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## ***Editorial introduction***

The Visegrad Group (V4), i.e., Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, have been regarded as typically emigrant countries for practically the entire 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The fact is that a far greater number of their inhabitants went abroad than immigrants arrived there. The situation began to change a few years after the enlargement of the European Union in 2004. Initially, however, these countries experienced significant outflows of inhabitants to other Member States. In the case of Poland, the level of emigration between 2004 and 2008 was so high that it could even be compared to the migration exodus of the late 1970s and early 1980s. In the case of the other three countries, the level of emigration, although significant, involved smaller proportions of their citizens.

The benefits of participation in the EU single market, the inflow of structural and cohesion policy funds and, above all, direct investment resulted in accelerated economic growth, which translated into an improved labour market situation. Added to this were the effects of demographic processes initiated after the Second World War (highs and lows in birth rates) and in the 1960s and 1970s (steady decline in fertility rate levels). This resulted in declining numbers entering the labour market in the first and second decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a result of these processes, there were shortages in the labour markets of the V4 countries that could be filled by foreigners. Therefore, the V4 governments, albeit to different extents and scales, decided to liberalise access to their labour markets, especially for citizens of Eastern Europe and selected Asian countries. Particularly wide doors to labour markets were opened first by the Czech Republic and later by Poland. In the case of Poland, a very liberal policy of admitting foreigners to the labour market has resulted in a situation where Poland ranked first in the European Union in 2019–2021 in terms of issuing various types of residence rights related to access to the labour market. The migration situation of the V4 countries has also been changed to a very significant extent by Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the related influx of war refugees from that country.

The leading political actors, recognising the possibility of quick political profit, effectively positioned the migrant crisis (2015–2016), and created so many additional levels of interpretation to existing ones, in order to place the issue of immigration and terrorism at the centre of the political agenda. Instead of the preparation for

effective management, there was a communication battle, which hystericised public debate both in domestic politics and at the European level too that basically crushed rational initiatives and correct dialogue. The migration policies of the V4 countries present many similarities that seem to be the effect of congruent historical and economic determinants. During the migration crisis of 2015–2016, the Visegrad states partially coordinated their political communication using the same communication panels, which strongly impacted domestic political relations. Later, the collaboration got disrupted due to the different reactions of the V4 governments after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022.

This special issue contains papers analysing the phenomenon of V4 countries transforming from typically emigrational to immigrational ones. Two of them also show the different approaches that have been taken to the influx of immigrants. The first compares Hungary's response to the influx of immigrants during the so-called migration crisis of 2015–2016 with Poland's response during the influx of immigrants across the Polish-Belarusian border in 2021, which has been triggered by Alexander Lukashenko's regime. The second paper analyses and compares the extent and rules on which war refugees from Ukraine have been and continue to be accepted in all four V4 countries. The other three texts included in this special issue on migration analyse the process of Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic becoming migration-oriented states, moreover, examine migration-related policies of the abovementioned states. Thus, the individual texts complement each other and form a whole showing the specificity of the V4 countries on the current migration map of the world.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century has been called the century of migration. During it, the V4 countries were categorised as emigrational. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, migration is becoming even more spectacular, although the time of the COVID-19 pandemic brought global migration to a halt for two years. In the current century, the V4 countries are migrant-receiving countries, which influences how they are perceived around the world. We, therefore, encourage you to read the paper that answers the question of how this whole phenomenon has happened and whether it is already a permanent trend or just a periodic change in the history of migration.

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## ***Is Czechia an immigration country? Evidence from civic integration policies***

### ***Abstract***

In Western Europe, the first integration policies emerged in the 1980s as a reaction to the long-term settlement of foreign workers, originally perceived as temporary migration, transforming these countries into immigration ones. Based on this West-European experience, the article claims that Czechia has evolved into an immigration country in the last two decades, providing evidence from its integration policies. It shows how Czechia implements what is called “civic integration policies”, a novel form of integration approach promoted by West-European countries since the end of the 1990s, inquiring into what aspects Czech civic integration policies resemble and differ from the West-European examples. For this purpose, the research offers a qualitative comparison with Austria as a representative of such a West-European experience. As a result, it brings new knowledge of immigrant integration policies in a region neglected in migration studies, while supporting the argument that immigration to Czechia has turned into a constant trend, requiring a complex set of integration policies in order to tackle this new reality successfully.

**Keywords:** immigration, Czech Republic, Austria, integration policies, civic integration

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## Introduction

Since the Second World War, Europe started to tackle a trend of vast mobility of people across borders, either forced due to the emergence of totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe or voluntary for the purpose of better living conditions abroad.<sup>2</sup> Mainly in the 1950s and 1960s, West-European countries began to accept foreign guest-workers as a consequence of labour shortages in the emerging post-war economic boom. As these foreigners were initially supposed to stay only temporarily, the host countries did not actively promote their integration into society. However, after reducing immigration with the oil crises of the 1970s, the majority of guest-workers chose to stay long-term in their host countries while uniting there with their families. Such a situation resulted in the creation of the first integration policies in Europe during the 1980s. Due to divergence in approaching immigrant integration across European states, the literature speaks about “national models of integration”, most often referring to the assimilationist model of France, the multiculturalist approach of the United Kingdom or the Netherlands, and exclusivism historically employed by Germany (Carrera, 2006; Castles, 1995; Joppke, 2007).

Nonetheless, a series of events after the turn of the millennium, such as the murders of Pim Fortuyn (2002) and Theo van Gogh (2004), bombings in Madrid (2004) and London (2005) or riots in Paris (2005) triggered a debate on problematic immigrant integration, entitled as “crisis of integration” (de Haas et al., 2020, p. 327). As a result, the chase for an alternative to the “failed” classical models has started. It is exactly by this time when civic integration policies (further CIP) attracted the most attention. Inspired by the Netherlands, adopting the first CIP in the *Newcomers’ Civic Integration Act* in 1998, several West-European countries began to implement similar practices, such as the introduction of integration programmes or agreements, language and civic courses and tests, or citizenship ceremonies and oaths. Promoted subsequently by the European Union, civic integration seems to offer a practical solution adaptive to different national migration experiences and needs.

This paper contributes to the already extensive CIP scholarly debate with an investigation of civic integration in a neglected region of Central Europe by examining the Czech case. With the claim that the “Czech Republic has become primarily an immigration country” (MV ČR, 2011, p. 74), the Ministry of Interior confirms identical conclusions made by several scholars (Baršová & Barša, 2005; Drbohlav, 2004; Kušniráková, 2014; Zogata-Kusz, 2020). This article also supports this argument by providing unique evidence from the implementation of the West-European model of immigrant integration. For this purpose, the research inquires in what aspects CIP in Czechia, where integration policies have generally evolved only recently, resemble and differ from the West-European examples, which have been developing their integration policies for almost a half-century. To answer this question, the analysis brings a detailed comparison of Czech CIP with the experience of its Austrian neighbour, a country with one of the eldest practices of CIP in Europe.

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The order of the article is as follows: it first focuses on the basic theoretical concept with which the research works, civic integration, and reviews the already existing relevant literature. Subsequently, the paper provides an overview of the methodology and methods applied by the research. The third part sheds light on the basic facts on migration and integration policies in both countries and the EU, followed by two sections summarising CIP implemented in Austria and Czechia. In the end, the article offers a discussion before coming to a conclusion.

### *Theory and literature: civic integration*

This research understands civic integration as an approach, “in which integration arises through immigrants’ acquisition of ‘citizen-like’, or civic, skills. These might include speaking the host country language, having knowledge about the country’s history, culture and rules, and understanding and following the liberal democratic values that underscore their new home” (Goodman & Wright, 2015, p. 1886). The acquisition of such “skills” can be promoted via integration programmes or agreements signed between the foreigner and the host state containing language and civic courses and tests, or citizenship ceremonies and oaths when passing the naturalisation process. In contrast to the afore-mentioned CIP definition, this paper does not see civic integration measures as “uniquely applied as conditions in the process of obtaining citizenship” (Goodman & Wright, 2015, p. 1886), as any of these measures can be offered to immigrants voluntarily, without elements of coercion.

As it follows from the term itself, civic integration intersects with two main migration concepts: immigrant integration and citizenship. Regarding the former, the research perceives immigrant integration as a two-way process, as it does not concern immigrants only, but affects the receiving society as well. This understanding of integration, where migrants are enabled to maintain their original identity, is distinguished from the assimilationist one-way approach, requiring a complete absorption of migrants into the host society (Penninx & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016, pp. 11–12; Van Wolleghem, 2019, pp. 8–9). The research thus reflects that the process of immigrant integration requires adaptation of both parts of the society, and civic integration does not account for an exception in this regard. In addition, as integration is a long-term process, it takes place across different dimensions of the individual’s life, most often referred to as cultural, socio-economic and legal-political dimensions (Penninx & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016). While CIP interferes with all three of them, its main focus lies in the cultural, social and legal-political integration with an impact on the economic one as a result, as language knowledge and socio-cultural orientation in the host society are important prerequisites for successful labour-market integration.

Citizenship as a concept plays an important role in CIP as well because acquiring citizenship by immigrants is often perceived as the final step of their successful integration into the host society. With naturalisation, immigrants gain full access to their political rights. However, European countries began to implement rising numbers of conditions for naturalisation through civic integration. Goodman identified three gates of state membership that immigrants have to pass in order to obtain their new

citizenship: entry to the country, settlement and acquisition of citizenship (Goodman, 2010). This research however revealed an important difference between the initial settlement of immigrants in their first years of stay and their subsequent long-term residence. Thus, four gates of membership are applied in the research: (1) entry, (2) initial settlement, (3) long-term residence, and (4) naturalisation.

Although at first it seemed that CIP expansion across European states finally brings a convergence of otherwise divergent immigrant integration practices in Europe (Joppke, 2007), subsequent research revealed a high variation in CIP use. According to several scholars, the cross-national differences differ significantly even after the application of this novel policy (Jacobs & Rea, 2007; Koopmans et al., 2012). Goodman's civic integration index (CIVIX) provides a comprehensive overview of such a variation within CIP use, as it measures language, civic-knowledge and value-commitment requirements across 15 EU Member States (Goodman, 2010, 2014). The Netherlands and Denmark rank among the countries with the widest and strictest use of civic integration requirements. Introducing CIP as the first country, the Netherlands implemented a 12-month integration course consisting of 600 hours of language and civic education with the *Newcomers' Civic Integration Act* in 1998. In 2006, the country extended CIP with pre-entry language and civic knowledge tests in the country of origin, getting a label of "the most drastic expression of this [CIP] development" (Joppke, 2007, p. 8). Other countries, such as Germany, France or Denmark, followed with similar programmes, also concluding integration agreements with newcomers in order to set up the responsibilities of the immigrant and of the state in the new relationship (Carrera, 2006). However, as Goodman's CIVIX index shows, the degree of restriction differs substantially among the countries.

The cases examined here support the argument of such divergent approaches to civic integration. Austria accounts for one of the strictest CIP regimes in Europe, while Czechia belongs to the moderate group, as it applies a mixture of obligatory and voluntary measures (Goodman, 2010, 2014; Mourão Permoser, 2012; Simbartlová, 2019). However, the CIP literature focuses mostly on the experience of West-European countries, omitting the region of Central and Eastern Europe. Thus, this article aims at filling this gap, showing in the example of Czechia that a Visegrad country, previously known to be an emigration or transit country, has already transformed into an immigration country implementing a complex integration model similar to its Western neighbours.

### *Data and methods*

The paper offers a qualitative comparison of the Czech and Austrian cases in order to provide an answer to the research question, in what aspects Czech CIP resemble and differ from the West-European examples. It zooms into the period since the end of the 1990s when both Austrian as well as Czech integration policies started to evolve, and follows their development until the end of 2021. The research was conducted in two phases. First, a qualitative analysis of legislative acts and governmental reports on migration was processed to uncover the development of CIP

in the studied environments. In the second phase, 43 semi-structured interviews were conducted in the years 2018–2022 with diverse actors involved in integration policy making at various levels of governance (national, regional, municipal), representing different kinds of units (governmental, administrative, as well as of NGOs and other institutions).<sup>3</sup> These interviews aimed at revealing the practice of CIP laid down in the legislation and other policy documents. For the protection of the identity of respondents, interviews are partially or fully anonymised, according to the consent given by the interviewees.

Examining CIP interferes with both immigration as well as integration policies. While immigration policies determine the rules for the entry of foreigners and regulate the conditions for their long-term stay in the country, integration policies aim at the integration of immigrants already living in the country. Together with asylum and other sets of policies (e.g. on irregular migration etc.), they are covered by an umbrella term of migration policies that tackle the regulation of migration flows over the country's borders generally (Baršová & Barša, 2005, pp. 9–11). Although migration policies deal with a wide range of migrant categories, this research focuses only on the integration of third-country nationals (further TCNs), as other important categories, such as EU nationals or refugees, do not pass the same gates of membership on their integration path and thus are subject to different integration strategies.

There exist several reasons for choosing Czechia and Austria as cases for comparison. First, many similarities drove the selection of these countries. Both have comparable geographic as well as demographic sizes and are geographically situated in Central Europe as neighbours. While having shared a long common history, the countries are also culturally close, being significantly impacted by the Christian religion, specifically by the Catholic tradition. Further, they represent states with the highest share of foreign citizens in their population in the region, Austria belonging to the top in Europe, and Czechia following the Netherlands and Portugal in the EU ranking (Eurostat, 2022). The development of migration flows is alike in both countries, also in the long-term, as they both accepted guest-workers before 1989 (Drbohlav, 2004; Kraler, 2011) and faced refugee flows after 1989, namely from dissolving Yugoslavia. Also, both countries have been dealing with integration policy making for a similar period of time, since the end of the 1990s. And last but not least, they both apply CIP.

On the other hand, several divergences bring important aspects to the comparison. First, while the countries were tied with common political and historical development

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<sup>3</sup> Twenty-three interviews were conducted with Austrian representatives of: Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs (BMEIA); Federal Ministry for Women, Family, Youth and Integration (BMFFJI); Expert Council for Integration; Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF); government or administration of five Austrian provinces; administration of four Austrian municipalities; five Austrian NGOs involved in immigrant integration; and International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in Vienna.

Twenty interviews were conducted with Czech representatives of: Ministry of Interior (OAMP MV ČR); Refugee Facilities Administration (SUZ); administration of six regional integration centres; administration of two Czech regions; administration of one Czech municipality; three Czech NGOs involved in immigrant integration; and International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in Prague.

until 1918, they have evolved very differently since then, namely after the Second World War, divided by the Iron Curtain. This fact led to a diverse development of migration flows and periods of accession to the EU with consequences on migration policy management. Hence, although they represent countries with the highest share of foreigners in their population in the Central European region, Austria experiences an impact of migration in much larger numbers than its northern neighbour, becoming an immigration country sooner than Czechia. Thus, Austria has always been a step ahead of Czechia in dealing with an influx of immigrants.

For these reasons, Austria is associated rather with West-European countries as existing cross-national analyses show (Carrera, 2006; Joppke, 2008; Michalowski, 2011). The state also evinces more publications focused on its (civic) integration policies (e.g. Kraler, 2011; Mourão Permoser, 2012, 2018; Mourão Permoser & Rosenberger, 2012; Perchinig, 2010) than other Central European countries that are generally marginal in the academic debate on immigrant integration. While there is only scarce research in this field in Slovakia and Hungary (Temesi, 2018; Zaková, 2019; Zubiková, 2021), several studies reporting on the development of local integration policies in Poland emerged recently (Duszczek et al., 2018; Okólski & Wach, 2020; Ślęzak & Bielewska, 2021; Winiarska & Wojno, 2018). Nevertheless, most attention regarding immigrant integration management in the Visegrad countries has been drawn to the Czech case (e.g. Bernard & Mikešová, 2014; Kušniráková, 2014; Simbartlová, 2019; Zogata-Kusz, 2020). Yet, the examination of civic integration in this region is still considerably underdeveloped. Therefore, comparing Czechia with Austria as the closest example of a West-European immigration country is relevant for searching for possible similar patterns in the field of immigrant integration policies in the Central European region.

### *Migration and integration policies in Austria, Czechia and the EU*

The adherence of both studied countries to the group of immigration states is simply derivable from long-term data provided by the national statistical offices. According to Statistics Austria, net migration of non-nationals for the period of 1961–2021 accounts for +1.784 million in total which has significantly changed the structure of society with almost 9 million inhabitants. The share of non-nationals in the population has been growing steadily since 1961, culminating in January 2022 with 1.587 million, representing 17.7 % of the total Austrian population. Nevertheless, when taking into account all persons with a migration background (thus nationals included), the number rises even to 2.240 million, making the share 25.4 %. Among the largest immigrant minorities coming from the EU countries count Germans, Romanians and Croatians, while TCNs come most often from Turkey, the region of ex-Yugoslavia and Syria (Statistics Austria, 2022, pp. 22–27).

Although the figures of non-nationals living long-term in Czechoslovakia before its division in 1993 counted less than 40,000, they have significantly risen since 1994 when the number exceeded 100,000 for the first time (Czech Statistical Office, 2022b). While constantly growing, the volume of non-nationals living in Czechia

reached 6.2 % of the 10 million population by the end of 2021, counting 660,849 in total (Czech Statistical Office, 2022a). Among the most represented TCNs, there are citizens from Ukraine, Vietnam and Russia, while Slovaks, Romanians and Poles account for the largest EU immigrant minorities (Czech Statistical Office, 2022c). Even if the national offices offer different statistical perspectives, one can clearly see a similar trend in both studied cases: long-term immigration has been present there for decades and impacts the host societies considerably.

As a consequence, both countries significantly reformed their migration policies and started to develop their own immigrant integration policies during the 1990s. The integration issue became more visible in the Austrian political debate with the promotion of the “integration before new immigration” principle in 1997 (Kraler, 2011, p. 34). In Czechia, the government responded to the integration question with the adoption of the Principles for the Concept of Immigrant Integration in the Territory of the Czech Republic (Cze. *Zásady koncepce integrace cizinců na území České republiky*, further the Principles) in 1999. The Principles were subsequently followed by a more detailed Conception of Immigrant Integration (Cze. *Koncepce integrace cizinců*, further the Conception) implemented in 2000 and updated in 2006, 2011 and 2016 (further the Updated Conception). A similar approach has been implemented in Austria in 2010 too, by designing a National Action Plan for Integration (Ger. *Nationaler AktionsPlan Integration*). With these documents and related legislative reforms, the Austrian as well as Czech governments progressively introduced civic integration measures, accounting for the major changes in immigrant integration in both countries.

When developing their policies, both countries relied on the coordination of integration approaches managed at the European level. While the harmonisation of immigrant integration policies is prohibited by the Lisbon Treaty, the EU institutions possess the competence in providing incentives and support to the Member States in this area (*Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union*, 2012, para. 79.4). Among the most important tools which the EU used in this regard, there are the Family Reunification and the Long-Term Resident Status Directives, impacting the field of integration policies by setting up minimum standards for the TCNs’ rights concerning their arrival and stay in the host countries. Further, the EU provided its Member States with a definition of an integration process, including the emphasis on immigrants’ knowledge of the host country’s language, history and values, in the Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the EU, adopted in 2004. Another tool for enhancing immigrant integration in the EU is represented by the European Integration Network, previously known as the National Contact Points on Integration, which gathers representatives of national authorities for exchanging best practices in the immigrant integration area. And last but not least, the EU employs its spending power through the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, preceded by the European Integration Fund, through which the Commission determines conditions for gaining subventions for immigrant integration projects. All these incentives considerably impacted the development of Czech as well as Austrian CIP which are described in more detail in the following sections.

### *Civic integration policies in Austria*

As Austria implemented the first civic integration measures as early as 2003, it ranks among the first states which drew inspiration from the new Dutch integration approach. Since then, it developed its own model of CIP, which led to one of the most restrictive citizenship and integration regimes in Europe (Mourão Permoser, 2012), together with the Netherlands or Denmark (Goodman, 2010, 2014). The next pages provide an overview of Austrian CIP as they evolved in time until 2020.

In 2002, the reform of the Aliens Act (Ger. *Fremdengesetz*), coming into force in 2003, introduced an obligation on the part of immigrants to sign and fulfil an Integration Agreement (Ger. *Integrationsvereinbarung*, further IA). The responsibility for the effectuation of IAs was transferred to the Austrian Integration Fund (Ger. *Österreichischer Integrationsfonds*, further ÖIF), originally entitled to deal with refugees, but becoming a close partner of federal ministries responsible for immigrant integration over time (*Interview No. 6*, October 17, 2019). In the first IA version, foreigners had to prove their language competence at the A1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (further CEFR), either with a passed certificate or by attending a partly subsidised government-sponsored integration course of 100 hours without a final exam, secured by ÖIF. With the subsequent reform of 2006, the language requirement increased to the A2 level. The language courses continued to be optional and partly subsidised by the government, but their charge increased to 300 hours, the costs scaled to hundreds of euro, and their completion was conditioned by a standardised final test (*Interview No. 4*, September 12, 2019; *Interview No. 5*, September 12, 2019; Mourão Permoser, 2012, pp. 186–187).

Also in 2006, a reform of the Citizenship Act (Ger. *Staatsbürgerschaftsgesetz*) took place, implementing new civic integration measures for naturalisation. Until then, applicants had to show their “adequate knowledge of the German language, taking into account the living conditions of the foreigner” only, as required by the Citizenship Act of 1998 (*BGBI. 124/1998*, 1998, para. 3). As the law did not set up clear guidelines for such an assessment, the recognition of the applicants’ skills has been largely dependent on the juries’ consideration (Stern & Valchars, 2013, p. 15). This changed with the 2006 amendment of the Citizenship Act, making the long-term residence permit a condition for naturalisation. Thus, since then, applicants for Austrian citizenship needed to fulfil the IA at the A2 level, which has risen to the B1 level in 2011 (Goodman, 2014, p. 100; Kraler, 2011, p. 45; Stern & Valchars, 2013, pp. 15, 24).

The 2006 reform of the Citizenship Act also introduced a very important novelty in the form of a citizenship test assessing the civic proficiency of the applicant. This exam is composed of three parts containing six multiple-choice questions each about: (1) the history of Austria, (2) the Austrian democratic political regime, and (3) information on the federal province of the applicant’s residence (Goodman, 2014, p. 99; Stern & Valchars, 2013, p. 24). The content of the test has been criticised repeatedly due to huge differences across various provinces as the responsibility for its design lies in the hands of provincial governments. The same concerns application fees, which differ considerably among federal states, ranging from 100 to 1360 euro (plus a federal fee of about 1000 euro, which must be counted as well) (Stern & Valchars, 2013, p. 31).



Preparation for the test is the responsibility of the applicant. What is available online is only an information booklet about the test and a training test (BMI Österreich, 2022).

The next substantial update of Austrian CIP happened in 2011. First, Austria followed the examples of some European states such as Germany, the Netherlands, France or Denmark (Hollomey & Kraler, 2011, p. 15) and introduced language knowledge at the A1 level of CEFR as a condition for obtaining visas enabling TCNs to enter and settle in the country. Specifically, this condition has to be proved by a “generally acknowledged language diploma” acquired at one of the selected institutions<sup>4</sup> when first applying for selected residence titles (migration.gv.at, 2022). Further, the 2011 reform of the Aliens Act introduced two modules of IA. Module 1 preserved the form of the previous IA with the A2 level for newcomers to Austria, while Module 2 started to serve to immigrants aiming for a long-term residence permit. Those needed to prove their language knowledge at the B1 level of CEFR (Mourão Permoser, 2012, p. 187).

Until 2017, the required language examination of both modules could be proved by either an internationally recognised language certificate (Ger. *Österreichisches Sprachdiplom*, further *ÖSD*) or a test specially designed for this purpose by *ÖIF* (Mourão Permoser, 2012, pp. 186–188). Nevertheless, this changed with the Integration Act of 2017 (Ger. *Integrationsgesetz*) which established a special examination designed by *ÖIF*, newly called the “integration exam”, as the only eligible form of fulfilling the IA requirements for both modules (*Integration Act*, 2017, para. 11–12). This step added civic knowledge to the obligation for newcomers while making *ÖSD* relevant only for certifications at the B2 and above levels, which are not legally required in Austria.

