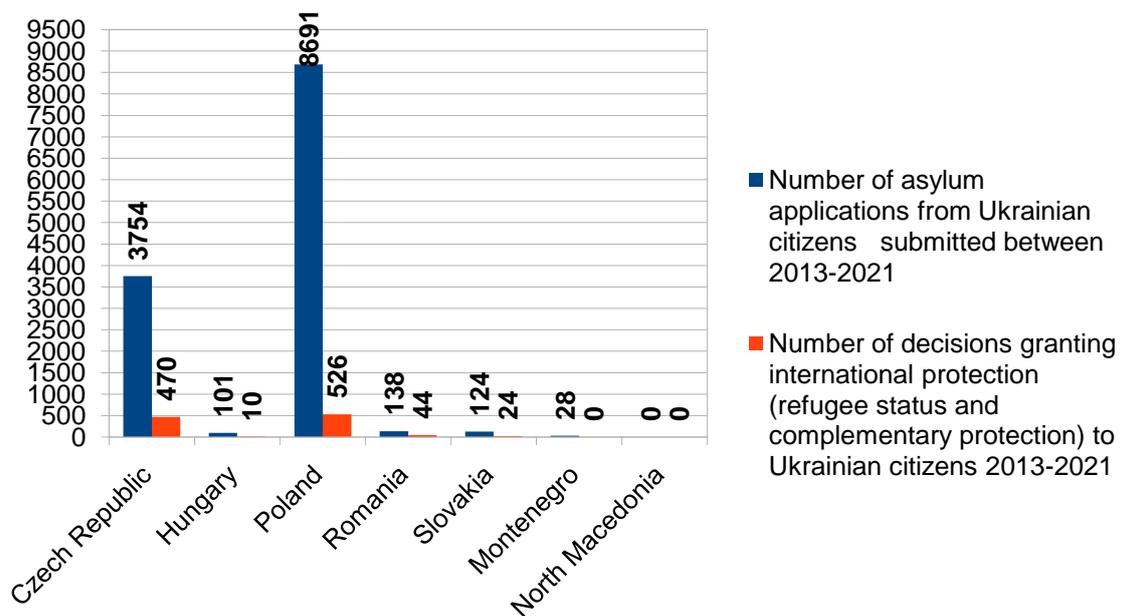
Source: Own elaboration on the basis of the data from the United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees: https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download/

4. Ukrainian diaspora characteristics in the studied countries – comparative view

Ukrainians constituted a significant immigrant community in the majority of the studied countries already before the full-scale Russian aggression of February 24, 2022. The main patterns of migration trends in Ukraine identified in 2016 by a group of Ukrainian researchers were: 1) a high level of outgoing labour migration; 2) a tendency to transform temporary labour migration to a permanent one; 3) the appearance of new migration patterns in Ukraine after the annexation of Crimea; 4) a decrease of immigrants in Ukraine and a low level of integration of foreigners in Ukraine (Sushko et al., 2016). The available data indicate that between 2013-2021 in the five EU countries the number of Ukrainian immigrants has significantly grown, while in Montenegro and North Macedonia, there were a few Ukrainians without any significant changes in numbers (see Table 7).

Table 7: Ukrainians holding a valid residence permit at the end of the year 2013/2021 in 7 countries

	all valid residents permits		valid resident permits with duration over 12 months
Country	2013	2021	2021
Czech Republic	107 254	193 547	190 044
Hungary	13 149	63 175	60 983
Poland	175 656	651 221	284 839
Romania	1 401	2 260	2131
Slovakia	6 361	54 138	48 450
Montenegro	135	141	No data
North Macedonia	60	64	No data

Source: Eurostat (2022); United Nations (2017); United Nations (2019). [21]

After the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the number of asylum seekers increased, however, as already demonstrated in the previous chapter, those with international protection constituted a tiny minority. The majority of Ukrainian immigrants in the studied countries represented economic migration (Pędziwiatr, Magdziarz 2023, p. 346). This is clearly demonstrated by Eurostat data for those with resident permits with duration over 12 months (see Figure 8), the exception being Romania where the majority of Ukrainian citizens declared family reasons as a justification for stay. Aside from economic reasons connected with differences in attractiveness of the labour market, historically embedded cross-border relations between Romania and Ukraine might have facilitated marriages between Romanians and Ukrainian citizens (some of them with a Romanian or Moldovan ethnic background). One must remember that Romania has the longest border with Ukraine in our cluster (649 km split by the Republic of Moldova) and it is estimated that approx. 150 to 500 thousand ethnic Romanians live in Ukraine, especially close to the border in the Chernivtsi Oblast (a former North Bukovina being historical part of Romanian territory) or Zakarpattia Oblast (Aligica, 2024).

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[21] The data for Montenegro and North Macedonia are for 2015/2019, taken from the United Nations Population Division: (United Nations, 2017); (United Nations, 2019).

Figure 8: Percentage share of family and employment reasons in all valid residence permits with a duration of at least 12 months held by Ukrainians at the end of the year, 2021
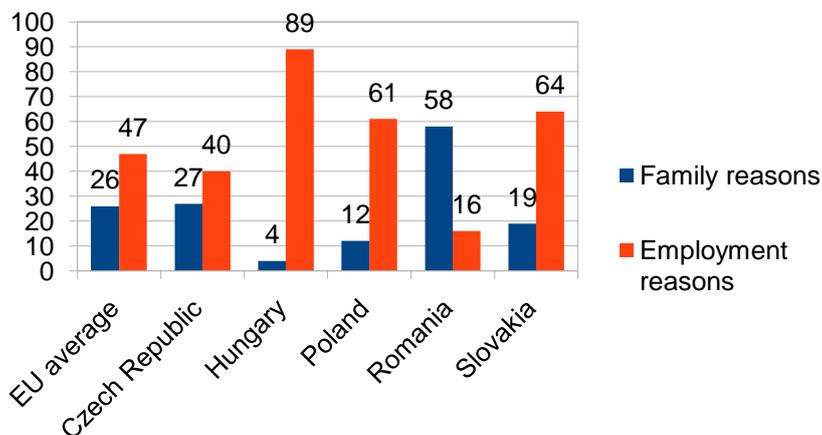
Source: Own elaboration on the basis of Eurostat (2022)

It should be added that in May 2017, the Council of the European Union approved visa-free travel for Ukrainian citizens holding a biometric passport. Those with such passports can enter the EU territory (except for Ireland) without a visa for 90 days in any 180-day period, if they travel for tourism, visiting family and friends or for business purposes (but not for work). The public opinion poll conducted at that time by the National Academy of Science of Ukraine showed that 27% would use it for tourism, 20% to search for employment, and 13% to visit family or friends (IOM, 2017 May 12). This means that visa-free travelling for Ukrainians might have been a contributing factor to labour immigration as well.

When considering the situation of the Ukrainian diaspora in the period preceding February 24, 2022, it must be remembered that Ukrainians enjoyed the status of being a national minority in the majority of countries of this study (except for Montenegro and North Macedonia). This means that aside from economic or educational immigrants who arrived recently (especially since 2013), there were already groups of Ukrainians with citizenship of these countries. These groups, at least formally, were protected by the laws regulating status of national minorities, which also guaranteed them some rights and legal recognition. This was accompanied by the functioning of different organisations integrating Ukrainian minorities, promoting Ukrainian culture, and articulating their interests in the public space.

For example, in Poland, Ukrainians represented a historically embedded national minority protected by the Act of 2005 on national and ethnic minorities and on the regional languages. According to the 2011 census, almost 40 thousand respondents with Polish citizenship declared Ukrainian identity (Central Statistical Office of Poland, 2015). Most of them were descendants of Ukrainians who had been forcibly resettled in 1947 into the north-west territory of Poland within the so-called 'Wisła' operation. The most important organisation representing the Ukrainian minority has been the Association of Ukrainians in Poland established in 1990, with 10 regional chapters and many more local circles. This organisation still functions as an umbrella organisation coordinating

many actions in favour of Ukrainians and representing them in relations with the Polish government (Urbanik, 2021). Ukrainians also had their business representation, because already in 1992, the Polish-Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce was called into existence, while in 2015, the Association of Ukrainian Business was established. Additionally, Ukrainians were integrated by the religious institutions in Poland, belonging to one of the two churches: the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (Bulletin of the Republic of Poland, n.d.). Poland has been relatively densely covered with official Ukrainian consular services. Except for the Ukrainian embassy in Warsaw, there were consulates in Gdańsk, Cracow, Lublin, and Wrocław (the last one opened shortly before the Russian invasion). Additionally, there are many more honorary consulates, however, a lot of them have been established recently (see Table 8).

Table 8: Diplomatic institutions of Ukraine on the territories of 7 countries

Country	Is there a Ukrainian embassy?	Are there any consulates?	Are there any honorary consulates?
Czech Republic	Yes (opened in 1992)	Yes -Brno	No
Hungary	Yes (opened in 1992)	Yes - Nyiregyháza	Yes – Szeged and Siófok
Poland	Yes (opened in 1992)	Yes - Gdańsk, Kraków, Lublin, Wrocław	Yes - Chełm, Opole, Bydgoszcz, Szczecin, Przemyśl, Katowice, Łódź, Tarnów
Romania	Yes (opened in 1992)	Yes – Suceava	No
Slovakia	Yes (opened in 1993)	Yes - Presov	No
Montenegro	yes (opened in 2008)	No	Yes - Nikšić
North Macedonia	Yes (opened in 2001)	No	Yes - Bitola and Prilep

Source: Own elaboration on the basis of data from the websites of the ministries of foreign affairs

In Hungary, the Act of 2011 on the Rights of National Minorities, gives Ukrainians the status of a national minority. According to the census in 2011, there were approximately 5,6 thousand Ukrainians in Hungary, the most of them from Western Ukraine and Transcarpathia (Embassy of Ukraine in Hungary, 2012). They are represented by the Ukrainian Cultural Association of Hungary (MUKE) founded in 1991. Additionally, the local elections in 1998 resulted in establishing the Ukrainian National Self-Government which has been functioning continuously since then, presenting their candidates in local elections in Budapest districts and Hungarian towns ('Magyarországi ukránok', n.d.). There is also the Ukrainian Orthodox Church conducting activities promoting Ukrainian culture within a 'Saturday School' ('A magyarországi ukrán egyház', n.d.). According to the recent census conducted in Romania, the Ukrainian national minority numbered 45 thousand, being the third largest minority (Population and Housing Census, 2022). As a result of this demographic significance, the Ukrainian community is officially represented before public authorities by the Union of Ukrainians in Romania (a political party established in 1990) and holds representation in the Romanian parliament. They also have opportunities for education in their mother tongue, the ability to communicate with central authorities in their mother tongue (where the percentage of ethnic Ukrainians exceeds 20 percent) or dedicated spaces within state education for individuals of Ukrainian ethnicity.

Additionally, in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Ukrainians constitute a well embedded national minority. It must be remembered that these countries and the western part of Ukraine share

a common history since they were parts of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in the 19th century. After Czechoslovakia gained independence in 1918, the Transcarpathian region became a part of the newly independent state, with ethnic Ukrainians already living there facilitating additional immigration from Soviet Ukraine. Their integration was supported by the Czechoslovak authorities, and Ukrainians established various institutions and organisations in Czechoslovakia at that time. These institutions, however, were closed after 1948 and during the socialist era, there was almost no immigration from Ukraine to Czechoslovakia. The situation changed after the Velvet Revolution, and since the early 1990s, Czechoslovakia (since 1993 Czechia and Slovakia separately) became the destination country for immigration from Ukraine (Drbohlav & Seidlová 2016, p. 99). Aside from the historically embedded Ukrainian minority, there was a significant number of irregular economic immigrants. The Czech Ministry of Interior estimated that by the end of 1998, there were 200 thousand irregular immigrants, while the Slovak Ministry of Interior estimated that there were 60 thousand irregular immigrants – the majority of them arriving from the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine (ceded to the USSR by Czechoslovakia's government in 1946) (Duleba, 2002, p. 23). Currently, the status of Ukrainians as a national minority is embedded in the National Minority Rights Act of 2001 (Czech Republic) and the Act of 1999 on the use of the languages of national minorities (Slovakia)[22]. The minority is represented in the Council of Nationalities (established in Czech Republic in 1990) and the Council for Minorities and Ethnic Groups (established in Slovakia in 1998) – the advisory bodies consisting of representatives of national minorities (Minority Rights Group, 2023). As for 2020 in Czechia, there were 23 NGOs representing Ukrainians, with 18 of them located in Prague (Velvyslanectví Ukrajiny v České republice, 2020).

As previously mentioned, the Ukrainian immigrants in the studied countries represented mainly labour migration. The majority of them worked in less skilled, manual occupations in the construction sector, industrial sector, or agriculture. Their migration to the EU territory was characterised by circularity and a relatively short duration of stay abroad (Piechowska, 2020). Before 2022, in the studied cluster of countries, these were Poland and Czech Republic which attracted the highest number of Ukrainian labour immigrants (Ibidem). As for 2017 in Poland, 31% working permits for Ukrainians were issued for the sector of 'craft and related trades', 30% for 'elementary occupations' and 21% for ' plant and machine operators and assemblers' (Wrona, 2019, p. 17). In the case of the Czech Republic, data for 2021 showed that Ukrainians were mainly employed as assembly workers (25%), machine operators (17%), and drivers (12%) (Ruschka, 2022). It must be added that the governments were interested in attracting a labour force from non-EU countries like Ukraine. For example, the Czech Government implemented several labour immigration projects between 2015-2022, and in 2019, the 'special work visa' was implemented by the novelization of the Foreigners Act. It mainly targeted circular migration from Ukraine and enabled easier obtaining of the one-year visa without a possibility of prolongation (Stojanov et al., 2022). Thus, we see that Ukrainians were an economically active group, contributing to the receiving societies by compensating for a shortage of labour in specific sectors and treated by governments as important for economic growth.

As for North Macedonia and Montenegro, the data from Table 7 show only a tiny group of Ukrainians, and these were definitely not countries attracting masses of labour immigrants. It is difficult to find data about the socio-economic situation of this small group, but it might be assumed that some of these individuals were entrepreneurs. In an analysis conducted by the North Macedonian

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22 In Slovakia, similarly like in the case of Romania, there is no one separate act regulating status of national minorities.

business platform 'Biznismreza.mk', it was found that in 2020 there were around 40 companies, in which one of the owners was from Ukraine. These companies were either micro or small firms, with only three companies achieving incomes greater than 3 million denars (50,000 euros) ('Колку украински фирми', 2022). In the case of Montenegro, the pattern of settlement after 2022 (described in the next paragraphs) indicates that some of those who lived there before 2022 might have worked in the coastal tourism sector or owned apartments there (IOM Montenegro, 2022). It is worth mentioning that despite the geographic distance between Ukraine and Montenegro, there were already established forms of bilateral cooperation in different fields. For example, in 2010, both governments signed an agreement on visa regime for travel of nationals of Ukraine and Montenegro, while in 2011, an agreement on cooperation on the field of tourism was signed. There were numerous protocols of cooperation between municipalities and regions of both countries: in 2009 between the Lviv Regional Administration and the city of Podgorica; in 2009 between the Kyiv City State Administration and the city of Budva; in 2009 between the Odessa Regional Council and the Herceg Novi Assembly; in 2011 between the city of Mariupol and the city of Bar, in 2011 between the city of Kharkiv and the city of Cetinje (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2019). Of symbolic, however important, meaning is the fact that both in Skopje and Podgorica there are monuments to the famous Ukrainian national poet and political activist Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861)[23]. This shows the already existing cultural ties and recognition of Ukrainian statehood manifested by these orthodox countries. The location of these monuments later would become the gathering place of those Ukrainians who protested publicly against Russia's full scale military aggression.

The aggression of February 24, 2022, triggered another wave of massive Ukrainian immigration, this time forced by war circumstances and recognized by European countries as demanding a special form of protection (compared to the previous asylum claims, it is now difficult to point to the alternative of 'internal flight' for Ukrainians looking for shelter). The figures presented in Table 9 reflect the estimated number of those who have fled Ukraine after February 24, 2022, and 'were granted refugee status, temporary asylum status, temporary protection, or statuses through similar national protection schemes, as well as those recorded in the country under other forms of stay' (UNHCR, 2023 June 14).

The UNHCR data show a differentiated picture of the influx of refugees, with Poland being the top destination country, while North Macedonia received the smallest number. In Figure 9, we also see that in some countries the number has dropped between January 2023 and 2024 (Poland, Czech Republic, Romania), while in the rest it increased, with a significant rise in the cases of Hungary, Montenegro and North Macedonia. The decrease might be explained by return migrations or moving to another country, like in the case of Poland, where in August 2023 it was estimated that 350 thousand Ukrainians had already moved to another European country, mostly Germany, after receiving temporary protection in Poland (Zymnin, 2023). In Romania, which also presents a significant decline in refugees, this was mainly because the country was an important transition route to other countries with its 650 km long border with Ukraine. The evaluation of the Romanian Border

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23 In Podgorica this monument was erected in 2011 in the City Park, while in North Macedonia the monument was erected in the city centre in 2009.

Table 9: Ukrainian refugees' stock in 7 countries and Ukrainian border proximity

country	number of refugees as for January 2023	number of refugees as for August 2023	number of refugees as for date in the bracket	general population as for 2022 (according to the World Bank)	ratio of Ukrainian refugees to the general population (column 4 to 5)	border with Ukraine
Czech Republic	483 620	361 485	381 400 (31.01.2024)	10 672 118	3,6%	No
Hungary	33 603	52 290	66 135 (17.03.2024)	9 643 048	0,7%	Yes/ 137 km long
Poland	1 563 386	968 390	956 635 (15.12.2023)	36 821 749	2,6 %	Yes/ 535 km long
Romania	106 835	95 195	77 250 (01.04.2024)	19 047 009	0,4%	Yes/ 649 km long
Slovakia	107 203	106 570	117 265 (24.03.2024)	5 431 752	2,2%	Yes/ 97 km long
Montenegro	33 098	53 240	65 105 (29.01.2024)	617 213	10,5%	No
North Macedonia	6 404	12 155	18 915 (22.02.2024)	2 057 679	0,9 %	No

Source: UNHCR https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine; World Bank: https://data.worldbank.org/country.

Police estimated that starting from 10 February 2022 (pre-conflict period), until 1 October 2023, 6,244,726 Ukrainian citizens entered Romania (Romanian Border Police, 2023). These numbers show that Romania was somewhat perceived as a country of transition. The increase in the number of refugees might be the result of facilitating immigration within the networks established by

Figure 9: Ukrainian refugees' stock in 7 countries compared over time according to the UNHCR data (the visible numbers are for 2024)
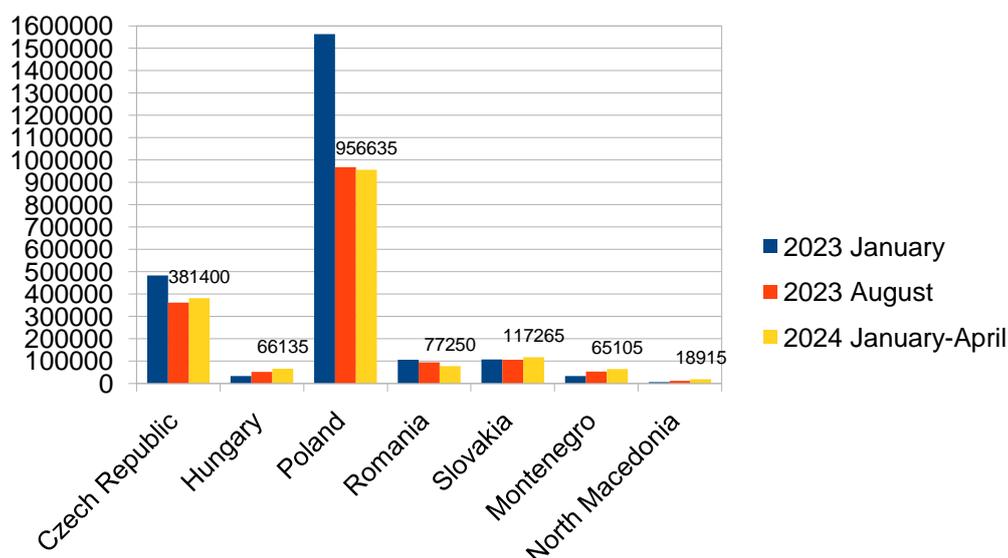
Source: UNHCR data from Table 9

the first waves of those escaping the war, but it is also possible that the governments of these countries have gradually extended different forms of protection (including temporary protection) to those who were already there, which is reflected in the statistics. However, what seems to be more important is

the share of Ukrainian refugees in the total population, because it shows quite a different picture. From such a perspective, it is the smallest country of Montenegro, which has the highest share, while in Romania this share is the lowest. North Macedonia has a slightly higher share than Hungary, similarly Poland has only a slightly higher share than Slovakia. Thus, the absolute number does not reflect the burden of hosting the refugees.

