

The background of the cover is a complex architectural line drawing in white on a dark blue background. It features various geometric shapes, lines, and patterns, including a grid, circles, and irregular polygons, suggesting a technical or engineering drawing.

HUMANITARIAN AID AND EMPOWERMENT OF UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

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

Edited by

Dorota Moroń, Małgorzata Madej and Judit Csoba



Humanitarian Aid and Empowerment of Ukrainian Refugees

The Case of Visegrad Group countries:
Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia

Edited by Dorota Moroń, Małgorzata
Madej and Judit Csoba

First published 2025
by Routledge
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2025 selection and editorial matter, Dorota Moroń, Małgorzata Madej and Judit Csoba; individual chapters, the contributors

The right of Dorota Moroń, Małgorzata Madej and Judit Csoba to be identified as the authors of the editorial material, and of the authors for their individual chapters, has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

The Open Access version of this book, available at www.taylorfrancis.com, has been made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-No Derivatives (CC-BY-NC-ND) 4.0 license.

Any third-party material in this book is not included in the OA Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. Please direct any permissions enquiries to the original rightsholder.

The project is co-financed by the Governments of the Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia through Visegrad Grants from International Visegrad Fund. The mission of the fund is to advance ideas for sustainable regional cooperation in Central Europe.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-032-78599-8 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-80390-6 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-50577-8 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003505778

Typeset in Sabon
by Deanta Global Publishing Services, Chennai, India

● supported by

● Visegrad Fund



Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>List of tables</i>	<i>viii</i>
<i>List of contributors</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>xii</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>xiv</i>
Humanitarian aid or empowerment? Policy towards support of refugees from Ukraine: Introduction	1
MAŁGORZATA MADEJ, DOROTA MOROŃ, AND JUDIT CSOBA	
1 Visegrad Group countries towards migration	13
MAGDALENA RATAJCZAK AND MARTA RYNIEJSKA-KIĘLDANOWICZ	
2 Refugees from Ukraine in the countries of the Visegrad Group	30
MAŁGORZATA MADEJ	
3 Legalisation of the Ukrainian refugees' stay	44
DOROTA MOROŃ	
4 Organising support for refugees from Ukraine: The role of the state, local governments, and civil society	62
ALŽBETA BROZMANOVÁ GREGOROVÁ AND FILIP BAMBŮCH	
5 The first step: Organising support at the location of refugees' temporary stay	78
PAVEL HULEC	
6 Assistance with housing	93
JUDIT CSOBA, ANDREA DIEBEL, AND LUCA SZŐŐR-FŰLŐP	

vi	<i>Contents</i>	
7	Teaching local languages to foreigners NATALIYA-MARIYA MOCHERNAK	111
8	Inclusion of children and youth in the national education system MARLENA PIOTROWSKA	128
9	Integration instead of ghettoisation: Integrating refugees with the local communities ALŽBETA BROZMANOVÁ GREGOROVÁ AND JANA ŠOLCOVÁ	145
10	Ukrainian refugees on the labour market JUDIT CSOBA, ANDREA DIEBEL, AND KATALIN ÁBRAHÁM	162
11	Business sector for Ukrainians: A form of support or profit-seeking? AGNIESZKA MAKAREWICZ	182
	Conclusions: Lessons learned and recommendations on the basis of the best practices in supporting Ukrainian refugees in the Visegrad Group countries JUDIT CSOBA, MAŁGORZATA MADEJ, AND DOROTA MOROŃ	200
	<i>Index</i>	207