As the IA requirements are compulsory for newcomers under Module 1, a system of sanctions has been in operation already since 2002. The first stem involves a partial loss of the subsidies for the course after 1.5 years. The second is about with financial penalties. The third is a possible deportation order unless the migrant meets the conditions within the 4-year time frame. These conditions remained the same with the 2006 reform, with the only exception of the entire loss of subsidies after two years, which was even lowered to 1.5 years in 2011 for Module 1 (Mourão Permoser, 2012, pp. 186–188). However, only four persons were threatened with the deportation order until 2011, while merely two eventually left the country (Mourão Permoser, 2012, pp. 193–196). With regards to Module 2, this requirement does not imply any sanctions as the acquisition of the long-term residence permit is not a compulsory step in order to stay legally on the Austrian territory.

### *Civic integration policies in Czechia*

Czechia experienced a different development in civic integration policy making than Austria, which hit a strict tone from the very beginning of CIP implementation. Contrarily, Czech policy makers aimed to avoid copying the restrictive examples, such as the Netherlands or Denmark (*Interview No. 7*, June 3, 2020). The next

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<sup>4</sup> Austrian Language Diploma German (*ÖSD*), Goethe-Institut, Telc GmbH and Austrian Integration Fund (*ÖIF*).



paragraphs will present the Czech model of CIP and its development in time, as in the Austrian case.

Since the adoption of the Principles and the Conception at the turn of the millennium, immigrants have been offered a range of language as well as socio-cultural courses through various integration projects carried out mainly by NGOs (MV ČR, 2004; Tollarová, 2011). These services were provided mostly for free, thanks to the subventions by the EU funds and relevant Czech ministries. Nevertheless, as NGOs did not reach all regions, the Ministry of Interior promoted the creation of a network of regional integration centres in 2009, in order to cover the integration needs of foreigners throughout the whole country (*Interview No. 2*, November 8, 2018).

The creation of such a network intersected with the first civic integration measure introduced in the 2007 amendment of the Aliens Act (Cze. *Zákon o pobytu cizinců na území ČR*), coming into force in 2009, requiring language knowledge proof at the A1 level for the applicants for a permanent residence permit (MŠMT ČR, 2008, para. 1; *Zákon č. 379/2007 Sb.*, 2007, para. 89). Thus, the integration centres provide the immigrants with appropriate preparation for this language examination, ensured separately by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. Apart from language courses, the integration centres also secure what is called “courses of socio-cultural orientation”, consisting of 1.5- or 2-hour sessions focused on practical issues of everyday life in more detail. These topics include information on residence issues, CV preparation, children’s primary school enrolment, and the pension system for foreigners, among others (*Interview No. 1*, 2018; *Interview No. 3*, 2018; *Interview No. 8*, 2022). These courses, language as well as socio-cultural ones, are offered for free, and their undertaking is voluntary.

Apart from these services, provided to Czech immigrants already throughout the 2000s by NGOs (Tollarová, 2011, p. 16) and subsequently by the integration centres, the Czech government announced the creation of a new introductory civic course called “adaptation-integration course” for newcomers in 2011 (Vláda ČR, 2011, p. 19). Designed by a platform of NGOs in cooperation with IOM (MV ČR, 2013, p. 73), the course lasted 8 hours and provided “information on rights and obligations related to residence (...) and basic socio-cultural orientation” (Vláda ČR, 2011, p. 19), offered on a voluntary basis. This course has been created together with a pre-departure package of information aimed at potential migrants in their country of origin, distributed at Czech embassies abroad, and other post-arrival information materials aiming at long-term settled immigrants, under an integration project focusing on the development of a “three-level system of information for foreigners” (MV ČR, 2013, p. 82).

The next significant update of Czech CIP came with the 2014 reform of the Citizenship Act (Cze. *Zákon o státním občanství České republiky*). Until 2014, applicants for naturalisation were obliged by the Citizenship Act of 1993 to pass a language knowledge proof in the form of a simple interview without a specified level of such a skill. Applicants only had to demonstrate that they can “fluently and linguistically correctly respond to questions related to everyday situations” and “orally communicate the content of text from the daily press” in a 30-minute interview (*Zákon č. 40/1993 Sb.*, 1992; MŠMT ČR, 1993). However, the 2014 reform of the Citizenship Act required the applicants to undergo a standardised language examination, while also proving “basic

knowledge of the constitutional system of the Czech Republic and basic orientation in cultural, social, geographic and historical realities of the Czech Republic” (*Zákon č. 186/2013*, 2013, para. 14.5).

Although the language knowledge has been set up at the B1 level of CEFR, the government does not organise any preparatory courses nationwide. Immigrants may only use free courses offered by the integration centres or NGOs, which, however, are not available in all regions at such a level, or pay for a commercial language course (*Interview No. 1*, 2018). Nevertheless, applicants may try the exam in a “dry run” mode or go through a model test online (NPI ČR, 2022a). They can also prepare with a specific course book focused on the exam. The civic part of the test is designed as 30 multiple-choice questions on three subjects: (1) citizenship basics, (2) basic geographic information about Czechia, and (3) basic historical and cultural information. Again, interested persons may prepare in courses provided by the integration centres or NGOs; however, not all these institutions offer such services, as in the case of language preparation. On the other hand, applicants have access to the database containing all 300 questions and their correct solutions, which is openly available online. Immigrants interested in passing this test need to pay 5,500 CZK (ca. 220 euro) for the exam as a whole, aside from additional administrative fees of 2,000 CZK (ca. 80 euro) required for the naturalisation process as such (NPI ČR, 2022a).

The last substantial change in the Czech CIP came with the 2019 reform of the Aliens Act which, for the first time, introduced an individual section focused on immigrant integration solely. Aside from legal anchorage of the existence of regional integration centres, the amendment turned the adaptation-integration course compulsory (*Zákon č. 176/2019 Sb.*, 2019, para. 149). Thus, since January 2021, all newcomers coming into the country are obliged to take part in this course while covering the relevant costs. Also, as this stands for a mandatory requirement, a sanction has been introduced, counting on financial penalties in case of non-compliance (*Zákon č. 176/2019 Sb.*, 2019, para. 154). On the other hand, the duration of the course has been shortened to 4 hours only (MV ČR, 2020, para. 13).

### *Models of civic integration: Austria and Czechia compared*

As the preceding section shows, both countries apply a broad range of civic integration measures in both languages as well as civic knowledge, implemented in various phases of the integration process. This part will now compare the selected cases and analyse their similarities and differences in order to answer the question of whether Czechia employs integration policies close to those implemented by West-European countries. The analysis will follow the order of the membership gates, as set out in the theoretical section. For easier orientation, Tables 1 and 2 offer overviews of Austrian and Czech CIP throughout the main milestones of the countries’ integration policy making.

Already from the very beginning of the migrants’ way to these two countries, one can recognise significantly higher expectations regarding the integration of immigrants in Austria than in Czechia. Even before their very entry into Austria, TCNs need to

prove their language knowledge with a certificate at the A1 level of CEFR since 2011. No material or financial support is provided by the government; the applicants thus have to make relevant arrangements themselves which may prevent some categories of migrants from entering the country (Mourão Permoser, 2012, p. 187; 2018).

In Czechia, no such a requirement has been introduced yet and is not even planned (*Interview No. 7*, 2020). The Czech government rather aims at information dissemination through a three-level system, starting at the pre-entry stage. Thus, since 2013, Czech embassies and consulates have distributed a free “pre-departure packet” containing an information sheet and a DVD, providing potential migrants with basic information about the conditions of entry relevant to different types of permits as well as stay in the territory (MV ČR, 2014, p. 86). Czech measures, therefore, do not include any obligatory requirements such as preparatory courses or tests in this integration phase. Both countries thus apply civic integration measures at the first gate of membership, although in a different way.

As for the second gate of initial settlement, a more restrictive approach is noticeable in the Austrian case with the language knowledge at the A1 level introduced in 2003 and raised to the A2 level in 2006. Apart from the language requirement, civic knowledge has also become relevant in the second gate of state membership in Austria since 2017. As migrants could prove the required language knowledge also by ÖSD until then, civic knowledge did not represent an obligatory measure for the initial settlement of immigrants in Austria. Nevertheless, since 2017, only integration exams designed by ÖIF, containing a civic part too, have been eligible for the fulfilment of IA (*Integration Act*, 2017, para. 11). This CIP reform, therefore, incorporated civic knowledge into the compulsory requirement.

Newcomers in Czechia are not required to pass a language test but, contrarily to Austria, are offered language courses for free, organised either by regional integration centres or by NGOs since as early as the 2000s. In addition to language courses, in 2011 Czech policy makers introduced an adaptation-integration course as part of the three-level information system, aimed at newly arriving immigrants. This initially voluntary and free 8-hour long course, providing immigrants with fundamental information not only about the conditions of the stay but also about their basic socio-cultural orientation in the country, became mandatory with the 2019 reform for all immigrants coming to Czechia after January 2021, in a paid but shortened version. Both countries, therefore, employ obligatory civic integration elements for incoming migrants, even though Austria emphasises language knowledge more while Czechia the immigrants’ orientation in the society.

The third gate of state membership deals with immigrants who aim to gain a long-term residence permit. In Austria, it is carried out through the EU long-term residence permission which immigrants can apply for after five years of stay. Since 2011, such applicants have to pass Module 2 of IA, which proves their language knowledge at the B1 level of CEFR. While the government secures the courses for Module 1 nationwide, offering some categories of immigrants a subsidy for an otherwise paid programme, such support does not apply to Module 2 (*Email Correspondence No. 1*, 2022; Mourão Permoser, 2018, p. 190). The applicant thus needs to prepare for the test individually either with material provided online (MeinSprachportal,

2022) or with commercial language courses. While the language requirement could be fulfilled by passing ÖSD or the special ÖIF exam before 2017, this changed to only the ÖIF integration exam being valid for fulfilling IA in 2017 (*Integration Act*, 2017, para. 12), as in the case of Module 1, making civic knowledge compulsory for this gate of membership, too.

Immigrants staying in the Czech territory for five years have the right to apply for permanent residence. This permit corresponds to the EU Directive on the long-term residence status for TCNs but enables them to live in Czechia permanently. Aside from various conditions such as proof of accommodation and sufficient financial means for the stay, no civic integration measures concerned the applicants until 2009, when a new requirement of language knowledge proof at the A1 level came into force. While the applicants get a voucher from the Ministry of Interior to pass their first exam for free, they need to pay for every other retake (MV ČR, 2012, p. 90; NPI ČR, 2022b). Two years after this requirement has been in force, the government also announced plans for the increase of the level demanded from A1 to A2 (Vláda ČR, 2011, p. 20), coming into effect in September 2021 after several years of negotiations (Vláda ČR, 2021). While civic knowledge became part of the integration exam in Austria in 2017, Czech long-term immigrants do not have to fulfil any civic exams to get a permanent residence permit. Contrarily, they enjoy the possibility of a wide range of socio-cultural courses offered for free by the integration centres or NGOs.

The last gate of state membership, naturalisation, shows a similar approach in both studied countries. Austria as well as Czechia required language knowledge proof already before the first official CIP, Czechia even preceded Austria with the Citizenship Act of 1993, while the latter implemented the likewise condition only in 1998. Nevertheless, both countries later reformed their naturalisation procedures, requiring language examination at the B1 level and employing similar civic tests containing parts focused on the knowledge of geography, history and culture as well as the political and institutional setting of the country. While Czech immigrants may prepare easily for the test with a database of all questions with correct solutions available online, Austrian applicants may consult an information booklet and a model test online only. As for linguistic preparation, immigrants cannot enjoy grant-aided language courses at such a level in either country and thus need to prepare on their own.

To sum up, the comparison of Austrian and Czech CIP clearly shows that Czechia, although developing its integration policies more recently, employs an integration model similar to those applied by West-European immigration countries, tackling immigrant integration for almost a half-century. Civic integration measures were identified in all four gates of membership, as in the Austrian case. While one cannot miss the differences between these two models, namely, at the level of restriction, Czech civic integration measures still account for typical CIP, likewise applied, e.g. in France between 2003–2007 (Goodman, 2014, pp. 192–194). The design of the Czech CIP thus corresponds to the claim of the representative of the Ministry of Interior that Czech policy makers do not want to go as far as Denmark, the Netherlands, or even Austria (*Interview No. 2*, 2018; *Interview No. 7*, 2020).

Table 1. Overview of the development of Austrian CIP

	Entry		Initial Settlement		Long-Term Residence		Naturalisation		
	Language knowledge	Civic knowledge	Language knowledge	Civic knowledge	Language knowledge	Civic knowledge	Language knowledge	Civic knowledge	Citizenship ceremony/oath
1998	No	No	No	No	No	No	Interview	No	No
2003	No	No	A1 level Language certificate (paid/ subsidised)	In ÖIF course only	No	No	Interview	No	No
2006	No	No	A2 level Language certificate (paid/ subsidised)	In ÖIF course only	No	No	IA fulfilled	Citizenship test (paid)	No
2011	A1 level Language certificate (paid)	No	A2 level Language certificate (paid/ subsidised)	In ÖIF course only	B1 level Language certificate (paid/ subsidised)	In ÖIF exam only	IA fulfilled	Citizenship test (paid)	No
2017	A1 level Language certificate (paid)	No	A2 level Integration exam (paid/ subsidised)	Integration exam (paid/ subsidised)	B1 level Integration exam (paid/ subsidised)	Integration exam (paid/ subsidised)	IA fulfilled	Citizenship test (paid)	No

Table 2. Overview of the development of Czech CIP

	Entry		Initial Settlement		Long-Term Residence		Naturalisation		
	Language knowledge	Civic knowledge	Language knowledge	Civic knowledge	Language knowledge	Civic knowledge	Language knowledge	Civic knowledge	Citizenship ceremony/oath
1993	No	No	No	No	No	No	Interview	No	No
2009	No	No	No	No	Language courses (free) A1 exam (first free/ paid)	Socio-cultural courses (free)	Interview	No	No
2011	No	Pre-departure packet (in design)	No	Adaptation-integration course (in design)	Language courses (free) A1 exam (first free/ paid)	Socio-cultural courses (free)	Interview	No	No
2014	No	Pre-departure packet (free)	No	Adaptation-integration course (free)	Language courses (free) A1 exam (first free/ paid)	Socio-cultural courses (free)	B1 exam (paid)	Civic exam (paid)	No
2021	No	Pre-departure packet (free)	No	Adaptation-integration course (compulsory/ paid)	Language courses (free) A2 exam (first free/ paid)	Socio-cultural courses (free)	B1 exam (paid)	Civic exam (paid)	No

## Conclusion

This paper intended to support the argument that Czechia has become an immigration country, as highlighted not only by some scholars (Baršová & Barša, 2005; Drbohlav, 2004; Kušniráková, 2014; Zogata-Kusz, 2020) but also by the Czech Ministry of Interior itself (MV ČR, 2011). The article provides new evidence for such a claim with its analysis of specific policies of civic integration widely applied by West-European states tackling immigrant integration for half a century. When comparing the Czech civic integration practice with Austria, the research revealed that Czech policymakers aim at designing long-term immigrant integration policies similar to those implemented by other European immigration states. Although not so restrictive as in the Austrian and other West-European cases, Czech civic integration measures were introduced in all gates of membership from the pre-entry stage through the initial and long-term settlement until the last one of naturalisation.

The concept of civic integration thus offers an interesting framework for identifying the development of a previously emigration or transit country into an immigration one, as the presence of such policies reflects the genuine need to incorporate non-nationals settling in the country in the long term. However, research on civic integration is rather scarce in the case of Central and Eastern Europe. A thorough comparison of integration policies applied by the Visegrad and other CEE countries could enrich the integration debate significantly with new original cases. And if these countries miss the civic integration dimension in their immigrant integration strategies, Czechia could serve as an inspiring successful model for them.

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## *Hungary and Poland facing the migration crisis*

### *Abstract*

This article presents a reflection on the experiences of Hungary and Poland in the face of the migration crisis. Its aim is to present the measures taken by the Hungarian government in 2015 and by the Polish government in 2021 when both countries were confronted with a particular threat related to the mass influx of illegal immigrants and the forcing of their borders. The response to the specific threat became the use of a special legal regime, Hungary introduced a state of crisis due to mass migration at the Hungarian-Serbian border, while Poland had a state of emergency along the Polish-Belarusian border. In this context, it was hypothesised that the decision to impose a special legal regime in Poland and Hungary was justified in the context of the specific threat that the migration crisis had become and the possibility to take quick action and respond adequately. In both cases, a decision was made to build a border wall to keep out illegal immigrants, so one can see some analogies in the actions of the Polish and Hungarian authorities, as well as their anti-immigration rhetoric. The comparative method, the normative approach and the discourse method were applied in the article.

**Keywords:** Poland, Hungary, migration crisis, state of emergency, state of crisis due to mass migration

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## *Introduction*

The migration crisis caused by the massive influx of immigrants affected Hungary in 2015, which, due to its location, was on the route leading primarily to Germany as the main destination country. Faced with this particular threat, Viktor Orbán's government took special measures in the form of special legal regime – a state of crisis due to mass migration was imposed in several border provinces. Poland, in turn, faced a similar threat in 2021 when there was a migration crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border. At that time, the response of the Polish authorities was the decision to introduce one type of state of emergency, namely, of emergency along the entire Polish-Belarusian border. Due to the influx of illegal immigrants and the fact that the state border was being pushed through, Poland and Hungary were faced with the challenge of large numbers of foreigners crossing their borders in the hope of applying for international protection. In both countries under discussion, the migration crisis was treated as a particular threat to state security and a rationale for the introduction of a special legal regime. The aim of the article is to present the reactions of the Polish and Hungarian governments to the migration crisis and to indicate the consequences of the introduction of a special legal regime in the two countries in question. The main research questions are: what actions were taken by the Polish and Hungarian governments in the face of the migration crisis? Can analogies in action be discerned between the two countries that experienced the migration crisis? Was the decision to impose a special legal regime justified? Such inquiries are answered by the thesis that the decision to impose a special legal regime in Poland and Hungary was justified in the context of the specific threat that the migration crisis had become and the possibility to take quick action and respond adequately. Indeed, the occurrence of situations of specific threats that cannot be removed by ordinary constitutional means justifies the introduction of a special legal regime. One can, therefore, see analogies and similarities in the action and response to the migration crisis between Hungary and Poland. Both countries have used such a strategy. In both states in question, a decision was taken to build a fence on the border pushed by immigrants in order to stop their influx. In connection with border protection and building a fence, the Hungarian government's discourse was partly based on the historical concepts of "Hungary, the Fortress of Christianity" and the "Bastion of Europe" (Glied & Pap, 2016). When analysing the experiences of Poland and Hungary in the context of the migration crisis, it is also important to point out crucial differences regarding the scale of the threat faced by the two countries in question. When comparing the data with regard to the number of immigrants arriving in Hungary in 2015 and in Poland in 2021, it should be emphasised that in the case of Hungary it was definitely at a higher level than in Poland, although there was a spike in both countries. However, it is worth noting that Hungary is a smaller country than Poland in terms of both area and population. The Hungarian situation, moreover, required greater mobilisation of services, as the threat was not limited to the border area, but a large number of immigrants managed to get to Budapest and gather in crowds at the Keleti railway station. In Poland, the threat concentrated mainly in the border region although it was also associated with an intensification of service activities and an increase in the number of officers

needed to protect the border and repel the assault on the border, which occurred at the border crossing point in Kuźnica. It is worth emphasising that the genesis of both migration flows is different. While the migration wave of 2015–2016 was in line with the spontaneous global migration trend (which, of course, is caused by armed conflicts as well as demographic, social and environmental reasons) as a border crisis with refugees, asylum seekers and illegal migrants, the migration crisis as a refugee crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border in 2021 was clearly generated by the Belarusian regime, most likely with the support of Russia as part of a hybrid strategy.

A comparative method became the primary research strategy in order to identify similarities and differences in the approach to the migration crisis in Poland and Hungary. The article uses a normative approach by analysing the legal acts in force in Poland and Hungary with regard to the issue of states of emergency, primarily the 2011 Constitution of Hungary and the 1997 Constitution of the Republic of Poland, as well as the laws on states of emergency. In addition, a discourse method relating to the analysis of media messages concerning the coverage of the migration crisis was used. Among the source materials, mainly legal texts and scientific articles should be pointed out, especially those by Anna Potyrała, who in her publications refers to the issue of the migration crisis in Europe and provides definitions of the concept of crisis. According to Potyrała, the term crisis used to refer to “*a state of tension between two or more states or other actors in international relations, leading to destabilisation at the state and/or international level*” (Potyrała, 2019b). The migration crisis (caused by the mass influx of foreigners) is a serious, dysfunctional phenomenon of a cultural, social, economic and political nature carrying a broad catalogue of risks and threats for the whole of Europe, including the EU (Czachór & Jaskulski, 2015).

The experience of European countries in 2015 related to the phenomenon of external migration, i.e., the crossing of national borders, gained momentum and began to be referred to as a migration crisis, although the term “refugee crisis” also appeared in the media. This was supposed to reflect the nature of the observed migratory movements, which were mainly caused by persecution by non-democratic regimes or ongoing armed conflicts. Later on, however, the perception of the crisis changed, as attention began to be drawn to the fact that economic migrants began to arrive in Europe along with people fleeing their own countries for fear of persecution, so the population movements began to be referred to as a “migration crisis” (Potyrała, 2016). The debate in the EU included a profound difference in attitude, stating that in 2015 “who was a refugee in Brussels, a migrant in Budapest and Warsaw” (Glied & Zamecki, 2021). The term “immigrant”, as used in the article, refers to any person arriving in the EU from a third country, a person who enters the territory of a country other than his or her country of origin for the purpose of temporary or permanent relocation, while the term “refugee” refers exclusively to a person designated by the 1951 Refugee Convention (Potyrała, 2016).

The migration crisis is viewed through the prism of state security (Potyrała, 2015) and the institution of an extraordinary legal regime, namely the state of emergency. Securitisation is one of the most significant, innovative and at the same time most contested approach in security studies which was introduced by the members of the Copenhagen School, namely Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde in their book

entitled *Security: A new framework for analysis* in 1998. Securitisation theory “aims to gain an increasingly precise understanding of who securitizes, on what issues (threats), for whom (referent objects), why, with what results, and, not least, under what conditions (i.e., what explains when securitization is successful)” (Juhász, 2020). In a democratic country, a state of emergency is understood as a special legal regime introduced in the event of a particular threat, the removal of which is possible only by means of measures of an exceptional nature, not provided for in the constitution and ordinary legislation. This regime is characterised primarily by a restriction (suspension) of certain individual rights and freedoms. There may also be a transfer of competencies between public authorities or the granting of specific powers to them to remove the resulting threat (Prokop, 2005; Eckhardt, 2012). Thus, the most important consequences of the introduction of a special legal regime may include changes in the principles of activity of the state apparatus and in the sphere of human and civil liberties and rights. It is possible that the competencies of the authorities may be shifted, leading towards the centralisation of public power and its concentration in the hands of the executive (Prokop, 2020). A state of emergency, irrespective of its type, is based on seven structural elements: the mode of introduction, the purpose of introduction, the prerequisites for application, the territorial scope, the duration, the emergency measures and the mode of abolition. Based on the provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of April 2, 1997, the most important principles of states of emergency can be presented, which include the following:

- 1) of last resort (exceptionality), states of emergency may only be used in situations of special danger if ordinary constitutional measures are insufficient a special legal regime;
- 2) legality, states of emergency may only be imposed by law, by means of a decree which is subject to public disclosure;
- 3) proportionality, the action taken as a result of the state of emergency must correspond to the degree of threat and the requirements of the situation, the measures taken should be adequate to the actual threat;
- 4) expediency, the emergency measures applied in a given state should aim to restore the normal functioning of the state as soon as possible;
- 5) temporariness, enforces that states of emergency do not last beyond what is necessary to restore the normal functioning of the state;
- 6) protecting the foundations of the legal system means that the constitution, electoral laws and the emergency law cannot be amended during a state of emergency;
- 7) protection of representative bodies, during states of emergency parliamentary terms continue, shortening them is prohibited, as well as holding a national referendum, holding elections.