Presenting a more systematic picture of the intentions of Ukrainians in the host countries in the first months of war is possible thanks to surveys conducted by the UNHCR and IOM. In Figure 10, we see that, except for Poland, a significant portion of refugees expressed a willingness to return to Ukraine (on average, 24%). Hungary and Romania had the biggest groups expressing their willingness to move to another country. In Poland and Slovakia, we see the highest share of those who would like to stay in their current host country. While in the Czech Republic, we see the highest level of uncertainty about the future and, interestingly, the lowest level of likelihood to stay in the host country. One must remember that this is a measurement of attitudes in the very dynamic

Figure 10: Refugees' plans for the near future, by host country (data collection between mid-May to mid-June 2022)
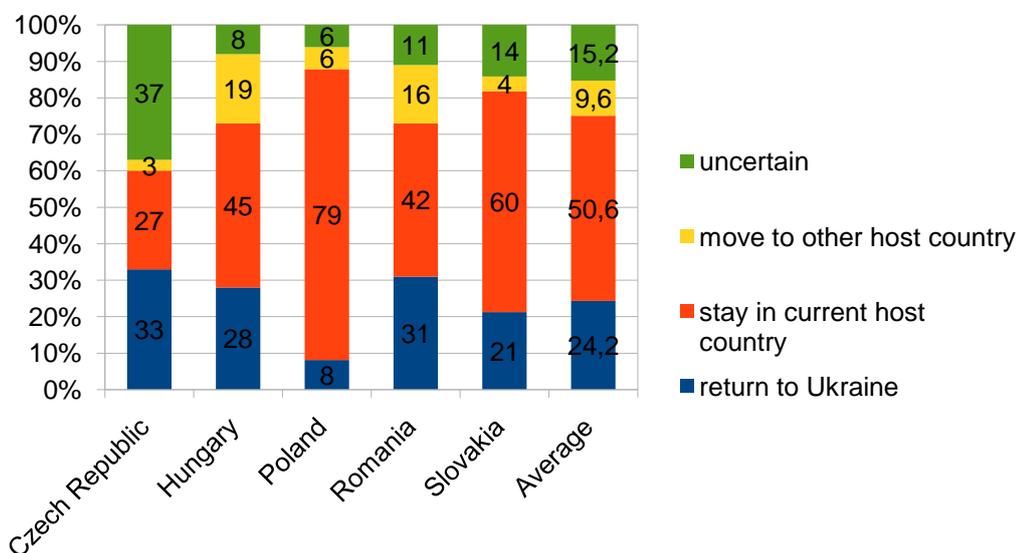
Source: UNHCR. (2022, July). *Lives on hold: profiles and intentions of refugees from Ukraine. Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia*, Regional Bureau for Europe.

context, thus it must be assumed that motivations of those surveyed could significantly change in the next few months[24]. However, we see at least a general picture for May-June 2022, showing a variety of intentions of those fleeing Ukraine, with only 50 % (in average) declaring intent to stay in the host country.

As for Montenegro and North Macedonia (where, according to UNHCR data from Table 9, the number of refugees increased), we can use the data from the 'rapid displacement and needs assessment' published by the International Organization of Migration. The survey from May 2022 conducted in Montenegro showed that 58% wanted to stay until the war ends and then return to Ukraine, 19% planned to stay up to 6 months, 9% did not know yet, 8% intended to stay and start a

24 Unfortunately, next editions of this report (altogether 5 of them till February 2024) do not allow to extract separate data for each country included in this analysis and some of these countries (like Hungary) were skipped from the next editions.

new life, and 6% wanted to stay for 1 year and then return (IOM Montenegro, 2022a, p. 3). A similar survey conducted between the months of July-August 2022 in North Macedonia showed that 55% wanted to stay in the country till the end of war and then return, 14% did not know yet, 12% declared they would stay for 1 year and then return, 6% wanted to stay for a few months and 4% wanted to stay and start a new life (IOM North Macedonia, 2022, p. 2). These data demonstrate that more than half of those surveyed declared a willingness to stay till the end of the war, but with the intention to return, while only a minority had a plan to start a new life in Montenegro and North Macedonia.

The legal status granted to Ukrainians is of importance, because it was the first time in EU history when the European Commission proposed activating the Temporary Protection Directive adopted by the EU in 2001. As the content of the Directive explains, a temporary protection 'means a procedure of exceptional character to provide, in the event of a mass influx or imminent mass influx[25] of displaced persons from third countries who are unable to return to their country of origin, immediate and temporary protection to such persons, in particular if there is also a risk that the asylum system will be unable to process this influx without adverse effects for its efficient operation, in the interests of the persons concerned and other persons requesting protection'(Council of the European Union, 2001). Thus, the Directive is an instrument to be used in exceptional situations when the asylum system of a given country cannot cope with the sudden increase in the number of asylum applications of those in need of rapid entry and support.

The directive was supported unanimously by the Council of the European Union, which activated the Directive on March 4, 2022. The final version of the text activating this Directive, issued by the Council, was a compromise with the Central European countries' expectations (especially Poland and Hungary) – this will be at the discretion of the member states as to whether to apply temporary protection mechanisms to non-Ukrainian third country nationals fleeing from Ukraine (Carrera et al., 2022). The decision activating this directive (Council of the European Union, 2022a), in Article 2.1, enumerates the following categories to be granted temporary protection:
a) Ukrainian nationals residing in Ukraine before 24 February 2022
b) stateless persons and nationals of third countries other than Ukraine, who benefited from international protection or equivalent national protection in Ukraine before 24 February 2022
c) family members of the persons referred to in a) and b)
At the same time the articles 2.2 and 2.3 provided an option for the member states as to whether to apply the Directive or 'adequate protection under their national law' to all other categories of third country nationals (and stateless persons) residing legally in Ukraine, who are 'unable to return in safe and durable conditions to their country or region of origin'[26]. The activating decision also refers to the already existing scheme of visa-free travel for Ukrainians established in 2017 (described at the beginning of this chapter). On those grounds, Ukrainians fleeing the country have a right to move freely within the EU territory and choose the member state where they would like to apply for temporary protection. This should allow them to connect with the already existing diaspora network covering the EU territory (Council of the European Union, 2022a)

Montenegro and North Macedonia, despite being outside the EU, also activated temporary protection incorporated into their laws. In the case of Montenegro, it was decided on 12 March 2022

25 There is a criticism towards the concept of 'mass influx', because it is defined vaguely and there are no clear objective indicators of the 'mass influx' situation. This gave the EU member states leverage to stop a possible activation of this Directive. It must be added that its activation demands a qualified majority vote in the Council (Ciger, 2022).
26 For comprehensive analysis of the circumstance and details of activating the TPD see (Carrera et al., 2022).

and later prolonged to 11 March 2025. As of March 2023, approximately 8 thousand persons applied for temporary protection, out of which 7,5 have been resolved (IOM Montenegro, 2023). This data demonstrates that the majority of Ukrainian refugees did not apply for this form of protection, deciding to legalise they stay by different kinds of resident permits offered by the state (UNHCR Montenegro, 2023). The Ukrainian embassy in Montenegro noticed that the processing of applications for temporary protection, and further waiting for identity numbers to be granted to those with such protection, was quite long, which was an important obstacle for those looking for a job (an identity number is needed to register at the Employment Agency) (Vukićević, 2022). According to an IOM survey, on average, people waited 45 days to obtain the status of temporary protection, however, one quarter of respondents waited between 60 to 120 days (IOM Montenegro, 2023). North Macedonia activated temporary protection much later, which was on 8 August 2023, for a period of one year (UNHCR North Macedonia, 2023). Before that time, Ukrainians had 90 days of visa-free stay and were considered tourists, and after three months, they could relocate to another country, return to Ukraine, or apply for a temporary residence permit on humanitarian grounds (for one year, with the possibility of extension to five years). However, such residence permits did not give them access to health, education or employment. According to a survey conducted by the IOM from 7 July to 15 August 2022, all of the Ukrainian refugees interviewed said that they had not applied for asylum because they believed there was no need, as they would stay in North Macedonia until the war was over, as their main intention was to return. Some of them also did not want to be seen as refugees. The majority of those who did not apply for temporary residence on humanitarian grounds said they were tourists. In the time of that survey, only 246 persons were granted temporary residence on humanitarian grounds, and 4 persons applied for asylum (IOM North Macedonia, 2022).

Originally, the temporary protection was activated by the Council for 1 year, with an automatic extension for another year. It was later extended by the Council decision to 4 March 2025. It must be underscored that Article 4 of the Directive, which regulates the duration of temporary protection, assumes its maximum duration for 3 years. This leads to a question of what will happen after 3 years, when the member states will face the challenge of overwhelming their own national protection schemes, in a situation of a lack of EU level solutions. There is already debate among legal experts of the European Commission and the Council over the broad interpretation of the Directive's provisions. There was a proposal that temporary protection could be prolonged indefinitely. Such a solution, however, has already caused criticism, as this is against the nature of any temporary mechanism to be extended indefinitely. There is also a risk that the political will to support the mechanism, now still strong, might vanish among member states, or some of them will start to question some of the provisions of the Implementing Decision. However, the basic challenge is for Ukrainians, who face uncertainty about their legal status, which might undermine their prospects and willingness for integration in the host countries. The year-by-year extension of the protection would put them into a state of permanent uncertainty, which is already one of the basic obstacles for them to take a long-term perspective (Wagner, 2024).

The Directive sets minimum standards of protection and imposes some obligations on the states implementing its provisions. These are described in Articles 12-15 of the Directive. The most important are an authorisation to engage in employment or self-employment activities (working rights), educational and vocational training for adults, providing necessary social welfare assistance and means of subsistence, access to suitable accommodation, or means to obtain housing, health care (including those with special needs), access to the educational system for those below 18 under the

same conditions as nationals of the host country, the right to family reunification (Council of the European Union, 2001). It must be noted that implementation of these obligations varied in different countries in terms of the scope of rights and benefits, quality of support, period of validity, or categories of displaced persons [27]. For example, Hungary and Poland distinguished beneficiaries of the temporary protection depending on their nationality – the temporary protection regime applies to Ukrainian citizens and their family members, while third country nationals or permanent residents of Ukraine are subject to different protection schemes, with different statuses or rules of registration (OECD, 2022).

Box 1: Accommodation allowance model for property owners who provide accommodation to Ukrainians with temporary protection in Slovakia

The accommodation allowance was introduced by the amendment to the Act on Asylum of 2002, effective March 2022. The providers of accommodation (both natural persons and legal entities) in Slovakia are entitled to the accommodation allowance according to the amended law. It is a financial contribution to the accommodation of refugees (persons with temporary protection in the territory of the Slovak Republic) under discounted conditions or free of charge. It is the accommodation provider, not the refugee, who is entitled to such a financial allowance. The amendments have extended the time frame for which the payment of the allowances is available.

Allowances have been continuously prolonged by the government on a 3-month basis. Originally, the state provided 5€ per night for the accommodation of a person younger than 15 years old, and 10€ per night for those older than 15. The legislation determines the maximum contribution that can be paid for the provision of accommodation, according to the number of habitable rooms. The government has adjusted and unified the maximum allowance for all age groups to 5€ per day. The maximum current available amounts are as follows:

- 390 EUR (previously 710 EUR) per calendar month for a one-room property
- 540 EUR (previously 1080 EUR) per calendar month for a two-room property
- 720 EUR (previously 1430 EUR) per calendar month for a three-room property
- 900 EUR (previously 1790 EUR) per calendar month for a four or more-room property

The allowances are currently granted until 30 June 2024.

Sources:

Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic. (2024a). *Informácie k príspevku za ubytovanie cudzinca podľa zákona o azyle*. https://www.minv.sk/?prispevok-za-ubytovanie

IOM Migration Information Centre in Slovakia. (2024). *Information and assistance in connection with the war in Ukraine*. https://www.mic.iom.sk/en/news/758-info-ukraine.html.

The instruments adopted by the government to help refugees and those private individuals who hosted them were also differentiated. For example, in Poland, individuals offering Ukrainians accommodation and meals could receive daily support of 40 PLN (approx. 9 EUR) per hosted person, but only for 120 days. This solution was introduced at the very beginning of the reception phase, but as it was only 120 days, it was short-term relief for those in need of accommodation. From the very

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[27] For review of the measures applied, which includes Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Romania see the OECD report (OECD, 2022).

beginning, those with temporary protection were entitled to collective accommodation centres free of charge. However, since March 1st, 2023, those who reside in Poland longer than 120 days must cover 50% of the cost of the accommodation (but not more than 40 PLN per person per day), while Those residing over 180 days must cover 75% (but not more than 60 PLN per person per day). The new rules are not applicable to those not able to work, because of disability, age, difficult life situation, pregnancy or childcare (Kaczorowska, 2023). In Slovakia, the strategy for supporting those who accommodate refugees is different, because it envisages long-term financial support for hosts (see Box 1 presenting the accommodation allowance model in Slovakia). While in Romania, the '50/20' program of financial support for those hosting refugees evolved towards direct cash payments to the refugees, under the condition of employment activity and school enrolment of minors (see Box 2).

Box 2: '50/20' programme to support Ukrainian refugees in Romania

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The Romanian government designed a specific program meant to support refugees from Ukraine. Initially, the hosting families received financial support through the '50/20' program, which allotted 50 RON per person per day for accommodation and 20 RON per person per day for food. The amounts were distributed as monthly cash payments to hosting families. However, because there were significant delays in reimbursements from the government, as of May 1st, 2023, this program was replaced by the '2000/600 program', offering increased financial support directly to refugees. Under this new scheme, families could receive 2000 RON (400 EUR) per month for accommodation (750 RON or 150 EUR for single-member households) and 600 RON (120 EUR) for food, for up to one year (until 30 June 2024). Under the terms of the second program, working-age adults must either be employed in Romania or demonstrate active job-seeking, while their children must be enrolled in some form of education in Romania.

Sources:
Emergency Government Decree 20/ 7 March 2022. https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/252480
Government Decree 368/26 April 2023.https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/267398
Guidelines for applying to the two programs (in Ukrainian/Romanian). https://protectieucraina.gov.ro/1/ocazare-temporara-si-locuire/

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Important characteristics of the new wave of refugees, no matter the recipient country, include some socio-demographic similarities. The fact that men of conscription age (18-60) were forbidden to leave the country[28] resulted in a significant share of women and children in the migratory wave. The main findings of the OECD study found that they had a 'higher than average' educational level, compared to other refugee groups and the Ukrainian general population, and the majority of them previously worked, especially in the health and educational sectors. The labour market inclusion of this group was relatively faster, compared to other refugee groups (OECD, 2023). The UNHCR survey, which provides data for the five EU countries of our cluster (plus Moldova), showed that 90% of refugees were women and children, and 77% of respondents had technical or university studies. Additionally, the majority of those surveyed experienced separation from at least one immediate family member: 90% in Czech Republic, 79% in Hungary, 85% in Poland, 78% in

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28 There are exceptions for fathers of at least three children, single fathers of children or guardians of disabled persons.

Romania, 80% in Slovakia (UNHCR 2022, July, p. 13). High levels of feminization and education also characterised those staying in Montenegro and North Macedonia as demonstrated by the IOM survey. In Montenegro, women constituted 85%, while 67% had bachelor's or master's degrees and 21% finished secondary school (IOM Montenegro, 2022a, p. 1-2). In North Macedonia, women also constituted 85%, while 79 % declared having a bachelor's or master's degree and 8% finished primary or secondary school (IOM North Macedonia, 2022, p. 2).

Both the right to work, guaranteed under temporary protection, and a high level of education should have created conditions for integration of refugees with the labour market, however, there are variations between countries in this regard. What seems to be common, however, is the language as one of the crucial barriers on the labour market, problems with childcare and working below qualifications. For example, the survey conducted in November 2022 in Poland showed that 65% of refugees found a job, 24% were looking for a job, while only 11% were occupationally inactive. At the same time, 46% declared that they work below their qualifications (compared to 33% declaring so among the pre-war labour immigrants). The ability to communicate in Polish is an important factor behind employment, because the survey showed that a declared command of the Polish language is positively correlated with a higher probability of being employed. Among refugees, 82% of those who declared a good command of the Polish language had a job, while among those who did not know Polish, the figure was 50%. It must be noted that there was a significant difference when it comes to the command of the Polish language between pre-war labour immigrants and refugees – in the first category, 58% declared good command of this language, while in the second category, 12% (67% 'understood a little bit') (Chmielewska-Kalińska et al., 2023, p. 10-20). In the Czech Republic, the survey conducted in July 2023 found that 67% of economically active refugees had a job. Full-time employment was growing, but unskilled jobs persisted - 58% of refugees worked in a profession demanding fewer skills than the one they performed back in Ukraine. These were more often those with a poorer knowledge of the Czech language. The wages of Ukrainians remain relatively low, as two-thirds of them earn up to 150 crowns net per hour. According to Ukrainians, the main barrier to finding a (better) job is insufficient knowledge of the Czech language and the absence of pre-school education and childcare (Šafářová et al., 2023).

In Slovakia, this picture looked a little bit different, because the employment rate among refugees in February 2023 was 34%, however, with a tendency to increase. The refugees in Slovakia also worked below their qualifications, because 38% worked in positions requiring the lowest level of qualifications, while only 7% of those in Slovakia had primary education (Veselková & Hábel 2023). Romania also represents the case with rather low labour inclusion, as compared to Poland and the Czech Republic. A survey conducted over the year 2023 showed that a significant share of refugees in Romania were occupationally inactive (46%), thus they were not looking for a job. Among those who were occupationally active, 54% were employed. The main barriers in looking for a job declared by respondents were language (55%), lack of knowledge on where to find a job (40%) and lack of jobs suited to qualifications (40%) (IOM Romania, 2024).

Finally, an important feature of those fleeing Ukraine is the pattern of settlement in the country of arrival. The refugees migrated mainly to the biggest cities, but it must be noticed that borderland regions were also significant areas of destination. These were not only border areas close to the Ukrainian border but also border areas located along the border with countries of better economic standing. These patterns are important as they clearly show the unequal distribution of the burden of hosting refugees and the challenges faced by different areas and local governments.

If we take a closer look at Slovakia and the spatial distribution of those granted temporary protections, we see that they immigrated primarily to four main regions. According to Figure 11 showing data for June 2022, the highest concentration is recorded by the Michalovce district in the eastern part of Slovakia, close to the border with Ukraine. The second most important area is located in the western part, with Bratislava and surrounding areas being the main immigration spots. The third important region is the northwest part with districts in Považie. The fourth region is located in the north of Slovakia, with the Liptovsky Mikulas district and surrounding districts as the main areas of concentration. The data for January 2024 show that two years after the massive influx of refugees, these were still the Bratislava Region (with 42 thousand) and the Koszyce Region in the east (with 14.5 thousand) which housed almost 50% of those with temporary protection (out of 114 thousand) (Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, 2024b).