4 Organising support for refugees from Ukraine

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

*Alžbeta Brozmanová Gregorová and
Filip Bambúch*

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- **Coordination.** The state provided management of the crisis in the individual countries by various coordinating bodies. It can be stated that all countries used their experience in managing the crisis gained during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, management of the crisis by the state depended on which responsible authorities and institutions had the issue of migration and refugees on their agenda. In Slovakia, the Central Crisis Headquarters, managed by the Ministry of Interior and Steering Committee on Migration, Integration and Inclusion of Foreigners, managed by the Migration Office of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, was responsible for managing the processes. The Hungarian Government established the National Humanitarian Coordination Council led by the Head of the Prime Minister's Office.
- **Strategies and plans.** In addition to specific laws, the V4 countries have adopted different types of strategies and plans related to the impact of the war in Ukraine. These plans were developed in close cooperation between the state, local governments, and NGOs in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In the case of Slovakia, for example, as noted by several NGOs, the need to address the crisis related to the refugee influx from Ukraine marked a new stage of cooperation with the state. Although both countries had existing strategies for integrating foreigners on their territory (the Concept of Integration of Foreigners and the State Integration Programme in Czechia and the Migration Policy of the Slovak Republic with a view to 2025), they adopted additional documents in response to the need to respond to the specific situation of the arrival of refugees from Ukraine.
- **Financial support to local authorities and NGOs.** Financial mechanisms to support activities directed to local governments and NGOs in V4 countries are another vital measure at the national level. In all V4 countries, humanitarian support to refugees in the early stages of the conflict, but in many cases also later, was secured through NGOs and local governments. However, they did not have the personnel, material, and financial capacity to provide support to the same extent. The state, therefore, played an essential role in their financial support. The allocation of financial resources from the EU has also helped to a large extent in this area. In Slovakia, for example, thanks to the EU funds, local governments and NGOs could refund their expenses connected with supporting Ukrainian refugees from 24 February 2023 until 31 December 2023. The Polish and Czech government also announced several calls to support initiatives related to refugee support from the state or EU budget.
- The last measure, although no less challenging, was the benefits from the V4 countries, except Hungary, going directly to help Ukraine and its people.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Role of volunteers in response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lessons learned and recommendations

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

References

- Ansell, C., Sørensen, E. & Torfing, J. (2021). The COVID-19 Pandemic as a Game Changer for Public Administration and Leadership? The Need for Robust Governance Responses to Turbulent Problems. *Public Management Review*, 23(7), 949–960. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2020.1820272>
- Baszczak, Ł., Kielczewska, A., Kukołowicz, P., Wincewicz, A. & Zyzik, R. (2022). *How Polish society has been helping refugees from Ukraine*. Polish Economic Institute.
- Bird, N., & Amaglobeli, D. (2022). *Policies to address the refugee crisis in Europe related to Russia's invasion of Ukraine*. IMF Note 2022/003. International Monetary Fund.
- Bryan, T. K., Lea, M. & Hyánek, V. (2023). Resilience, ambiguous governance, and the Ukrainian refugee crisis: Perspectives from NGO leaders in the Czech Republic. *Central European Economic Journal*, 10(57), 35–49. <https://doi.org/10.2478/ceej-2023-0003>
- Byrska, O. (2022). Civil Crisis Management in Poland: The First Weeks of the Relief in Russian War on Ukraine. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 25(3–4), 463–470. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2022.2079196>
- Coll (2022a). Act of 17 March 2022 on certain measures in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of Ukraine caused by the invasion of the Russian Federation (Zákon ze dne 17. března 2022 o některých opatřeních v souvislosti s ozbrojeným konfliktem na území Ukrajiny vyvolaným invazí vojsk Ruské federace), 2022, no 65 (as amended).
- Coll (2022b). Act of 17 March 2022 amending Act No 480/2002 Coll. on asylum and amending and supplementing certain acts (Zákon zo 17. marca 2022, ktorým sa mení a dopĺňa zákon č. 480/2002 Z. z. o azyle a o zmene a doplnení niektorých zákonov v znení neskorších predpisov), 2022, no 124 (as amended).
- Eurostat (2023). *Beneficiaries of temporary protection at the end of the month by citizenship, age and sex – monthly data*. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR_ASYTPSM/default/table?lang=en
- Gallová Kriglerová, E., Gažovičová, T. & Kadlečiková, E. (2011). *Integrácia migrantov na lokálnej úrovni – výskumné zistenia a odporúčania*. Centrum pre výskum etnicity a kultúry.
- Garcés Mascareñas, B. (2022). Why this refugee crisis is different. *CIDOB Opinion*, 708. Retrieved from https://www.cidob.org/en/publications/publication_series/opinion/2022/why_this_refugee_crisis_is_different
- Garkisch, M., Heidingsfelder, J., & Beckmann, M. (2017). Third Sector Organisations and Migration: A Systematic Literature Review on the Contribution of Third Sector Organisations in View of Flight, Migration and Refugee Crisis. *Voluntas*, 28, 1839–1880. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-017-9895-4>