### *Migration crisis in Hungary in 2015*

In 2015, the EU was confronted with a massive influx of migrants and refugees, who reached Europe by sea – the southern route, the Mediterranean route or by land – the Balkan route. This phenomenon came to be known as a migration crisis, and its

extraordinary and unique character was determined primarily by the scale of the phenomenon. For comparison, according to estimates by the International Organisation for Migration, more than one million people from African and Middle Eastern countries entered Europe in the whole of 2015, which, compared to 280,000 immigrants in 2014, represented a more than threefold increase (Potyrała, 2019a). Since the culmination of the migration crisis in 2015, the EU has been implementing measures to control its external borders and the influx of migrants. The Union as a whole as well as its Member States are intensifying their efforts to develop an effective, humane and safe European migration policy. The Common European Asylum System provides for minimum standards for the treatment of all asylum seekers and minimum standards for the processing of asylum applications across the Union. The migration crisis has been characterised by a mass influx of asylum seekers and has demonstrated that EU asylum rules need reform in this context. Furthermore, faced with a massive influx of irregular migrants, individual Member States, citing the need to guarantee public order and the security of their citizens, questioned the legitimacy of the concept of a border-free area and reintroduced controls at the internal borders of the EU.

One of the EU countries on its external border that was most affected by the migration crisis at the time was Hungary. In 2015, the influx of migrants seeking asylum in this country increased from 42,775 in 2014 to 177,135 (Roślon-Żmuda, 2017). The increase in the number of immigrants was largely due to Hungary's geographical location, which was at the crossroads of the eastern and south-eastern migration routes. Together they form the Western Balkan route leading through Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Hungary and on to other EU countries. Hungary was, therefore, initially on the main and shortest route for the flow of refugees and immigrants, for whom the destination point was mainly Germany. According to the Hungarian authorities, the country was facing a wave of migration, not refugees, as they were reaching Hungary from safe transit countries, with the wave of migration largely due to the uncontrolled flow of migrants through Greece, the first country of the EU and the Schengen area to be reached (Gniazdowski & Jaroszewicz, 2015).

In response to the increased wave of migration, the Hungarian authorities decided to amend the migration law by increasing penalties for smugglers bringing migrants across the border and introducing criminal liability for illegal border crossings (Mohay, 2021). In addition, citing legal solutions within the framework of the EU's common asylum policy, the Hungarian authorities also decided to refuse asylum to persons arriving in Hungary from the territory of Serbia, which was classified as a safe country. The 175-kilometre Serbian-Hungarian border has become one of the most heavily trafficked borders by migrants in the EU – from the beginning of 2015 to mid-September 2015, more than 190,000 immigrants were reported to have crossed the Hungarian-Serbian border (Sadecki, 2015), and riots occurred at the Horgoš-Röske border crossing. This became the reason for the Hungarian authorities' decision to tighten the rules on illegal border crossings and build a barbed wire fence on the Hungarian-Serbian border, which was criticised by the EU and resulted in a change of migration routes and paths (on September 15, 2015, the Hungarian authorities closed the border with Serbia). In order for the implementation of the wall to proceed smoothly and for the services to be supported by the military in their border operations, a state of crisis

due to mass migration was imposed in the two provinces of Csongrád and Bács-Kiskun by government decision 269/2015 (in 2016 it was extended to the whole country by Government Decree 41/2016). The regulation of the state of crisis due to mass migration contains Chapter IX/A of the Asylum Act. The explanation why the state of crisis due to mass migration is not regulated on a constitutional level is a political one. Since Fidesz lost its two-thirds majority in the parliament on the by-elections in February 2015, the Hungarian Government has chosen the easier and political way: instead of introducing the state of crisis due to mass migration by amendment of the Fundamental Law which would have required two-thirds majority support in the Hungarian Parliament, the Government regulated it by the amendment of an ordinary law with a simple majority (Juhász, 2020). Hungarian Constitution of 2011 provided six states of emergency: state of national emergency, state of emergency, state of defence mobilisation, state of unexpected attack, state of danger, state of terrorist emergency introduced by the 2016 Sixth Amendment. However, in the December 2020 amendment to the Hungarian Constitution, the number of states of emergency was reduced to three (the change took effect from November 1, 2022): state of war, state of emergency, state of danger (Héjj, 2022). Under the state of crisis due to mass migration in 2015, the right not to tender for public procurement was mainly exercised, with procurement going to a narrow circle of trusted individuals centred around the Prime Minister (Héjj, 2020). A number of administrative facilitations were granted to the security authorities, including access to state or local government property and to companies under their authority, the construction of facilities for immigrants bypassing public procurement procedures and the participation of the military in guarding the border became possible (Sadecki, 2015). The authorities announced intensified police checks, including ID cards and searches of persons and cars, and the airspace was closed for some time on a 20-kilometre stretch near the Serbian border to allow the smooth movement of police, army and ambulance air units. Much harsher penalties for illegal border crossings and a simplified path for the deportation of immigrants to countries deemed safe, including Serbia, were introduced. This was followed by a package of legislation making illegal border crossing a criminal offence rather than the previous offence. Persons apprehended while illegally crossing the border were brought before a fast-track court. Damage to the border fence or entanglements (considered as destruction of state property) and obstruction of construction were also punishable. In addition, the penalties for people smuggling migrants across the border were increased (now up to 20 years in prison). Due to the current state of crisis, asylum seekers had to wait for their applications to be processed in the transit zones at the border. Hungary was the first among the EU countries to start erecting fences on its borders with Serbia (151 km long) and Croatia (300 km long), “*facing accusations of misappropriation of European values and undermining the idea and duty to protect human rights, including those of migrants*” (Potyrała, 2019b). The resulting protections were reinforced with barbed wire border fence, visual monitoring systems, movement detectors and even heat and live detectors (Juhász, 2017).

The measures taken, i.e., mainly the construction of a fence on the Hungarian-Serbian border and changes to the law (the asylum law was tightened) proved to be effective, as refugees stopped arriving in Hungary in large numbers after the experience

of September 2015, choosing other alternative migration destinations and routes. It appeared that the sealed border and the restrictive asylum procedure discouraged immigrants from entering Germany via Hungary. The authorities' decision to build a border wall became the cause of fierce criticism at home and abroad. It was alleged that Hungarian actions were contrary to "European principles". Human rights organisations, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), accused Hungary of violating the rights of migrants, in particular, the abuse of detention, violations of the principle of *non-refoulement* (expulsion of persons facing persecution), failure to provide them with the basic means of existence and decent conditions of residence (Gniazdowski & Jaroszewicz, 2015). In the last few years, the European Court of Human Rights has also found violations by Hungary of the European Convention on Human Rights regarding the unlawful prolongation of detention of foreigners.

At the beginning of September 2015, in the face of an escalating migratory wave, the Hungarian authorities decided to demonstrate their determination to enforce EU rules and, in this aspect, entered into a dispute with Germany, which had publicly declared its willingness to accept refugees, and Austria, declaring its willingness to provide them with transit to Germany. In fact, both countries agreed to also admit those migrants who had not registered in their first country of residence in the EU, thus agreeing to derogations from the rules of the European asylum system. Hungary regarded the German authorities' declarations of readiness to receive immigrants as an irresponsible incentive to illegally push the borders of the EU. When migrants residing on Hungarian territory attempted to reach Austria and Germany by rail and gathered at Budapest's Keleti station, the authorities of the capital removed them from the station and then launched an operation to transport immigrants to the border with Austria by bus (Gniazdowski & Jaroszewicz, 2015). The Orbán's government subsequently spoke out against the introduction of a mandatory quota mechanism pushed within the EU, and received support on this issue from the three Visegrad countries. Poland was initially in favour of the relocation mechanism, but after the change of government, the then Prime Minister Beata Szydło supported Hungary in this regard (Cebul & Zenderowski, 2020). The coalition formed by the Visegrad countries against the migrant relocation mechanism was called the "coalition of the unwilling" by the media. The migration crisis has highlighted the fact that many states prioritise national interests and place them above European solidarity, abdicating co-responsibility for its solution (Greenhill, 2016). Hungary has consistently refused to accept immigrants under the relocation mechanism and advocated for the construction of hotspots outside the external borders of the EU (Bauerová, 2018).

The Hungarian authorities intensified anti-Islamic and anti-immigration rhetoric in order to win voter support. The migration crisis dominated the Hungarian public debate, sidelining other topics as Prime Minister Orbán's firm rhetoric was in line with a public mood full of fear of strangers. Prime Minister Orbán declared that he wanted to preserve "Europe as a continent for Europeans and Hungary as a country of Hungarians" (Orbán, 2017), he further suggested that there is a direct link between immigration and terrorism, rising unemployment and crime. According to the Hungarian Prime Minister, the migration policy of the EU, aiming to incorporate people from different



civilisation-cultural backgrounds, may lead to cultural and ethnic changes and would transform the Christian character of Europe within a few generations. The government has demonstrated its willingness to protect the Schengen border absolutely. An important move by the Hungarian authorities became the ordering of a nationwide referendum to strengthen Hungary's position in the EU in the debate on the migration crisis. In the referendum held on October 2, 2016, 98% of Hungarians who cast a valid vote answered negatively to the question: "Do you want the EU to be able to decide on the compulsory settlement of non-Hungarian nationals in Hungary without the consent of the Hungarian parliament?" (Sadecki, 2016). However, the referendum turned out to be invalid as only 40% of eligible voters took part, so the turnout requirement, which according to the 2011 Hungarian Constitution must be at least half of the eligible Hungarian citizens (Sejm Library, 2016), was not met. The reasons for the insufficient social mobilisation and poor turnout in the referendum could be attributed to the changing situation, as the vote was conducted at a time when there had already been no influx of migrants into Hungary for a year (Czyż, 2017).

It is worth noting that the crisis caused by the mass migration crisis introduced in 2015 was subsequently extended and covered the entire national territory. It was maintained despite the fact that the number of immigrants fell after the culmination of the crisis in 2015, and that the threat had been removed and the country had returned to a relatively normal functioning. In reality, therefore, there was no rationale for using a special legal regime in practice.

### *Migration crisis in Poland in 2021*

The Constitution of the Republic of Poland of April 2, 1997 provides for situations in which ordinary constitutional measures are insufficient in the face of specific threats, and in Chapter XI speaks of three types of states of emergency: martial law, state of emergency or state of natural disaster. The above three types of emergencies were distinguished by the criterion of the source of the threat: in the case of martial law, it is introduced in the event of an external threat, as regards the state of emergency – it is introduced in the event of an internal threat, while the state of natural disaster is introduced in the event of a threat caused by acts of nature. Detailed rules for the operation of public authorities and the extent to which human and civil liberties and rights may be restricted during individual states of emergency are defined by laws:

- 1) Act of August 29, 2002 on martial law and the competencies of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and the principles of his subordination to the constitutional bodies of the Republic of Poland (Journal of Laws 2002 No. 156, item 1301),
- 2) Act of June 21, 2002 on the state of emergency (Journal of Laws 2002 No. 117, item 985),
- 3) Act of April 18, 2002 on the state of natural disaster (Journal of Laws 2002 No. 62, item 558).

In 2021, Poland faced a sudden influx of migrants from Belarus (most of whom were from the Middle East and North Africa) who wished to cross further into Germany



via Poland. According to the Border Guard, 39,697 attempts were recorded in 2021, when third-country nationals attempted to cross the state border with Belarus against the law, outside border crossings. This is more than 300 times as many as in 2020 (Border Guard, 2022). A similar problem was faced by Lithuania and Latvia, against whom the Belarusian authorities headed by President Alexander Lukashenko also used a hybrid war (Wicha, 2021). The premise of the implemented action by the Belarusian side was migratory pressure on the eastern border of the EU and destabilisation in countries supporting opposition activities against the Belarusian regime (Wróblewski, 2021). The actions taken by Belarus were seen as blackmail against the EU, a crisis artificially created by the Belarusian authorities as revenge for the imposition of sanctions on the Lukashenko regime (Chochowski, 2021). In response to the EU sanctions, Lukashenko launched an operation (code-named Sluice) to bring into Belarus citizens from Asian and African countries, who were promised assistance in reaching Western Europe (Wawrzusiszin, 2022). In view of the situation, the prime ministers of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Poland issued a joint statement on the hybrid attack on the countries' borders by Belarus, in which they stressed that the existing crisis was planned and systematically organised by the Alexander Lukashenko's regime.

Due to the influx of illegal immigrants across the Polish-Belarusian border, President Andrzej Duda on September 2, 2021, at the request of the Council of Ministers, imposed a state of emergency on part of the territory of the Republic of Poland – the area covered 115 towns in Podlaskie Voivodeship and 68 towns in Lubelskie Voivodeship, along the entire Polish-Belarusian border (Journal of Laws 2021, item 1612). The state of emergency was initially imposed for 30 days, then by a decree of October 1, 2021, the President extended it over the entire previous area for another 60 days (Journal of Laws 2021, item 1788) due to the continuing threat. The day before, the extension of the state of emergency was approved by the Polish Parliament. In connection with the imposition of the state of emergency on part of the territory of the Republic of Poland, relevant restrictions of rights and freedoms were introduced, including the suspension of the right to organise and hold assemblies, mass events, the prohibition to stay in the area covered by the state of emergency, restrictions on access to public information by refusing to provide information on activities carried out in the area covered by the state of emergency in connection with the protection of the state border and prevention of illegal migration (Journal of Laws 2021, item 1613). The authorities claimed that the imposition of the state of emergency helped the state to organise an effective response to the migration crisis and to protect both borders of Belarus and Poland and Belarus and the EU. In reaction to the experience of the migration crisis, the Polish authorities decided to build a fence on the Polish-Belarusian border (Journal of Laws 2021, item 1992).

Following the end of the state of emergency, a decision was taken to amend the Law on the Protection of the State Border (Journal of Laws 2022, item 295). The amendments to the law imposed a similar set of restrictions that were introduced with the constitutional state of emergency. The amendment to the Law on the Protection of the State Border thus became a substitute for the state of emergency, as it prolonged the legal solutions as if the state of emergency had not practically ended. It made it possible for journalists to be present in a specific area, with an official

permission, which during the state of emergency was subject to restrictions and caused a number of controversies and allegations of violations of citizens' rights to reliable information. The opposition also pointed to aspects of human rights violations in relation to the treatment of migrants forcing their way across the Polish-Belarusian border and the lack of sufficient access to assistance by humanitarian organisations, activists or medics. The migration crisis at the Polish-Belarusian border had several dimensions:

- legal, related to the introduction of the state of emergency as a solution to ensure the safety of border residents and the freedom of the services to carry out their duties;
- humanitarian, directly related to the situation of immigrants trapped in border forests threatening their health and lives, without access to water, food or other forms of basic assistance;
- financial, related to losses incurred by border entrepreneurs and the need for support from the state budget or the costs of technical border security and dam construction;
- logistical, linked to the need to increase the presence of services securing the border area;
- informational and psychological, related to disinformation and propaganda activities against Poland, the EU and NATO carried out by the Belarusian and Russian state media.

### *Summary and conclusions*

The migration crisis was treated as a particular threat to the security of Poland and Hungary and became a premise for the introduction of special legal regime. The thesis put forward in the article that the decision to introduce a special legal regime in Poland and Hungary was justified in the context of the specific threat that the migration crisis had become was confirmed. The existence of a situation of specific threats in the face of the migration crisis justifies the introduction of a state of emergency in Poland and a state of crisis due to mass migration in Hungary. In both countries in question, a similar decision to use a special legal regime and build a border wall as one of the instruments in response to a situation of an extraordinary nature was made. One can, therefore, see an analogy in the action of these states, and since the Polish experience with the migration crisis occurred later, it can be pointed out that Poland modelled itself, so to speak, on the Hungarian solutions taken in the face of the migration crisis. In both countries discussed, the consequences of the use of a special legal regime were restrictions on civil rights and freedoms and administrative facilitation or the use of the military to protect the border. However, it should be remembered that the scale of the threat and the genesis of migration crises were different for Hungary and for Poland. The data suggests that by the time the fence was built on the border with Serbia and Croatia, more than 378,000 immigrants had entered Hungary in 2015 (Bodalska, 2017). According to data from the Polish Border Guard, almost 40,000 attempts to illegally cross the Polish-Belarusian border were recorded in 2021. Compared to data from previous years, there was a visible, jumping

increase in the number of immigrants and illegal border crossings in both countries in question.

The difference between Poland's and Hungary's approach to a special legal regime is that in Hungary a state of crisis due to mass migration was extended for years to come and encompassed the whole country. It was formally in force despite the fact that waves of migrants had no longer been arriving in Hungary for a long time and no real threat from immigrants persisted. In Poland, the state of emergency under the constitution was formally extended for 60 days, while it ceased to be in force at the end of the period for which it was introduced and then extended. However, although the emergency regime formally ended, an amendment to the Border Protection Act passed by parliament maintained the ban on border crossings.

Poland and Hungary are widely perceived as adopting a negative attitude towards the influx of foreigners, especially those arriving from Africa and the Middle East. It was represented by forming, together with the Czech Republic and Slovakia, what is called "coalition of the unwilling" against the mechanism of mandatory refugee relocation quotas between individual EU Member States in 2015. The Visegrad countries did not agree with the imposition of the need to accept immigrants on their territory. This was due to fear of strangers, as migrants pushing across borders were portrayed in the rhetoric of those in power in Poland and Hungary as a threat. The migration crisis became an important topic in domestic politics in both countries under discussion, effectively used by ruling politicians to fuel anti-immigration and partly anti-EU sentiment (the fight against mandatory quotas was presented as opposition to Brussels' dictates and a desire to preserve national sovereignty in the face of externally imposed solutions). The Orbán's government built an entire political narrative on the foreign threat, and the migration crisis became a dominant theme in public debate in Hungary in 2015, but also thereafter.

Among the EU Member States, the approach to the migration crisis and related problems varied. Poland and Hungary presented an approach treating the migration crisis in terms of a threat, which should be defined as having a negative, often destructive impact on the state. Thus, the actions taken by the Hungarian and Polish authorities in the face of a massive influx of migrants and border forcing were justified precisely by the need to guarantee the security of the state. Poland and Hungary perceived migration in terms of an economic or even civilisational, cultural and religious threat. This approach differed from that of other EU Member States, which prioritised the need to provide security and assistance to immigrants in the context of the migration crisis. They emphasised the need to fulfil international obligations guaranteeing the right to seek asylum, as well as the social dimension and humanitarian attitude towards individuals in need of support.

For Poland and Hungary, an important aspect of the migration crisis has become an increase in the sense of threat among citizens and, consequently, an emphasis on security considerations above all, the need to protect against the destabilisation of the internal situation that may be caused by the stay of immigrants on the territory of a given state. Special legal regime has become an instrument used in the hands of those in power to maintain a sense of particular threat and thus justify the need to resort to a specific tool. Both countries have restrictive migration policies, both have been reluctant to

admit immigrants, and both have chosen to defend their borders and those of the EU as a whole against immigrants. In both countries, right-wing parties were in power at the onset of the migration crisis: in Poland, Law and Justice (in power continuously since 2015), in Hungary, Fidesz (in power continuously since 2010). The ruthlessness demonstrated by the authorities in their approach to immigrants and their anti-immigrant rhetoric were driven by calculations and political views.

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## ***Migration processes and determinants: the case of the Slovak Republic***

### ***Abstract***

While the Slovak Republic is not one of the traditional immigration destinations, in recent years, the situation has changed. The current paper aims to analyse the migration processes in the Slovak Republic and identify the determinants for immigration.

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The results show that during the last three decades, the accession to the EU and Schengen area affected the migration patterns in Slovakia the most. One of the crucial determinants causing labour migration to the country is the domestic labour demand and labour shortage due to emigration flows. While the COVID-19 pandemic did not significantly influence the migration processes in the country, the restrictive measures are affecting the employment of foreigners.

On the other hand, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict has caused unprecedented immigration flows to the country. The latter calls for a modernisation of immigration and integration policies that will lead to a more efficient labour market and sustainable economic growth in the Slovak Republic. Creating an Immigration and Naturalisation Office, with the aim of bringing together all migration processing and provision of related services is a necessary step forward in migration policy management. This article focuses on the migration developments shaping the migration policy in Slovakia in the near future and provides policy recommendations.

**Keywords:** migration, determinants, labour, migration policy, Covid-19

## *Introduction*

International migration is a phenomenon that emerging economies face in the modern world. During the last decades, the issues of international migration, particularly, immigration and migrant integration problems in host countries, “brain drain” in donor countries, came to the forefront in the Member States of the EU and are shaping the immigration policies in all European countries. Social and demographic influences of the migration processes in both donor and host countries are at the centre of the attention of corresponding authorities.

Besides its social and demographic effects, the migration processes also impact the economy of host and donor countries. The influence of immigration on economic development and the labour market is frequently discussed in economic and political circles. While the economic impact of migration processes is highly significant, there is no agreement on its nature. Various studies concluded that several factors were affecting the economic impact of immigration, such as the migration and integration policies in the host countries, social protection policy, labour market conditions and macroeconomic indicators (Damette & Fromentin, 2013; AboElsoud et al., 2020; Okamoto, 2021; Přívara, 2021, 2022a).

The migration processes and determinants within the EU should be considered at the European level. However, individual countries have their own attitudes concerning immigration policies and can be described by a different set of determinants. There are some common pull factors attracting human capital to the EU, including the availability of high-quality services, better socio-economic conditions, higher wages and income level, as well as political stability within the Union. However, the economic development and prosperity differences among various EU Member States create grounds for asymmetric migration flows. The latter is also accelerated by immigration and integration policy differences across the Member States.

In the framework of the current study, under the immigration policy, we understand the set of policy instruments and regulations for entry and residence in the given country. The immigration policy also includes the migrant integration policy. The latter implies management instruments to offer immigrants the opportunity to successfully integrate into the host country's professional, social and cultural environment (Štefančík et al., 2021).

From the point of view of the evaluation of migration processes and determinants, the case of the Slovak Republic is of high interest. While the Slovak Republic is not one of the traditional immigration destinations, the situation has changed recently. The accession of the Slovak Republic to the EU and later to the Schengen area significantly altered the migration patterns, as evidenced by statistics. The Eurostat statistics on the foreign-born population in the Slovak Republic show a considerable increase from 1.19% in 2010 to 3.7% in 2021.

In general, the primary motivation of immigrants influx to the V4 countries include better employment conditions, quality of education and family reunification (Mihi-Ramirez et al., 2017; Přívara et al., 2018; Přívara, 2019a). Currently, labour migration accounts for the largest segment of regular immigration in the V4 countries, including the Slovak Republic. However, in a rapidly evolving world and considering the COVID-19 pandemic (Bhowmik et al., 2021; Přívara & Rievajová, 2021; Vorobeva & Dana, 2021) and military conflict in Ukraine, it is essential to monitor and reflect on the shifts in migration processes and immigration policies in the Slovak Republic as the latter becomes a more attractive destination for immigration.

Considering the facts mentioned above, the current paper aims to analyse the migration processes in the Slovak Republic and identify the determinants for immigration. The structure of the article includes several sections starting with an introduction to present the concept of the issue under discussion and the research goal. The second section consists of a literature review on the migration processes and determinants in the EU in general and in the V4 countries in particular. The third section gives a deep analysis of the evaluation of the migration policy in the Slovak Republic. The following section presents a statistical and logical analysis of migration processes and determinants in the Slovak Republic, drawing corresponding conclusions presented in the last section of the research paper.

### *Literature review*

The literature considers migration a somewhat complex concept that includes various ways of human mobility. In the context of the current study, we will explore the determinants of international migration that presumes crossing borders. The main types of human movements that are referred to as migration include economic, seasonal, return, and non-economic migration. Economic migration or work (labour) migration (UN, 1990; Ahmad-Yar & Bircan, 2021; Alvarez & Royuela, 2022) is a phenomenon that includes people seeking a higher income and a better standard of living in another region or country in the case of international migration, considering the insufficient labour opportunities in the country or region of origin. Seasonal migration (Bregiannis,

2021; Martin et al., 2018) is very similar to work migration as it occurs due to the seasonal nature of labour demand for specific professions. Return migration (Lagakos et al., 2020; Elmallakh & Wahba, 2022) is the return of migrants to their countries of origin on a voluntary or forced basis. Non-economic migration (Müller & Tai, 2020; Rokitowska-Malcher, 2020) can happen under the influence of such factors as a family reunion, climate, education, military conflict, civil war, political repressions, etc.