Figure 11: Spatial distribution of granted temporary protections in Slovakia (number per 1000 inhabitants, data as of 21.6.2022)
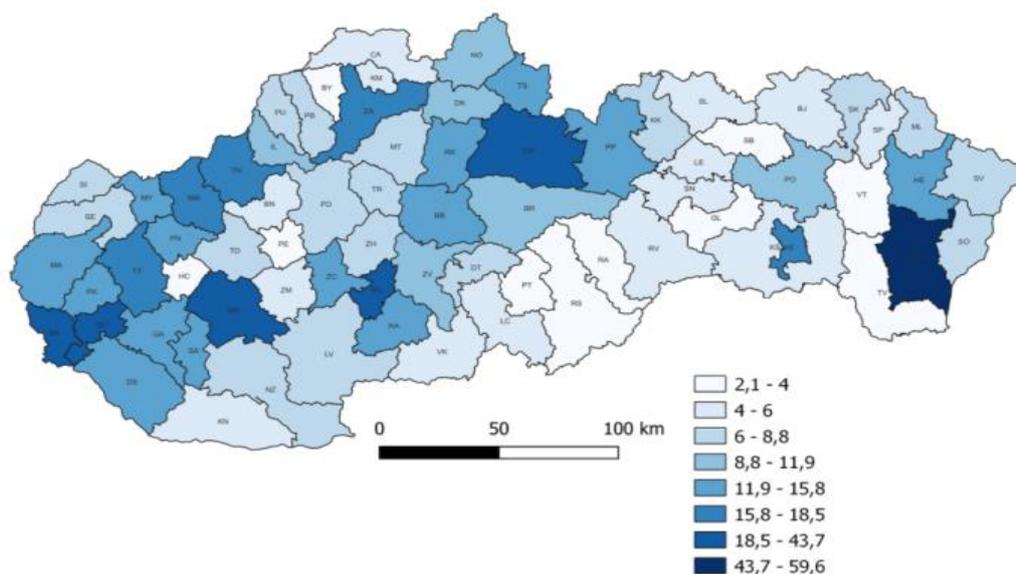
Source: Ministry of Interior of Slovak Republic (2022)

In Poland, especially in the first phase of reception, the number of the refugees also depended on the type and location of the given local government. These were cities located close to the border with Ukraine and the biggest cities, which received the highest share of refugees, however, the small towns and rural communes also hosted refugees (Ruch Samorządowy TAK! dla Polski, 2022, March 30). The estimates based on the geotrapping method showed that at the end of March 2022, around 70% of Ukrainians (both refugees and those who already lived in Poland before February 24) stayed in 12 of the biggest Polish cities and surrounding communes (metropolitan areas). These cities experienced a 17% increase in population (Cywiński & Wojdat 2022, p. 12;46). Those staying in the Czech Republic were also concentrated mainly in metropolitan areas, with around one-third located in three of the largest cities in the Czech Republic (Adunts, Kurylo & Špeciánová, 2022). Thus, the number of refugees accepted in particular Czech districts varied significantly. It only slightly

exceeded 1% of the population, for example, in Karviná or Opava districts. In contrast, Prague, Pilsen, or the Tachov district received numbers corresponding to 7% of their population (Münich & Protivínský, 2023). The study in Czech Republic has identified a positive association between the population of Ukrainian immigrants living there before the war and the number of Ukrainian refugees, suggesting, in line with the network theory, that refugees are attracted to locations in which they have relatives or friends, or at least know someone (Adunts, Kurylo & Špeciánová, 2022). In the case of Hungary, it was the capital city of Budapest where the concentration of the refugees was highest, with specific districts of the city (especially district X) being places of highest concentration. Additionally, the north-west region along the border with Austria (Győr-Moson-Sopron County) was also characterised by an over-average influx of refugees (Szabó & Hont, 2023). In Romania, these were also the biggest cities, especially the ones close to the border (both with Ukraine and Moldova), that experienced the highest inflow of refugees, but for the summer 2023, the majority of them stayed in Bucharest and the tourist areas of Constanța-Năvodari and Brașov (Expert Forum.Ro, 2023). In North Macedonia, between February and August 2022, it was the capital of Skopje which housed 67% of refugees, the next being Ohrid (8%), Prilep (6,6%), Bitola (5,6%). In this case, four cities absorbed 87% of all those who arrived after February 24 (IOM North Macedonia, 2022). Montenegro is interesting case when considering the pattern of settlement, because aside from the capital of Podgorica and Nikšić (industrial centre), this is the coastal region of Montenegro (including Budva, Bar, Tivat, Herceg Novi) where a significant number of refugees settled. The coastal region of Montenegro is the most tourist-attractive and expensive area to live, which indicates that it attracted Ukrainians in a better socio-economic position, who can afford an apartment and a more luxurious life (or had their relatives staying there before 2022). They are not necessarily attracted by the economic opportunities of the EU countries, where they can receive different forms of support and find better employment opportunities. The Ukrainians on the Montenegrin coast choose long-term rentals of luxury apartments, as well as villas with a view of the sea. It is reported that since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, real estate prices on the coast have skyrocketed ('Bogati Ukrajinci i Rusi', 2022). In the IOM assessment from May 2022, we can read that in Montenegro there were two collective accommodation centres, with a capacity of 120 beds each, but Ukrainians refused to move there because of the poor living conditions offered (IOM Montenegro 2022a). Another IOM assessment, from October 2022, found that the majority of respondents previously worked in highly qualified professions like the IT sector, services, trade, educational, academic, financial and health sectors. More than a quarter of them were still employed or self-employed in the IT or educational sector at the time of interviews (IOM Montenegro, 2022b). It shows that some of the refugees managed to maintain a source of income, and the nature of their profession suggests that they could work online. However, we must remember that among Ukrainian refugees in Montenegro, there was also a significant group of people in need. The needs assessment conducted on December 2022 by the Montenegrin Red Cross (among 449 heads of households representing 1,381 individuals) showed that 23% of respondents had chronic physical or mental health issues, 18 % had some kind of disabilities, 27% did not have enough food in the last month, 29% had funds available to cover only 1-2 months of expenses for basic needs (IFRC Montenegro, 2023). Thus, the picture of Ukrainian refugees in Montenegro shows a rather diversified community in terms of conditions of living.

5. The reaction of political institutions – comparative view

After 24 February 2022 the majority of key political leaders of all seven states strongly condemned Russian aggression against Ukraine; however, the differences in position could be observed from the beginning when it comes to help offered to Ukraine and relations with Russia, especially in the case of Hungary, and later, Slovakia. Despite their differences, all governments at that time demonstrated a welcoming stance towards refugees, opening their borders and streamlining border-crossing procedures. For example, in Poland, the process of liberalising procedures of border

Box 3: Special measures aimed at facilitating border crossings by Ukrainian refugees at the reception phase in North Macedonia

As a massive influx of Ukrainian refugees arrived across Europe, the government of North Macedonia implemented measures to facilitate their entry into the country's territory. One of these measures was an exemption from paying international car insurance for vehicles transporting refugees across the border. The exemption, introduced in March, was valid until 30 June 2022 for all cars with Ukrainian licence plates transporting refugees to North Macedonia or using its territory as a transitory route. The decision was made by the National Insurance Bureau in cooperation with the Insurance Supervision Agency. It must be stressed that it was also possible thanks to consensus among all 11 non-life insurance companies operating in North Macedonia. All possible costs of damages made by such vehicles were covered by the guarantee fund of the National Insurance Bureau. Additionally, the government stated that Ukrainian citizens would also be exempted from submitting a negative PCR test result on border crossings. Ukrainians could also register with the Public Health Insurance Fund and have their monthly fees covered by the government, thus allowing them to access health services.

 Sources:

Украинските бегалци во земјава нема да плаќаат за гранично осигурување [Ukrainian refugees in the country will not pay border insurance]. (2022, March 18). *360 Stepeni.* **https://360stepeni.mk/ukrainskite-begaltsi-vo-zemjava-nema-da-plakaat-za-granichno-osiguruvane/**

IOM North Macedonia. (2022, July-August). *Rapid impact assessment. Refugees from Ukraine – North Macedonia, Round #01*. https://dtm.iom.int/reports/north-macedonia-refugees-ukraine-rapid-impact-assessment-round-01-jul-aug-2022?close=true

crossing started already on February 19. On February 25, Commander-in-Chief of the Border Guard issued a decision allowing for entering Poland on foot through all road border crossings, where border with Ukraine is 535 km long with 8 road border crossings, which facilitated migratory movement (Jaroszewicz et al., 2022, p. 5). According to Border Guards data highest influx of refugees was registered in the first two weeks with an average of over 100 thousand daily crossings (Jaroszewicz & Krępa, 2022).[29] In Hungary Viktor Orbán personally supervised the humanitarian preparations along the Hungarian-Ukrainian border in the days following the outbreak of war. He visited the temporary refugee stations and talked to the first refugees. On February 26, 2022, Viktor Orbán stated that Hungary will admit all refugees from Ukraine and will jointly provide care with civil organisations; however, he drew a clear difference between helping Ukrainians fleeing the war and 'masses arriving

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[29] This openness and humanitarian attitude was later juxtaposed with a totally different policy towards refugees on the Polish-Belarusian border in the last minutes of Agnieszka Holland's movie 'Green Border'. The movie appeared in 2023 and sparked outrage among the members of the United Right government calling it 'anti-Polish' ('Government to show', 2023).

from Muslim regions in hope of a better life in Europe' ('PM Orbán: Every refugee', 2022). In North Macedonia, where the refugee influx was the smallest one, the government also took special measures to facilitate border crossings by exempting them from vehicle insurance (see the box 3).

In the first months after the Russian invasion, we could speak about a 'romantic phase' in Polish-Ukrainian relations. It was characterised by full and unconditional support for Ukrainians, manifested by the government of the United Right, the majority of political parties, and civil society, at the same time forgetting about conflicts over the collective memory, mainly the tragedy of ethnic cleansing, so called 'Volhynian massacre', organised by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army in 1943-44 in eastern Poland (Strzyżyński, 2023). The most visible sign of political will to support Ukrainian refugees and consensus around this issue was the March 12, 2022 law on assistance to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the armed conflict on the territory. The law got strong support from almost all parties in the parliament, because 439 members of parliament voted in favour, while 12 were against (Sejm of Poland, 2023). The only anti-Ukrainian force criticising, since the very beginning, enormous support for Ukrainian refugees was far-right Confederation, whose prominent figures still present pro-Russian inclinations and narratives (Alan-Lee, 2023). Since the morning of 24 February 2022, Romania, through the voice of president Klaus Iohannis, has strongly condemned 'the completely unjustified, illegal and unprovoked aggression of the Russian army against Ukraine, which endangers countless human lives" (Romanian Presidential Administration, 2022). The Romanian president's reaction was soon followed by a similar stance by the prime minister, as well as other high-level political leaders. Moreover, even the Russian national minority in Romania, constituted in the 'Community of Russian Lipovenes in Romania' and represented in the Romanian Parliament, issued a press statement in the first days of the conflict, asking 'insistently to stop the aggression!' (Community of Russian Lipovenes in Romania, 2022). However, after the initial tumultuous phase of the conflict, dissenting voices within the Romanian parliament emerged. These voices criticised Ukraine and called on the Romanian Government to cease its support. The individuals in question belong to the far-right Alliance for the Union of Romanians party, whose leadership has faced allegations of collaborating with Russian intelligence services (Defense Romania, 2023). Despite their efforts to launch an anti-Ukraine campaign, it had no impact on the Romanian government's unwavering support for Ukraine. In the Czech Republic, there was a widespread consensus on condemning the aggression, shared by the coalition government led by the Civic Democrat Party (ODS). In fact, the government had already provided artillery shells to support Ukraine as early as January 2022. The government allocated promptly 60 million euro for the first-aid packages for the refugees. Both the opposition party ANO and president Miloš Zeman condemned the aggression and expressed support for Ukraine–the president has changed his attitude from general sympathy towards Russia (Ogrodnik, 2022); nevertheless, the voices criticising the Ukrainian refugees appeared from the party Freedom and Direct Democracy pointing that the government is prioritising Ukrainians, instead of its own people when it comes to public spending (Havlik & Kluknavská, 2023).

The Balkan states also condemned the aggression. North Macedonian's president Stevo Pendarovski strongly criticized the situation, considering it as an attack on Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, breach of the basic principles of international law and a threat to Europe's overall stability (Dimeska, 2022). The government adopted the EU package of sanctions against Russia and offered humanitarian and military support to Ukraine. On March 3, 2022, the parliament adopted a declaration denouncing Russia's invasion (Stasiukevych & Malovec, 2022). Only 2 MPs of the small

Left party did not condemn the invasion and aligned itself with Russia, reproducing the official Kremlin's narrative about the 'special military operation' and accusing North Macedonia's foreign minister of Russophobia. The party was denounced by other parliamentary parties and Macedonian NGOs. The party is not however using anti-Ukrainian refugee rhetoric in its agenda (Marusic, 2022).[30] Montenegro adopted the EU package of sanctions against Russia already on March 2; however, there were some delays in implementing it due to the reluctance of the then prime minister with pro-Russian and pro-Serbian sympathies. Ultimately the sanctions were implemented by the new minority government in April (Stasiukevych & Malovec, 2022). Afterward statements were made by the most prominent Montenegrin state officials in support of Ukraine. At the beginning of 2023, on the anniversary of the invasion against Ukraine, the then president Milo Đukanovićsent sent a message of support to Ukraine. The new president of Montenegro, Jakov Milatović, elected in mid-2023, agreed with the position of his predecessor regarding support for Ukraine. In a speech before the United Nations General Assembly in New York, he said that Montenegro was firm 'in its condemnation of unprovoked and unjust Russian aggression' and that the country that he presides over 'provides relentless support to Ukraine' ('Milatović: Tri stuba', 2023). Both North Macedonia and Montenegro were put by Russia on the list of 'unfriendly' states.

The case of Hungary and Slovakia must be considered separately. The approach of Hungary was at the beginning strongly influenced by elections, which took place on 3 April 2022. The new geopolitical situation fundamentally changed key topics of the campaign. The war taking place next door placed the issue of peace, security and solidarity with Ukraine and those fleeing the war at the top of the voters' problem map, and the attitude towards the war inevitably became the most important topic (Dudlák, 2023). Viktor Orban, despite recalling the Soviet invasion against Hungary in 1956, did not express support for Ukrainian integrity and refrained from condemning Russia. Government communication was reserved and the prime minister emphasised the need for 'strategic calm', choosing staying out of the war approach as a priority. The government joined the EU sanctions against Russia, but refused to participate in the EU financial aid to Ukraine or to permit the transit of weapons to Ukraine via Hungarian territory (Merabishvili, 2023). The official government discourse on Ukraine, in addition to asserting minimal solidarity and the Hungarian interests, degraded the importance of the country and denied that it has any independent decision-making ability. According to this, during the long months of the war, Ukraine practically lost its sovereignty, as it was only sustained by external support, without which both the state and the army would collapse. Since the government cited war as the cause of all economic problems, such as, high energy and fuel prices, rising inflation, the most important slogan became pro-peace, i.e., that peace must be achieved at any cost. The opposition parties criticised that stance, expressing their support to Ukraine and openly identifying Russia as the aggressor; however, their politicians were portrayed as the ones dragging their country into the war (Kyriazi, 2022).

As already mentioned, at the same time the government manifested openness towards Ukrainian refugees, framing them as 'proper' refugees in contrast to those from the Middle East in 2015-2016. It must be stressed that among those fleeing to Hungary there were also ethnic Hungarians living in Transcarpathia oblast close to the Hungarian border. A lot of them had Hungarian as well as Ukrainian citizenship, thanks to the 2011 extension of citizenship for Hungarians living in neighbouring countries; consequently, there was a legal and language proximity with the host country.

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30 After the parliamentary election of May 2024, the Left party has 6 MPs.

However, at the very beginning of the activation of Temporary Protection, they were not entitled to it as holders of Hungarian nationality (this changed after March 8, 2022). The government-controlled media presented a very positive image of those fleeing Ukraine, with top politicians posing there as organisers of humanitarian support (Kyriazi, 2022).

In Slovakia, after February 2022, we can observe significant political change, which demonstrates replacement of the governing parties with a clear pro-Ukrainian (including support for refugees) approach, by those supporting Russia and critical towards helping the refugees. After the beginning of the full military invasion, all major state institutions expressed their condemnation. The prime minister, in response to the beginning of the military intervention, condemned the actions of Russian President Vladimir Putin. He added that self-defence of Ukraine will be helped in cooperation with allies in NATO and the European Union (Government Office of the Slovak Republic, 2022). President Zuzana Čaputová issued a statement in which she condemned the actions of Russia and emphasised Ukraine's right to defend itself and expressed the establishment of peace as an absolute priority. Together with the President of the National Council, they participated in the meeting of the Security Council of the Slovak Republic (President of the Slovak Republic, 2022). It can be stated that all the highest representatives of the Slovak Republic led by President Čaputová called the 'unprovoked invasion an act of military aggression and denounced the war' (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, 2023).

On the other hand, the opposition parties and leaders have boycotted sanctions against the Russian Federation claiming Slovakia's economic, political and historical dependence on Russian fossil sources including natural gas and oil. The opposition (SMER-SD; HLAS-SD; ĽSNS; REPUBLIKA) had already shown its position during the public discussion about the placement of NATO forces in Slovak territory before the Russian invasion, strongly opposing the US-Slovak defence agreement and calling it the abolishment of national interests (Mesežnikov, 2022). This is also one of the reasons why the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs has engaged and created a section of Myths and Facts about Ukraine.[31] The website responded to major arguments as formulated by the opposition parties, which were the reflection of the official Kremlin's narratives, i.e., Ukraine produces biological weapons; there is a genocide of the Russian-speaking population in Ukraine, among others (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of SR, 2024). The opposition parties claimed that the Slovak Republic has adopted too many helping measures, financial incentives and support for Ukrainians while ignoring the economic status of Slovaks during the post-pandemic and energy crisis (Dubóczi & Škríbová, 2022). These socio-economic and political circumstances have also significantly impacted the September 2023 parliamentary elections and enabled SMER-SD as a pro-Russian oriented party to win the election in 2023.

As the main ruling party, the SMER-SD has kept its approach to maintain the wide humanitarian support to Ukraine and Ukrainians, but the party has refused any military support. Motivated by their populist 'no more bullet to Ukraine', they argue that military support is only prolonging the military conflict. Such an attitude is true for Slovak far-right and Slovak national party (Yar, 2023). The current prime minister Robert Fico (SMER-SD) has repeatedly confirmed that the war between Russia and Ukraine is a frozen conflict that cannot be solved by sending additional ammunition and military equipment to Ukraine. Additionally, a new narrative appeared concerning the Ukrainian male-refugees of drafting age. The minister of defence estimated that around 300,000

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31 See the website: https://www.mzv.sk/en/web/en/news/myths-and-facts/myths-and-facts-about-ukraine (last time accessed 15.05.2024).

Ukrainian men of military age had taken refuge in Europe, and they should receive assistance to return and join the Ukrainian armed forces: 'They are sufficiently patriotic, so we have to motivate them and provide resources to these young men who are able to serve in the Ukraine army to go back and do so. It's surely better than sending our own soldiers there' (Melkozerova, 2024). While this opinion did not portray Ukrainian refugees in a derogatory manner, it implied that those of drafting age were not in the right place, and this might soon become another argument used by opponents against accepting refugees. In Poland there was already a public opinion poll conducted in May 2024 in which Poles have been asked whether Ukrainians of conscription age should be sent to Ukraine. On such question 51% responded positively, while 39% were against (10% 'did not know'). Opinion that Poland could help Ukrainian government in sending back Ukrainians of drafting age was expressed by the Polish minister of defence, but there are not any specific actions in that regard now (Kozubal, 2024). The end of temporary protection in March 2025 might be challenging, especially for this category of refugees, remembering that according to the new mobilization law in Ukraine, they will be deprived of consular services if not registered with the military draft commissions by July 18, 2024.

Table 10: The main political parties with anti-Ukrainian refugees position in the studied countries

Country	Name of the party	Votes gained in the latest parliamentary elections and governing status	The main components of narratives critical towards Ukrainian refugees
Czech Republic	SPD (Freedom and Direct Democracy, Svoboda a přímá demokracie)	parliamentary elections in 2021: 9,56% (20 MPs)/opposition	- Ukrainians should not get any governmental financial support, instead, Czech citizens should be supported - government is placing the needs of Ukrainians over the needs of its own people - Ukrainians are burden to health care system, job market and community safety - there is no war at the majority of Ukrainian territory, therefore, Ukrainian refugees should go back
Poland	Confederation (Konfederacja)	parliamentary elections in 2023: 7% (18 MPs)/opposition	- disapproval to 'welfare immigration' of Ukrainians and opposition to welfare payments for them as leading to 'financial catastrophe' - pointing at risks of 'ukrainization' of Poland, - exploiting fears of Ukrainian radical nationalism (including annexation of some cities in eastern Poland) and capitalising on old, historically determined anti-Ukrainian stereotypes shaped by the ethnic cleansing organised by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army in 1943-44 (so called 'Volyn massacre') - burden of reception of refugees, should be reciprocated by giving to Polish companies preferential treatment in the Ukraine's postwar reconstruction
Romania	Alliance for the Union of Romanians	parliamentary elections in 2020: 9.18% (33 MPs) Chamber of Deputies; 9.17% (14 MPs) Senate/opposition	- disagreement about the benefits that Ukrainian refugees have in Romania, including the benefits that the private sector offered to Ukrainian citizens (e.g. free private medical services, free accommodation) - at the beginning of the conflict they promoted a discourse denying the existence of a conflict in Ukraine and consequently attacking support for the Ukrainian state and Ukrainian refugees
Slovakia	SMER-SD and Slovak National Party (SNS)	parliamentary elections in 2023: 22,94% for SMER-SD (42 MPs) and 5,62% for SNS (10 MPs) /both being part of governing coalition	- too many helping measures and financial incentives for Ukrainians, while ignoring the economic status of Slovaks at home - refugees in conscription age should go fight for Ukraine according to the Ukrainian mobilisation law

Source: Authors own elaboration on the basis of the literature in the reference list

Despite the positive outlook towards the refugees among the most important political parties in the studied countries with the exceptions being described in the table 10, a new political force stimulating anti-Ukrainian sentiment emerged in 2023, mainly the farmers (but also truck drivers) dissatisfied with the import of Ukrainian agricultural products. The most contentious issue is the competition posed by Ukrainian grain, as well as products like eggs, poultry, and honey, to farmers in Poland, Slovakia, Romania, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Bulgaria. In June 2022, European Commission opened the internal EU market for Ukrainian agricultural production by lifting tariffs, which caused dissatisfaction among farmers of neighbouring countries. Next, in May 2023, the EU imposed temporary restrictions for exporting agricultural products from Ukraine to Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria; however, the restrictions were lifted on September 15, 2023. Since that moment each country has taken their own measure, either imposing unilateral ban on importing products from Ukraine (in cases of Poland, Slovakia, Hungary) or making agreements entailing import licences for selected recipients, and that was the case of Romania ('Neighbourly feuds', 2023).