- Gindlová, B., Miklian, M., & Gono, F. (2023). *Ako zmerať ľudskosť. Ako mimovládne neziskové organizácie pomáhali počas vojny na Ukrajine. Ministerstvo vnútra Slovenskej republiky/Úrad splnomocnenca vlády SR pre rozvoj občianskej spoločnosti.*
- Grzymała-Kazłowska, A., Downarowicz, P. & Wydra, A. (2023). Private assistance for Ukrainian refugees and attitudes towards refugee sponsorship in Poland. *CMR Spotlight*, 3(49). Retrieved from <https://www.migracje.uw.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Spotlight-MARCH-2023-1.pdf>
- Guadagno, L. (2016). *Integrating migrants in emergency preparedness, response and recovery in their host countries: Training manual (Facilitator's Guide)*. International Organization for Migration.
- Hungarian Interchurch Aid (2023). *Hungarian Interchurch Aid's response to the crisis caused by the war in Ukraine. One year of multisectoral humanitarian assistance report*. Retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/hungarian-interchurch-aids-response-crisis-caused-war-ukraine-one-year-multisectoral-humanitarian-assistance-report>
- Jacková, A. (Ed) (2021). *Z cudzincov domáci: Ako na integráciu v samospráve KapaCITY: Zistenia z projektu*. Retrieved from <https://www.hrl.sk/assets/files/obsah/1066-Z%20cudzincov%20doma%CC%81ci%20-%20Ako%20na%20integra%CC%81ciu%20v%20samospra%CC%81ve.pdf>
- Jelínková, M. & Hornek, J. (2022). *Dopady uprchlické krize na města a obce ČR: výsledky dotazníkového šetření z června 2022*. Svaz měst a obcí České republiky. Retrieved from <https://www.smocr.cz/Shared/Clanky/12046/vyhodnoceni-dotazniku-prevod-final.pdf>
- Journal of Laws (2022). Act of 12 March 2022 on assistance to citizens of Ukraine in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of Ukraine (Ustawa z dnia 12 marca 2022 r. o pomocy obywatelom Ukrainy w związku z konfliktem zbrojnym na terytorium tego państwa), 2022, item 583 (as amended).
- Kiss, A. (2023). *Mapping and rapid assessment of existing national NGO coordination mechanisms focusing on Hungary, Poland, Romania, and the Republic of Moldova*. International Council of Voluntary Agencies, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
- Madej, M., Myśliwiec, M. & Tybuchowska-Hartlińska, K. (2023). Local Governments in Poland in the Face of the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis. In A. Kasińska-Metryka & K. Pałka-Suchojad (Eds.), *The Russia-Ukraine War of 2022: Faces of modern conflict* (pp. 133–149). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003341994>
- Mishchuk, Z. & Vlasenko, R. (2023). *Ukrainian refugees in Visegrad countries: Societal attitudes and challenges of accommodating people fleeing the war*. Globsec.
- OECD (2022). *International Migration Outlook 2022*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/30fe16d2-en>.
- Podgórska, K., Jekaterynczuk, A., Yarosh, O., Kuzmuk, O. & Liubchuk, L. (2023). Support for Ukrainian refugees after Russia invades Ukraine: aid structure and resilience factors. Case studies of Lublin and Lutsk. *European Societies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2023.2206892>
- Pries, L. (2022). *Why civil society engagement is crucial for refugee protection*. Retrieved from <https://www.asileproject.eu/why-civil-society-engagement-is-crucial-for-refugee-protection/>
- Sahin-Mencütek, Z., Barthoma, S., Gökalp-Aras, N. E. & Triandafyllidou, A. (2022). A crisis mode in migration governance: Comparative and analytical insights, *Comparative Migration Studies*, 10(12). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-022-00284-2>

- Sandberg, B. (2015). Nonprofit Organizations: Theories. In D. A. Bearfield & M. J. Dubnick (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Public Administration and Public Policy* (3rd ed., pp. 2296–2300). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.1081/E-EPAP3-120051399>
- Scholten, P. & Penninx, R. (2016). The multilevel governance of migration and Integration, In B. Garcés-Mascareñas & R. Penninx (Eds.), *Integration processes and policies in Europe*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-21674-4_6
- Soltész, B., Kaličinská, E., Novotný, O., Vadasi, V., Homel, V., & Karak Vargová, J. (2021). *The role of local governments in the integration of refugees in the V4 countries*. *Člověk v tísni, Marginal, Institut of Public Affairs, Menedék*.
- UNESCO (2022). *Mapping of host countries' education responses to the influx of Ukrainian students*. UNESCO.
- Wodzicki, M., Pichola, I., Tomera, E., Komada, O., Herbik Piszczako, E., Patorska, J., Łaszek, A. & Trzeciakowski, R. (2022). *Refugees from Ukraine in Poland. Challenges and potential for integration*. Deloitte.