The current article focuses on the economic determinants of international migration. Particularly, the positive and negative demographic changes in the EU Member States brought to the forefront the debates about labour migration and the investigation of its determinants (Jakovljevic et al., 2018; Farkas & Dövényi, 2018; Přívara et al., 2020; Marois et al., 2020; Sahoo & Pradhan, 2021; Ghio et al., 2022; Přívara, 2022b).

Considering the various natures of migration processes, in general, we can divide the migration factors into two large groups: economic determinants (Cimpoeru, 2020; Hrysenko & Pryiatelchuk, 2020; Schwabe, 2021; Hakim et al., 2022) and non-economic determinants (Arif, 2020; Winter, 2020; Jończy et al., 2021). The non-economic factors include political factors (Bhimji, 2018; Branton et al., 2022; Malo, 2022), personal factors (Martínez & García, 2018; Rashid, 2019; Hoffmann et al., 2019) and dyadic factors (Winter, 2020; Přívara, 2019b). The economic and political factors are characteristic of the country at the macro-level analysis. However, on the micro-level analysis, we can also distinguish personal factors for migration, such as family reunification (Crawley & Hagen-Zanker, 2019; Mascia, 2021; Činčalová et al., 2021). Finally, dyadic factors are characteristic of country pairs, and the determinant underlying this factor is generally geographic (Abel et al., 2019; Larotta Silva, 2019). The economic factors include unemployment (Harding & Neamțu, 2018; Kilic et al., 2019; Basile et al., 2019), income level (Nguyen, 2020; Laskienė et al., 2020; Slettebak, 2021), economic growth and development (Tolmacheva, 2020; Lyulyov et al., 2021; Rennó Santos et al., 2022), poverty (Kluge et al., 2019; Nowak-Lehmann et al., 2021; Diallo, 2022), the tax system (Lamantia & Pezzino, 2018; Guerreiro et al., 2020; Dai & Tian, 2021), economic freedom (Aarhus & Jakobsen, 2019; Gignarta et al., 2020; Arif et al., 2020). So, we can state that considering the main migration factors, it is evident that people leave their countries of origin to find better living conditions in foreign countries and to escape unfavourable environments.

On the other hand, another branch of literature distinguishes between pull and push factors leading to immigration and emigration in a given country (Mohamed & Abdul-Talib, 2020; Unguren et al., 2021; Garelli & Tazzioli, 2021; Piras, 2021; Khalid & Urbański, 2021). The push factors leading to high emigration rates from a country are mainly corruption (Matallah, 2020; Arif, 2022), unemployment (Baumann et al., 2015; Cimpoeru, 2020; Espinosa & Díaz-Emparanza, 2021), unstable political environment (Mourão et al., 2018; Agadjanian & Gorina, 2019; Žižka & Pelloneova, 2019; Grumstrup et al., 2021; Kang, 2021), military instability (Habchak & Dubis, 2019; Veebel, 2020), climate changes (Barassi et al., 2018; Schutte et al., 2021; Reichman, 2022), low wages and income (Fischer & Pfaffermayr, 2018; Delogu et al., 2018), low or negative economic growth (Tolmacheva, 2020; Lupak et al., 2022; Gavurová et al. 2017). The pull factors leading to high immigration rates to a country are high wages and income (Laajimi & Le Gallo, 2022), low level of poverty (Hager, 2021; Urbański, 2022),

high standard of living (Hager, 2021), high economic growth (Schwabe, 2021), immigration and integration policy (Beverelli, 2022), welfare (Cebolla-Boado & Miyar-Busto, 2020; Ferwerda & Gest, 2021), immigrant networks (Kaplan et al. 2016; Kabir, 2021).

Usually, empirical studies examine income differences and unemployment together. The findings show that the countries with a lower level of wages generally have higher unemployment rates. On the other hand, the regions that offer higher wages attract high-skilled labour migrants. It leads to a phenomenon known as “brain drain” in the countries of origin. Moreover, it is argued that income differences are the basis of the decision-making stimulating economic migration from poorer regions. Usually, people see migration as the only way to escape poverty; hence, poverty is another crucial factor motivating people to migrate.

The business environment is a highly important factor for the skilled labour force (Žižka et al. 2019; Stichhauerova et al. 2020; Tucek & Hrbáková, 2019). Countries offering a more favourable business environment attract not only foreign investments, but also foreign human capital (Simionescu, 2021, 2022; Tucek et al. 2020). So, countries with a higher level of corruption usually have a less favourable business environment leading to emigration from the country to destinations with lower corruption levels.

Considering the impact of migration processes on the socio-economic indicators and the negative demographic trends, most countries began paying more attention to efficient migration governance. In the case of effective management, migration can bring many benefits to the donor and recipient countries. Examining the Slovak Republic, Grenčíková & Španková (2016) argue that if previously mainly economic factors, such as wage level, welfare, and social benefits, were influencing people’s decisions to emigrate, nowadays, the political situation in the region plays a significant role.

### *Migration policy in the Slovak Republic*

The migration policy in the Slovak Republic has gone through several phases (Stojarová, 2019; Liďák & Štefančík, 2020). In the framework of the current study, we have distinguished five main stages of evolution of the migration policy in the Slovak Republic. The first stage was from 1990 to 1994, during which there was no comprehensive concept of immigration management. We can characterise the first stage as the period of liberal migration policy. During the post-communist years, the migration policy was not the priority, and it allowed anyone to immigrate to the country and get a permanent residence allowance. The period from 1995 to 2002 was the phase of the institutionalisation of migration governance. During these years, the Slovak Republic developed the primary migration legislation, introducing such terms as “asylum seeker” and “refugee”. The migration policy was highly restrictive then, allowing immigration mostly for family reunification. Special immigration conditions were created for the Czech Republic and Ukraine. The consolidating era followed in the years preceding and succeeding the EU accession. The harmonisation of the national migration law with EU laws lasted until 2005.

The Czech Republic and Slovak Republic underwent similar historical changes, including the transition to a market economy from a centrally planned economy,

the accession to the EU leading to opening their boards for the citizens of EU Member States. Hence, mutual labour migration between these countries historically recorded relatively high numbers. Since accessing the Schengen area in 2008, there have been no formal barriers to international migration between these two countries.

The Slovak Republic did not have a clear migration policy characterised until 2011, as after the EU accession Slovakia allowed unrestricted immigration from EU member states. Immigration entered the political debates already in 2011, and the Slovak Government started implementing restrictive migration policies. As a result, the Slovak Republic developed a new legislative document for migration governance, namely, “Migration Policy of the Slovak Republic: perspective until the year 2020” (Slk. *Migračná politika Slovenskej republiky s výhľadom do roku 2020*), approved on August 31, 2011 by Government Resolution no. 574. It became the primary legislative document for migration policy.

The resolution introduced such terms as “controlled economic migration”, “integration policy”, and “migration of qualified labour force” (Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, 2011). The Slovak government identified that the country is in need of human capital inflow due to negative demographic tendencies. Thus, the Slovak Republic began a step-by-step implementation of preferential migration and integration policies to promote the immigration of a qualified labour force to the country. The critical criterion for receiving and integrating economic migrants was their usefulness for economic development in Slovakia. The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, and Family of the Slovak Republic was determined as the responsible institution for implementing the integration policy in compliance with the Concept of Foreigner Integration in the Slovak Republic. In January 2014, the Slovak Government approved another essential document – the Integration Policy of the Slovak Republic (Slk. *Integračná politika Slovenskej republiky*) developed by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, and Family. Since then, the migration policy of the country did not go through any significant change.

Since the summer of 2022, the Slovak Republic has been in need of immediate reforming of migration policy due to a new wave of the refugee crisis and illegal migration. Several EU Member States, including the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Austria decided to introduce border checks on the border with the Slovak Republic to prevent illegal migration to their countries.

### *Migration processes and determinants*

The Slovak Republic is not a traditional immigration destination. Moreover, the political environment was not very welcoming to potential immigration. However, the general attitude towards immigrants has changed over the recent years, considering the negative demographic trends. Currently, the country has a specific migration policy targeting the high-skilled labour migrants and facilitating their integration into the labour market and society.

If we look at the statistics of immigration and emigration in the V4 countries, it is evident that the immigration flows have intensified since 2016 (Figure 1), while emigration is characterised by high volatility (Figure 2). In the case of Czechia, there



are three high periods of immigration – 2007–2008 (1%), 2016 (0.6%) and 2019 (0.99%). The period from 2009 to 2015 is characterised with relatively lower immigration rates (around 0.2% to population). Such a decrease in the immigration flows was due to the economic crisis in 2009 causing a decline in the GDP by 4.7%. The crisis was followed by a stagnation until 2015, and the recovery growth started in 2016 bringing a new wave of immigration to the country. We can see that the general trend of immigration to Czechia has been positive since 2016, and the strict travel restrictions can explain the lower number in 2020 due to the pandemic. Also, there is another interesting fact that we should highlight, the first two periods of high immigration are the post-crisis years of the global financial crisis and the one related to the decrease in oil prices. Over the last 12 years, more than 625 thousand people migrated to Czechia, accounting for 6% of the population.

On the other hand, the immigration flows to Hungary can be described with steady growth rates reaching 0.9% in 2019 against 0.25% in 2010. The decrease in 2020 is again related to strict travel restrictions. Over the last 12 years, more than 635 thousand people migrated to Hungary, accounting for 6.3% of the population.

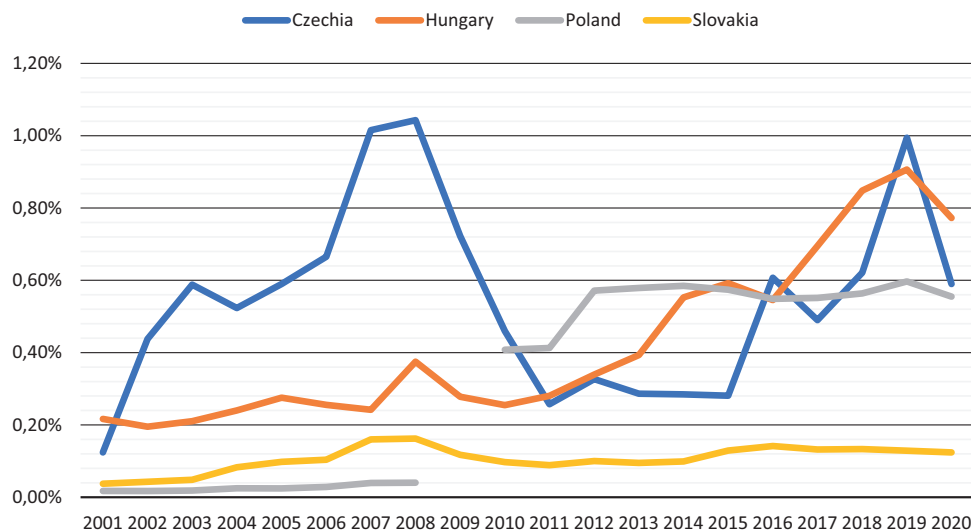
In the case of Poland, the immigration rates were steady over the last eight years, varying around 0.6%. Poland hosted the highest absolute number of migrants among all four countries – more than 2.45 million during the previous 11 years (6.4% of the population).

Slovakia has the lowest immigration rates among V4 countries. The immigration flows have been steady in the last decade, varying around 0.1%. A total of 75 thousand people have migrated to the Slovak Republic during the previous 12 years accounting for 0.14% of the population. The reason for such low rates can be the absence of a clear integration policy of immigrants for a long period, which created a significant barrier for immigration. On the other hand, another barrier can be the hostility against immigrants that is seen in the political discussions.

Therefore, the V4 countries have not been traditional immigration destinations and were primarily described by emigration flows in the past. However, the EU accession and accession to the Schengen area drastically changed the situation in these countries, including the Slovak Republic.

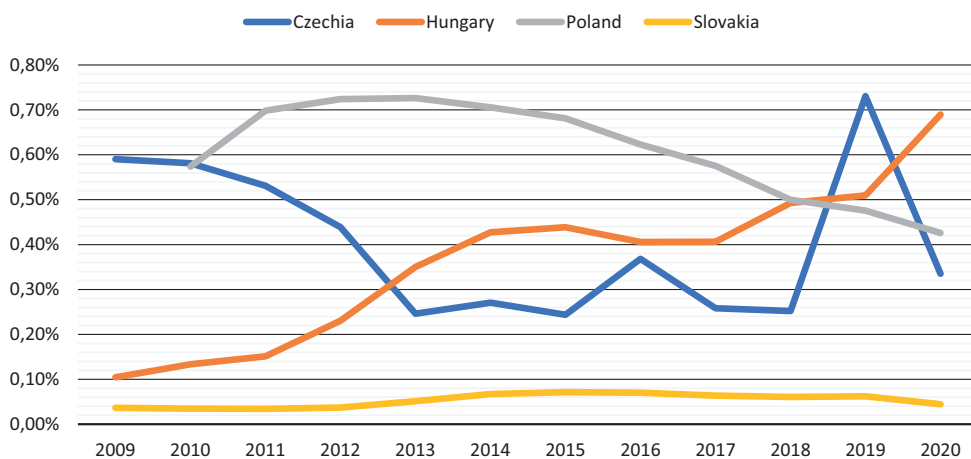
Currently, all four countries have positive net migration. The emigration rates have been the highest in Poland from 2011 to 2017. Poland is the only country with a negative net migration until 2015. The Slovak Republic is described by the lowest emigration numbers, varying around 0.07%. The emigration numbers in Hungary are steadily increasing but with a lower rate compared to immigration. Czechia is characterised by high volatility of emigration flows. The relatively high emigration rate in Czechia from 2009 to 2012 is the result of the economic crisis in 2009 and the followed economic stagnation, that were accompanied with an increase in unemployment.

Considering the significant inflow of migrants to the V4 countries, the foreign-born population's share has steadily increased during the last decade (Figure 3). Hungary and Czech Republic have the highest foreign-born population percentage with the highest growth rate in the previous 11 years. As of 2021, the share of the foreign-born population in Hungary accounts for 6.14%, Czechia – 5.33%, Slovakia – 3.7%, and Poland – 2.38%.



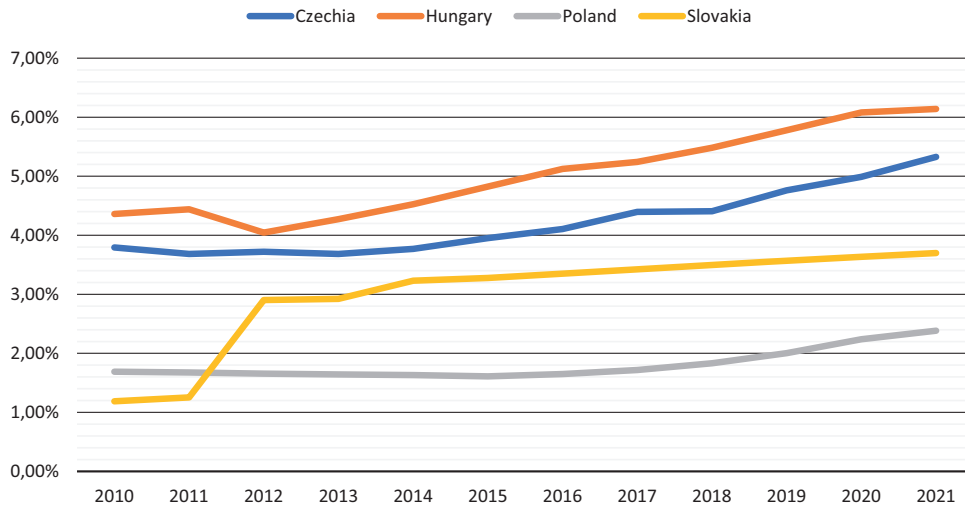
**Figure 1.** Immigrants to population ratio in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and the Slovak Republic in 2009–2020

Source: Eurostat



**Figure 2.** Emigrants to population ratio in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and the Slovak Republic in 2009–2020

Source: Eurostat



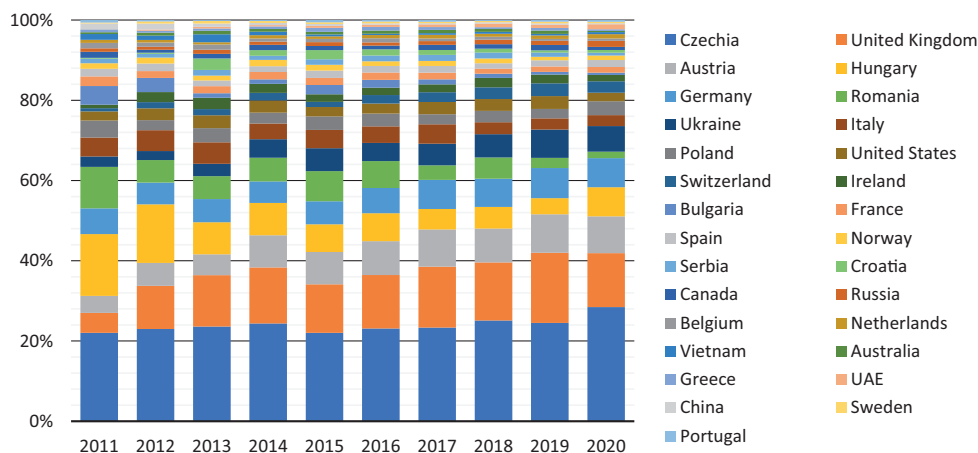
**Figure 3.** Foreign-born population share in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and the Slovak Republic in 2010–2021

Source: Eurostat

The structure of the immigration to the Slovak Republic by country of previous residence (Figure 4) shows that the top donor countries are Czechia (average of 35%), United Kingdom (average of 20%), Austria (average of 12%), Hungary (average of 10%), Germany (average of 9%), Romania (average of 7%) and Ukraine (average of 7%). The geographical structure of the immigration lets us make assumptions on the determinants of choosing the Slovak Republic as their next place of residence. The first determinant is the lower living conditions in the countries of previous residence (Romania, Ukraine, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, etc.). For example, the GDP per capita by PPP (purchasing power parity) has been lower in Hungary and Poland than in Slovakia from 2005 to 2016. We should notice that the immigration flows from these countries to the Slovak Republic were higher during this period. Another determinant is the reallocation of the labour force to a less competitive labour environment due to the labour shortage in Slovakia.

On the other hand, on average, 33–35% of immigrants are from non-EU countries. In this case, given the geographical structure of donor countries, we can state that the main determinants are lower standard of living, unstable political and military situation and the perspective to get residence in an EU Member State. The final factor is the geographical (Ukraine, Austria) and cultural (Czechia) proximity of the country.

Considering the already considerable immigration flows to V4 countries, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has not been significant in the region. On the other hand, recent reports show that the new migration wave due to the military conflict in Ukraine causes high immigration rates to the Slovak Republic. Considering that effective migration management can positively impact the economy of the country, Slovak Republic needs to reconsider its migration and integration policies to address the recent migration



**Figure 4.** The immigration to the Slovak Republic by country of previous residence, 2011–2020

Source: Eurostat

wave of Ukrainians. In the case of efficient migration governance during the migrant crisis, the Slovakian economy can receive high benefits. The latter calls for a modernisation of immigration and integration policies that will lead to a more efficient labour market and sustainable economic growth in the Slovak Republic. Creating an Immigration and Naturalisation Office aiming to bring together all migration processing and provision of related services is a necessary step forward in migration policy management.

## Conclusions

The current study aimed to analyse the migration processes in the Slovak Republic and identify the determinants for immigration. The migration policy in the Slovak Republic was initially developed following the international treaties of the United Nations, European Council and International Labour Organisation. The policy has been changed repeatedly during the last three decades. The first fundamental changes were related to the EU accession and entering the Schengen area. The next wave of crucial changes was related to the migration crisis in Europe.

We can state that while the Slovak Republic is not one of the traditional immigration destinations, over the recent years, the situation has changed. The results show that during the last three decades, the accession to the EU and Schengen area affected the migration patterns in Slovakia the most. One of the crucial determinants causing labour migration to the country is the domestic labour demand and labour shortage due to emigration flows. Among other determinants we can highlight the geographical and cultural proximity, lower standard of living, political and military instability in the donor countries.

While the COVID-19 pandemic did not significantly influence the migration processes in the country, the restrictive measures are affecting the employment of foreigners. On the other hand, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict has caused unprecedented immigration flows to the country. The latter calls for a modernisation of immigration and integration policies that will lead to a more efficient labour market and sustainable economic growth in the Slovak Republic. Creating an Immigration and Naturalisation Office aiming to bring together all migration processing and provision of related services is a necessary step forward in migration policy management.

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## ***Good and bad migrants in Hungary. The populist story and the reality in Hungarian migration policy***

### ***Abstract***

After the 2014 elections, the governing coalition of Hungary put migration-related issues on the political agenda as the main theme to regain its domestic legitimacy. One major means for this was the securitisation of the migration discourse by strong binary

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oppositions and the southern state border, a distinguished place in Hungarian identity through constructing a fence and bolstering its othering function. It faced rejection all over Europe but then garnered some supporters, mostly in post-socialist Europe and among populist parties of Western Europe. The anti-migration stance caused significant communication success and legitimised its pioneer, the Hungarian government.

The authors aim to evaluate the political and social impacts of the migration crisis in Hungary through the perspective of the Hungarian domestic political and economic interests and examine the special characteristics of Hungarian populism. Moreover, focus on a new conceptual approach that examines the government's attitude towards migrants dividing them into good and bad groups.

**Keywords:** Hungary, populism, European politics, migration crisis, migration

## *Introduction<sup>2</sup>*

Hundreds of thousands of Asian and African refugees crossed Hungary's border in 2015 and 2016 (Messing & Ságvári, 2019; Glied & Pap, 2016). As a response, the Hungarian cabinet opted to securitise the migration issue and erected an "anti-migration" fence to the country's southern border, moreover, established a system of regulations that effectively blocked uncontrolled and irregular migration to the country (Bajomi-Lázár, 2019; Kitanics & Hegedűs, 2021; Éberhardt, 2021). The right-wing government noticed very quickly that the populist anti-migration communication – that contained diverse elements to convince Hungarian voters – was overwhelmingly successful not only in Hungary but in the recently democratised Central European states and the countries of the Balkans, awaiting the accession to the European Union, therefore, it could be used to achieve domestic political goals (Szalai & Göbl, 2015; Juhász et. al., 2015; Glied, 2020).

Before the migration crisis the Hungarian society as well as the political elite in general had very little information on migration itself. The very issue of migration was not part of the political agenda until 2015, because there have been no significant immigrant communities in the country, and two-thirds of the earlier immigrants (in the 1990s and 2000s) were ethnic Hungarians from the neighbouring states. The Hungarian state and society have been assimilating the arrivals pretty successfully due to its complicated language and traditions that helped to preserve the homogeneous nature of Hungarian society. Basically that means that despite various religions, minorities and ethnicities which live together in the country, there are no extraordinary tension and strife among different nationalities or ethnicities, except for the Roma minority who are also considered Hungarians and not immigrants.

That is why it was quite strange for the Hungarian society to hear the government's narrative between 2015 and 2016 which basically made public opinions sound hysterical (the migrants not respecting local traditions and culture, taking Hungarians' jobs).

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<sup>2</sup> The manuscript was finalised in March 2022, the parts related to Ukraine were added later.

On the one hand, the official communication called the (illegal) migrants dangerous elements who would like to conquer Hungary and Europe. On the other hand, there were migrants who were regarded as useful. This inconsistent narrative of the government was reflected in various measures. For instance, people from outside the EU could purchase a Hungarian residence or settlement permission for money (residence bonds) and only 0.3% of applicants did not receive the permission to purchase the bond due to different reasons.

The government anti-migration narrative radically changed due to the Ukrainian–Russian war in 2022. In the days following the outbreak of the war, the Hungarian government did not take an official position on this issue, but emphasised the importance of helping the refugees. Government has perceived the public mood well as the surveys demonstrated that four-fifths of the respondents (79%) believed that refugees from Ukraine should be accepted by Hungary without restrictions (Kyriazi, 2022, p. 7). According to estimates more than 1.8 million Ukrainian refugees arrived in Hungary since February 2022, however, not more than 25,000 of them applied for asylum and more than 120,000 have applied for temporary residence permits (UNHCR, 2022).