Figure 12: The map of road blockades organised by the Polish farmers (supported by hunters) on February 20, 2024.
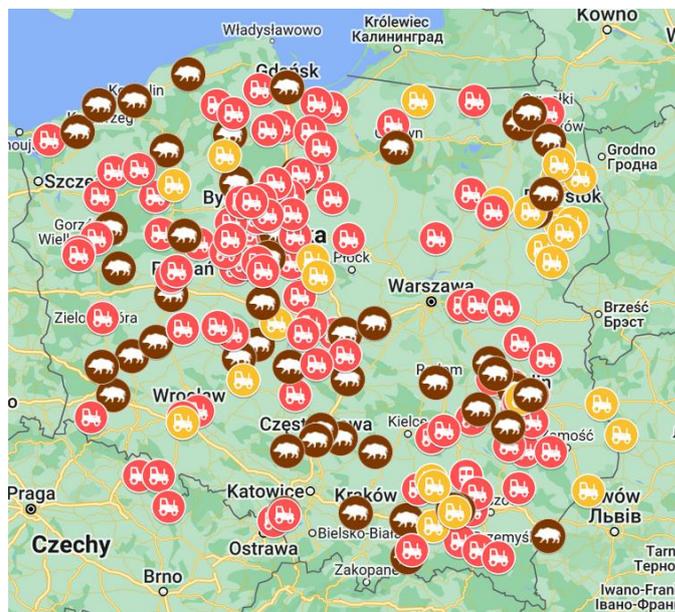
Source: Institute of the Agricultural Economy: https://instytutrolny.pl/ (accessed 20.02.2024)

However, the farmers were not satisfied with the existing solutions, claiming that Ukrainian products were still flowing into their territories (Konończuk, 2023). They were reinforced by hauliers who protested against cheaper transportation services provided by Ukrainian companies. For example, in Poland they blocked Ukrainian trucks trying to cross the Polish border (Kość, 2023). In January and February 2024, associations of farmers organized huge nationwide protests across all the EU countries in our cluster. The protests took the form of blockades of important roads all around the country. In the Czech Republic they disrupted traffic around Prague (Ahmatović, 2024), while in Poland the border with Ukraine (Easton, 2024). In Romania, farmers, together with hauliers, blocked the border with Ukraine and roads surrounding Bucharest ('Romanian farmers', 2024). The figure 12

shows the scope of protest organised by farmers associations in Poland almost 2 years after the full scale invasion. It demonstrates that after two years, a huge solidarity with Ukraine was confronted with economic interest of well organised pressure groups. It must be underscored that not only the Ukrainian import was a reason behind these protests in Central Europe, but also opposition to the European Green Deal. The farmers did not use slogans targeting the Ukrainian refugees; however, tensions with Ukraine over economic interest might have contributed to the reduction of sympathy to the Ukrainian diaspora.

The role of international organisations must be also stressed, because the main domestic institutional actors engaged in support for refugees, like governments, their agencies, local governments and the NGOs, interacted with international institutions. In this context a triple role of international organisations should be distinguished: providers of normative framework, providers of resources, and advocates.

All countries of the cluster signed the most important international act regulating rights of refugees–the 1951 United Nations Convention against Refugees. The United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees has its offices in each of the seven countries and makes an effort in assisting their governments in implementing the Convention and related acts. Thus, these countries (even if their governments violate the non-refoulement principle as the core of the 1951 convention) operate under some legal, humanitarian standards being the point of reference for evaluating their policies towards refugees. However, the most visible example of an international organisation providing normative framework in the time of the Ukrainian refugee crisis is the EU and its Directive on Temporary Protection adopted in 2001. The directive has been already described in the previous chapter, but it must be underlined once again that it was the first time in history when the directive was implemented. Although its invocation demanded a qualified majority, the move was supported unanimously by all members of the Council of the European Union. The implementation differed in each country; however, some minimum standards were agreed upon and allowed for providing basic security and freedom of movement to the millions of people entering the territories of the studied countries. Montenegro and North Macedonia also decided to implement this instrument, as they had already enshrined it in their laws on asylum. This shows that the EU played a role of provider of normative framework also for the countries outside of its borders, aspiring to be a part of the block.

Additionally, international organizations provided resources to different domestic actors for their work with the refugees. These resources might include financial aid from the special funds established by the EU: the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund for 2021-2027 and the Border Management and Visa Instrument. For example, during the absorption of Ukrainian refugees, Poland received 273 million Euros from the first fund and 162 million Euros from the second (Krzysztoszek, 2023). Another example is Hungary, where in February 2024, the Ministry of Interior published two calls for project proposals aimed at social integration of people displaced from Ukraine. The projects might be submitted by the NGOs, church entities, local governments and international or intergovernmental organisations. Among supported activities are Hungarian language lessons, labour market integration, school integration or training for professionals working with third country nationals. The projects will be financed from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (Budai, 2024).

It is not only the EU, but also specialised UN agencies that provide financial support. UNICEF supported the financial administration of the big Polish cities in their projects, especially the one focusing on children. Between May-December 2022 Warsaw received approximately 100 million

PLN, Lublin 19 million, Poznań 6 million, and Rzeszów 6 million (Jarosz & Klaus 2023, p. 79). It is worthy to point out the cash assistance programme implemented by the UNHCR, where the refugees receive direct cash payments. The programme is based on the assumption that having cash improves freedom and empowers the refugees, because they can make their own choices as to how to spend this money. The UNHCR in Romania in 2022 supported 43 thousand refugees with such assistance, while in 2023 it planned to provide one-time payment (568 RON per person) to the refugees with special needs (UNHCR Romania, 2023). There is also support in the form of providing necessary equipment by the UNHCR, like in the case of North Macedonia, where computers were provided to children from Ukrainian families. This activity was the result of cooperation between the UNHCR and the local NGO established by the Ukrainian community in Skopje 'Joint Home for Mothers and Children From Ukraine'. This was aimed at supporting the children's educational activity as they attended online classes, provided by the Ukrainian school system, and extracurricular activity (Interview with the UNHCR North Macedonia Staff Member, 2023).

Aside from financial aid, international organisations also support capacity building. In the first months of the refugee influx international organizations that already functioned in Poland, expanded their actions and increased the number of staff. For example, UNHCR, together with UNICEF, established 12 so-called Blue Dot Hubs, which were places where refugees from Ukraine could get psychological help, child friendly space, legal aid and counselling on public services in Poland, administrative support. These places were established in the biggest cities and on the Polish-Ukrainian border crossings (Sarrado, 2022). Eventually, they were shut down at the end of 2023, but in the time of greatest influx they constituted significant relief for overburdened administration. Such Blue Dot Hubs were also established in Romania (10 hubs, majority of them along the border with Ukraine) (UNHCR Romania, 2022), in Slovakia (5 hubs) (UNHCR Slovakia, 2023), Hungary (2 stationary hubs, 1 mobile) (UNHCR Hungary, 2022). There were no such Blue Dot Hubs in Montenegro and North Macedonia; however; the UN agencies were also actively involved in arranging support for refugees in cooperation with domestic institutions. In North Macedonia, the UNHCR alongside with the International Organization for Migrations, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and few other stakeholders, have started to collaborate on carrying out a protection profiling/needs assessment of Ukrainians. A Help Page and an Information Brief were opened by the UNHCR, where Ukrainian refugees could inform themselves on assistance and protection, and the access to rights, respectively. A Protection Working Group was established, within which the UNHCR, a few other UN agencies and non-governmental organisations (Red Cross, Legis, MK Caritas) worked to synchronise helping efforts and sharing information regarding the situation with the Ukrainian refugees in the country (UNHCR North Macedonia, 2022).

Important example of capacity building by the UNHCR is the Refugees Response Plan. The Refuge Response Plan is a strategic approach used by the UNHCR to support host government in dealing with complex refugee situation through planning and coordinating of international assistance. It is a platform that facilitates cooperation between different partners, raises funds for them and allow for coherent response to a specific refugee situation. Part of the plan is assessment of funding required by the partners involved in order to address needs of refugees. The Response Plan constitutes some framework for more systemic and long-term vision of approaching refugees at the country level, which in the absence of the governmental strategies for reception and integration of a huge quantity of refugees, might be at least imperfect substitute. Additionally, it includes not only the agencies falling under the umbrella of the UN (mainly UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF, WHO) and governments of

the hosting countries, but also a significant number of international and local NGOs. They work together within the inter-agency Refugee Coordination Forum, or equivalent, established

Table 11: Regional Refugee Response Plan for Ukraine - overview of the countries situations at the end of 2023

Country	Number of partners involved	Number of people reached with different forms of assistance (thousand)	Individuals receiving cash assistance (thousand)	Funds received (million $)
Czech Republic	4	323	3	33
Hungary	37	98	28	25
Poland	83	883	203	225
Romania	34	257	100	78
Slovakia	18	191	35	41

Source: UNHCR. (2024a). Regional Refugee Response Plan for the Ukraine Situation. Final Report 2023.

at the country level. The Refugee Response Plan for the Ukraine Situation was established in March 2022 and, at the very beginning, it included only 12 international partners, estimating that 550 million USD is needed to respond to the refugee situation (UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe, 2022). In the course of time the country response plans were established in the majority of the Eastern European states, including new stakeholders from the NGO sector. The table 11 shows a brief overview of achievements within such response plans at the end of 2023 in 5 countries of our cluster (there were no such response plans in North Macedonia and Montenegro). We see that in some countries these plans involved significant number of partners, engaged in different forms of assistance like child protection, non-formal education programmes, health care services, training or preventing gender-based violence.

International organisations are also engaged in monitoring the refugee situation and conduct some advocacy activity to ensure right to protection as prescribed by international law. The positive reaction of the Central European governments opening their borders for the Ukrainian refugees, allowed many observers to see a double standard in approaching people in need. The differences between the approach in 2015/2016 and the approach in 2022 were visible, including in how it was portrayed/covered by the media. (Venturi & Vallianatou, 2022; Korkut & Fazekas 2023; Sales, 2023). However, the 2022 influx from Ukraine was also marked by discrimination of some categories of refugees, as was reported by journalists, civic activists and those discriminated against. These reports were referred to by international organisations calling for equal treatment. One of the examples of that are reactions of high-ranking UN officials after reports about discrimination of third country nationals escaping from Ukraine to Poland. The media reports, signals sent to the Polish Ombudsman and accounts of migrants indicated that students from Africa and Asia got different treatment when waiting in the line to cross the border with Poland and some of them were transported close to the German border, although they wanted to go somewhere else in Poland (Mikulska & Rumieńczyk, 2022). In reaction to these reports UN High Commissioner for Refugees stressed that 'it is crucial that receiving countries continue to welcome all those fleeing conflict and insecurity—irrespective of nationality and race' (Reilly & Flynn 2022, p. 3). In July 2022 the UN special rapporteur on human rights of migrants pointed out double standards in approaching Ukrainians and those third country citizens trying to cross the Polish-Belarusian and Polish-Ukrainian border (UN Human Rights Office, 2022).

The Roma people fleeing Ukraine also face different forms of discrimination which caused reactions from international organisations. It is estimated that before the invasion there were 400 thousand Roma people in Ukraine, with 10-20% lacking documents confirming their Ukrainian citizenship or residential status. This was one of the reasons behind denying them entrance into neighbouring countries (Lecerf, 2022). Study conducted in Hungary found that the Roma from Zakarpathia faced different forms of discrimination like waiting for a long time on the border to cross it, reluctance of humanitarian organisations to place them in refugee centres, difficulties with renting private flats and lack of any humanitarian assistance ('Hungary: discriminatory', 2022). Study of situation of Roma people fleeing to Poland also found that they faced discriminatory treatment, because 'the support system set up by the state perceived Ukrainian Roma fleeing the war simply as those who wanted to take advantage of the aid system, without noticing or ignoring their Ukrainian citizenship' (Mirga-Wójtowicz et al., 2023, p. 5). There are also reports of discrimination of Roma fleeing to the Czech Republic and Romania, where they were refused meals or were packed in prison-like facilities (Kottasova, 2022). This was confirmed by monitoring missions of the staff from the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights. The monitoring visits were conducted in March 2022 in Poland, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Czech Republic, with focus on border crossing points and the facilities hosting refugees. As a result, the Commissioner called for 'more coordinated efforts by all member states to meet the humanitarian needs and protect the human rights of people fleeing the war in Ukraine' and 'more proactive assistance and orientation in seeking protection' for the vulnerable groups (Council of Europe, 2022). Following these reports the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights also called for ensuring 'equal treatment for Roma fleeing Ukraine (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2022). On the occasion of International Roma Day in April 8, 2022 European Commission published a statement appealing to member states for inclusive treatment of Roma community, estimating that 100 thousand of its members fled Ukraine: 'People fleeing war must always be able to find a safe place and shelter, regardless of racial or ethnic origin, colour, religion or belief, or sexual orientation. This is particularly important for Roma people, some of whom are stateless and might not always have the relevant documents such as ID or passport' (European Commission, 2022). Advocacy actions in favour of the Ukrainian Roma community were also undertaken by the UNHCR, which organised two days conference in Moldova (another important destination for this group) with participants representing Roma community from Hungary, the Czech Republic, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Germany (UNHCR, 2024b). These actions naturally are not enough to eradicate deeply rooted prejudices and problems faced by the Roma community, but they constitute significant voice reminding about universalistic principles enshrined into international law protecting refugees.

The last institutional sector to be analysed is the local government, which has proven to be very important, both at the reception phase in the first months of influx and in the second phase aimed at integration of refugees into social and economic life of the municipalities. It must be pointed out that already before 2022 these were the biggest cities which attracted immigrants; thus, compared to the central authorities, some municipalities already had experience with integrating immigrants by establishing special community centres, contact points or social dialogue commissions (Soltész et al., 2021). Additionally, as already underlined in the previous chapter, the general pattern of migration and settlement of the Ukrainian refugees was characterised by unequal distribution, with the biggest municipalities attracting the highest share of them, together with areas close to the Ukrainian border (or borders of countries offering better opportunities). This means that the local authorities faced the

biggest challenge and burden of hosting refugees, that is why at the same time they are interested in integrating them with the local life and expect the central government systemic solutions.

Box 4: 'Territorial Governmental Round Table' in Poland – the local government initiative to formulate and advocate in favour of a long-term strategy for integration of Ukrainian refugees.

On May 8-9, 2022, the 'Territorial Governmental Round Table' was organised in Wrocław in order to work on recommendations for systemic changes necessary to design long-term strategy for the integration of Ukrainian refugees. The Round Table was initiated by country-wide organisations integrating local government officials: YES! For the Poland Local Government Movement, the Union of Polish Cities, and the Union of Polish Metropolises. As the local governments were on the front lines of the reception of the massive influx of refugees, their representatives were aware of the necessity to advocate in favour of a systemic and long-term approach to integrate refugees after the reception phase was over. The Ukrainian refugee situation was defined as a both challenge and opportunity to work on a systemic migration policy based on cooperation between the central government, local self-government and NGOs. The two-day meeting gathered 120 representatives of different sectors. Aside from the local government officials, academic circles, and business community, there were representatives of 29 non-governmental organisations. The participants were divided into 8 subtables, each constituting a working group addressing different topics:

- social integration and civic activities,
- labour market, economy, and social economy,
- housing,
- education and science,
- finance, allocation of tasks, and legislation,
- public safety and cybersecurity,
- healthcare and social welfare,
- support for Ukraine, networking, and European cooperation.

The result of proceedings was a White Paper, with diagnoses and recommendations, which was later handed to the prime minister, president, and senate.

Sources:

Territorial Government Round Table in Wrocław. (2022, 8-9 May). *White Paper. The challenges of systemic support for refugees at the local and national level.* **https://www.wroclaw.pl/beta2/files/dokumenty/129661/Bia%C5%82a%20ksi%C4%99ga_version%20EN.pdf**

Waplak, E.,& Wołodko, M. (2022, May 21). Samorządowy Okrągły Stół w sprawie uchodźców z Ukrainy. *Wrocław.pl.* **https://www.wroclaw.pl/dla-mieszkanca/samorzadowy-okragly-stol**

In the case of Poland we might say that the local government since the very beginning compensated for inefficient preparation of the central authorities to provide assistance, by taking advantage of its decentralised character (Pędziwiatr & Magdziarz 2022, p. 367). The phase of reception was characterised by experts as an 'institutional bricolage' (Łoziński & Szonert, 2023, p. 22). It means that the Polish government and society suddenly faced the necessity to organise/improvise actions aimed at receiving a massive influx of refugees, these actions being spontaneously implemented by a variety of actors from different sectors and levels of state-society intersection. Admittedly, in the years preceding the influx of refugees the local government experienced weakening of its competences and financial situation as a result of recentralization efforts implemented by the ruling coalition (Swianiewicz et al., 2023). However this was still a relatively strong, active and autonomous institutional sector with significant positions of mayors at municipal

level, having under their disposal experienced administrative apparatus being well embedded in the local context. Important characteristic of the municipal authorities' support for refugees (especially in the big cities) was usage of already existing networks of cooperation with the local non-governmental organisations and Ukrainian community. These networks also used support of international organisations (Jarosz & Klaus 2023, p. 36). Already in May 2022 the representatives of the local governments (and the ngo sector) started to think about long-term and systemic solutions, which was indicated by organisation of the 'Territorial Governmental Round Table' in order to work on recommendations for changes (see the Box 4).

Also in Romania the local public administration played a vital role in the on-the-ground execution of policies and services for refugees, however in this case it was embedded in the central government's strategy for integration. The initial phase involved a swift response, characterised by the establishment of refugee centres where Ukrainians without accommodation in Romania could find shelter. Those centres were supported by the local authorities who made sure that the Ukrainians residing there received essential supplies for a dignified life, funded through local government resources. At the same time, especially in the local governments which were far from the border crossing points with Ukraine, donation centres were opened. The main goal of these centres was to gather essential supplies and transport them to reception centres in Ukraine, where they are distributed to those in need. The second stage was characterised by implementation of the central government's strategy enshrined in the Emergency Ordinance no. 100/29 from June 2022. The Ordinance adopted 35 action plans including various measures aimed at integration of Ukrainian refugees, such as preventing risks of abuse and exploitation, facilitating access to the labour market, offering language courses at the workplace, providing advice on starting a business or a start-up, ensuring access to unoccupied housing for Ukrainians, continuing education for Ukrainian children and students (Government of Romania, 2022). The cooperative approach of local public authorities has eased the execution of plans endorsed at the central level. Local leaders have taken a proactive role, specifically in preparing schools for Ukrainian students, locating social housing for refugees, and collaborating with county employment agencies to pinpoint employment prospects for Ukrainians (Dincă et al., 2023).

When it come to the Romanian local governments near the border crossing points, their involvement was much greater than in other public administrations in the country. Therefore, the local governments of Sighetu Marmatiei (Maramures County), Halmeu (Satu Mare County), Siret (Suceava County), and Isaccea (Tulcea County) must be treated separately from the rest of the public authorities. Of course, there are more border crossing points between Romania and Ukraine, but the larger flows of refugees have passed through points in the cities mentioned above. The mobilisation of local authorities in these cities was much more complex because, in addition to the measures adopted at the national level, they had to ensure the proper functioning of border crossing points and manage the large influx of Ukrainians entering the territory of Romania while simultaneously ensuring the sustainable delivery of services to its own population. Considering the fact that the budgets of the mentioned local authorities are not among the largest, compared to the budgets of other authorities in the country, they had to resort to other sources of funding. The study carried out by Dincă et al. (2023) reveals that the main sources of funding used by the local governments in the migrant crisis were donations and sponsorship (40,98%), local budget funds (27,87%) and European funds (13,11%). (Dincă et al., 2023).

In Hungary these were local authorities in the towns along the Ukrainian borders (together

with humanitarian NGOs) which arranged basic help in the first days of reception. The refugees further travelled to Budapest, where bottom up initiatives constituted the main form of support provided to them at the Nyugati and Keleti railway stations (Eross, 2022, p. 78). The government's actions, at that stage, were limited to lifting restrictions on border crossings, but also providing free of charge train travelling (Korkut & Fazekas, 2023). Yet, the local government in Hungary is

Box 5: Regional Assistance Centre for Help to Ukraine in Ostrava in Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic, the most active institutional actors in assisting refugees from Ukraine became the regional governments, despite their lack of previous experience with such an agenda. In all 14 Czech regions, the Regional Assistance Centres for Help to Ukraine (KACPU) were established and became responsible, inter alia, for the registration of refugees from Ukraine with the Foreign Police, arranged temporary protection and offered assistance for navigating their further stays in the Czech Republic. Moreover, the centres provided fundamental aid to Ukrainian refugees, including accommodation, food, and essential material support. Additionally, the centres received support from firefighters who actively participated by providing transportation and later aiding in the registration of Ukrainians in Czech municipalities. It must be noted that in the first phases of the refugee influx, the problem faced by these institutions was a lack of experience of all officials working there, because their usual agenda differed from the KACPU activities, and they were assigned to KACPU according to the actual needs of each KACPU rather than their professional specialisation and everyday tasks. However, the decline in the number of inflowing refugees was accompanied by the professionalisation of these centres. Regarding the Moravian-Silesian region, with Ostrava being its capital, approximately 33,000 Ukrainians have sought assistance at the KACPU since the onset of the refugee crisis. In 2023, the number of registered Ukrainian refugees notably declined to 6,407, starkly contrasting the 26,345 recorded in 2022. With the decline of the inflow of new immigrants, all actors participating in KACPU decided on the professionalisation of the centres. All KACPU employees are now specialised in specific agendas, and the situation has been improved with the professionalisation of the centres. Currently, all administrative assistance is provided to incoming Ukrainians at the KACPU premises. There are representatives of the Department of Migration and Asylum Policy, health insurance companies, the Foreign Police Service, representatives of the administration of refugee facilities, and an interpreter.