### *Conceptual framework*

In our paper we seek to answer the question of how and in what form the Hungarian government (FIDESZ-KDNP<sup>3</sup>) has been using the “migration narrative” to achieve its domestic policy goals and to shape its political agenda. Our next research question is how the government differentiates between migrants, and what are the basic, general factors of acceptance. Furthermore, we are trying to uncover how the government’s ideas spread beyond the borders of Hungary. In order to answer these questions, we analysed contemporary domestic discourses on migration (official and non-official as well), focusing on political speeches and political communication in general as well as other government moves (legislation, institution-building, etc.). Additionally, where applicable, we used media discourses to support our argument.

We argue that each element of the debate on mass migration was built on the concepts of *threat* and *security*, *invasion* and *protection* (Williams, 2003), nevertheless our paper brings a new aspect to the debate that makes a distinction between two types of migrants in the Hungarian context. Furthermore, we examine how domestic politics were influenced between 2015 and 2017 by the government’s communication, which eventually spread, contributing to an anti-immigration sentiment across Europe and strengthening governing parties’ arguments across Hungary, the Central European countries and even some parts of the European Union. Since these narratives utterly dominated the public discourse, the reality and the explanation of reality designed by the government disguised other measures that might have called into question the credibility of the government’s policy.

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<sup>3</sup> FIDESZ is the largest, currently governing party of Hungary with a nationalist centre-right ideology. KDNP is the smaller Christian Democratic party, which takes part in the governing coalition.

We also argue that – in both communication and policy practice – the government has polarised political communication on migration to the extreme in order to force domestic policy actors to take a stand by controlling public discourse and the political agenda. In this rhetorical context, there are only *good* (useful) and *bad* (undesirable, dangerous) migrants. This approach fits into the general political logic of the Hungarian government and its binary opposition approach to both foreign and domestic policy, where an actor is either friend or foe, with no position in between. This perspective was used to justify political changes and political discourse in Hungary, moreover, it made any meaningful political debate impossible (Sata & Karolewski, 2019). This structuralist concept, present in the public discourses on a daily basis, also fuels ethno-nationalism and xenophobia, utilised by the government in the political mobilisation for the support of its continuous confronting policies (against: its political opposition, EU agencies, civil society organisations (CSOs), liberal institutions like CEU<sup>4</sup> or SZFE<sup>5</sup>, or individuals like American–Hungarian businessman and philanthropist George Soros). In migration policy, one of these binary oppositions is the well-known nationals vs. immigrants distinction, which is extensively used in media communication (see, e.g. “blue billboard campaign” where slogans like “If you come to Hungary you have to obey our laws” or “If you come to Hungary you can’t take Hungarians’ jobs” etc. in Hungarian were used to strengthen the in-group/out-group sentiments among the citizens) (Glied, 2020). However, due to various reasons (demography, economics, values, etc.) the government set up a second binary contrast, this time within the group of migrants, resulting in the sub-groups of good and bad migrants, desirable and undesirable ones. Basically, this attitude shows the inconsistency of the government’s narrative: there are migrant categories, however, this can be changed as a result of an unpredicted event. The question of what these categories are arises. The migrants are divided into groups of those who are of some use, namely:

1. Belong with “us”, (e.g. persecuted Christians, people with Hungarian ancestry, etc. – ethnic- or religion-based community), where the “benefit” is to demonstrate that Hungary is a country of solidarity and inclusion, however, only for those who belong;
2. Help (e.g. the Hungarian contingent in Afghanistan), where the “benefit” comes from the gesture (a very small and special group in itself, but with high visibility domestically);
3. Pay (e.g. businessmen, students, those who buy settlement bonds), where the “benefit” is purely financial;
4. Work (e.g. guest workers), where the “benefit” is in the functioning of the economy and meeting the needs of investors.

All migrants arriving at the country for other reasons are considered “bad”, especially those from Muslim countries in Asia, the MENA region and the rest of Africa, with different civilisational backgrounds and lack of resources. We also argue that distinguishing among migrant groups based on their usefulness (resource wise – rich/poor), their civilisational (European/non-European) and religious backgrounds

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(Christian/Muslim) builds heavily upon popular geographical and geopolitical imaginations (Said, 1978; Dittmer & Bos, 2019) existing in the society and fuelled by the government's communication that stated, among others, that the European Christian values are in danger, and "all the terrorists are migrants" (Kaminski, 2015). During the migration crisis the government's narrative started to nuance the division mentioning legal and illegal migrants. In the first case, the term referred to those migrants who "knocked on the door of Hungary politely", in the other case those "who came without invitation and wanted to kick the door on us" (About Hungary, 2022). Positioning the clash with the unwanted groups right to the southern border of the country (instead of allowing migrants into the territory of the state) also has its imaginary fundamentals, as this is the direction where Hungary historically faced the most important invaders (Ottomans), and defending the southern border is deeply embedded in Hungarian national identity (Pap & Reményi, 2017).

### *Populism in Hungary*

After 2010, Hungarian government began to use essential elements of populist political rhetoric in its communication (Glied, 2020). A cornerstone of populism, the threat and – as an effective reaction to the migration challenges affected the European Union and especially Hungary – security/defence relation has begun to dominate public discourse after 2015. To back up the success of the phenomenon of populism in Hungary, it is important to mention that government communication has strongly built on the sharp disparities in civilisation and religion that characterised the arrivals from the Middle East, Africa, or Asian Muslim states, but disregarded these differences altogether in the case of migrants settled into Hungary by the government through various mechanisms (refugee conventions, residence bonds – the good migrants).

Populism has become one of the most common and trending terms of political science in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and Hungary was one of the first countries in Europe where it (re)appeared and has been utilised deliberately as a purely political tool. In our case populism can be called a political strategy narrowed down to a consequential series of tactical steps which degrade the interactions of the political community to an arena of political communication. It has no other purpose than creating a virtual reality as an alternative to mainstream politics which gives a voice to disillusioned, lost, offended, angry and vengeful people (Müller, 2018, p. 9). Essentially, frustrated people are prone to blaming others for their fate and the current state of affairs (Fieschi & Heywood, 2004). This statement resonates with Pope Francis's opinion from 2017 in which he blends populism with the xenophobic sentiment increasing due to the migrant crisis after 2015 and the acts of terrorism committed all over Europe, saying "the *crisis* usually leads to fear and panic" (Magyar Kurir, 2017). It is very likely that with the political reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have to say that populism is nothing else but a bunch of reactions to actual or putative events, articulated in a simple and instinctive way, without any actual substance, aiming to polarise the public opinion and gain political advantage (Canovan, 1999). According to Brubaker (2017a)

the Hungarian government did nothing else but utilised the unprecedented situation and used the populism as a political practice (situated political innovation).

Migration crisis induced moral panic (Cohen, 2011) which is a well-known phenomenon in sociology. Cross and Ma (2015) phrased the moral panic phenomenon as an overreaction to a critical situation which can bring destabilisation and the end of the common European project (Metz, 2017). The conflicts which occurred in relation to the migration crisis affected the liberal and democratic fundamental human rights (Boswell, 2000).

The discourse of the European leaders was quite sentimental focusing on the European values and solidarity (Radu, 2016). On the other hand, the Eastern European politicians were concentrating on the danger which was not their invention, only in the sense that they brought this aspect of migration to the fore. The phenomenon can be divided into two parts. According to the civilisationist national populist concept – that has become popular for radical anti-immigration political forces in Western Europe – Muslim migration is a threat and European Christian identity must be preserved. New elements have been added to the discussion by leading Central European political forces. After 2010, Hungarian government has already begun to attack liberalism, which has plunged Europe into crisis and was unable to cope with increasing migration pressures. Later, other governments joined the debate stand by Budapest (Brubaker, 2017b). According to the official government narrative, mass migration jeopardises the European lifestyle especially its security, living standards and culture.

This is clearly the case of *securitising* the international migration topic as Szalai and Góbl (2015) argue in their work. While addressing the policies of the government, they emphasise that by securitising it the topic is elevated to higher level of socio-political importance thus opposing it by potential desecuritising actors becomes more difficult. Securitisation helped the government successfully divert discourses from any unfavourable issues. Therefore, we also agree with Szalai and Góbl's statement that the issue of securitising is merely for domestic political goals. Migration has not posed such a real threat to any segments of Hungarian society which would explain the necessity of such security measures taken by the government.

The essential element of the discourse on migration was that Central European population needs to be protected from the effects of a flood of migrants from other religions and cultures. After 2015, populism manifested itself in gradually increasing anti-migration and anti-EU/Brussels slogans like: "If you come to Hungary you have to respect our culture"; "Hungarians said no to migration"; "Respect for Hungarians"; "We will not become a colony"; "Don't let Soros have the last laugh!". These slogans and buzzwords have been present on posters, billboards, television, radio spots, and on the Internet. In this context, invasion and mass migration pose a tangible threat to society. Therefore, the promise of protection made by the government serves to fulfil the basic need of regular people for security. It resounds especially well in Hungary as it also emphasises the importance of preventive action, thus legitimising the political steps of the *proactive political actors*. The appropriation of the definition of the actors involved in the migration process as well as the creation and shaping of one's own narrative is also part of the discourse, but building all elements around the concepts of *threat* and *security* (McDonald, 2008; Balzacq, 2011).

Three elements can be considered common characteristics in populist phenomenon. Populism always refers to the people and justifies its actions by appealing to and identifying with the people, it is rooted in anti-elite feelings, and furthermore, it considers people a homogeneous group without internal differences (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007, p. 322). All these key elements could be observed in Hungarian political publicity. The empty populism theory identifies as a systematic failure of Hungarian politics itself, referring the Prime Minister Orbán's famous quotation that *governance is the art of ruling the moment*. From this perspective, all tools and rhetoric turns that can help to control the public opinion and political agenda are allowed and accepted. According to this approach, politics is driven by the logic of short-term popularity-hunting through effective media communication. This method is grounded in the most instinctive human feelings like fear, uncertainty, despair, envy, disillusionment and revenge (Csigó & Merkóvity, 2016, p. 304).

Fighting "violent" migrants and uncontrolled migration influx cover actual issues with a "greater" challenge, ranking higher in the hierarchy of interests. This can be represented as an international conflict, the action of another country, people or group, their "attack" or malice, or the appearance of a group different from the culture or religion of the specific community: the *Other*. Hungarian populism obviously builds on the centuries-long desires of Hungarian people, namely, the idea of rebellion against oppression, freedom and independence as well as the historical aspects of constant scapegoating. It prefers to refer to the post-communist period (1989–1990) as an untold, unfathomable topic, the lack of self-reflection and social debate, furthermore, the effects of external (foreign) influence and reinterpretation of its impacts (Ágh, 2019). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Hungarian society went through several revolutions, regime changes and historical shocks (defeat in both world wars, massive territorial losses, Holocaust, deportations, German and Soviet occupation, retaliations, communism/socialism). Each of these also meant an ideological turn, resulting in deep historical wounds and grievances. There was no opportunity to discuss the traumas, the lack of confrontation created taboos that still – together with complex political issues – represent deep political, cultural fault lines for both society and the political elite (Csepeli & Örkény, 1996; Fekete, 2020). According to Eric Kaufmann (2018), the explanation why populists are more successful in Central Europe is utterly clear: ethnic change is the danger; crisis is the ignition point and immigration is the reason. If historical traumas, national grievances, and losses are also considered, the "big picture" comes together. Eastern European generations born after the Second World War did not have any direct experience with immigration, unlike Western Europeans. From here, it is only a matter of effective political communication in order to explain this to the Hungarians in such a way that Hungary's security and sovereignty are in danger.

When extremist, nationalist political forces come into power, they use the entire state to achieve their goals. Prejudices and stigmatisation of other religions impregnate Hungarian history up until the present days. While tolerance towards others and peaceful coexistence between "Us" and "Them" work more or less, different types of crises, as history has clearly shown, can bring certain forms of xenophobia to the surface. These forms are determined by the cultural traditions and historical experiences of given societies, and they also leave a mark on the political thinking of the community



(Glied, 2020). If a government pursues an effective inclusion (and assimilation) policy, potential differences can blur, then arise again and be the part of public debates from time to time but thus avoid a serious social crisis. Where those extremist political elements are in power and strive to regain their position, retain their power, in extreme cases, intensifying xenophobia and igniting certain social groups against each other could lead to serious social conflicts and even violence (Nyíri, 2003).

## *The background of the Hungarian immigration policy*

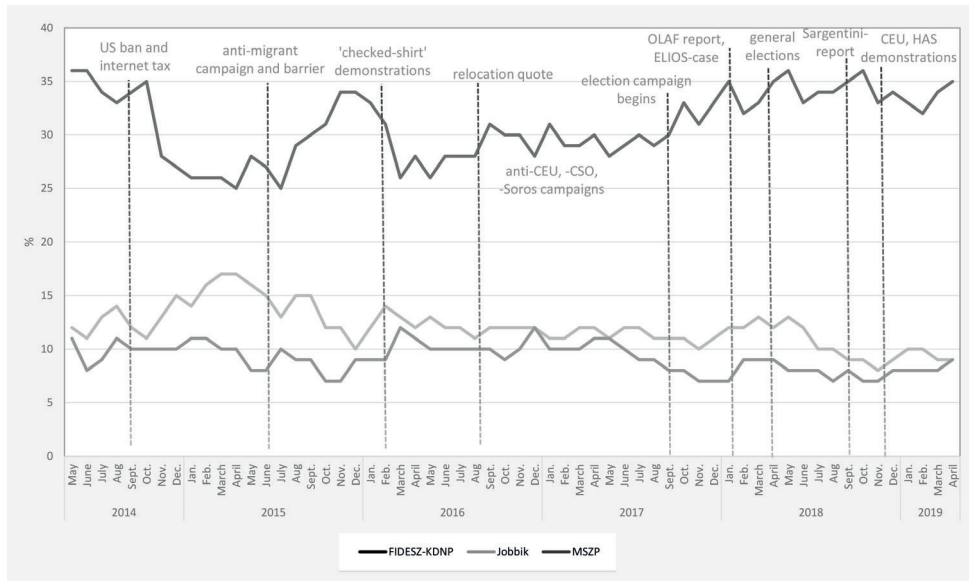
### *Campaign on migration crisis*

For understanding the situation that emerged in 2015, examining the entire phenomenon's background might be beneficial. Undoubtedly, migration and the management thereof have become major talking points of Hungarian politics for several reasons. Firstly, natural reproduction has seen negative change in Hungary since the early 1980s, an unfavourable tendency considering the long-term sustainability of social systems.<sup>6</sup> Simultaneously, the influx of ethnic Hungarians from the neighbouring countries has started to increase, contributing to political tensions since the 2000s. In 2011, the simplified naturalisation system was introduced, and ethnic Hungarians were fast-tracked to citizenship. However, Hungarian society has never considered ethnic Hungarians from the neighbouring countries as migrants, but as members of the nation torn apart from the kin-state violently through political events. Furthermore, the size of non-European migrant communities in Hungary – and their economic and political significance – has been low, compared to other states west of the former Iron Curtain, and in some cases the size of these communities is even shrinking (e.g. the Chinese) (Péti et. al., 2021). Despite such a limited significance, migration became a decisive topic of Hungarian public and political discourses for years. The Hungarian government has consciously, step by step, developed a world of explanations in which the mass migration of people from different cultures and religions, represented in government narratives as ones not knowing or not respecting European values, was called the most critical challenge that Europe faced. At the same time, they criticised Brussels' slowness and ineffective migration policy as well as the inclusive attitude of the Willkommenskultur, claiming that it would lead to very deep social conflicts and finally the destruction of European culture. Furthermore, they criticised not only the EU, but also NGOs that help migrants and promote an open society, highlighting that multiculturalism failed, hence it was time to take part in law-and-order views instead of integration. Government communication has gradually radicalised its position on migration and migrants since spring 2015. Political campaigns were launched and were advertised on billboards, television, radio, the Internet and as a result, the attitudes of the majority of the Hungarian society became markedly anti-immigration over a few years (Glied & Pap, 2016).

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<sup>6</sup> In 2017, the population of Hungary was below ten million. At its peak in 1981, it was 10.7 million.





**Figure 1.** Popular support for Hungarian political parties from 2014 to 2018

Source: Based on Dull & Szémann, 2017 and data from Közvéleménykutatók.hu (2022)

The governing right-wing party alliance won both the 2010 and 2014 elections with a two-thirds majority, while the 2018 elections with simple majority. The opposition was divided into small and weak parties. With three consecutive wins and two super-majorities the government gained unprecedented powers in post-1989 Hungary. Shortly after the elections in 2014, the popularity of governing parties started to decline. However, the migration crisis in 2015 offered a new chance for the government coalition to regain popularity (Győri, 2015). The presumed and actual impacts of the refugee and migration crises in Hungary served to strengthen popular support for the governing parties as social support for the government became closely tied to the issues of migration. FIDESZ-KDNP had significant popular support when public discourse was ruled by the issue of migration (Fig 1.). The constantly renewing campaigns (billboard campaigns, quota referendum, anti-Soros campaign) (Fig 2.) thematised public discourse along the issues of migration and popular support soared, as reflected in the polls. However, when other topics came to the agenda, popular support fell sharply. News of corruption and the state of education in the country reigned in public discourse, disrupting the migration narrative, and resulting in a significant decline in public support for FIDESZ-KDNP and anti-government protests in Budapest.

The government has communicated domestically and internationally the threat of (Muslim) migration from the MENA region to Europe, with a very clear geographical approach, and a subsequently increased terror threat. However, basically a greater number of Muslim immigrants were settling in Hungary from different Arab countries,



**Figure 2.** Did you know campaign from 2016. It reads: “*Did you know? One and half million illegal immigrants arrived at Europe. Referendum 2 October 2016.*”

Source: 24.hu, 2016, last accessed: March 3, 2021

Turkey, Central and Southern Asia in the 1970s and 1980s. Thousands arrived from Kosovo and Bosnia throughout the Yugoslav wars as well. The Muslim minority is still not significant in Hungary even if the number of the university students following Islam has been increasing recently.

Nevertheless, Hungarian political culture showed some phenomena that are considered unique in Europe. The far-right and radical nationalists do not follow anti-Muslim sentiments as their Western European fellows, however, they demonstrate very radical anti-Semitic and anti-Gypsy xenophobia. Although only a negligible minority of the population has an immigrant background in Hungary, the anti-migration campaign invoking terrorism and Muslim immigration has been extremely successful from a political point of view<sup>7</sup>. FIDESZ was able to achieve its goals without increasing violence in the country – Muslim leaders in Hungary reported “only” verbal violence – and government measures prevented any unwanted migrant groups in the country (Mudde, 2015).

What characterised this type of communication from a geographical approach? Its spatial and cultural duality, building heavily on binary oppositions. Government

<sup>7</sup> Foreign minister Péter Szijjártó is deeply integrated in domestic political communication as well. This is apparent for example in the phone campaign of November 2017 which encouraged people to participate in a mail-in consultation regarding George Soros. The foreign minister explained to Hungarian voters why it was important to participate, mentioning 900 supposed no-go zones in Europe, clearly targeted at anyone but the international community.

narratives intentionally simplified the issue to a Christian–Muslim, Europe–non-Europe (Middle East/Africa), European culture–non-European culture, civilisation–terrorism discourse (and keep doing so) (miniszterelnok.hu, 2022). What is more, some liberal, international/global actors, west of Hungary, move the chains behind the curtains. This divides the world into three parts in the narrative (Szalai & Göbl, 2015):

1. the *West* as orchestrating the migration,
2. the *East* as the source of unwanted migrants, and
3. *Us*, as the victims of the process.

Another important thread in Hungary's migration policy, as we stated above, is its selectiveness based on the perceived value of different migrant groups, as it distinguishes potential migrants based on the benefits they can provide for the state and the elites in power. Thus, we can speak of a group of wanted, or good migrants, the government supports and encourages to enter the country and another group whose arrival it continuously hinders.

The Russian attack on Ukraine (February 24, 2022) challenged the Hungarian asylum system almost immediately (Duszczuk et. al., 2023). The Hungarian state provided free accommodation, food, medical assistance, and financial aid to the refugees from Ukraine, furthermore, civil organisations also contributed to the care of the refugees. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán visited the Hungarian-Ukrainian border to personally supervise the care of refugees arriving from Transcarpathia in Ukraine. The Hungarian government's narrative has changed radically within a few days. While since 2015, the communication phrase to stop irregular and illegal migration dominated the public discourse, in relation to Ukraine, aid and acceptance immediately took over. The government's communication apparatus attempted to switch to the new narrative, i.e., it divided the migrants into a "non-European, non-Christian dollop who departed from the Middle East, Afghanistan, Iran or Africa" and into "the Christian refugees fleeing the bloody war from Ukraine, who come from the same cultural domain as the European peoples". Nevertheless, the Hungarian government's ambivalent attitude towards EU aid to Ukraine – Hungary vetoed EU financial aid for Ukraine in December 2022 – and Russia fundamentally undermined V4 cooperation and isolated Hungary within the EU from diplomatic aspect as well. Distinction between two types of migrants was perfectly visible in 2022, when the government did not want to hide its opinion anymore, according to which there are good (welcome) and bad (*personae non gratae*) arrivals.

### *The "good" migrants*

In the case of those migrants who are considered desirable for Hungary authors of this essay found public and reliable data on the number of migrants and foreign workers (Hungarian Central Statistical Office) until 2019. Supporting the world's *persecuted Christians* is a unique theme in Hungarian immigration policy. In 2016, the government established the Deputy State Secretariat for the Aid of Persecuted Christians to ensure that Budapest becomes a major centre of this issue. Among other initiatives, a scholarship programme was also announced for Christian youth suffering from

persecution, supporting their study in Hungary. About EUR 3 million was allocated for the operation of the state secretariat in 2017, and from September, 72 young Christian students (mostly from the Middle East) commenced their studies as Hungarian state scholarship beneficiaries, which was followed by around 100 additional students per year (Government Decision no. 1829/2016. (XII. 23.)). At the end of 2021, approximately 300 students received the scholarship. This group differs greatly from other migrant groups welcomed by the government as – according to official communication – their favourable acceptance is based upon moral values. As the protector of Christian values, the Hungarian government promotes the message that common roots and commitment to preserving culture/civilisation is of utmost priority (kormany.hu, 2020).

Immigrants with ethnic Hungarian origin from neighbouring countries form a similar group, where ethnicity creates the sense of belonging. With the simplified naturalisation process the government encourages the immigration of people with Hungarian ancestry. However, as we pointed out above, the overwhelming majority of Hungarian citizens does not perceive the members of this group as immigrants (although technically they are), but parts of the Hungarian nation.

In the case of other “good” migrant groups, financial revenue seems to be the most important aspect. To support the financial sustainability of higher education, Hungary’s government makes serious efforts to attract *foreign students*, regardless of their cultural background. This initiative is mostly economic: according to statistics from the Education Office, the number of Hungarian students in higher education has decreased by almost a third in 10 years from 424,161 students in the 2005–2006 school year to 287,018 in 2016–2017 (oktatas.hu, 2017). In order to balance the decreasing number of Hungarian students by increasing the proportion of foreign students, the government provides incentives to both Hungarian higher education institutions and future students. Through tuition fees and the use of various services, foreign students greatly contribute to the economy of university towns (eduline.hu, 2017).

The Hungarian government set its higher education strategy to ensure that 15% of students studying in Hungary are foreign by 2024 (kormany.hu, 2017a). Based on data from the Education Office, the number of foreign students studying in Hungarian institutions increased sharply over the last five years: in the 2012–2013 school year 20,694 foreign nationals were admitted compared to more than 36,000, or 16.5% in the 2019–2020 school year (eduline.hu, 2019).

In the framework of the *Stipendium Hungaricum* scholarship programme, which is for financing the studies of foreigners in Hungary from the state budget, almost 4,000 students studied in the 2017–2018 school year (TKA.hu, 2017a). According to the data published on the webpage of Study in Hungary the current (2020–2021) number of scholarship holders is over 10,000 (TKA.hu, 2022). Most students arrived from Jordan, Syria, Mongolia, Pakistan, and Azerbaijan, remote places, which are culturally separate from Hungary (TKA.hu, 2017b). From a geographical standpoint, it is just the opposite of what the official narrative of the Government on migration communicates.