Sources:
ČTK. 2024. 'V Moravskoslezském kraji je 22 tisíc uprchlíků z Ukrajiny, problém je čeština'. Ostravská Drbna - zprávy z Ostravy a Moravskoslezského kraje. **https://ostravska.drbna.cz/zpravy/spolecnost/032-v-moravskoslezskem-kraji-je-22-tisic-uprchliku-z-ukrajiny-problem-je-cestina.html**

Jelínková, M., Plaček M., & Ochrana, F. (2023). The Arrival of Ukrainian Refugees as an Opportunity to Advance Migrant Integration Policy. *Policy Studies*, December, *45*(3–4), 507-531.

Jelínková, M., &Valenta, O. (2022). *Migration integration in the Czech Republic: An Analysis of the Priorities the Country Has Set and Its Support for Them*. Czech Sociological Review, *58* (1), 71–97.

Moravskoslezský kraj 2024. Krajské asistenční centrum pomoci Ukrajině. **https://www.msk.cz/cs/kraj/krajske-asistencni-centrum-pomoci-ukrajine-10758/**
Interviews with the experts from the Ministry of Interior directly involved in the coordination of the MoI activities in KACPU in Ostrava, February 2024
MV ČR. (2024). *Oficiální webový portál pro cizince, kteří žijí nebo chtějí žít v České republice.*. *https://frs.gov.cz/navstivte-krajske-asistencni-centrum-pomoci-kacpu/*

characterised by low autonomy, which constrains possibilities for conducting own policies towards immigrants, consequently many of its activities remained at symbolic level (Pędziwiatr & Magdziarz 2022, p. 367). Already, at the end of March 2022 government centralised the coordination of reception by channelling the refugees to newly opened transit centres at the BOK Stadium in Budapest (Dobiás & Homem, 2022, p. 18). In Slovakia the reception of the refugees was handled mainly by the regional governments and NGOs (Hudec, 2022)[32]. For example in the eastern part of Slovakia, it was the Košice Self-Governing Region, an entity responsible for crisis management, which coordinated the most activities related to reception and help. These activities were implemented through a large 'capacity centre' in Michalovce-Stráňany. Similar capacity centres were established in Bratislava, Nitra, Žilina and Humenné (Dobiás & Homem, 2022, p. 24). In the Czech Republic the most active institutional actors in providing direct assistance have been the regional governments that had almost non-existent previous experience with accommodating immigrants (Jelínková et al., 2023). In this case a special Regional Assistance Centres for Help to Ukraine were established in 14 regions and in the course of time they professionalised their approach to the refugees (see the Box 5). In the cases of Montenegro and North Macedonia the local government engagement was small, partly due to the highly centralised process of immigration management. The refugee flow was managed mainly by central authorities, cooperating with international organisations specialising in support for refugees (UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF) and humanitarian NGOs (Red Cross, Caritas). Active roles were also played by few NGOs established by the Ukrainian diaspora.

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[32] Although the Ministry of Interior tried to outsource this to a private company as well. The contract signed between the ministry and the company sparked criticism, because the owner was connected with the governing party OlaNo and personally knew the interior minister (Hudec, 2022).

6. The reaction of host societies – comparative view

There are two components of interest in this part of analysis. The first one is how the civil society reacted to the refugees and the second one regards public opinion dynamics. When considering the civil society, it must be remembered that before the massive influx of refugees in 2022 the civil society sector experienced serious difficulties, because of the pandemic of Covid-19. The pandemic worsened the regulatory environment for the NGOs as governments introduced legislative changes restricting basic freedoms and lowered standards of dialogue with the civil society sector. The NGOs have also been hit financially, because of limited access to funding from the state and donors less willing to support the sector in the time of economic crisis. A lot of smaller organisations suspended their activities. In fact, the pandemic exaggerated already existing problems of this sector, further undermining its institutional capacities and long-term prospects (Balkan Civil Society Development Network, 2021; Pazderski et al., 2022). Adding to this impact, we must point at the differences between the strength of civil society between countries included in our cluster. In order to compare them, we can use the Civil Society Organizations Sustainability Index published by the United States Agency for International Development where the strength of the CSOs sustainability stretches from 1 to 7, with 7 being the lowest. The data for 2021 showed that the Czech Republic was the best performer (2,5 points), followed by Poland (2.9), Slovakia (3.0), Romania and North Macedonia (both with 3.6), Hungary and Montenegro (both 4,0). Additionally, between 2015-2021 Poland and Hungary experienced significant decline in the scoring of sustainability of their civil society sectors[33].

In the light of the challenges mentioned above, it is interesting to note that the civil society played a crucial role in reception and integration of the refugees, being compensation for inefficient governmental policies or lack thereof. Its flexibility, experience, social capital, determination and embeddedness in the local contexts allowed for fast reactions and performing different functions (not only pure humanitarian help, but also implementing/advocating in favour of long-term solutions and watchdogging activity). Moreover, in some countries, the massive influx of Ukrainians also had a transformative impact on receiving societies, including their NGO sector. However, the scale of engagement of civil society actors was also determined by the number of refugees coming and the number of organisations working with immigrants before. For example, there was a difference between Poland, Czech Republic, Romania on one side and North Macedonia or Montenegro on the other – in the last two countries there were few NGOs actively involved in working with the Ukrainian refugees. When analysing this engagement we should distinguish three types of actors:
a) NGOs having already professional experience with support for immigrants
b) NGOs that changed they profile towards helping refugees or NGOs created on the wave of influx of Ukrainian refugees
c) ordinary citizens-volunteers who spontaneously provided support or engaged themselves in actions coordinated by NGO and local governments

In Poland, before the February 24, there were NGOs with experience related to migration and

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33 Hungary worsened from 3.4 to 4, while Poland from 2.1 to 2.9. The data are taken from the CSO Sustainability Index Explorer: https://csosi.org/?region=EUROPE

refugees—the main 9 organisations being integrated into the Migration Consortium. However, according to the 'open letter' published by this Consortium there were 55 organisations altogether in Poland, many of them small and working on a local scale, having experience of working with migrants (Migration Consortium, 2022). These were important organisations, which in the first months of the influx of refugees coordinated and initiated various forms of humanitarian support. These actions were implemented in cooperation with a variety of other actors like local governments, international organisations, and volunteers who joined their ranks. This is also the time of developing unprecedented cooperation between third sector and private entrepreneurs, who supported efforts to help refugees in the form of transportation, material help, housing and employment (Jarosz & Klaus 2023, p. 6). Similar body was set up in Czech Republic already in 2003—the Consortium of NGOs Assisting Migrants, which is an umbrella for 18 NGOs working with immigrants. The Consortium collaborated with other actors, such as the Ministry of Interior and the municipality of Prague, on the creation of the web platform *'Pomáhej Ukrajině'*. The platform was established already in February 2022 as an online tool to match the public offers of help in different areas with both the needs of individual Ukrainian refugees and organisations helping migrants ('Konsorcium nevládních organizací pracujících s migranty', 2023). One of the most active Czech NGOs in providing assistance to Ukrainian refugees was the 'People in Need'. This organisation has been helping people in eastern Ukraine since the beginning of the war in 2014 by providing them with humanitarian aid, but also development assistance in the form of education of young people and the economic development of agricultural areas (People in Need, n.d.). In Slovakia, in November 2022, the Ministry of the Interior signed special memorandum on cooperation with 11 NGOs actively engaged in supporting Ukrainian refugees, which gives some picture of number of organisations professionally working with immigrants with some of them being also religious organisations like Slovakian Red Cross, Slovakian Catholic Charity, Slovakian Maltese Help ('Governance of Migrant Integration in Slovakia', 2024). However, there were more than 100 other NGOs engaged in such support (Gregorová et al., 2024). In Hungary when the first refugees arrived at the Ukrainian–Hungarian border, the first organisations that helped were the Red Cross and the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta, which responded to the wave of refugees and started providing care for the refugees. The latter organisation supported Ukraine a long time before 2022, cooperating with the Maltese organisations located in Ukraine in locations like Berehove (border district with the biggest Hungarian minority estimated at 100 thousand ethnic Hungarians), Lviv or Iwano-Frankiwsk. Already before the full scale invasion the organisation improved its logistic capacities along the border with Ukraine, having 6 charitable groups and offices there (Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta, 2023). In the case of Hungary, the role of religious charity organisations seems to be important in helping refugees. They are integrated in the Charity Council (Catholic Charity, the Hungarian Reformed Charity, the Hungarian Maltese Charity, the Hungarian Inter-church Aid, the Baptist Charity and the Hungarian Red Cross) and enjoy financial support of the government, being also the partner for the UNHCR in Hungary ('Government to provide HUF 3 billion', 2022).

In North Macedonia one of the most active organisations specialised in work with immigrants, which engaged in support for Ukrainian refugees, were Open Gate – La Strada (La Strada, n.d.) and the Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA, n.d.). These organisations had special focus on counteracting human trafficking and providing legal aid for asylum-seekers, thus they were important providers of legal support to those fleeing Ukraine. Additionally, the Macedonian Red Cross played a significant role in providing humanitarian support (but also Macedonian language

classes) in partnership with central authorities and other international organisations. According to its Response Plan for North Macedonia 1,300 people from Ukraine will be assisted until December 2025 (IFRC North Macedonia, 2023). In Montenegro the NGO Civil Alliance, having a professional experience in legal aid to asylum seekers, provided free of charge legal advice to Ukrainians seeking for temporary protection or Montenegrin identity number. The organisation opened new offices in Bar and Herceg Novi to be more accessible for Ukrainian community, ensuring also a legal adviser at the Red Cross premises in Budva, Kotor and Tivat (Civic Alliance, 2022). As in the case of North Macedonia, the Red Cross in Montenegro also played a crucial role as provider of humanitarian help, with an estimate of five thousand Ukrainians receiving assistance until December 2025 (IFRC Montenegro, 2023).

As presented above, the engagement of NGOs did not happen in an institutional vacuum, because it usually involved some less or more coordinated cooperation with ordinary citizens, local government, international organisations and central authorities. Obviously, the pace of events and variety of actors involved in the first phase of reception demanded intensification of coordination efforts. Romania might be an example of institutionalisation of cooperation between the

Figure 13: Inter-agency communication scheme describing cooperation between the government and the third sector in Romania.
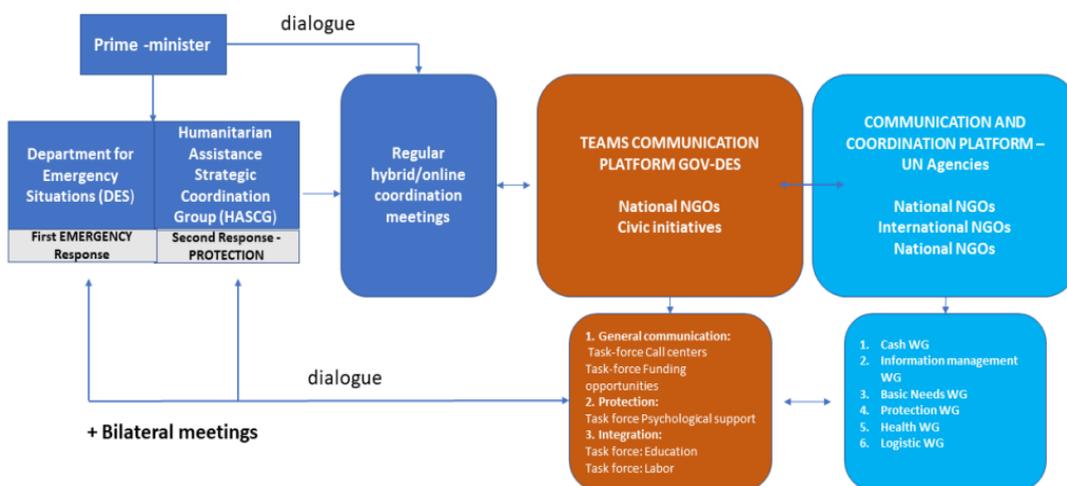
Source: Chancellery of the Prime Minister of Romania (2022, April 21).

government and civil society sector, showing at the same time complex situations faced by the country with the longest border with Ukraine. According to a report by the Chancellery of the Prime Minister of Romania in April 2022, approximately 160 national non-governmental organisations and over 2,000 volunteers were consistently active at Romania's border crossings with Ukraine (Dincă et al., 2023). In the early stages of the crisis, civil society and volunteers actively engaged in establishing mobile emergency services, encompassing accommodation, transportation, food, translation, and information (Petrescu et. al., 2023). However, lacking organisation, the efforts of the volunteers may become disorderly or less effective amidst the increasing number of Ukrainian refugees. This situation gave rise to the need for coordinating civil society assistance. Consequently, just four days

after the outbreak of the crisis, on February 28, 2022, the first meeting between the Romanian government and civil society representatives was convened in response to a request from a coalition of NGOs. During this meeting, representatives from civil society advocated for the establishment of a collaborative national-level steering group, the development of tools to address logistical challenges in aid distribution and the inclusion of civil society representatives in the management of refugee camps (General Secretariat of the Government of Romania, 2022). As a result of this meeting, a permanent dialogue channel between central public authorities and civil society was established, as described in Figure 13. Through this channel, the activities of NGOs, companies, or volunteers involved in supporting Ukrainian refugees could be coordinated. Another advantage of opening this channel of communication has been the facilitation of public-private partnerships that have streamlined the implementation of beneficial measures for refugees.

Box 6: The Ukrainian diaspora's integration and support in Montenegro thanks to the ' Dobro Djelo' NGO

One of the ways in which Ukrainians in Montenegro are associated is within the NGO sector. In this context, the most active and likely the most significant organisation is the NGO 'Dobro Djelo' (Good Deed). This NGO was founded in Podgorica in March 2022 by those fleeing Ukraine. From the initiative group, they have become the umbrella organisation of the Ukrainian diaspora in Montenegro, representing the Ukrainian community during official meetings with the authorities of Montenegro. The organisation is cooperating with the Embassy of Ukraine in Montenegro, Caritas, UNICEF, UNHCR and IOM. It is a volunteer organisation with 50 members working across the country in the Ukrainian Community Centres in Podgorica, Budva, Bar, Herceg-Novi. There are four official goals of the organisation:

1. Creation of an information environment and effective communication channels for Ukrainians in Montenegro
2. Development of a clear and transparent system for legalising the stay of Ukrainians in Montenegro, ensuring a safe and comfortable environment for everyone
3. Managing a strong, responsible, mutually supportive Ukrainian community in Montenegro
4. Expansion of the association's interaction zones with local and international companies and communities

So far, 'Dobro Djelo' has organised or participated in a number of activities of importance for Ukrainians in Montenegro. For example, in cooperation with UNICEF, they have set up a helpline for psychological and social assistance for the refugees. They have also established a Ukrainian library with 5 thousand books, Ukrainian Saturday school, or a sensory room for children with special needs. The scope of their activities is well presented by numbers they publish: 3 thousand documents have been translated, 5,5 thousand citizens' complaints have been processed, 3,5 thousand humanitarian aid kits have been handed out, almost 200 children participated in summer camps, 300 people finished a basic course of Montenegrin language, and 18 specialists (educators and psychologists) got the opportunity to work. 'Dobro Djelo' has become an important voice and platform for the Ukrainian community arriving in Montenegro

Sources:
The website of Dobro Djelo association: https://dobrodjelo.me/en.html
The movie presenting the activities of Dobro Djelo:https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWcSRv5frGY

Aside from the NGOs experienced in working with migrants, the refugee influx had also some transformative impact on the NGOs sector, because organisations which did not have migration-related actions within their profiles started to help refugees, where a lot of them previously worked in the field of social inclusion or education. For example, a survey conducted in May 2022 in the Polish region of Greater Poland has shown that out of 108 surveyed NGOs supporting Ukrainian refugees 65% was not engaged in such actions before February 24, which means that they changed their profile (Centrum PISOP, 2022). Among NGOs supporting refugees there were NGOs established by Ukrainian diaspora, which before February 24 conducted mainly educational-cultural activities; however, sudden influx of refugees forced them to change their profile, like the Association of Ukrainians in Poland. The support was also provided by country wide organisations like the Polish Scouting Association, Rural Housewives Circles or Voluntary Fire-Brigades (Jarosz & Klaus 2023, p. 57). The last two organisations have a dense network of local chapters constituting significant social capital and being important help providers in rural communities. In North Macedonia the Association of Ukrainians *Lesya Ukrainka* in Skopje, the platform of Ukrainian diaspora, became a supporter of refugees and advocate of the Ukrainian cause in that country. At the beginning of the war, it established two points for collecting aid for Ukrainians in Skopje (Atanasova, 2022). The influx of refugees resulted in the creation of another Ukrainian NGO providing humanitarian support to women and children 'Joint Home for Mothers and Children From Ukraine–Skopje'. This is a purely humanitarian organisation working directly with refugees and using support of already existing organisations like UNHCR, Red Cross or La Strada (Personal communication with the representative of the organisation, October 9, 2023). Montenegro also saw the establishment of a new NGO in order to address the needs of newly arrived refugees. In March 2022 Dobro Djelo (Good Deed) association was founded and soon became the official representation of the Ukrainian diaspora in that country (see the Box 6).

Last, but not least, ordinary citizens showed their solidarity with Ukrainian refugees engaging themselves into various forms of support like financial and in-kind donations, providing meals, organising collections, providing transportation services, voluntary work at the reception or accommodation centres, helping with administrative tasks and providing free accommodation. The last one seems to be the best indicator of solidarity, trust and devotion as this means sometimes taking 'under the same roof' complete strangers in need. If we take a look at the data collected by the UNHCR (see figure 14) in May-June 2022, significant percentage of those surveyed (on average 34%) were hosted in private accommodation, and we might assume that this was also the accommodation of their relatives and friends. Out of 5 of the EU countries, Poland had the highest share of those hosted by owners of accommodation, while Hungary the lowest. These data also show that the accommodation provided by the state apparatus housed only a minority of those in need, except Romania, with the majority of them staying in hosting or rented accommodation.

Figure 14: Current accommodation by host country (data collection between mid-May to mid-June 2022)
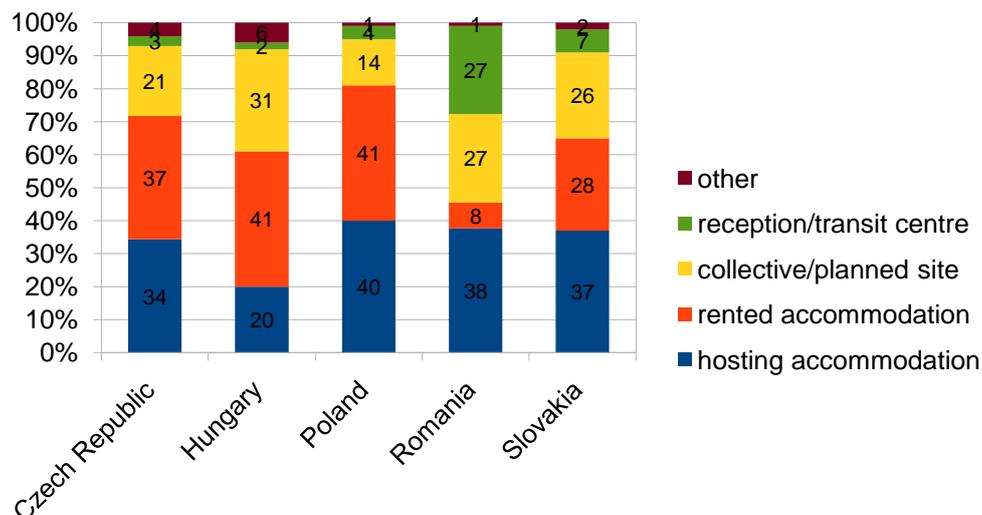
Source: UNHCR. (2022, July). *Lives on hold: profiles and intentions of refugees from Ukraine. Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia*, Regional Bureau for Europe.