To facilitate the residence of migrants holding the appropriate capital the sale of *residence bonds* was launched in 2013. The system required the purchase of a 300,000 euro bond and provided residence permits to customers and their family members once

cleared by the national security screening. Subject to heated domestic political debates, the program was shut down in 2017. JOBBIK for a better Hungary, the largest opposition party accused the operators of the system of corruption, primarily due to lack of transparency, and its opposition to any kind of migration to Hungary. Before the system ended, the Minister of Interior announced that through the purchase of bonds, 3,649 residence permits and 6,655 residence permits to family members were issued, as well as 4,794 settlement permits, and 8,951 settlement permits for family members. The overwhelming majority of participants was Chinese, followed by Russians and buyers from the Middle East (parlament.hu, 2017).

To counter the increasing lack of workforce, the government has supported intermediating (primarily Ukrainian and Serbian) *foreign workers* to Hungary. Pursuant to a legislative amendment in July 2016 (Act XXXIX), there is an option to authorise the Hungarian employment of foreign nationals in an expedited procedure. Furthermore, in the case of certain job types with a workforce shortage, citizens from countries outside the EU can be employed without a permit, which applies mostly to Serbians and Ukrainians. Since 2016, a Hungarian campaign in major Ukrainian cities has been promoting employment in Hungary (Czinkóczy, 2017).

Migration driven for employment purposes, supported by the state, serves to strengthen the efficient operation of the economy endangered by a lack of workforce. In the first quarter of 2017, there were 43,000 unoccupied job positions in the private sector, according to the official figures of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH), a historic peak. According to professional organisations, the actual number of unoccupied jobs is several times higher (Hornóák, 2017). As a consequence, the number of foreign workers rose from 67,000 in 2018 and less than 23,000 in 2017 to approximately 88,000 in 2019 (nfsz.hu, 2021).

Combining the numbers above (excluding ethnic Hungarians) results in an approximate number of 150,000 people or 1.5% of total population for good migrants, welcomed or even helped by the government to arrive to the country despite its anti-migrant rhetoric.

### *The “bad” migrants*

As opposed to the group we referred to as “good” migrants above, all other groups, namely, those who cannot contribute to the economy or do not share the same cultural values can be considered “bad” migrants. Since 2015, the government has rejected the acceptance of migrants and refugees from the MENA region. Large-scale communication campaigns, new law enforcement policies, the construction of the border fence, and the rejection of the quota allocation system (aimed to place 1,294 persons in Hungary for asylum) aim to facilitate the accomplishment of domestic political goals and better position of the ruling political party competing with other parties. In the government’s opinion, the group of refugees does not possess significant resources and its individuals become *personae non gratae*. According to the cynic logics of interest-based, populist politics, it is their rejection and its communication value which renders them useful.



Based on KSH data, 177,000 asylum requests were submitted in Hungary in 2015, with about 500 accepted. In 2016, the number of requests fell below 29,500, with less than 500 accepted. In 2017, there were 3,397 (1,216 accepted), in 2018, further 671 asylum requests were submitted combined and 367 were accepted (nepszava.hu, 2021).

While the Hungarian government tolerates, explicitly encourages and even uses its resources to support “good” migrants, it securitises the mass, “irregular” migration claiming the migrants/refugees affected not only being “useless” but dangerous “Others” from different cultures, geographical regions, and religious groups, posing a threat, but at least financial burden to the Hungarian society. Therefore “bad” migrants are used by the communication of the Hungarian government as important but unorthodox resources: they are the scapegoats, the arrival (invasion in government narratives) of which has to be stopped, a task only the government is able to carry out against global conspiracies. The result, as we have shown earlier and discussed in the next section, has been convincing so far from an opportunistic, cynical political stance.

### *Hungarian government's changing position in European migration policy*

The policies implemented in reaction to the 2015 crisis mark a dramatic change in Hungarian political thinking and public opinion. Although the government argued that the policies were implemented due to economic and security considerations, these policies had no predecessor in Hungarian migration policy history, and it seems the explanation may lie in a factor external to the literal migration-related phenomena. Orbán and FIDESZ systematically built their policies on reactions to the crises and tensions of multicultural co-existence in Europe. The government was so efficient that even the representatives of (anti-immigration) political forces in Western Europe and the Visegrad Four (V4) countries have adopted certain rhetorical elements and arguments (Glied & Zamecki, 2021).

The 2015 terrorist attack on the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in Paris was the first case of the Hungarian PM making anti-immigration statements: *Economic immigration is a bad thing in Europe, it must not be considered like anything beneficial, it only brings trouble and danger to European people, and therefore immigration has to be stopped, this is the Hungarian position* (Kiss, 2016).

After the Bataclan massacre in Paris in November 2015, the Hungarian government intensified this communication, stating that the link between immigration and terrorism is undisputed since all terrorists are migrants. Moreover, the West is at war with Islamists in the Middle East, so the enemies sent warriors among the arriving migrants. If we allow millions of people into Europe without identifying them, the danger of terror will increase. Therefore, external borders must be secured, the Schengen Zone must be protected, and no other alternative will suffice (Kaminski, 2015).

Starting spring 2015, the Hungarian government began criticising the immigration and integration policies of the EU, particularly those regarding economic migrants, declaring that the EU had failed at adequate regulation. In addition, the Hungarian

government rejected the “compulsory relocation quota” imposed after the European Commission announced a refugee emergency, stating that European solidarity requires each Member State to take part in managing the refugee crisis through accepting refugees in their countries.

The quota faced serious resistance – PM Orbán explicitly called it madness – and the heads of state and government of the EU admitted that the real solution would be to end the Syrian and Libyan civil wars. EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Federica Mogherini negotiated with the UN Security Council on the possible destruction of human trafficking boats while the largest wave of migrants arrived to the Balkans as well as western and northern European countries, through Hungary from Greece. Budapest reacted by announcing the construction of a 175-kilometre fence on the border with Serbia, leading to heated debate within the EU.

As Pap and Reményi (2017) pointed out, the security fence on the southern border is not merely an instrument to halt migration. It has been a constant element of government communication. All media coverage revolved around the fence: its construction, usefulness, efficiency, etc. In the government narratives this is the geographical location where Hungary faces migration, a historically sensitive part of the country, a direction (South) from which invaders (with special reference to the Ottoman Empire which brought the fall of the Hungarian Kingdom in the 16<sup>th</sup> century) reached the country from time to time. The government in its narratives even “fights” the “invaders” here (see what is called Battle of Rösztke) as the Hungarian Kingdom did it with the Ottomans. Hungarian public knowledge is well established about the Ottoman occupation of Hungary, self-sacrificing war heroes, martyrs, and civil sufferings from the hands of Muslim invaders interlace Hungarian identity (from books to school curricula, from nursery rhymes to movies, etc.). To build a narrative on this familiar knowledge, and interpret migrants as Muslim invaders from the south, from Asia, using tropes referring to historical eras and popular geopolitical imaginations of lands with different cultures helped the government to influence the public much easier.

Orbán even declared Hungary the bulwark of Europe (defensive function of Hungary) and himself the captain of a border fortress.<sup>8</sup> In September 2015, Orbán attended the meeting of the state legislature group of the German conservative CSU party in the Banz Abbey in Bavaria and argued that: *Because of the European Union and the Schengen Agreement the borders of Bavaria can currently be protected at the external border of the Schengen Area, which is currently the southern border of Hungary* (Pap & Glied, 2017).

This militaristic and securitised narrative about the invaders, fences and battles along the southern border, besides its rootedness in Hungarian public knowledge and identity, creates also an image of the potent government, which does not only talks but acts as well. In domestic communication of the government both aspects are important in directing the course of discourses. Not surprisingly the Hungarian government faced intense criticism regarding its migrant policies from various humanitarian organisations and NGO's.

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<sup>8</sup> Border fortress captains are a distinct, important protagonists of Hungarian memory owing to the heroic resistance of fortress soldiers of the Ottoman-Hungarian (Habsburg) frontier in the 16–17<sup>th</sup> century against the Ottoman forces superior in number.



In its July 2016 report, Amnesty International appealed to the European Commission to review atrocities and possible unlawful acts made against migrants, declaring a humanitarian crisis that demanded real assistance to refugees rather than criminalisation (menedek.hu, 2017). Hungarian-born billionaire, George Soros suggested that migrants be accepted and integrated, a symbolic antithesis to the Hungarian government and Orbán in particular. The Hungarian government struck back, declaring Soros and his related organisations (Open Society Foundation, Central European University) an enemy and opponent of the nation. In addition, authorities started investigating several NGOs financed from abroad, including Társaság a Szabadságjogokért (Hungarian Civil Liberties Union), Amnesty International and Magyar Helsinki Bizottság (Hungarian Helsinki Committee). In late 2016, Orbán announced that 2017 *was going to be about displacing Soros and the powers he symbolises* (kormany.hu, 2017b).

However, the war against Soros, the NGOs, and CEU has not remained domestic but instead garnered international attention, raising the question of Hungary's state of democracy. The Hungarian government has emphasised that this is only a dispute with a billionaire speculator and its international liberal allies. A perfect storyline for a populist government that completely dominated the public discourse while the opposition and pro-NGO organisations protested, but without serious result, they basically observed the manoeuvres of the government. In the case of the Ukrainian–Russian war the Hungarian government's ambivalent attitude towards Russia and Russian aggression, the constant hesitation and reluctant behaviour regarding the EU-imposed sanctions and help for Ukraine definitely increased the tension within the V4 countries and drastically changed the progressive cooperation of this Central European political block. Until the Hungarian narrative sounded like Hungary did nothing else, only attempted to pursue a “realpolitik” in relation to Russia, V4 states treated Hungary as a traitor and an unreliable “friend”. It showed the seriousness of the situation that President of the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Republic Pekarová Adamová called Hungary “trojan horse of Russia” in November 2022 (Sybera, 2022). It is worth adding that the Hungarian situation is infinitely vulnerable, because Hungarian energy supply is heavily dependent on Russian energy imports.

## Conclusions

Hungary maintains no comprehensive migration policy, for FIDESZ and Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán, the number one priority related to migration is improving and sustaining their domestic political position, while secondary objective is to improve the financial situation of the country through the support of “good” migrants, therefore, migrants and refugees are not the mere subjects of the policy but means of the government's aims. To achieve this, they have established an efficient communication system which conveys the same message to reach goals. Therefore, when the Hungarian foreign minister makes statements about migration anywhere in the world, it can be assumed to be spoken directly to domestic voters. The government's propositions to EU bodies about migration are submitted by a country without practically mass migration. A country that erected a security fence alongside

its southern border to halt uncontrolled migration waves, furthermore, would prefer a selective immigration policy which would benefit the EU also. According to the incumbent Hungarian government, migration decisions should remain within the competence of the Member States, and therefore, rejects any proposal that would raise this to the Community level. Meanwhile proposals are radical, almost impossible to implement, and clearly only serve to communicate to the domestic audience and newly appearing supporters in Western and Southern Europe. In addition, neither Hungary nor any of the V4 countries have significant Muslim communities, so the campaigns like the Hungarian ones can result in significant political profit without major political risk. This is an issue that almost everyone is interested in, but almost no domestic groups are affected directly, and no losers are left behind.

The spatialisation of the discourse helps the government to deliver its messages to everyday citizens easier and efficiently. The binary opposition logic of distinguishing between good and bad migrants, Christians and Muslims, Europeans and non-Europeans, etc. serves this well. The southern border and its securitisation also support that. Anti-Brussel and pro-Central European attitudes, the contraposition of western (old) and eastern (new) Member States also fall under this logic.

The fact that there was some European reception of the Hungarian communication campaign serving domestic political interests shows the marketability of the message. Governing forces in the V4 countries understood this and applied very similar rhetoric concerning illegal migrants and uncontrolled immigration in their societies, opposing migrants from other civilisations and religions, at the same time, a distinction was made between “good” (welcomed) and “bad” (denied) migrants. As anti-migration sentiments also flourished, benefiting centrist as well as extremist parties in the West, Hungary, and Viktor Orbán have become a “beacon” for the anti-immigration right-wing political parties and movements.

The Russian invasion in Ukraine drastically changed the narratives not only on migration but on Russia and foreign policy aims also. The EU has gradually imposed sanctions on Russia and attempted to help Ukraine with money and weapons. The Hungarian government’s standpoint might have been characterised by hesitation. On the one hand, Hungary has voted all the sanctions packages, on the other hand, it always wanted to express a minority report about the possible effectiveness of the sanctions against Russia. Hungary was becoming increasingly isolated in the EU and among its regional allies, the V4 countries, for its more pro-Russian position in Putin’s war in Ukraine and blocking the EU’s initiatives to punish Moscow for its aggression and help Ukraine. It is also clear that the gap between foreign policy stances is very deep, and only the end of the war could bring about change.

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***The reception and integration of refugees  
from Ukraine in Poland, Czechia, Slovakia  
and Hungary – the New Immigration Destinations  
of Central Europe***

***Abstract***

The aim of this article is to assess the policy response deployed by the Visegrad Group countries (Poland, Czechia, Hungary and Slovakia) during the humanitarian crisis of displacement following the beginning of the brutal Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, in the light of the theoretical framework of New Immigration Destinations (NID). Such a framework is introduced and assessed as relevant to explain how the scant previous experience of public institutions and the wider society in addressing the needs of forced migrants, and migrants' presence in general, impacts the reception

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and integration of refugees in the region. The paper explores the relevance of NID in the analysis of the forced migrants' situation in Central Europe. The study is based on qualitative methods, including desk research, expert interviews in four analysed countries, and legislation analysis. The paper argues that in the wake of a humanitarian crisis on an unprecedented scale, the lack of experience, coupled with scarce infrastructure, insufficient legal framework and resourcing, and poor coordination of different stakeholder groups' engagement, impeded and delayed the implementation of the newly-established policy tools, and in some cases led to the lack of an adequate and timely state-coordinated response.

**Keywords:** Central Europe, Ukraine, refugee crisis, New Immigration Destination, refugee policy

## *Introduction*

The ongoing Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine significantly altered migration flows in Europe. The region particularly impacted by the humanitarian crisis of refugee was Central Europe. Next to Moldova and Romania, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, admitted large numbers of refugees over a very short period of time. While up to 2022, Ukrainian migrants constituted one of the largest groups of migrants in the region, they rarely sought asylum, most commonly using migration pathways established to facilitate voluntary, economic migration (Sobczak-Szelc et al., 2022).

This situation has been changing rapidly since the end of February 2022, when approximately one in three Ukrainians were forced to leave their homes due to the atrocities committed by the Russian military. This led to one of the largest displacement crises in the modern history unfolding on the Eastern EU border. According to the UNHCR estimates, as of August 2022, over 6.6 million Ukrainians sought shelter across Europe, and so far the largest group has temporarily settled in Central Europe (UNHCR, 2022a). The most numerous groups of temporary protection beneficiaries are currently residing in Poland and Czechia, however significant numbers are staying also in Hungary and Slovakia (UNHCR, 2022b).

To that end, the aim of this article is to analyse the migration situation of the Visegrad Group countries (hereafter: V4; Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, and Hungary) during the current crisis, against the New Immigration Destinations' (NID) framework. In doing so, the paper explores how the above framework can be used to facilitate understanding of the new challenges around migration faced currently by the V4 policymakers and societies. In order to do that, the article provides both an overview of measures addressing reception and integration of forced migrants from Ukraine in the region<sup>2</sup> and also, to a lesser extent, touches upon migration profiles of V4 countries in the context of voluntary migration.

Firstly, the paper briefly introduces the NID framework and explains to what extent it can be seen as relevant to the migration situation of the V4 countries. Then, it outlines

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<sup>2</sup> The major part of the article presents the state of knowledge as of September–October 2022.

how the V4 countries have been positioning themselves in the context of forced and voluntary migration in the years preceding the Russian invasion of 2022, and how they reacted to the outbreak of the ongoing refugee crisis. This part of the analysis addresses newcomers' reception and integration, touching upon the access to financial support, housing, education and health services as well as their social and economic integration. Thirdly, the paper addresses policies established in response to the crisis, and then proceeds to discuss the process of implementation of support. Finally, the article discusses how those experiences can be understood in the light of the NID framework, coming up with the conclusions on how relevant the framework might be to the analysis of the situation of the recent refugees and migrants in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Czechia.

The article is based on the material collected through the desk research, analysis of the existing register data, recent studies of both qualitative and quantitative nature, as well as the review of the relevant policy documents and legislation. This data has been supplemented with 10 in-depth expert interviews carried out with the academics, the representatives of the local and transnational NGOs, as well as the local authorities in the analysed countries. Four of those have been carried out for the purposes of the master's dissertation submitted by one of the authors at the Department of Social Policy, London School of Economics & Political Science (Magdziarz, 2022).

The study has an exploratory character, and the conclusions from the analysis can be best used as a point of reference for the future research aiming at carrying out an in-depth analysis of the issues addressed in this paper tentatively. Such a character of the study is determined by a relatively scant, previous research interest in the NID framework in the Central-European context, by the fact that this framework has not been commonly deployed for the analyses of refugee policies and, thirdly, by the ongoing character of the analysed humanitarian crisis.

### *The New Immigration Destinations (NID) framework*

As outlined in the introductory part of this paper, the theoretical framework that constitutes a basis for the analysis is the New Immigration Destinations (NID). The countries and regions referred to as NID are those that experience "accelerated immigration over a short period of time, reversing a longstanding tradition of emigration" (Macareavey & Argent, 2018b, p. 150). Such a shift results in "a significant relative change in the make-up of the [local] population, [...] boost to the local population and rejuvenation of the economy" (Macareavey & Argent, 2018b, p. 150). The rapidness of reversal of the local migration patterns and the social importance assigned to such a process locally is considered more important than the very number of people arriving in a given NID (Winders, 2014, p. S158).

The above framework has been developed mostly in the US context, referring originally to emerging, rural destinations of voluntary, labour migration (Macareavey & Argent, 2018a). "Urban, suburban, and rural" NIDs in the US were characterised by their social and spatial distance from the established immigration destinations such as New York or Los Angeles (Winders, 2014). However, since then, the NID framework has been applied also to other spatial units, policy contexts and types of immigration, including

studies on refugees' arrival in new destinations or the studies addressing the whole countries instead of focusing on specific, local contexts (Macareavey & Argent, 2018a). In Europe, the latter has been the case, e.g. in Ireland, Scotland, Greece, Italy, Sweden, Portugal and Spain, as those countries were identified as NIDs in the context of the inflow of migrants from Central and Eastern Europe (Winders, 2014).

Some challenges connected to such an analysis include the following issues: firstly, the NIDs both within the US and across Europe are diversified, both in relation to each other, and internally, e.g. regarding differences between different regions. This poses a risk of oversimplification and overgeneralisation for any comparative analyses (Marrow, 2013). Then, the generalisability of conclusions from the US-specific research to non-US contexts is limited, as "what it means to be Polish or Lithuanian in rural Northern Ireland and (...) Hispanic in rural North Carolina are clearly not the same thing, nor are the labor-market experiences or racializations of these two groups interchangeable" (Winders 2014, p. S171).

The diversification is the case also for the four analysed countries. Some regions of Visegrad Group, particularly, the metropolitan areas, have been accommodating large numbers of migrants already before 2022 (e.g. on Warsaw see: Duszczyk et al., 2018), even if those persons were mainly labour migrants. In some cases, the local policies, initiatives, networks and institutions addressing the needs of foreigners have been developed. Another problem with researching migration in the NIDs is the lack of data and knowledge on their presence, due to "the speed and unexpected nature of immigrant settlement in NIDs" (Winders, 2014, p. S156).

In this paper, acknowledging the limitations of the NID framework, such a perspective is adopted to analyse the migration situation of the relatively new destinations of immigration in Central Europe – Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, where the rapid increase of forced migration's volume and its social significance have been observed. To that end, the article points to the areas of migration management that are currently addressed by V4 countries', and contextualising their activity in this respect within the NID framework.

### *V4 countries as NID for voluntary migrants*

Firstly, as far as a voluntary immigration is concerned, over the last three decades the patterns of policy development and development of political context around migration have been to some extent similar in all the analysed countries. Prior to the dissolution of the Soviet bloc, the migration policies in Poland, Hungary and the former Czechoslovakia, under their respective, authoritarian governments, have been restrictive, with limited cross-border movement (Bolečková, 2021; Łodziński & Szonert, 2016; Gödri et al., 2014). Only with the political transition, the V4 countries opened their borders to international movement and commenced development of their autonomous migration and refugee policies. The most profound changes in their migration and asylum policies took place in the context of the accession of the analysed countries to the European Union in 2004 (Letavajová & Divinský, 2019; Gödri et al., 2014; Kicing, 2009; Drbohlav, 2005).

In those early days of the migration policy development in Central Europe, immigration used to be a fairly neutral, relatively non-politicised subject, discussed mostly by the local academics and experts, yet hardly touched upon in the broader public discourse (Vermeersch, 2005; Mesežnikov & Bútorová, 2018; Bíró-Nagy, 2022; Drbohlav, 2012). Only recently, international migration turned into a contentious and frequent subject of public debate in the region. Such a change was driven by the right wing governments coming to power in Central Europe, capitalising on xenophobic fear and using it as a fuel for their “illiberal turns”, particularly around the 2015 refugee crisis (Scott, 2021). As a result of those changes, in the following years the development of V4 countries’ policies addressing refugees shifted towards securitisation, even if the door for voluntary, labour migration were being opened wider and wider (Androvičová, 2016; Klaus et al., 2018; Klaus, 2017; Legut & Pędziwiatr, 2018; Pancevski, 2019; Bures & Stojanov, 2022). Another similarity worth mentioning in this context is that formally, the development of migration and refugee policies in the Visegrad Group had a fairly centralised character, remaining within the prerogatives of the respective countries’ ministries of interior (Łodziński & Szonert, 2016; Mesežnikov & Bútorová, 2018; Drbohlav, 2012; Gyollai & Korkut, 2020).

Despite the aforementioned similarities, there are also important differences between the analysed countries in this context. One of those is that Hungary and the Czech Republic transformed into transit and destination countries faster, while Slovakia and Poland followed in the consecutive years (Drbohlav, 2012), as illustrated by the data below.

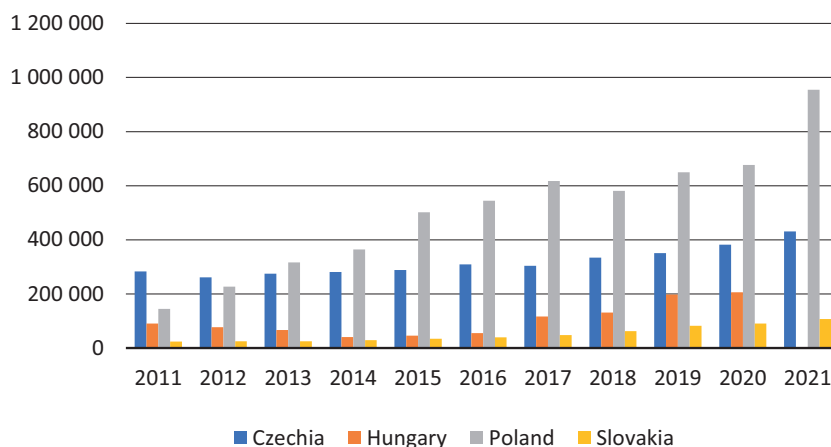
Hungary has been the local front-runner of migration transition. The country’s profile shifted from a sending country to a “receiving and transit country”, and then an NID two decades ago, alongside the country’s EU accession. The share of migrants in the Hungarian population increased from 1.5% at the turn of millennia (Illés et al., 2022) to 4% between 2011 and 2016, when the majority of foreigners were EU nationals (Gyollai, 2018; Bálint et al., 2017). Then, steady increase since 2016 resulted in the number of foreigners totalling almost 585,000 people in 2021, which constituted over 6% of the overall population of Hungary (United Nations, 2022; European Commission, 2021).

The number of foreigners residing in Czechia grew steadily since the beginning of 1990s. The share of immigrants in Czech population rose from less than 1% in 1993 to almost 5% in 2017. There has also been a steady increase in the number of foreigners holding different types of valid residence permits, from over 230,000 in 2011 to above 430,000 a decade later (see: Chart 1). The majority of foreigners who settled in Czechia came from outside of the European Union. Czechia has been also registering the highest share of residents who do not hold a Czech citizenship amongst all V4 countries. In 2020, there were almost 5.5% of such individuals residing in Czechia.

Slovakia has undergone a migration transition later than the aforementioned countries (Bolečeková, 2021). The number of foreigners registered for residence in the country increased by close to 300% between 2004 and 2015, up to approximately 85,000, with close to 60% of foreigners residing in the country in 2015 having arrived from the EU/EEA MSs (Androvičová, 2016, p. 42). The next six years saw this number increasing twofold, reaching close to 170 000 by December 2021. Slovakia’s relative

increase in migrant population after 2004 had been the second largest among the European countries (Drbohlav & Jaroszewicz, 2016, p. 130), and the share of foreigners in the Slovak population rose from 1.6% in 2015 to 3.07% in 2021 (Androvičová, 2016; Bolečeková, 2021). As of 2021, across the EU, only Polish and Romanian populations had smaller shares of foreigners (International Organisation for Migration, 2022).

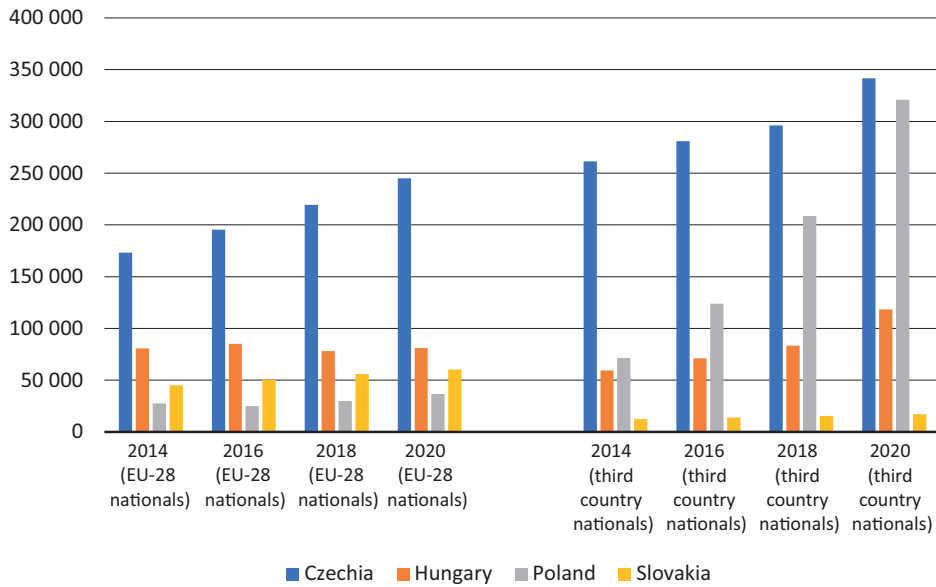
Poland, after the collapse of communism in 1989, became a country of emigration, with dozens of thousands of Poles leaving the country in search of work and better living conditions. This trend used to be sustained by high unemployment, reaching close to 20% around 2004, when Poland joined the EU. More than 750,000 persons left the country prior to the EU accession and further several hundred followed after the May 1, 2004. As of 2018, approximately 2.5 million Poles lived in one of the EU countries (GUS, 2017, 2018). At the same time, particularly from 2014 onwards, the size of immigrant population has been rapidly growing. The occupation of Crimea and the war in Donbas redirected the main migration flow from Ukraine to Poland, rather than to Russia, which had been the case in the previous years (see: Malynovska, 2021). The population of immigrants with a formalised status residing in Poland rose from slightly below 400,000 in 2014, to approximately 1 million in 2021. Thus, the foreigners constituted around 2.5% of Polish overall population in 2021, with 68% among them holding Ukrainian passports (see: Charts 1 and 2). The above patterns have been depicted in the Charts below<sup>3</sup>.



**Chart 1.** Number of valid residence permits (all types) held by foreigners residing in V4 countries, as of 31.12 each year (2011–2021)

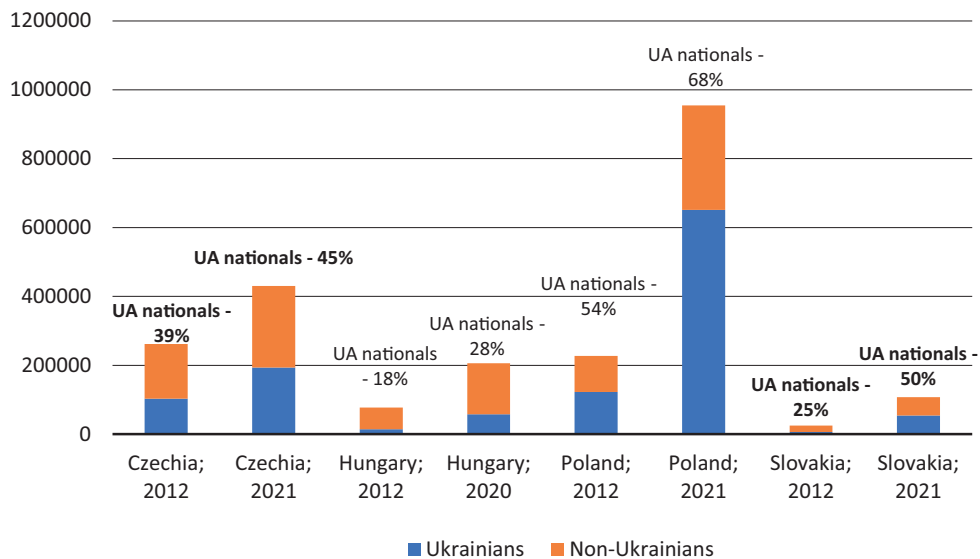
Source: Analysis based on the data from Eurostat (2022a).

<sup>3</sup> The discrepancy between the numbers quoted in the previous paragraphs and the Eurostat data in Charts below stems from a difference between the number of foreign-born residents of the respective countries, and the number of foreign citizens.



**Chart 2.** EU-28 nationals and third country nationals residing in V4 countries on the January 1, (2014–2020)

Source: Analysis based on the data from Eurostat (2022c).



**Chart 3.** Increasing share of Ukrainian nationals among valid residence permits' (all types) holders in V4 countries, as of December 31 of each year (2012–2021)

Source: Analysis based on the data from Eurostat (2022b).



Based on the above data, the Visegrad Group countries can be referred to as NIDs with regard to voluntary migration, as they all have undergone transition from countries of emigration to countries of transit and immigration in a non-distant past. In all of them the socio-political importance of foreigners' presence rose significantly over a short time, particularly after 2015. The increase in the number of immigrants residing in V4 countries, prior to 2022, had mainly economic character, and was connected to demand on labour in the local economies and foreign investments.

### *Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, and Hungary as New Immigration Destinations for displaced persons*

In the past, the events such as the Balkan war, the Chechen wars, and, more recently, the civil war in Syria, reinforced migration flows through Visegrad countries, with most of the asylum seekers, though, treating V4 countries as transit ones. Overall, with the exception of Hungary, prior to 2022 Visegrad Group countries had experienced only a modest presence of displaced persons. However, the circumstances around the war in Ukraine can be expected to alter the socio-demographic structure of the migrant population in Central Europe impacting the needs addressed by integration policies in the region. Referring to OECD classification it has been found that while before 2022 the Visegrad Group countries had been classified as “countries with immigrant population[s] shaped by border changes and/or by national minorities” (OECD, 2018, p. 30), now they can be expected to turn into “key destination countries for forced migrants”<sup>4</sup> (OECD, 2018, p. 29).

For example, in Slovakia, since the beginning of 1990s, the number of asylum seekers “has been significantly lower than in many other European countries” (Mesežnikov & Bútorová, 2018). It peaked around 2004, with over 11,000 people applying for international protection at that time (Androvičová, 2016, p. 42), to decrease in the years that followed. Even the 2015 refugee crisis did not change the above pattern, as the number of applicants remained at the same level between 2014 and 2015. One of the reasons for this was the country's “strict asylum policy, compared with neighbouring countries” (Androvičová, 2016, p. 42).

For centuries, Poland used to be a country of emigrants, many of whom considered themselves refugees. During the communist period many Poles, but also Czechoslovaks and Hungarians sought safety, freedom and better living conditions outside of the region, escaping their countries ruled by totalitarian regimes. Key moments for this migration outflow were the political turmoil of 1956 in Hungary, Prague Spring of 1968 in Czechoslovakia, and the events of 1980–1981 in Poland. After the collapse of the communist rule, Poland emerged as an important transit country for asylum seekers trying to reach Western Europe. Up until 2020, they were predominantly Russian citizens of Chechen origin. Later, Belarussians were the main group applying for international protection in Poland. In 2021 they were joined by more than 1,000 Afghans evacuated after the Taliban took over the power in the country (Sobczak-Szelc et al., 2022, pp. 21–25).

<sup>4</sup> In particular Poland and Czechia, to a smaller degree also Slovakia and Hungary.

**Table 1.** The number of applications for international protection filed in V4 countries between 2012 and 2021

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>Czechia</b>	740	695	1,145	1,515	1,475	1,445	1,690	1,915	1,160	1,405
<b>Hungary</b>	2,155	18,895	42,775	177,135	29,430	3,390	670	500	115	40
<b>Poland</b>	10,750	15,240	8020	12,190	12,305	5,045	4,110	4,070	2,785	7,795
<b>Slovakia</b>	730	440	330	330	145	160	175	230	280	370

Source: Annual aggregated data (Eurostat, 2022e).

As seen in Table 1, before the outbreak of war in February 2022, Czechia was not a country hosting a large number of asylum seekers and refugees. In the 1990s the largest number of applications for international protection came from citizens of Bulgaria, Romania and Armenia (European Parliament, 1999). In the last decade, the annual number of applications for international protection has never exceeded 2,000. The political crisis in Belarus and the political change in Afghanistan have, similarly to Poland, led to the increase in the number of applications filed by citizens of these countries along with the applications from MENA countries citizens.

Among the analysed countries, the biggest impact of forced migration has been recently witnessed in Hungary, where the number of asylum seekers increased from 2,157 in 2012 to 18,900 in 2013, 42,777 in 2014, and then 177,135 in 2015. Such an increase turned Hungary into the EU Member State with the biggest share of asylum seekers in its respective population in 2015, even if Hungary was only a transit country for the majority of forced migrants. Then, the above number plummeted to 29,432 in 2016 and 3,397 in 2017 (Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2022a), following the signing of the agreement between the European Commission and Turkey as well as construction of a fence on the Hungarian border with Serbia (Gödri, 2019, p. 246). The rapid increase in the number of international protection applicants stemmed both from the inflow of Kosovars and the nationals of Northern-African countries as well as Pakistani and Bangladeshi people. Importantly, however, only a tiny share of the people who applied for asylum in Hungary in that period were granted a positive asylum decision – between 2013 and 2016, out of close to 270,000 applicants, the refugee status has been obtained by 738 persons, subsidiary protection by 1,080 applicants, and tolerated stay by 24 people (Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2022a).

Importantly, even though the number of people granted official protection in the analysed countries had been infinitesimal, particularly, in relation to the number of applicants (see: Tables 1 & 2), and only Hungary dealt with significant refugees' presence, the subject shaped the political and public debate in the recent years. Particularly for Slovakia, Poland and Czechia, a spike in public interest in refugees was not caused by "the real impact of immigration on the country's socio-economic development or due to serious consequences caused by arrival of migrants from abroad, but due to the fact that it began to be debated before the parliamentary elections"

**Table 2.** Positive, first instance decisions in asylum application cases in the Visegrad Group countries, 2012–2021

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>Czechia</b>	720	900	1,000	1,335	1,300	1,190	1,385	1,390	960	935
<b>Hungary</b>	1,100	4,540	5,445	3,340	5,105	4,170	960	710	475	60
<b>Poland</b>	2,480	2,895	2,700	3,510	2,480	2,600	2,500	1,995	2,000	3,610
<b>Slovakia</b>	440	190	280	130	250	90	80	90	80	130

Source: Annual aggregated data (Eurostat, 2022).

(Narkowicz & Pędziwiatr, 2017; Mesežnikov & Bútorová, 2018, p. 53; Legut & Pędziwiatr, 2018).

The inflow of forced immigrants to the V4 countries increased exponentially in 2022 after the new phase of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine commenced. Out of 7,751 million people who fled Ukraine by October 2022, V4 countries accommodated 26% of all refugees and almost 42% of the forced migrants who resided in one of the European countries except Russia (UNHCR, 2022b). At the same time, it is worth recalling that V4 populations together constitute 14,1% of the overall EU-27 population (Eurostat, 2022d). As of October 2022, close to 2 million refugees from Ukraine were registered in the Visegrad Group countries with temporary protection, 30,000 registered in Hungary (constituting 0.3% of the overall Hungarian population, referring to the Eurostat data for 2021), 96,000 in Slovakia (close to 2%), 442,000 in Czechia (4%) and 1 422 482 in Poland (3,6% of the overall population of the country) (UNHCR, 2022 b; Eurostat, 2022d).

### *V4 countries' policy response during the refugee crisis*

In this section the policy response of the respective V4 countries to the ongoing refugee crisis is discussed, and, where relevant, contextualised within the NID framework.

### *The legal status of forced migrants from Ukraine in the V4*

Firstly, speaking about the formal status granted to displaced persons, it is argued that their legal status is a foundation for their further integration (Ager & Strang, 2008; Brzozowski & Pędziwiatr, 2014). While in the US context it was found that in the NIDs a larger share of migrants lack formal recognition, it was also argued that a legal status of a forced migrant “fundamentally changes [their] starting point for achieving economic success, social inclusion, and political representation (...)” (Marrow, 2013, p. 119). The problem of formal recognition currently occurs across the Visegrad Group only to a limited extent, particularly as far as refugees from Ukraine are concerned.

Based on the *Council Directive 2001/55/EC*, the analysed countries opened their borders for the displaced persons and established an easy pathway to obtaining a formalised status (and a range of social services and protections). As the access to temporary protection in the analysed countries proved easier than being granted international protection, very few refugees from Ukraine applied for the latter. While refugee policy scholarship usually distinguishes between policy measures addressing refugees' "reception" (understood as the period before the displaced persons are granted international protection) and "integration" (from the moment a protected status is granted) (e.g. Sobczak-Szelc et al., 2022), under the *Council Directive 2001/55/EC*, in this paper it is more accurate to talk about a merger of reception and integration from the moment refugees cross the border.

In Poland, the persons fleeing war in Ukraine could fairly easily enter the country, but until the beginning of March their legal status was unclear. They were advised by legal experts not to apply for international protection or for a residence permit but wait for establishment of the designated protection framework instead. Accordingly, based on the *Act on the Support for the Nationals of Ukraine in Response to the Armed Conflict* from the March 12, 2021, the temporary protection has been offered to Ukrainian nationals, non-Ukrainian third-country nationals, and stateless persons have been granted international protection in Ukraine, family members of the above groups as well as non-Ukrainian third-country nationals with permanent residence in Ukraine who arrived in Poland after February 24, 2022. The act provided target groups with a free access to childcare, education, health services, labour market and social benefits available to Polish nationals (Fundamental Rights Agency, 2022).

In Czechia, forced migrants have been arriving from Ukraine crossing the territories of Slovakia, Hungary and Poland, from the first days of the war. Initially there was no designated legal framework to accommodate the arrival of the newcomers. It was introduced only on March 17, 2022, with three government bills ("Lex Ukraine 1"), and then amended in June without sufficient consultation with wider policy stakeholders (Interview 2, 2022), alongside introduction of the new package of laws ("Lex Ukraine 2"). Temporary protection in Czechia covers Ukrainian nationals residing in Ukraine before February 2022, Ukrainian nationals who had entered Czechia legally without a visa or with a short-stay visa before February 2022 and had been residing in the country when the war broke out, non-Ukrainian third-country nationals and stateless persons covered with international protection in Ukraine, family members of the persons meeting the above criteria, as well as non-Ukrainian third-country nationals legally staying (e.g. based on visa) in Ukraine before February 2022, who can prove that their return to their country of origin is not possible due to the threat of imminent danger. Under the introduced framework all persons fleeing war in Ukraine were entitled to free access to labour market, education, healthcare as well as social housing (Fundamental Rights Agency, 2022).

The Hungarian government offered temporary protection to the Ukrainian nationals who had been residing in Ukraine before the war broke out, and crossed to the EU on February 24 or later. The protection was also offered to the refugees and stateless persons recognised in Ukraine, and family members of the persons falling within the above categories. The protection, however, has not been offered to

non-Ukrainian nationals fleeing the conflict, persons who had been in asylum procedure in Ukraine, and several other groups falling outside of the eligible group (UNHCR, 2022c). The non-Ukrainian third-country nationals have been receiving “a certificate for temporary stay, valid for 30 days and subject to prolongation up until six months” (Fundamental Rights Agency, 2022). As argued by NGO representatives, the government failed in provision of information to the newcomers, which resulted in a significantly limited number of persons granted with the temporary protection status (Babická, 2022).

Contrary to Hungary, in Slovakia, temporary protection has been extended also to the non-Ukrainian nationals who had held permanent residence permits in Ukraine before the war broke out. The newcomers could apply for the protection in the registration centres, or in the foreigners’ police offices located in the larger cities (Ministerstvo vnútra SR, 2022b). Arguably, Slovakia has been offering temporary protection statuses generously, as, different to some other countries, it has been offering protection to the newcomers “regardless of their date of departure from Ukraine” (OECD, 2022b).

### *The direct financial support*

One of the key elements of the support for refugees arriving from Ukraine was the direct financial support. In Poland, Ukrainian refugees were eligible to a one-time benefit of PLN 300 (approx. EUR 65) upon their arrival in the country. What is particularly important for women and children who together constituted 86% of the refugees in Poland at the end of 2022 (Pędziwiatr et al., 2022a, p. 8–9), the Polish regulator made temporary protection grantees eligible also to receive social benefits available to Polish nationals. By May 2022, Ukrainian refugees submitted over 445,000 applications for the Polish childcare allowance of PLN 500 (approx. EUR 105) per each child per month, hence, applying for a support for ca 691,000 children. The above benefit constitutes one of the most important instruments of financial support to Ukrainian refugees provided by the Polish government (Otto-Duszczyk & Nowosielska, 2022).

The Czech Republic offered the Ukrainian refugees one of the most generous financial support schemes across Central Europe, attracting a large number of them to temporarily settle down in the country. This contributed to the share of refugees in the wider population in Czechia, being the highest across the V4, after the outbreak of war. In line with the *Lex Ukraine 1* the humanitarian allowance of CZK 5,000 (ca EUR 200) was provided to the beneficiaries of temporary protection for up to five months (European Commission, 2022c). Later, the *Lex Ukraine 2*, prolonged this allowance for another five months. Such an allowance, though, was not being provided to people granted free accommodation, alimentation and basic hygiene products (European Commission, 2022b). Ukrainian refugees in Czechia have been also granted a free access to all social benefits available to Czech citizens, depending on their individual situation.

The Slovak government made the “refugees from Ukraine (...) entitled to the basic benefit and allowances in the same amount and under the same conditions as are entitled citizens of the Slovak Republic” (Ústredie práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny, 2022b), however, the protection grantees were not eligible to receive “state social benefits such as child allowance, parental allowance, maintenance allowance, funeral allowance or childbirth allowance” (Ústredie práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny, 2022b). In Slovakia, as of the May 9, 2022, “material needs and protective allowances [were] provided on a sliding scale based on household size and identification of special needs and any other allowances based on family situation” (OECD 2022b, p. 25). The value of the support to cover one’s material needs ranged from close to EUR 70 per month for an individual without dependants, up to approximately EUR 240 per month to be granted to a couple with four dependants. Similarly, the value of protective allowance depended on an individual situation of an applicant. There were also subsidies for school supplies and alimentation available to pupils from the households on state aid. The temporary protection grantees have been made eligible to receive financial support for training courses facilitating their social and labour market integration.

In Hungary the temporary protection grantees were eligible to receive financial support only after their temporary protection application was assessed positively, as that process had not been automated and could take even as long as two months (Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 2022). As the above procedure was lengthy, and as such limited the access to financial support for the applicants, the directive on temporary protection, arguably, had not been implemented in Hungary in line with the European regulator’s intention, as the key feature of temporary protection scheme was to provide protective measures to the displaced instantly after they reach their country of destination. Moreover, persons granted financial support in Hungary were obliged to remain in contact with the institution responsible for issuing of work permits to the newcomers, respectively to the foreigner’s place of accommodation. They also risked losing access to financial benefits if they refused to accept a job they were offered. The direct financial support in the country, as of the June 27, 2022, totalled EUR 61 per month for adult persons eligible to qualify as job seekers and EUR 37 per month for minors (OECD 2022b).

Apart from the state-funded support across the Visegrad Group, financial support to the refugees was also provided by the multilateral organisations, e.g. in Poland, UNHCR claims that 360,000 refugees were targeted by its support, with the most vulnerable groups prioritised such as women-headed households, people with disabilities or those with health conditions (UNHCR, 2022c, Pędziwiatr et al., 2022b, p. 7). To provide another example, in Slovakia the transnational aid agencies took over funding of the social benefits from the state for three months since May 2022 (Ústredie práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny, 2022b).

### *Access to Housing*

Provision of housing has been one of the major challenges in the reception and adaptation of Ukrainian refugees in the V4 region. This problem is closely linked with



the minimal social housing stock in possession of the local authorities and the general shortage of affordable housing.

In Hungary, particularly at the beginning of the crisis, the key role in accommodating the newcomers was this of civil society actors, churches, municipal authorities and common people, as there was no infrastructure available to accommodate them. Refugees found shelters in schools, universities, offices or eldercare facilities. However, belatedly, the state provided publicly-funded accommodation (Dumont, 2022). Nevertheless, according to OECD, as of June 27 it has not offered reimbursement of costs to people accommodating newcomers at their facilities or provided the displaced persons with specific housing subsidy (OECD, 2022a, p. 16). As argued by one of the experts, due to stripping of the country's asylum system, during the current crisis the Hungarian government: "[had] to deal with the inflow of people, but [did] not have the infrastructure, [nor] the staff to provide information to the people, [or] the reception centres. That's why accommodation of people had been taken over by big charities, such as the Maltese, Baptist Church, Reformed Church, Red Cross, the civil society, municipalities" (Interview 3; 4, 2022).

Likewise, the Slovak government provided the refugees an opportunity to stay overnight in provisional accommodation, after which they were moved to asylum centres and state accommodation facilities. The government has been reimbursing to the hosts EUR 7 per an adult person and EUR 3.50 for a hosted person younger than 15 years old per night (OECD, 2022a). Another stakeholder important in provision of accommodation to the refugees were the local governments. One of the interviewees described the emergency response mechanism implemented in the country, where particular municipalities "took shifts", taking over the responsibility for accommodating large groups of newcomers arriving at the border during a given week (Interview 6, 2022). The government promised to reimburse the expense incurred by municipalities on accommodating refugees. However, there have been complaints from the local authorities that the financial support has not been provided, and resultantly they struggled to finance their obligatory tasks.

In all the analysed countries a large share of a responsibility for refugees' accommodation has been assumed by individual people, supported financially by public authorities. In Czechia the government established "solidarity allowance for hosts", which can be obtained by a Czech person who has provided accommodation free of charge to a foreigner with temporary protection (European Commission, 2022c). A Czech host providing accommodation to Ukrainian refugees is entitled to CZK 3,000 (EUR 122) per person accommodated in a given month for more than 16 consecutive days. The maximum of amount of support one may receive is CZK 12,000 (EUR 490) for four or more accommodated persons (OECD, 2022). In general, in Czechia, provision of housing to refugees has been successful, even though certain problems with quality of accommodation have been pointed out (Kavanová et al., 2022). On the other hand, one of the interviewees pointed out that the Ukrainian refugees of Roma origin were provided with poorer service and housing (Interview 2, 2022).