When it comes to hosting people in Montenegro, an interesting pattern appears. The assessment conducted by IOM in March 2022 showed that 73% Ukrainians stayed in hosting accommodation, while 27% rented an apartment or house. However, another assessment from May 2022 showed that 64% stayed in rented accommodation and 16 % in hosting accommodation (additional 12 % were hosted by family or friends, 5% stayed in hotels, 3% owned property). The accommodation situation worsened in two months, mostly because the summer season approached causing the growth of demand for accommodation from tourists. Consequently, the owners asked the refugees to leave or alternatively to pay in advance 6 to 12-month rent to secure their stay (IOM Montenegro 2022). A similar study for North Macedonia, conducted in July-August 2022, showed that only 4% stayed in hosting accommodation, 46% were hosted by family of friends and 49% stayed in rented accommodation (IOM North Macedonia 2022).

It is worthy to point at symbolic forms of support among ordinary citizens showing their solidarity with Ukrainians and at the same time exposing in the public space importance for helping Ukraine. There were numerous marches and protests against the Russian invasion around the world. The non-profit organisation ACLED recorded 1,8 thousand such protests between February 24 and March 4 in 2022. These protests were held in 93 countries and territories, with 99% of them taking place outside Ukraine. Significant share of these protests were organised in Europe, but there were also a lot of them in the USA, Canada, Japan, and Russia where 95% were repressed (Jones, 2022). Such protests were also organised in the cluster under analysis, the example being Montenegro. The residents of the old royal capital of Montenegro Cetinje**,** since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, have held over a hundred gatherings and walks in support of this country ('Stota šetnja podrške', 2022). During the first few months of the war, these walks were held on a daily basis, and then became less frequent, being held periodically ('Spremamo se za kontraofanzivu', 2023). Similar gathering of

this kind, organised by the Ukrainian community on the anniversary of the Russian aggression, was organised on the central square in Podgorica and was joined by Montenegrin citizens ('Ukrajinci tišinom u Podgorici', 2023). Interestingly, a protest rally against Russian invasion, also on the anniversary of the Russian aggression, was organised by Russians living in Podgorica who constitute a significant community in Montenegro migrating there already before 2022 ('Rusi u Crnoj Gori protiv', 2023). However, there were some incidents resulting from the fact that both Ukrainians and Russians live in the same space of Montenegro. In July 2022, in the wider area of the municipality of Budva (a coastal municipality with a large number of Russian and Ukrainian inhabitants), a Russian citizen attacked a group of Ukrainians who entered the local beach bar with the Ukrainian flag. The owner of the bar then removed the Ukrainians from the premises ('Ovo je prava istina: Oglasio', 2022). In February 2023, a group of Russians gathered in Budva and prevented the performance of a Ukrainian pop band. The Embassy of Ukraine in Montenegro addressed this incident, stating that this gesture could be interpreted as 'a direct threat to Ukrainian visitors to Budva' ('Podržavaoci Rusije spriječili', 2023). Notwithstanding, just as the support of Montenegrin political parties is largely on the side of Ukraine, anti-Ukrainian sentiment among Montenegrin citizens, in the context of the war conflict, is only an incidental phenomenon. Similar, peaceful protests were organised by the Association of Ukrainians *Lesya Ukrainka* in North Macedonia, also on the day of the first anniversary of the Russian aggression. It gathered Ukrainian diaspora and Macedonians in the Woman-Warrior Park in the centre of Skopje, where flowers were laid in front of the monument of the famous Ukrainian writer Taras Shevchenko (Ognjanov, 2023). When considering the role of NGOs in supporting Ukrainian refugees it must be underscored that these organisations fulfilled several functions. The first one, especially visible at the reception phase in the first months of the mass influx, was purely focused on humanitarian relief and providing shelter. We can present the whole catalogue of various actions undertaken by the NGOs in the studied cluster:

- collection of clothes, food, hygienic articles, money and handing them out,
- storage and distribution of the collected goods, both for refugees and transporting them to Ukraine (remembering about the huge number of those internally displaced),
- translation, legal and psychological support,
- round-the-clock duties at the border, railway stations, bus stations to help arriving refugees and later in the reception centres/accommodation centres,
- organising time for women with children by providing child-friendly space,
- recruiting volunteers,
- providing language lessons and support in search for employment in the form of trainings,
- providing accommodation and intermediating between citizens offering accommodation and refugees.

These activities are obviously important, but they should be followed by actions aimed at integrating the refugees and creating long-term systemic solutions for that. In this context, another important function fulfilled by the NGOs was advocacy in favour of more systemic solutions improving integration and security for immigrants, together with implementing pro-integration projects—sometimes in cooperation with public authorities. In Romania the civil society started to focus on such actions from the second half of 2022, which was in line with the Romanian government's strategy for the integration of Ukrainian refugees aimed at facilitating access to education, psychological support and entry into the labour market (Petrescu et. al., 2023). To implement these measures, non-governmental organisations have undertaken efforts to establish

Box 7: The support for integrating Ukrainian refugee children with the public education system in Hungary – a role of the NGO sector

According to the asylum policy in Hungary children should have a free access to kindergarten, primary and secondary school education up to 16 years of age. However, when the Ukrainian children arrived, they faced serious difficulties. In Hungarian schools there was a lack of teachers who could communicate in Ukrainian or even Russian. The schools and the pupils were left alone, as it was difficult to follow the Ukrainian school programme, due to the lack of cooperation between the Hungarian and Ukrainian ministries responsible for education. It was also a crucial problem that many pupils arrived in Hungary without their documents, medical certificates, partly because they were left at home, or they were damaged; therefore, the organising of education in mother tongue became the task of different NGOs that tried to solve this question upon their capacities and personal contacts.

On September 16, 2022, a conference entitled 'WHO, WHAT, HOW: Ukrainian Refugee Children in Hungarian Public Education' was held (with simultaneous translation into Ukrainian), where numerous NGOs, together with Hungarian and foreign teachers' unions were represented. The aim of this conference was to find solutions on how to integrate Ukrainian children into the Hungarian public education system and how to support sharing information by Hungarian educational institutions. The conference was organized by the Civil Platform for Public Education (body integrating more than 50 NGOs) and the Civil College Foundation, with support of the United Way Hungary–a member of the international network of one of the biggest fundraising organisations. The organizations participating in the conference run several projects aimed at integrating the Ukrainian refugee children. For example, the Psi Pont Foundation provides psychological support for children, while the *Товариство Нова Хвиля* has organised joint camps for children. The Ukrainian Refugee Education Centre Foundation (UREC) provides important supplementary education 4 times a week to Ukrainian children who face serious challenges. With their help, children can prepare in a safe and professional environment for the requirements of the Hungarian education system, as well as progress in their studies at home according to the Ukrainian curriculum.

The conference was a milestone of the bilingual EDUA project, which aims at making essential and useful information concerning education in Hungary easily accessible to all those interested, and to enable different actors of the educational sector to connect and benefit from cooperation, whether as educators, Ukrainian parents or students. One of the results of this work is Hungarian-Ukrainian information site uainfo.hu, which has been up and running since 2022. It is available for both teachers and parents in two languages, and by clicking they can find the most appropriate information related to education and practical issues like school enrolment or curricula.

Sources:

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Együtt Ukrajnáért – Ukrán Menekült és Oktatási Központ Alapítvány (2023, October 10) https://unitedway.hu/egyuttukrajnaert-ukran-menekult-oktatasi-kozpont-alapitvany/

Hogyan oldják meg z ukrán menekült gyermekek oktatását Magyaroszágon? (2022, November 9) https://hvg.hu/brandcontent/20221003_Tobb_mint_iskola__interju_Ercse_Kriszta_oktataskutatoval

Website of Pszi-Pont Alapítvány (Pszi-Pont Foundation): https://pszi.hu/befogado-iskolai-kozosseg/Information site UAINFO.HU: https://uainfo.hu

vocational training or retraining centres, educational hubs for children, and centres where Ukrainian citizens can learn the Romanian language. In Hungary these were NGOs that tackled one of the biggest problems faced by the Ukrainian refugees all over Europe, namely providing education to children. The Hungarian Civil Platform for Public Education—body integrating more than 50 NGOs, implements a bilingual EDUA project aimed at supporting teachers, parents and pupils in their access to public education (see the Box 6 for more details). In 2022 the EU CARE project was established in Slovakia on the basis of cooperation between the Ministry of Interior, Office for Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development and representatives of NGOs. The project assumed distribution of funding for the Slovakian NGOs conducting humanitarian and integration activities for Ukrainian refugees. This project set an important precedence, because for the first time the EU

Table 12: The main points from the open letter to international donors and organisations published by the Migration Consortium in Poland (October 2022)

Points made by the Migration Consortium	Brief explanation
1. No 'implementing partners' – just partners	language is important – how we define ourselves shows how we want to build partnership. We do not want to just implement your vision as 'implementing partners'. Our appeal is not just to change the term, but to change the approach. Stop implementing and start listening to us and our experience
2. Respect for the time of local partners	We respect all your initiatives and efforts, but our resources are limited. Thus, we can't keep every one of you informed all the time, we are not able to be available ad-hoc for everyone. In order to improve our cooperation, pass on the information and knowledge you gain from us within your teams, reconsider frequent rotations of staff, be more permanent and predictable.
3. Unified due diligence procedure	The due diligence procedures we must go through when approaching multiple international organizations are a major bureaucratic burden for us. Each INGO has its own procedures, which means that we need to go several times through due diligence procedures. If, possible agree on one unified procedure, so we can save our time. Design procedures that do not exclude small, local organizations
4. Shared and locally applicable internal policies	We are happy to improve our internal policies, but it would be useful to present a standard list of policies that you require from partner organizations. Consider some flexibility in your policy standardization – based on the size of organization.
5. Contributions at the local level	We don't have access to even a fraction of the funds for Ukraine that are at your disposal, and yet we do much of the work at the local level; UN agencies have very broad and complicated procedures for applying for funding, which can be passed only by big or medium organizations, while these are the local organizations that can ensure greater effectiveness, longitude and risk-sharing
6. Recognize capacity	As you leave, sooner or later, it is important to strengthen the local organizations and their ability to help refugees- change your strategy of support for capacity building of the local organizations, so it is adopted to our needs.
7. Transparency	Be transparent about how much money raised by your organizations has been distributed to support local organizations and for what; Be open about who you work with and what your plans are – so we can use your help sensibly.
8. Quality cooperation	Do make sure your procedures, processes and funding are provided with no delay. It already happens that we wait for responses/documents/agreements for months. In the case of a crisis, this is harmful. Promise less – but deliver in a timely manner.
9. Frankness	We know you will go, so share with us your exit strategies - we would like to know your plans to manage our resources efficiently

Source: Own elaboration on the basis of: Migration Consortium. (2022, October 10). Open letter to international donors and organisations that want to help Ukrainian refugees in Poland.

money flowing to the Slovak budget was distributed by a consortium of 6 NGOs. The Open Society Foundation Bratislava was the leader of this consortium, which distributed 9.5 million EUR in 2023

to 110 NGOs (Gregorová et al., 2024, p. 8). Interesting advocacy action was undertaken by the already mentioned Migration Consortium in Poland, which published the open letter to international donors and organisations with appeal for changes in approaching the local NGO partners. The 9-point letter (see Table 12) draws attention to the main problems and deficiencies after a few months of constant cooperation in supporting Ukrainian refugees. Another example of long-term and vision-based engagement in favour of migration policy by the Migration Consortium is 'The outline of the local integration policies' (Dąbrowska, 2022). The document provides local governments in Poland with the framework for planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating local migration policies, offering guidelines for each step.

Last, but not least, there was also a watchdogging function fulfilled, taking the form of monitoring activities and pointing out deficiencies in policies towards refugees. In Hungary, where the NGO sector, especially human rights organisations, struggled for years in the atmosphere of securitizing immigration, Hungarian Helsinki Committee enumerated different weaknesses of the government's approach to the refugees, including a 'destruction of Hungary asylum's system' in the years preceding Ukrainian's influx. While the government was praised for quick opening of the borders and granting temporary protection, it left the humanitarian support for refugees to civil society, especially in the first critical weeks. There were not enough immigration officials on the border and in the shelters, which was pointed as one of the reasons behind the low number of applications for temporary protection. The government provided assistance by funding some charity organisations, while municipalities and other civil society organisations have been left on their own (Bakonyi, 2022). In Poland, on March 4, 2022, 96 Polish NGOs published an appeal to the Polish government to ensure procedures preventing discrimination at the Polish-Ukrainian border and segregation on the basis of race, nationality or religion. Additionally the appeal stressed the importance of introducing the law which would give equal protection to all those fleeing from Ukraine (Oko.Press, 2022). The appeal was the reaction to reports about discrimination on the border towards third-country nationals fleeing the Ukraine (Mikulska & Rumieńczyk, 2022). Later, situation of refugees was systematically monitored by the Polish chapter of Amnesty International, which published several critical reports covering different aspects of this situation like: access to education for Ukrainian children (Amnesty International in Poland, 2023a), Roma People from Ukraine, anti-Ukrainian propaganda (Amnesty International in Poland, 2023b) or housing conditions (Amnesty International in Poland, 2023c). In North Macedonia an important voice was expressed by the Association of Ukrainians *Lesya Ukrainka* in order to tackle Russian disinformation against Ukrainians and Ukraine. The association sent an appeal to all media outlets in North Macedonia in which they demanded to block the possibility of writing comments under the online publications that have sensitive content regarding the war against Ukraine. They claimed that this should curb the further influence and spreading of Russian disinformation about the war, at the same time pointing at risks of destabilisation of North Macedonia by exploiting pro-Russian sentiment and distorting public opinion. The association urged that more measures need to be introduced by the North Macedonia's government to tackle this problem, underscoring the fact that the country belongs to NATO and has close relations with the EU ('Украинците во земјава' 2022). Further study, conducted by the Citizens Association MOST/Fighting False News Narratives, found that Russian disinformation concerning the war against Ukraine is well entrenched in North Macedonia. The monitoring of online content between March 2022 and February 2023 found that there were 79 anonymous Facebook pages and groups involved in coordinated mass dissemination of Kremlin's narratives. These pages/groups

used content from Kremlin's controlled media sources, but also amplified messaging of Russian embassy in North Macedonia (Aleksoska & Aleksov 2023).

The enormous solidarity with Ukrainian refugees expressed by the representatives of civil society is also reflected in the public opinion polls. As pointed out in chapter 2 the patterns of public opinion legitimise particular policies towards refugees; however, these patterns might be also shaped by different socio-political actors instrumentalizing various types of problems, threats and narratives in order to push for their own agenda and build political influence. The Eurobarometer data published in 2023 (three rounds of polls) allow for presenting some general patterns of public opinion in the studied cluster, make comparisons and trace changes over the 2023.

Figure 15: General opinion on immigrants' contribution to receiving society—percentage of those who agree or disagree with the following statement: 'immigrants contribute positively to our country' (May-June 2023 compared with October/November 2023)
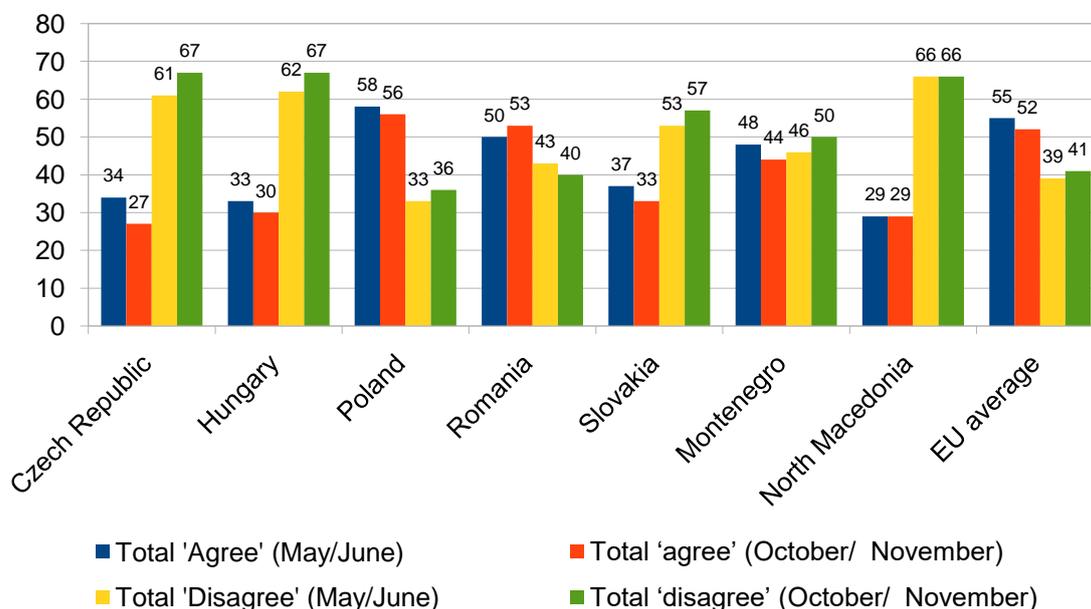
Source: Standard Eurobarometer 99 – Spring 2023 (question B11.1); Standard Eurobarometer 100-Autumn 2023 (question B8.1).

First of all, when we look at the general views towards immigrants, we see that a significant proportion of those surveyed were not convinced about the positive contribution of immigrants in their countries. This somewhat corresponds with a low acceptance of immigrants already presented in the figure 1. In the case of figure 15 we see that in countries like the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and North Macedonia, considerable majority stick to this view. The Montenegrin public opinion is split on that issue, while in Poland and Romania more than 50% believed that immigrants contribute positively in those countries. When we compare the cluster with the EU average, it looks like in the majority of countries those who did not believe in the positive role of immigrants outnumbered the EU average (in average, in October/November, 55% as compared to 41%). Moreover, the percentage of respondents with such attitudes slightly increased between May/June

and October/November, exception being Romania and North Macedonia. Therefore, we see that countries hosting immigrants from Ukraine, as refugees are also immigrants, had a significant share of those who did not believe in a positive contribution of immigrants in general. When asked however about helping refugees in general (see figure 16), these attitudes look different with the majority believing that their country should help refugees. Consequently, while there was no dominant belief that immigrants can contribute positively, there was a dominant feeling that refugees should be helped, with the highest share of such attitudes among Poles, corresponding with the EU average. But what seems to be important is that in each country there was still a sizable minority, which did not believe that refugees should be helped and it slightly grew in countries like Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Montenegro. On average, in October/November, there were 36% to hold such belief in the 7 countries.

Figure 16: General opinion on helping refugees – percentage of those who agree or disagree with the following statement: 'our country should help refugees' (May-June 2023 compared to October/November 2023)
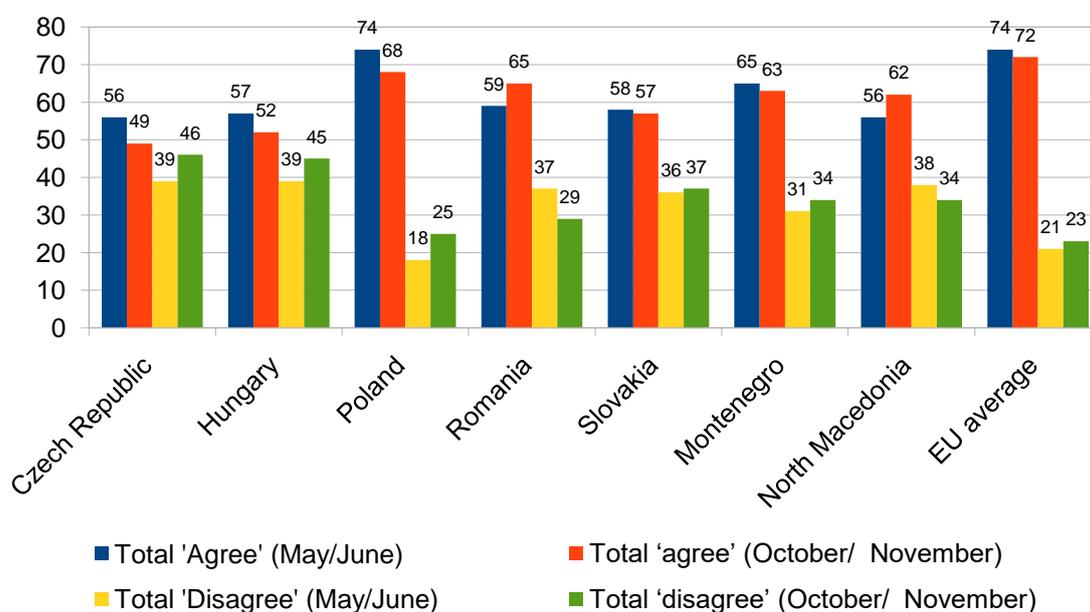

Source: Standard Eurobarometer 99–Spring 2023 (question B11.2); Standard Eurobarometer 100-Autumn 2023 (question B8.2).

The attitudes analysed above referred to immigrants and refugees in general; thus, it is crucial now to take a look at the attitudes towards the Ukrainian refugees from January and February to October and November 2023. First of all, we see that at the beginning of 2023 there was still enormous support for welcoming refugees from Ukraine. Although there were some variations between the countries, on average, 82% (in January/February) agreed with welcoming 'people fleeing the war,' which was nonetheless still below the EU average. Only a tiny minority was against that (on average 15%), with Hungary and Romania having the highest share of those disagreeing. Secondly, we also see that attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees are more positive as compared to attitudes towards refugees as such. When confronted with a specific refugee situation, especially if there is a cultural

proximity and empathy induced by feeling of tangible threat from Russia, a higher percentage of people are likely to accept those from Ukraine, than an abstract group of refugees (82% as compared to 62%). It must be noted that the research on support for asylum seekers, conducted in 15 European societies in 2016 and 2022, have shown that there is a strong and long-standing social preference for the specific characteristics of refugees that make them more acceptable. It happens that they are possessed by Ukrainian refugees what is the main driver of support for them, and not their

Figure 17: The EU has taken a series of actions as a response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. To what extent do you agree or disagree with welcoming into the EU people fleeing the war? (three rounds of measurement for 2023)
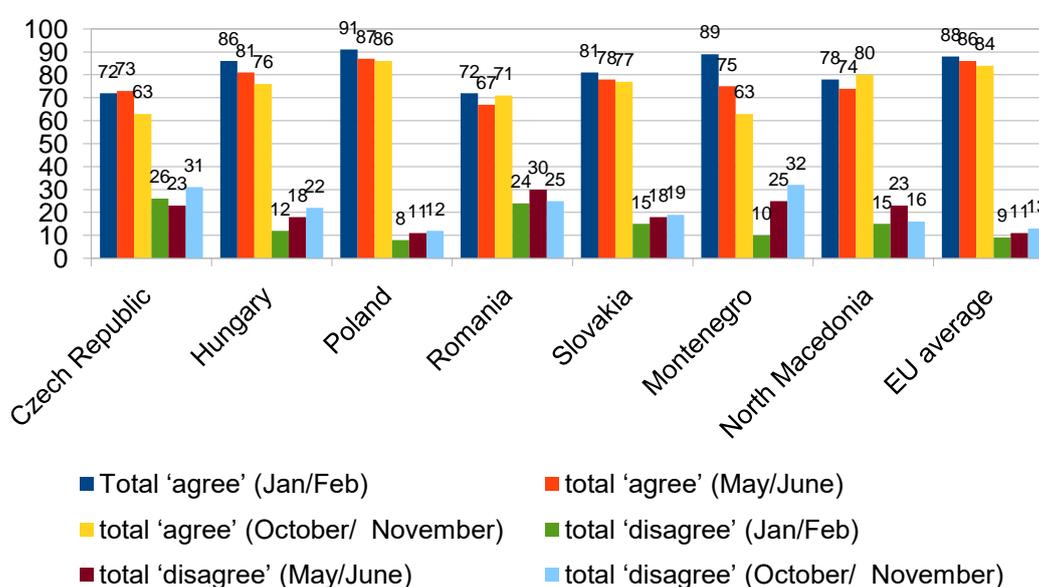
Source: Standard Eurobarometer 98–Winter 2022-2023 (question E 2.5); Standard Eurobarometer 99–Spring 2023 (question E 2.5); Standard Eurobarometer 100-Autumn 2023 (question B8.2).

nationality. Compared to refugees from other countries of origin (like the Middle East countries), they are predominantly female, young, Christians, fleeing war (instead of migrating for economic reasons), well-educated, with experience of work in middle and high-skill occupations (Bansak et al., 2023, p. 851). This might also explain a remarkable support in our cluster, higher than for refugees in general. The other tendency, which is visible in figure 17, is a small decline of support between January and February as well as October and November 2023. We can see it in all countries, except for North Macedonia, with the biggest decline in Montenegro, Hungary and Czech Republic. On average this declined from 82% to 74%, but still an overwhelming majority presented supportive attitudes. Considerable support for Ukrainians is also reflected by opinions on providing humanitarian help in figure 18, because at the beginning of 2023 almost 85% agreed for providing humanitarian support. These numbers changed a little bit over the year 2023, but in different directions depending on the country. In North Macedonia and Poland even more people agreed with providing

humanitarian help, while in the rest we see slight decline, the exception being Montenegro with more than 20% drop.

Figure 18: The EU has taken a series of actions as a response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. To what extent do you agree or disagree with providing humanitarian support to the people affected by the war? (three rounds of measurement for 2023)
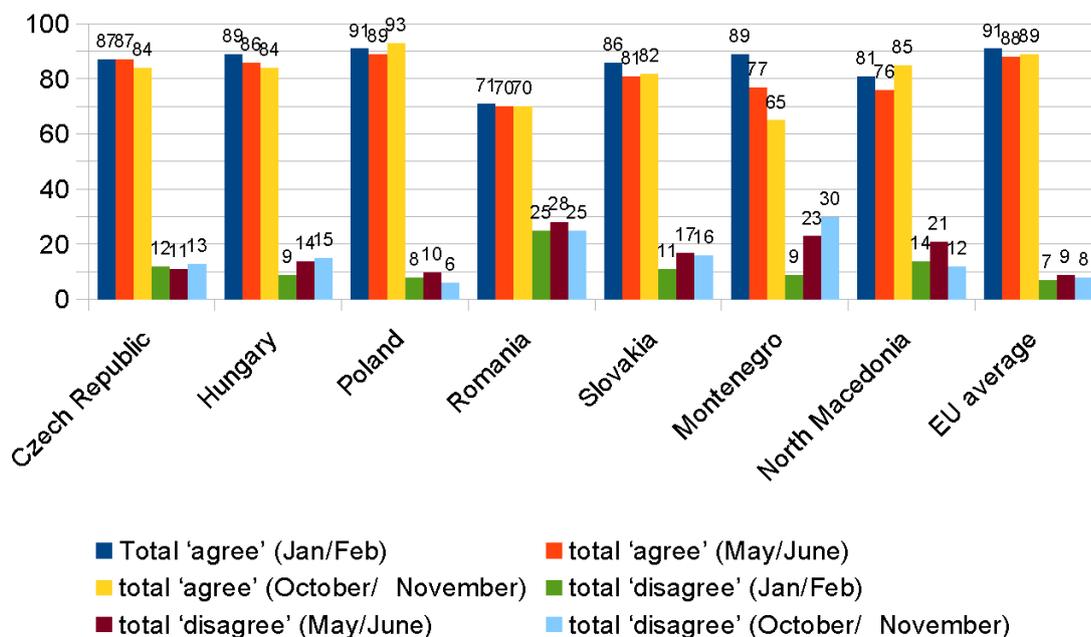

Source: Standard Eurobarometer 98–Winter 2022-2023 (question E 2.5); Standard Eurobarometer 99–Spring 2023 (question E 2.4); Standard Eurobarometer 100-Autumn 2023 (question B8.2).

The Eurobarometer data presented above show that there was a significant group of people in each country, who do not believe in the positive contribution of immigrants into their society. At the same time, the majority believed that their countries should help refugees in general. This opinion increased significantly when asked about support for the Ukrainian refugees either by welcoming them or providing humanitarian support. There was a small decline in such support over 2023 (the biggest decline occurring in Montenegro), but despite that, there was still a huge number of respondents expressing support for refugees.

This picture looks a little bit different if we take into account other public opinion polls for selected countries, where alternative questions were asked, for example, data for Poland and Slovakia. Poland might be treated as a country with enormous enthusiasm for supporting the Ukrainian refugees, both among ordinary citizens and among the main political parties with an exception being the Confederation described in the previous chapter. In Slovakia the main opposition parties had a more critical stance towards the refugees and they gained power in parliamentary elections in September 2023, replacing governing parties with a clear pro-Ukrainian position. Consequently, we can assume that anti-Ukrainian sentiment was much stronger in Slovakia.

The figure 19 shows data of the Public Opinion Research Centre in Poland, covering almost two years after the full-scale invasion. The number of Poles believing that Ukrainian refugees shall be accepted dropped from 94% in March 2022 to 62% in November 2023; thus, a systematic decline of public support is clear. Still two thirds of the respondents however supported the policy of accepting refugees from Ukraine. When asked about motives of their critical opinions Poles were especially afraid of negative consequences of hosting Ukrainians in Poland in the fields of availability of public services and growing prices of renting apartments (Kubiciel-Lodzińska & Kownacka, 2023). Research conducted in the social media forums and aid groups presents similar conclusions (Janusz et. al., 2023). The survey from the end of February 2024 showed that this fear and scepticism towards Ukrainians is shared by a significant portion of the population: 40% believed that it has a negative impact on the country if those Ukrainians staying in Poland now would stay for many years (with 45% believing that it is has a good outcome). Interestingly, this percentage is even higher among women aged18-39 and respondents aged 18-49. This might be caused by perceiving Ukrainians as a potential competition in line for public services, job, accommodation or matrimonial prospects (Pacewicz & Garbicz, 2024).

Figure 19: In your opinion should Poland accept Ukrainian refugees from the territories affected by the war?
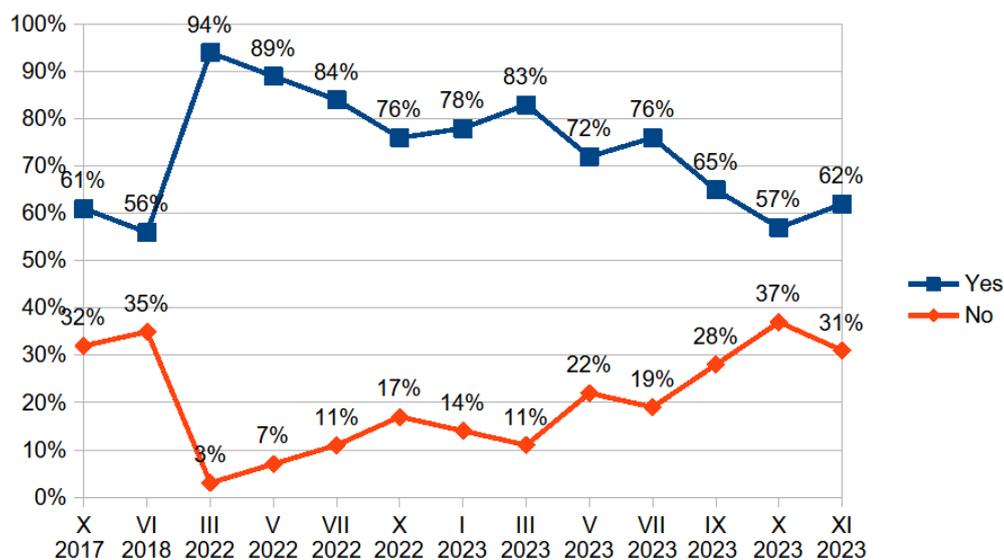
Source: Public Opinion Research Centre (2023, November). *O wojnie na Ukrainie i scenariuszach jej rozwoju*, no 142.

If we take a look at the figure 20 covering public opinion change in 2022 in Slovakia, we see that already in March there was approximately 21% of respondents who did not want to see the Ukrainian refugees settling for a longer period in their country, while 16% did not agree to give Ukrainians the same rights as to Slovaks. The percentage of people with such views increased at the end of 2022. The survey conducted by the Bratislava Policy Institute in February 2023 found 56,6% respondents believing that the arrival of Ukrainian refugees means the reduction in the quality of public services and the weakening of the economy. Additionally, 70% of the respondents said that they feel that the state cares more for newly arriving refugees than for its own citizens (Sekulova, 2023). Thus, already one year after the massive influx of the refugees to Slovakia, there was a widely shared feeling that the Ukrainians have a detrimental impact on the quality of life for the recipient

society. This was a fertile ground for using anti-Ukrainian sentiments by the parties in opposition claiming that the Slovak Republic has adopted too many helping measures, financial incentives and support for Ukrainians, while ignoring the economic status of Slovaks during the post-pandemic and the energy crisis. While there is evidence in the news media, Facebook posts and other channels controlled by political parties and politicians, especially far-right and radicalising left, for dissemination of the narratives blaming Ukrainian refugees, the most significant attention has been paid to other third country nationals–refugees coming from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq (Dubóczi & Škríbová, 2022).

Figure 20: Support by Slovaks to accept refugees from Ukraine (March 2022-December 2022)
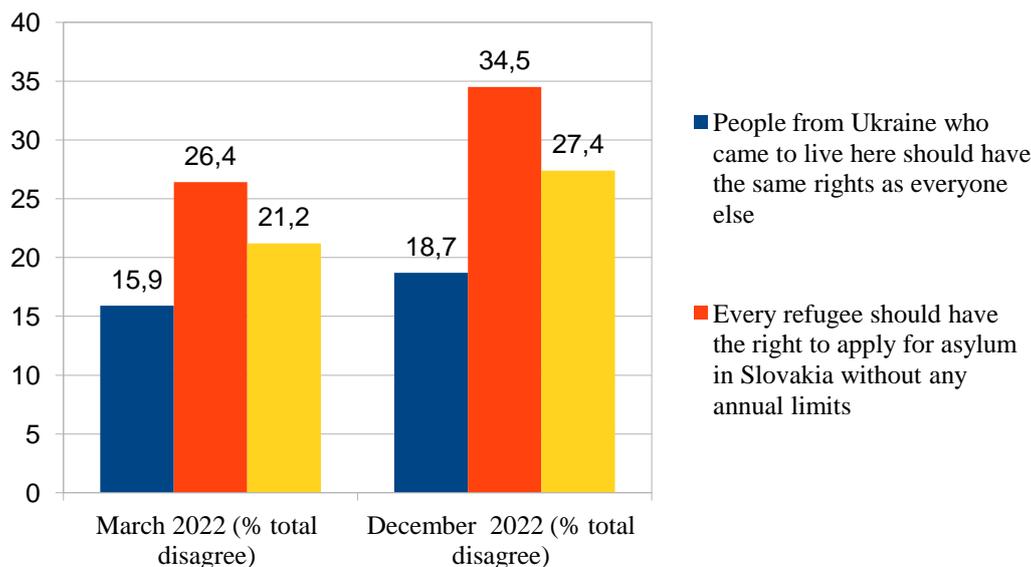
Source: Processing by the authors based on Papcunova (2023).

When considering change in the public opinion patterns, it is crucial to underline possible influence of disinformation strategies aimed at producing anti-Ukrainian sentiments. For years before 2022 the Kremlin had been a key actor using disinformation as an instrument of destabilising the EU countries and Western Balkans; thus, on March 1, 2022 the Council of European Union banned the Kremlin-sponsored media outlets 'Sputnik' and 'Russia Today' as a part of a wider package of sanctions (Council of the European Union, 2022b). However, it has not stopped dissemination of Russian disinformation, because social media and a vast number of internet portals are still being used to promote false narratives about Ukrainians and Ukraine.[34] Additionally, the influx of Ukrainian refugees delivered a new topic to exploit and provoke tensions in the receiving societies. For example, a study of Russian propaganda in Poland found that in January 2023 a significant portion of those surveyed agreed with the Kremlin's narratives: 41% agreed that the Ukrainian refugees are in fact economic immigrants and 62% agreed that Poland cannot afford to accept refugees (Warsaw Enterprise Institute, 2023, p. 10). Old sentiments, embedded in historical context of the Volhynian

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[34] The international, English version of Sputnik is still accessible on the territory of the EU. On the Balkans there is the Russia Today Balkan – the Serbian domain of Russia Today, which emanates across the Western Balkans (Stoycheva, 2024).

massacres, have been also fertile ground for anti-Ukrainian narratives on social media disseminated by some politicians and freelance journalists, calling themselves 'independent' (Tymińska et al., 2023, p. 16-17). It was especially a political Confederation party using anti-immigrant rhetoric, including anti-Ukrainian slogans, in the electoral campaigns of 2023 and 2024. Its leaders, being also MPs, belonged to the top propagators of anti-Ukrainian messages online with Twitter (now X) being the main tool used, as found by monitoring between November 2022 and April 2023 (Grzesiczak, 2023).

In Slovakia the National Security Authority blocked four disinformation sites in March 2022. It was the result of the amendment to the Cyber Act motivated by the security measures undertaken regarding the situation in Ukraine. The rationale behind was to prevent the spread of harmful or misleading content on the Internet. Opposition parties (SMER-SD, ĽSNS and REPUBLIKA) together with non-parliamentary SNS talked about the censorship. The argument of the then governing coalition was that Slovakia could also be the object of a hybrid war by Russia (Zvercová, 2022). In order to counteract Russian disinformation on Ukraine the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs has engaged and created a section of Myths and Facts about Ukraine. The government responded in this way to major arguments as formulated by the opposition, which was about to become the governing coalition after September 2023. The survey conducted in March 2023 by the Slovak think tank GLOBSEC showed that in Slovakia, as compared to four other EU countries of our cluster, there was a highest share of those believing in Kremlin's narratives. That time 34% believed that the West is responsible for starting the war by provoking Russia, while 17 % that Ukraine is to be blamed for the war, because it oppressed the Russian speaking population. When asked about refugees 69% believed that the 'refugees from Ukraine receive assistance from our fellow citizens who need it more' (Mesežnikov, 2023)[35]

The Kremlin's disinformation is also present in North Macedonia and Montenegro; however, accessible analyses showed that it is not directly targeted against Ukrainian refugees ('Pro-Kremlin false', 2022). The Ukrainian community in North Macedonia is too small to be presented as a threat, and in both countries, Ukrainians do not get any special economic benefits; as a result, it is difficult to define them as a privileged group. In April 2022 the government of Montenegro, following the EU package of sanctions, banned two Russian media outlets: 'Russia Today' and 'Sputnik' (Femic & Medjedovic 2023, p. 342). In North Macedonia the government banned 'Sputnik' and 'Russia Today' already at the beginning of March 2022 (Trkanjec, 2022). The vice president of the Association of Ukrainians *Lesja Ukrainka* however, in an interview for the fact-checking portal, pointed that the Russian disinformation is well developed, involving official Russian institutions, the Russian diaspora, and political parties that are financially supported. The Macedonian-Russian friendship associations and Russian cultural centres serve as other tools promoting Russian propaganda. She believed that the Macedonian media to a large extent publish accurate information on the war in Ukraine, but the number of paid articles that express pro-Russian sentiments were on the increase. Online media platforms are another realm where Russian propaganda has a visible impact, with extensive use of bot networks to disseminate disinformation. That is why her association, as already mentioned, sent an appeal to the media outlets in North Macedonia to block comments under some sensitive materials regarding Ukraine. The propaganda narratives exploit divisive Macedonian issues

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35 The same percentage of such answers was in Romania, while in Czechia 39%, Hungary 41%, Poland 52% (Mesežnikov, 2023).

like ethnic tensions, relations with neighbours, the EU aspirations and historical grievances. Moreover, the role of the Russian ambassador's comments in North Macedonia was noticed as he openly justified military aggression (Iljoska, 2023). Further study of Russian disinformation found that the ambassador's comments were amplified by a coordinated dissemination campaign in pro-Russian social media. The study also found that the promotion of the 'Slavic-orthodox' brotherhood between Macedonia and Russia was among central narratives, together with blaming the West for the war; however, the two most persistent narratives present within the entire period of analysis between March 2022 and February 2023, were about alleged 'biological weapon labs in Ukraine' and that 'Ukrainians are Nazis' (Aleksoska & Aleksov 2023, p. 5-6). Although, the refugees were not directly targeted, it might be possible that such portrayal of Ukrainians was detrimental to their image in receiving society.

7. Conclusions

1. This was somehow a paradoxical situation that countries of the cluster presented such openness in accepting huge number of Ukrainian refugees. If we look at their pattern of defining national identities all of them are close to the ethno-cultural model (despite official references to civic understanding of nationhood in their constitutions), which is recognised as conducive to support for exclusionary policy towards immigrants – this attitude was reflected by one of the lowest levels of acceptance of immigrants as measured by the 2016 Migrant Acceptance Index. This demonstrates that in specific geopolitical circumstances and arrangements (such as belonging or aspiring to the same international organizations), historically and culturally grounded inclinations towards defining immigrants might be of secondary importance. However, as history matters and cultural patterns persist, there is a risk that after the geopolitical shock of the full-scale invasion diminishes, negative stereotypes and ethnic-based particularism will come to the fore in defining Ukrainian refugees and will be exploited by political actors on greater scale.

2. The analysed countries have a long history of emigration (especially economic, but also political), which resulted in serious labour shortages detrimental to economic development. However, recently the five EU countries became countries of massive labour immigration supported by governments policies and entrepreneurs. Montenegro and North Macedonia experience also labour shortages, however community of economic immigrants is relatively small there. It means that these countries only recently approach the challenge of integrating and dealing with immigrant masses, without any long-term experience in integration policies, while treating immigrants mainly in terms of necessary labour force.

3. The analysed countries were characterized (by Migrant Integration Policy Index) as having rather low standards of integration policies towards immigrants offering so called 'equality on the paper', with a little bit better performance in Romania, Montenegro and Czech Republic (the last two countries classified as ensuring comprehensive integration, however only 'halfway favourable'). There is also a visible pattern when it comes to areas of integration policies, because these countries ensure quite good anti-discrimination normative framework, but they score very poorly in ensuring political participation, access to education and citizenship. Thus, it might be concluded that relatively good anti-discrimination standards enshrined in the normative frameworks are accompanied by weak empowerment of immigrants, if we interpret access to political power, education and citizenship as instruments improving their leverage and capacity to defend their rights. But it also indicates that these countries had not been prepared for creating proper conditions for long term integration of the newly arrived refugees (for those who would like to stay in long run) and explains the problems faced by them when adapting to new realities.

4. In the V4 countries the refugee policy was strongly securitized during the 2015-2016 immigration crises and rhetoric directed against refugees and immigrants in general (especially from the Middle East and Africa), becoming an instrument of electoral politics used by mainstream parties. Hungary, the country which experienced the biggest pressure from asylum-seekers along its borders, was the point of reference for other V4 countries, which converged to some extent their position on issues concerning immigration. This was somehow paradoxical, because this anti-immigration rhetoric was accompanied by growing influx of labour immigrants necessary for economies of these countries. The securitization of immigration was not so visible in Romania, North Macedonia and Montenegro. However, in the whole cluster the acceptance rate for asylum applications in 2013-2021 was low,

both for all applicants (stretching from 0.53% to 25%) and applicants with Ukrainian citizenship (stretching from 6% to 32%). It means that before 2022 Ukrainian citizens had a very low chance to get international protection in the countries of the cluster.

5. In all the EU countries of the cluster Ukrainian citizens constituted significant diaspora, which grew between 2013-2021 (Poland and Czech Republic having the biggest number). Majority of them stayed in these countries for working purpose (exception being Romania where majority stayed for family reasons). Moreover, in these countries Ukrainians were recognised as a national minority which means that they enjoyed some protection of their culture (including language) and had their platforms (for example associations or self-governments) of representation in relation to the state apparatus. In North Macedonia and Montenegro the Ukrainian community was small, however it played an important role in supporting Ukrainians who arrived there after 2022. It means that before 2022 there were quite well embedded Ukrainian networks in the studied countries, comprised of people who were economically active, relatively well educated (knowing also the language of the host society) and politically recognized as legitimate minority.

6. The profile of the Ukrainian refugees is a specific one, constituting some form of advantage for them, but also determining specific challenges for integration. Majority are women with children, Christians, with good education level and previous working experience. Additionally, their displacement pattern was clear – escaping highly mediatized military invasion. These characteristics increased social support in the hosting societies for accepting them and providing help. Their qualifications facilitated inclusion into labour market. However, assuming that significant proportion of refugees are women and children, the limited access to the pre-school education, childcare and lack of preparation of schools for teaching Ukrainian children constitute one of the biggest obstacles for integration. Moreover, as women and children are important users of the public services such as education, health care, welfare payments (in some countries), they are under higher risk of being perceived by the host society as competitors for public services. We have learned that this is one of the main narratives of anti-Ukrainian propaganda.

7. Patterns of settlement in the countries of arrival are very important. The refugees migrated mainly to the biggest cities, but it must be noticed that also borderland regions were significant areas of destination. These were not only border areas close to the Ukrainian border, but also border areas located along the border with countries of better economic standing. An interesting pattern appeared in Montenegro were, aside of the capital, touristic, coastal towns attracted significant number of Ukrainians. These patterns are important as they clearly show unequal distribution of burden of hosting refugees by the local governments in one country, demonstrating also risks of shortage of public services (like places in school, kindergartens, public housing) in specific regions and municipalities.

8. The governments of all countries expressed support for accepting the refugees and even in countries with parties in power demonstrating pro-Russian sympathy (like Hungary), there was a willingness to host refugees. However, electoral politics creates temptations for using narratives directed against the Ukrainian refugees by political parties (such parties exist in Poland, Romania, Czech Republic and Slovakia), with Slovakia being an example were opposition parties used such narratives and took control over government in 2023. This proves that exploiting issue of allegedly 'privileged' position of the refugees might be an effective electoral topic. Additionally, these are not only certain political parties that disseminate anti-Ukrainian refugees message, but also dissatisfied and organized farmers opposing the import of agricultural products from Ukraine. Their criticism however is not

targeted directly against the refugees, but creates an atmosphere in which Ukrainians and Ukraine are defined as a threat to the national economic interests.

9. Multidimensional rule of international organizations must be stressed. First of all, they provide normative framework for approaching refugees for the nation-states, the most visible example being the EU and activation of Temporary Protection first time in its history. Also countries, which did not belong to the EU decided to activate this mechanisms, which shows that EU played a role of norm-provider (and might have exerted some pressure on the countries aspiring to the EU), but in the case of North Macedonia and Montenegro interest in applying for temporary protection was low. Secondly, international organizations provide resources in the form of financing and capacity building, the most tangible example being the Refugee Response Plan for the Ukraine situation covering Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania. The last functions might be watchdogging when international organizations like the UNHCR pointed at double standards in approaching those fleeing Ukraine.

10. The local government has proven to be an important sector both in the phase of reception, when the humanitarian help and assistance were needed, but also as a force interested in providing some long-term solutions for integrating refugees. These were local governments of big cities and borderlands that were at the frontline of refugees reception and that still face administrative and financial challenges generated by the influx of huge number of people. That is why they are also interested in implementation of long-term solutions for integration. In countries like Poland or Hungary number of municipalities, in cooperation with the local NGO sector, entrepreneurs and international organizations, compensated for inefficient actions of governmental authorities. Thus, the local administration took the significant share of burden connected with the reception of immigrants, but also experienced transformation towards more professionalized approach to them.

11. NGOs sector, despite its difficult conditions for operation, was at the frontline of supporting the refugees. Its flexibility, experience, social capital and embeddedness in the local contexts allowed for fast reactions and performing different functions (not only pure humanitarian help, but also implementing/advocating in favour of long-term solutions and watchdogging activity). Moreover, in some countries, the massive influx of Ukrainians had a transformative impact on their NGO sector, because some NGOs changed their profile. However, the scale of engagement of civil society actors was also determined by the number of refugees coming and the number of organisations working with immigrants before. For example, there was a difference between Poland, Czech Republic, Romania on one side and North Macedonia or Montenegro on the other – in the latter there were few NGOs actively involved in working with the Ukrainian refugees.

12. The Eurobarometer for 2023 show that there was a significant group of people in each country, who did not believe in the positive contribution of immigrants into their society (on average, in October/November 2023, 55%). At the same time, the majority believed that their countries should help refugees in general. This opinion increased significantly when asked about support for the Ukrainian refugees either by welcoming them or providing humanitarian support. So, the attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees are more positive as compared to attitudes towards refugees as such. When confronted with a specific refugee situation, especially if the refugees are characterized by specific set of socio-demographic features and a feeling of solidarity is generated by the tangible threat from Russia, a higher percentage of people are likely to accept those from Ukraine, than an abstract group of refugees (82% as compared to 62%). However, there was a small decline (on average from 82% to 74%) in such support over 2023, despite that there was still a huge number of

respondents expressing support for the refugees.

13. Important challenge faced by the Ukrainian refugees, aside of the language barrier, access to accommodation, recognition of qualifications, childcare and schooling, is the uncertainty of their legal status. The article 4 of the Temporary Protection Directive, which regulates duration of the temporary protection, assumes its maximum duration for 3 years. Officially, it was already extended by the Council till 4 March 2025. This leads to a question of what will happen after that date, when the member states would have to decide about the legal status of those entering their territories since the February 24, 2022. The nature of this situation undermines the Ukrainians prospects and willingness for integration in the host countries.

14. The last conclusion and lesson learned is in relation to the differentiated volume of data published in each country regarding the situation of Ukrainian refugees, which seems to be connected with the size and importance of the Ukrainian community, but also the number of knowledge producers within the academic, media or NGOs sector. In the countries with huge influx of Ukrainian immigrants (not only refugees), such as Poland, the sources are in abundance allowing for quite comprehensive analysis, while in the countries where influx of Ukrainian immigrants did not have significant transformative impact, for example in the North Macedonia, the sources available are scarce. The most important providers of data about the Ukrainian refuges in North Macedonia and Montenegro are international organizations working there and scarce media reports. This is surprising especially in the case of Montenegro, which has the highest share of the refugees compared to its population. It demonstrates the challenges faced by the authors of this report and indicates unequal interest in the situation of Ukrainian refugees, despite the fact that a small number of them in some countries still constitutes research and policy issue. From the point of view of the European public opinion these communities seem to be 'imperceptible'.

8. Recommendations

1. Addressing the situation of Ukrainian refugees and their long-term well-being cannot be treated as a separate issue, but must be a part of a wider strategic approach towards immigration and refugees implemented by governments. The extraordinary situation experienced after February 24, 2022 created not only challenges, but also opportunities to overhaul and transform the approach towards immigrants, showing huge potential for accepting and supporting refugees at different social levels. Therefore, there ought to be strategic documents adopted that prescribe a cohesive and long-term approach to immigration policy by governments of Hungary and Poland, which currently does not have such documents.

2. Such documents, also in the case of countries that currently adopted those strategies, should combine human rights agenda and respect for international law with the requirements for security. Democratic parties and governments, facing both authoritarian regimes using migrants as instruments of destabilization and populist parties using xenophobic, anti-immigration rhetoric, must incorporate into these strategies the balance between providing international protection to those in need and ensuring security on their territories. Protection of refugees is not mutually exclusive with providing security. What it demands, is the political will, inclusive language and resources necessary to enable the integration of refugees with host society.

3. Political parties should refrain from depicting refugees and immigrants (of all nationalities, religions and races) as a threat so as to gain electoral advantage, since this creates a vicious circle of anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies, which undermine conditions for inclusive immigration policy. The electoral campaign in Poland in October 2023 showed that even opposition parties and politicians, that were commonly defined as defending liberal democracy started to frame irregular immigrants as a threat, and when winning elections their government rejected the Pact on Migration and Asylum together with Hungary – the country previously criticized by the same parties when in opposition. It shows that anti-immigration populism is tempting and infectious.

4. There should be more awareness raising campaigns about the positive contribution of immigrants to the hosting society. They should be based on presenting arguments and examples for economic contribution of immigrants to hosting society. The Ukrainian community, economically active and well educated, has an advantage on this field. However, there should also be some argumentation grounded in the fact that all of these countries have their own track record of massive emigration (both economic and political). So, the emigration experience (and opportunities this creates) of the studied countries should be harnessed to argue in favour of positive contribution of immigrants. This is a line of argumentation, which builds also on the norm of reciprocity.

5. In the countries with a tradition of multi-ethnic diversity (like Montenegro or North Macedonia) there should me more visibility and attention given to the so-called new minorities, which means those who recently immigrated to these countries for example the Ukrainians. As these countries are familiarized with traditional national/ethnic minorities, there is not enough recognition given to the special needs of the new minorities.

6. Long-term and well-funded immigration policy, with integration of refugees as a priority, requires building a culture of both the resilience to disinformation which discredits the refugees and the respect for the refugees. This can be established through educational programmes at the basic, compulsory level which should be implemented accordingly. The topics related to refugees (and immigrants generally) should be integral part of civic education in the state schools curriculum.

7. The analysis found that in many countries the local government played a crucial role in the reception and basic integration of the refugees, to great extent because the majority of Ukrainian refugees flocked in the urban municipalities. In this context the local government should be the main level of the building of inclusive environment for the refugees. It means that an integral part of the local governments' development strategies and competences should be the integration policy of immigrants, with usage of instruments such as education, support for cultural activities, legal counselling, labour market assistance. However, this should be accompanied by the financial support from the central government based on well-defined, transparent and objective criteria of transferring subsidies. Additionally, central government, border guards and the border municipalities under high risk of influx of refugees should cooperate on emergency plans and capacity building to be prepared for a well-coordinated reception.

8. When designing an integration policy for Ukrainian refugees the structure of this community must be taken into account to address specific needs. As a significant proportion of Ukrainian refugees are women and children, child care protection and access to schooling are the most important services to be provided. The inclusion into the educational system should be one of the crucial tasks, together with the implementation of the specific forms of assistance and extra lessons for Ukrainian children. This would improve also the integration with the labour market among Ukrainian women, partly released from their everyday responsibilities.

9. The role of the private sector should be enhanced as entrepreneurs have proven to be important partners both at the stage of the reception of the refugees and integrating them. Their demands and interest should be included in the migration policy strategies of different levels, at the same time they can constitute a source of employment, training and financial support for refugees.

10. All the studied countries have an existing anti-discrimination framework protecting the immigrants, however the problem is with its implementation. Thus, the mechanism and resources ensuring better implementation of these standards should be arranged. These could be local centres for providing legal and administrative support for immigrants, established by local government authorities or operated by local NGOs with financial support of the public authorities.

11. There should be a map of NGOs engaged in work with the refugees in each country and they should establish a special regulatory body responsible for regular reviewing and monitoring of the refugee policy officially recognized by the government. Additionally, there should be a platform for cooperation and consultation between these organizations and the central government. This could be a special working group established within the governmental body responsible for immigration policy.

12. The Ukrainian diaspora before 2022 has proven to be an important social capital facilitating migratory movement and being a safety net for the newly arrived. While the newcomers after 2022, have also demonstrated an ability to be proactive and support each other. These emerging communities and non-governmental organizations should be given financial and organizational support, both from the local government and by central government programmes.

13. It is advisable that the religious organization are better utilised in the integration process - these are bodies that are strongly embedded in the local settings, having social capital and helping others is usually part of their official mission. Moreover, under conservative governments they are more likely to have financial support and trust of the authorities.

14. It would be recommended that the governments of the main hosting countries intensify their effort to find political support and elaborate on the long-term solutions following the 3 years period of duration of the Temporary Protection. Poland, being among countries with the biggest number of those under temporary protection, should be leading this process and advocating in favour of Ukrainian citizens in the EU. Poland will preside over the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2025 (which overlaps with the end of the Temporary Protection on March 4, 2025), which gives an opportunity to make it one of the priorities in the agenda.

Annex

Theoretical underpinnings for studying the Ukrainian 'refugee situation'

situation of Ukrainian refugees after the full-scale invasion of Russia in February 24, 2022

two elements of the 'refuge situation'

reaction of the receiving country towards Ukrainian refugees and how it changed after February 2022

characteristics of the Ukrainian refugee community and how it changed after February 2022

theories of immigration policy

theories of international migrations

national identity theory

domestic politics theory

globalization theory

network theory

historically determined cultural patterns of defining national identity/membership as a frame and as a resource

main socio-political groups within the political system reacting to refugees, expressing their position, using different resources to secure interests

external forces/pressures like global mobility of labour force and international organizations promoting norms and providing resources

community of Ukrainian refugees embedded in pre-February 24 social networks and its characteristics (demographic, economic, political, attitudinal)

public opinion (mass attitudes as expressed in pools, media coverage, social media narratives)

analytical framework

Source: Own elaboration on the basis of the scholarship quoted in the chapter 2

The analytical framework for the structured, focused comparison of a country case

General analytical path	Structure of the country study and possible guiding questions
	1. Introduction - general description of immigration policy
presenting a general description of the country's immigration policy	- Is the immigration policy based on some well-articulated/formulated strategy or not? - Has the immigration policy evolved before 2022, and if so, what were the main factors behind this evolution? - Are ethno-cultural or civic based concepts of national membership dominant in the formulation of policy towards immigrants? - Can you describe the main channels of integration of immigrants with the receiving society? - Can you describe the main barriers to the integration of immigrants with the receiving society? - Were there any problems with implementing the 1951 Refugee Convention pointed at by any institutionalised actors? (e.g. ngo, international organisations, courts, parties).
presenting a short description of the number of received refugees before 2022	What was the general number of refugees (people with official status of refugee under domestic law of the receiving country), including refugees from Ukraine?
dimensions to be focused on	**2. Ukrainian diaspora characteristics before and after 2022**
presenting demography	What was the number of Ukrainian immigrants before 2022 and after 2022? What was the structure of the Ukrainian diaspora according to characteristics like gender, age, education, place of residence and how it changed after 2022?
presenting legal and economic position	What is the most important legal basis for residence and protection of Ukrainian citizens? What were the main sectors of employment of Ukrainians before 2022? How many private enterprises are owned/run by Ukrainian citizens? Are there any organisations/formal bodies representing the Ukrainian diaspora? (including number of consulates) What has changed when it comes to their legal and economic position after 2022?
presenting attitudes of diaspora	What are the attitudes of the Ukrainian diaspora towards the receiving country (is it transitory, permanent settlement or short-term settlement with the perspective of going back home)? Can you tell any difference between those before 2022 and after 2022?
dimensions to be focused on	**3. Political institutions' reaction**
sub-dimension	3.1 Government and its agencies + international organisations (e.g. UN, EU, IOM) interference/impact
presenting a general overview of the situation	What was the general reaction of the country's government towards Ukrainian refugees and has it changed over time?
presenting the main institutional actors involved and policies implemented	What were the main political institutions involved in the policy towards Ukrainian refugees (in terms of management, coordination, regulation, resources providing)? What was the position of the main political parties on the influx of Ukrainian refugees?

	Was there any difference between parties in government and parties in opposition?
	What were the main policies/programmes implemented to support Ukrainian refugees?
	What was the role of international organisations in the receiving country?
	What were the relations between international organisations and domestic political institutions in the realm of receiving Ukrainian refugees?
sub-dimension	3.2. Regional and local government (depending on territorial division and level of decentralisation)
Presenting a general overview of the situation	What was the general reaction of the country's regional/local government towards Ukrainian refugees and has it changed over time?
Presenting the main activities of the local/regional government	If the local/regional government was involved in the reception/support of Ukrainian refugees, what were the main forms of involvement?
	What were the relations between central government and the regional/local government in the realm of receiving Ukrainian refugees?
dimensions to be focused on	**4. Receiving society's reaction**
sub-dimension	4.1 Civil society
general overview of the situation	What was the general reaction of the country's civil society towards Ukrainian refugees, and has it changed over time?
present the main institutional actors involved	Was there any involvement of non-governmental organisations into the reception/support of Ukrainian refugees? What kind?
	Were there any interest groups (like trade unions or farmers organisations) expressing their position/support towards Ukrainian refugees?
	Can we point to any civil society groups manifesting their dislike/animosity/protest towards the reception of Ukrainian refugees?
sub-dimension	4. 2 Public opinion reactions
general overview of the situation	What was a general perception of Ukrainian refugees over time as indicated by accessible public opinion pools?
present the main institutional actors involved	Can we point at the main groups/institutions creating the image of Ukrainian refugees in the public discourse?
	Can we point at any disinformation actions (for example in social media) directed against Ukrainian refugees?
construction of the refugee's image in public discourse	Was the image of Ukrainian refugees positive /negative/ambiguous? Has it changed over time?
	5. Conclusions

Source: Elaboration of the authors of the report

Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) scoring in 2019 for 7 countries [36]

Country	Category/overall score	labour market mobility	family reunion	education	health	political participation	permanent residence	access to nationality	anti-discrimination
Czech Republic	Comprehensive integration - halfway favourable/50	54	63	60	61	10	50	36	64
Hungary	Equality on paper – halfway unfavourable/43	37	58	0	29	15	81	25	96
Poland	Equality on paper - slightly unfavourable/40	31	58	33	27	10	50	50	63
Romania	Equality on paper – halfway favourable/49	46	67	41	46	5	56	38	96
Slovakia	Equality on paper – halfway unfavourable/39	17	59	7	50	5	65	28	79
Montenegro	Comprehensive integration - halfway favourable/52	46	29	36	64	5	54	45	86
North Macedonia	Equality on paper – halfway unfavourable/42	31	58	21	38	0	69	22	100
Average for 7 countries within each dimension of assessment	45	37	56	28	45	7	60	34	83

Source: Huddleston, T., & Solano, G., (2020). *Migrant Integration Policy Index 2020,* Barcelona/ Brussels: CIDOB & MPG; Huddleston, T., (2016) *Regional MIPEX assessment for the Western Balkans*, Migration Policy Group.

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36   The data for Montenegro are from 2015 (Huddleston 2016).

Refugee population in 7 countries between 2013-2021 according to UNHCR data

Country	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Czech Republic	2966	3129	3640	3640	3640	2186	2054	1919	1909
Hungary	2422	2854	4383	4736	5671	6019	5750	5838	5676
Poland	16428	15730	14057	11738	12225	12495	12658	2771	4875
Romania	1747	2171	2581	2880	3911	4134	3860	3581	4200
Slovakia	691	791	816	980	912	938	965	1006	1046
Montenegro	8471	6455	1762	970	794	727	653	166	175
North Macedonia	980	880	697	634	414	413	354	303	292

Source: Own elaboration on the basis of the data from the United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees: https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download/

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