According to the research carried out in June and July 2022 almost one-third of refugees live in separate or specially reserved parts of apartments and houses, which were provided to them mainly by Czech households. Further 11% of refugees share

a household with Czechs and another 6% with Ukrainians who lived in the Czech Republic before the war. A total of one-fifth of refugees live in regular rent – either commercial (18%) or municipal (3%). The remaining almost one-third stays in non-residential housing such as hostels (16%) and less often hotels and boarding houses (9%). Refugees who stay in non-residential housing are more likely to be those who arrived to Czechia after March and April 2022 and had no family contacts in the country before the war (Kavanová et al., 2022).

Similarly to Czechia, in Poland the key role in provision of housing to Ukrainian refugees played individuals, civil society actors, churches and local and regional authorities. Additionally, the Polish government provided temporary financial support of PLN 40 per one hosted person per day support to persons who provided housing and accommodation to the refugees. The programme was designed to provide help for 120 days maximum to be extended only in case the hosted persons are pregnant persons, carers with three or more children, and seniors (Infor.pl, 2022). The recent UMP study pointed out that around 525,000 Ukrainians have been accommodated by Polish citizens, including close to 120,000 in Warsaw, almost 107,000 in Wrocław and close to 60,000 in Gdańsk (UMP, 2022b). Additionally, the Polish authorities were also reimbursing companies providing hotel-type accommodation and alimentation to war refugees up to PLN 70 per day (Bankier.pl, 2022).

In the discussed countries the provision of housing was particularly problematic in the large, metropolitan areas, where most of the newcomers concentrated. Importantly, the competition over scarce resources between the newcomers and the native population was reported in the NID literature to possibly lead to “conflict between new arrivals and settled residents, (...) racist sentiments, and to undermine[d] community well-being, particularly (...) where demand far outstrips supply (John et al, 2005; Robinson, 2010)” (Robinson, 2010, p. 2458).

### *Access to healthcare*

Some problems regarding newcomers’ access to healthcare pointed out in NID literature, specifically in the US context, include suffering worse health, including worsened mental wellbeing. Some reasons for this include “increased risk of raids, arrest, and deportation” which lead to “reduced social- and health-service utilization” (Flippen & Farrell-Brian, 2021, pp. 11–12). The above problems are less likely to occur in the context of the current crisis, where migrants from Ukraine reside in the Visegrad Group based on a legal status that provides them with an access to healthcare services. However, some other problems mentioned in the literature, such as “increased isolation due to mistrust and fear”, or lower density of “social and structural support around healthcare” (Flippen & Farrell-Brian, 2021, pp. 11–12), are likely to be relevant to the situation in the Visegrad Group, particularly in the areas where migrants have limited access to social and institutional support (for Poland, see: Magdziarz et al., 2022; Magdziarz & Styrnol, 2021).

During the ongoing crisis, in all V4 countries the refugees have been covered with healthcare, in line with the 2001 Directive, which specifies that grantees of temporary

protection should be provided *emergency care* and *essential treatment of illness*, leaving the exact scope of coverage offered to displaced persons to national authorities' decision (European Commission, 2022a). For example, in Slovakia, the grantees of temporary protection "are entitled to the same free medical services as citizens of the country" (VisitUKRAINE.today, 2022a), which indicates that the Slovak authorities fully-implemented the health provisions described in the 2001 Directive, as the EU encourages national authorities to provide the displaced persons with the widest possible health support (European Commission, 2022a).

According to *Lex Ukraine 1*, beneficiaries of the temporary protection status from Ukraine are already insured by public health insurance from the date of entry into the territory of the Czech Republic. The free access to public health insurance applies also to children of parents from Ukraine born in the Czech Republic after February 24, 2022. In an effort to push more people into the labour market where they would automatically receive health insurance (Interview 1, 2022) *Lex Ukraine 2* changed the unlimited free access to health services to Ukrainian refugees to the situation where the state is covering health insurance (except for children and the elderly) for a maximum of 150 days. Beyond this time frame each adult refugee from Ukraine must pay for health insurance themselves, be employed or be registered with the labour office as a jobseeker. From the legal perspective students between 18 and 26 years of age who are studying at secondary and higher education institutions in Ukraine are considered dependent children for the purposes of health insurance and hence do not have to pay insurance premiums (European Commission, 2022b).

In Hungary, the formally-recognised refugees and persons granted subsidiary protection status are covered with public healthcare system for the first six months of their stay. Then they must start contributing financially to the public system to access the health services (UNHCR, 2022e). The persons granted with temporary protection are eligible to access comprehensive public medical care, including prenatal and obstetric care, oncological care and other types of treatment addressing chronic illnesses. Beyond that, they can also access specialised care, including dental and orthodontic treatment, if they are in urgent need or if they fall within several special-needs groups specified in the regulations (National Directorate General for Aliens Policing, 2022). Health support for the displaced persons has been deployed also by the NGOs, such as the Hungarian and Spanish Red Cross (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2022).

While Ukrainian refugees in Poland are entitled to free access to medical services on the similar conditions to Polish citizens, Office of the Polish Ombudsman rang the alarm bell already in May 2022 with respect to some cases of an unequal access of the refugees to healthcare services in the country. Some of those issues included the difficulties with access to medical services for persons not granted a PESEL number (personal identification number under the Polish administrative system), insufficient coverage of the refugee population with COVID-19 vaccinations in Poland and barriers to employment faced by Ukrainian medics, even with the shortages of medical staff posing a significant problem in the country (BRPO, 2022). In a large-scale quantitative research carried out amongst the refugees in Kraków, Southern Poland, between May and June 2022, 66% of respondents reported that

their health is either very good or good, while only 5% assessed their health as bad or very bad (Pędziwiatr et al., 2022b).

### *Integration into education systems*

During the ongoing crisis, a particularly difficult challenge was integrating of a large number of Ukrainian children in the host countries' respective education systems, establishment of new facilities providing care over minors and education, as well as facilitation of remote access to Ukrainian educational system for refugee children.

In Hungary the policy decision was to oblige the newcomers to enrol their children in the host country's system of education. The children of applicants and grantees of temporary protection are eligible to be enrolled also in nursery schools (UNHCR, 2022c). Interestingly, one of the interviewees argued that introduction of such an obligation was not welcome by some of the newcomers (Interview 3, 2022). In Slovakia, on the other hand, the regulator decided not to make refugee children enrolment in the Slovak educational system obligatory. The country can be pointed out as an example of the problem with insufficient incorporation of the refugee children into the receiving country's educational system (European Commission, 2022c).

The share of Ukrainian children enrolled in schools and nursery schools in Slovakia is very low (respectively: close to 40% and around 30%) (European Commission, 2022b). Reportedly, some of the refugee children residing in the country follow the Ukrainian curriculum attending classes provided by the Ukrainian Ministry of Education, while others are enrolled in both systems. In this context, it was found in the subject literature that educational facilities in emerging destinations might "lack the equipment, funding, and preparation" to address needs of foreigners, and, hence, "offer fewer linguistic support services than those in traditional gateways" (Flippen & Farrell-Brian, 2021). The above can be expected to result in educational institutions being "generally less accommodating for immigrant students than those in traditional gateways" (Flippen & Farrell-Brian, 2021). Accordingly, the surveyed Slovak teachers pointed out that the largest problems in provision of education to refugee children include: "a lack of interest [among young Ukrainians] in learning Slovak" (30% of teachers), "mental discomfort (...) and trauma related to war experiences" (21% and 18%, respectively), "'overload' associated with parallel education in the Slovak and Ukrainian education systems" (13%) (European Commission, 2022b).

Likewise, in Poland, according to UNICEF, 69% out of over 600,000 refugee children in Poland remain outside of the host country's educational system (UNICEF, 2022). While at the beginning of the 2021/2022 school year, 133,281 foreign children studied in Polish compulsory education system, it is estimated that in June 2022 there were around 200,000 Ukrainian children studying in Poland (40,000 in kindergarten 140,000 in primary schools and 20,000 in the secondary schools). Some problems mentioned by UNICEF in the context of Poland include poor utilisation of Ukrainian teachers' potential, the lack of sufficient data collection systems, the lack of harmonised curriculum for teaching Polish as a second language as well as an underestimation of a need to establish anti-discrimination and multicultural education

and integration policies, based on perceived cultural and language proximity between Poland and Ukraine (UNICEF, 2022).

Some examples of changes introduced to facilitate reception and integration of refugee children into host country's education system can be found in Czechia, where an extracurricular enrolment period for kindergartens and primary schools was established; Czech language courses and assistance with social integration were provided, including psychological support; Ukrainian-speaking teachers were hired to support provision of education to foreigners, and university admissions regime for refugee candidates was simplified (European Commission, 2022c).

While the approach of the V4 countries to incorporation of refugee children into their education systems varied, all of the analysed countries struggled significantly with this challenge, while insufficient accessibility of support in provision of care was yet another challenge. For example, both Czech and Slovak interviewees pointed to the problems with availability of places in nursery schools in their respective countries (Interview 1; 2; 5, 2022). Such a problem can obstruct successful labour market incorporation of newcomers, particularly for women being sole carers for minors and seniors. Needless to say, this issue should bring the attention of policy-makers to a gender dimension of migrants' experience of residing in NID (Flippen & Farrell-Brian, 2021).

### *Socio-economic integration*

Overall, the analysed countries provided the refugees access to their respective labour markets, however, this was the case to a different extent for each of them. In Poland, temporary protection beneficiaries' have been granted access to the local labour market, in line with the Temporary Protection directive. The EWL study found that 18% of refugees in Poland had previous experience of working in the country (EWL, 2022). The anxiety about finding a job in Poland was the most common concern related to living in the country among refugees, with 45% survey respondents in the early 2022 reporting such a concern. As of October 2022, information about the refugees' labour market in Poland was scarce. According to the data released by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies by August 2022, 372,000 refugees from Ukraine found employment in Poland (MRiPS, 2022).

In Czechia, refugees from Ukraine were provided a free access to the labour market. They are also entitled to unemployment benefit and can participate in retraining or engage in self-employment (European Commission, 2022b, 2022c). However, Czechia is an example of how, for some of refugees, professional skills' and qualifications' transferability to the receiving country's labour market might pose a problem. Like in other analysed countries, it was found that many skilled workers from Ukraine in Czechia lack the documentation confirming their credentials, which posed an obstacle to securing a better-paid employment (Janicek & Gec, 2022). Importantly, only 16% of employed refugees work in the same professions in which they used to work back in Ukraine (Interview 1, 2022). While as of August 2022, it was estimated that more than 25% of temporary protection beneficiaries (around 120,000 people) have already found gainful employment in the country, the interviewed experts emphasised

that employment found by the refugees in Czechia is often below the level of their qualifications, leading to a loss of human capital (Interview 1; 2, 2022).

Hungary is an example of how the temporary protection directive facilitates refugees' access to host countries' labour markets, as is easier for the temporary protection grantees with Ukrainian passports to secure employment than it is for refugee status applicants. The first are now eligible to work in the country without additional employment permits (Visit UKRAINE.today, 2022b), while for the latter employment eligibility is significantly limited (asylumineurope.org, 2022). However, the temporary protection beneficiaries in Hungary can still access only positions specified as shortage occupation positions, with the employment in the other sectors of the labour market restricted to those individuals who are issued "permits under a preferential procedure" (National Directorate-General for Aliens Policing, 2022). In the interviews carried out for this study it was argued that labour market integration in the country is not as successful as expected, with both caring obligations burdening many of the newcomers as well as a language barrier cited as important obstacles.

When designing labour market integration policy in the Visegrad Group it should be acknowledged that social and economic integration of foreigners are known to co-determine each other. Focusing on the latter, without acknowledging the first, poses a risk of "social fragmentation, polarisation and contestation whereby migrants feel that they are part of the economy but have not connected socially" (Macareavey & Argent, 2018b). This aspect should be emphasised even despite that in all the analysed countries the support for Ukrainian refugees was common<sup>5</sup> (e.g. Papcunová, 2022; Wesolowsky, 2022). Arguably, the approach of the Central-European public opinion to the Ukrainian refugees is more open than this towards the asylum seekers arriving in Europe during the 2015 crisis (Kriglerova, 2022).

The attention, however, should be given particularly to the deprived and closed local destinations within the four analysed countries as in such destinations migrants are particularly likely to face hostility, at least initially, particularly where the demographic changes occur fast and unsupported by policy interventions "mediating the challenges raised by this process of change", and where competition over scarce resources occur (Robinson, 2010, p. 2458). The research on US, NID suggests that migrants in new destinations are more likely to experience social segregation (Hall, 2013, pp. 13–14). Refugees' presence in such destinations might provoke social tension stemming from the "perceived economic and political threat" rising among the majority of native dwellers alongside the rising visibility of the minority group (Flippen & Farrell-Brian, 2021, p. 13).

The risk of newcomers' obstructed socio-economic integration stems from the fact that V4 countries' nationals, on average, have a relatively limited experience of contact with immigrants, in comparison to the other European societies. For example, according to Mesežnikov and Bútorová: "the number of [Slovaks] hav[ing no] personal ties with immigrants is much higher [...] than in the EU as a whole (79% in Slovakia

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<sup>5</sup> However, one of the interviewed Hungarian experts suggested that the Hungarian nationals might be characterised by a less unanimously positive approach towards the Ukrainians refugees than nationals of the other countries of the region (Interview 3, 2022).



and 59% in the EU) and reaches similar levels as in the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary” (2018, pp. 59–60). This has been confirmed also by the research carried out by Stonawski and colleagues for Poland (2022). Another issue is that in V4 countries the ethnic networks are less established than those in traditional immigration destinations. In such contexts migrants can “lack the critical mass to develop their own economies, services, networks, and organizations [and] there are fewer community-based services and organizations (...) through which immigrants can claim government resources (...)” (Marrow, 2013, p. 112).

The language barrier can be a problem particularly in Hungary, where the native language is not similar either to Ukrainian or Russian, while low English proficiency among the refugees, most importantly among the elderly, poses an additional problem. In this context, it is important to emphasise that in Czechia it was found that people living together with native dwellers are relatively more proficient in Czech than their counterparts who do not share a household with Czech people, and refugee children living in accommodation provided by Czech families are more likely to attend Czech schools (Kavanová et al., 2022).

In this context, it is also important to mention that social networks were the main drivers of refugees’ choice of the country of destination, as indicated by the IOM survey data (Teke Lloyd & Sirkeci, 2022, p. 529). This should be linked to the fact that the Central European countries, facing infinitesimal unemployment, were facilitating foreigners’ access to their respective labour markets in the previous years, in the wake of an “increasing reliance on migrant labour as a means of sustaining businesses that would otherwise be unviable” (Macareavey & Argent, 2018b, Tupá & Krajčo, 2019). In the light of the above, the labour migrants’ visibility increasing in the region over the last several years is expected to improve socio-economic integration prospects for the recent refugees.

### *Implementation of support for displaced persons*

While the previous section described policies that were established in the analysed countries in reaction to the crisis, the following one focuses on implementation of support, and identifies stakeholders engaged in this process, referring to the NID framework throughout.

As argued in the previous parts of this paper, the V4 countries are relatively new labour immigration countries and, beyond that, up until recently they have had very limited experience in admitting large numbers of forced migrants, with the exception – to some extent – of Hungary during the 2015–2016 migration crisis. Their respective governments refused to admit refugees in the previous years, hesitant to participate in the Commission’s relocation mechanism. There has been also a lack of political will and initiative to develop sustainable, humane reception policies (Duszczyk et al., 2020, p. 472; Pędziwiatr & Legut, 2017; Kissová, 2017, pp. 762–763). Instead, the V4 countries’ relevant policy frameworks have been developed in a form of a merger of securitarianism and policy-making driven by an economic demand on workforce (Macareavey & Argent, 2018a, pp. 19–20). As argued further in this section, this made the analysed

countries largely unprepared to address the reception and integration of 2 million refugees from Ukraine since early 2022.

Such a lack of preparedness materialised particularly in the problems of organised implementation of the established policies, e.g. both for Hungary and Slovakia, it was pointed out that as a result of the lack of a comprehensive plan covering the division of responsibility and organising logistics turned coordination of the crisis response into a major challenge. For instance, one of the interviewed experts assessed that in Hungary “implementation and resourc[ing was] bad, [...] the government system haphazard and superficial” leading to the situation where “[one] never know[s] if something is implemented or not, [...] and there is a lot of uncertainty” (Interview 3, 2022). To provide an example, the funding for accommodation was pointed out as something that “some councils get [...] while] some can’t, and some are still struggling for” (Interview 3, 2022). Likewise, in Slovakia, the much-discussed example of the system insufficiency was the case of a municipality of Ublá, which had been very active from the beginning of the crisis, but then, like other local authorities, struggled financially, not receiving reimbursement for its refugee-related expenses, and in consequence had to limit provision of support (ta3.com, 2022). Overall, like in the other analysed countries, in Slovakia the human resources and financial assets of the bottom-level stakeholders have been gradually drying out, exposing insufficiency of policy mechanisms in place. While the Slovak example illustrates that the infrastructure facilitating integration of the newcomers might improve with time (European Commission, 2022e), arguably, in the NID context, it is only partially possible to make up for the lack of efficient, state-coordinated structures and mechanisms in place once the crisis breaks out.

Another issue relevant in this context is that the policy discussions in the Visegrad Group countries, in the first months after the outbreak of war, focused on responding to the most urgent humanitarian needs. They addressed the subsequent, gradually arising challenges in an ad-hoc manner, taking long-term integration of refugees into consideration to a lesser extent (e.g. Lezova, 2015, p. 1). Such a pattern has been described as common also in the broader NID literature where it is argued that, particularly at the beginning of a new immigrants’ inflow, the question lingering in NID is whether the newcomers would settle down for longer, or even permanently, or whether they would return to their home countries shortly. To that end, it will be important for the further research on migrations in Central Europe to monitor the process of development of strategies of migrants’ integration, as doing so in the NID context provides a view on “how integration unfolds in societies with minimal institutional support” and with a lack of institutional infrastructure (Anatolie, 2018, p. 98; Macareavey & Argent, 2018b, p. 150).

In the light of the above, it needs to be emphasised that the availability and sufficiency of support to the refugees, particularly with regard to integration measures, depended in V4 largely on the availability of non-state support in a local context where a given migrant resided. To give an example of such a variation, in Hungary, in the previous years, the authorities were reported as unsupportive of the locally-residing third country nationals, failing “to establish a coherent integration strategy” (Gyollai, 2018, p. 12), with “non-Hungarian migrants receiv[ing] no state support, such as vocational, language training or housing benefits” that could facilitate their integration

(Gyollai, 2018, p. 12). In Slovakia, it was reported that the main problems regarding the integration policies include: ‘lack of integration expertise at the local level, reluctance from local institutions to engage in the integration agenda, a lack of appropriate policies, measures, services, and funding’ (European Commission, 2022d), with Bratislava standing out in its activity to establish local policy mechanisms facilitating refugees’ integration. In Poland, on the other hand, while the above problems could be pointed to regarding the situation in the countryside, some large cities (Gdańsk, Wrocław, Kraków) became the front-runners of migrants’ integration in the last years (Matusz-Protasiewicz & Kwieciński, 2018; Mucha, 2021), and benefited from it during the crisis.

Another result of V4 countries’ unpreparedness to face an inflow of forced migrants were the delays in deployment of the newly-established policies, particularly in the first weeks after the outbreak of war. Firstly, it took time for the national governments to practically engage in the provision of support, and it also took time for the relevant legislation to be developed, and then reviewed in light of the evolving circumstances and increasing knowledge of newcomers’ needs. For example, in Slovakia, the IOM together with the Slovak NGOs “managed all the logistics at the borders at the beginning [of the crisis]” (Interview 6, 2022), significantly contributing to construction of infrastructure, as there was none that could be used when the war broke out.

Such a delay in the involvement of the state administration contributed to an increased bottom-up engagement in the provision of support in both rural and urban communities, virtually everywhere across the discussed countries. Even the local stakeholders without prior experience in accommodating refugees were forced by the circumstances to step in, in an effort to make up for the gaps in state-coordinated support. Such an engagement has been identified among stakeholders on all levels of governance, from local communities, NGOs, civil society representatives, and individual people, churches, and businesses, up to local governments, supported by transnational organisations and multilateral institutions. This bottom-up activity covered all the policy areas discussed in this analysis, ranging from supporting refugees right at the border, through the provision of emergency and accommodation, health support, and financial aid, to social and language support.

To provide several examples, firstly, the role of transnational organisations providing aid on the ground and coordinating deployment of support was significant across all the analysed countries. In Slovakia, IOM was described as pro-active from the outbreak of the war, supporting refugees in job seeking, or providing language courses (Interview 6, 2022). Also UNICEF has been pointed out to as significantly involved in the crisis response, having established a network of facilities providing support to women and children, and financing the local NGOs. To give another example, in Hungary, UNHCR established a forum for its local partners and deployed its own policy strategy. Beyond the activity of the transnational humanitarian agencies, cooperations of businesses and civil society organisations have been raising funds and providing material aid.

Then, with regard to local governments, the variation in their engagement can be illustrated through a comparison. While neither Polish nor Hungarian local governments had been formally responsible for handling the support for refugees before

the war, in Poland, taking advantage of the decentralised character of the Polish system of public governance and a strong presence of the third sector organisations, the local governments turned into main providers of immediate support for refugees, in close cooperation with the local NGOs and multilateral agencies (Magdziarz, 2022). The local Hungarian authorities, on the other hand, enjoy minimal regulatory space to implement their own policies (Gyollai, 2018, p. 22; Tèmesi, 2019). Additionally, the pro-immigrant NGOs in the country were suppressed in the recent years by the Hungarian government, which limits their current presence and activity (Gyollai & Korkut, 2020, p. 27). Resultantly, as reported by one of the interviewed experts, “many [of the local governments’] activities remained at a symbolic level” and local authorities’ crisis response “was not fully fledged, comprehensive” (Interview 6, 2022). The above examples, again, point to the fact that the support available to migrants across V4 depended to a large extent on a specific, local context, which might be a finding generalisable also on the other NID country contexts.

The experiences of the previous months, on the one hand, exposed the insufficiency of the state-coordinated system of support, under crisis circumstances, leading to bottom-level stakeholders being burdened with unsustainable share of responsibility. While some stakeholders such as local governments or locally-operating NGOs needed to fill the gaps in the system of support for migrants, in some cases temporarily becoming the main providers of support, in doing so they often had to make up for the lack of experience, finances, and capacity. As a result, there were numerous cases of municipalities struggling with unsustainably strained budgets, or NGOs overstretching their HR capacities.

At the same time, such circumstances highlighted the importance of stakeholders’ previous experiences in multi-stakeholder cooperation in the area of humanitarian support. In all the V4 countries, stakeholders who had knowledge and experience in working with migrants co-operated with each other independently to increase efficiency, speed, leverage, and impacts of their involvement.

## *Conclusions*

Throughout the analysis it was emphasised that the scale of the discussed refugee crisis was unprecedented in the Central-European context. The issues discussed in this paper, and related to the lack of significant previous experience in reception and integration of refugees among the V4 countries, led to, among others, problems in provision of accommodation to refugees, insufficient integration of refugee children into the educational systems as well as a delayed and insufficient provision of support to bottom-level stakeholders implementing the support on the ground.

The characteristics of New Immigration Destinations identified in V4 countries include, firstly, the lack of preparedness of public institutions and administration to respond to the challenges of the crisis. The above stemmed both from the lack of relevant legal frameworks, as well as from the lack of established, experience-based practices and patterns of operating. Similar issues were identified with regard to administrations on a country level as well as V4 countries’ local contexts; the regions, cities and local

communities. Some of the Ukrainian refugees found themselves arriving in locations where hardly any immigrants had settled in the past, and the previous experience around migration management, or even in accommodating foreigners, was very much limited.

Facing the lack of previously-established policies and infrastructures, the analysed countries focused on ensuring that the most basic needs of migrants were addressed. The policy reaction in the first period of the crisis was focused around this area and based mostly on ad-hoc interventions, with the discussion on long-term integration of refugees left for “later”. While such a progression was justified by the urgency of the need to respond to newcomers’ basic needs after they have arrived in the host countries, it also exposed the insufficiency or non-existence of policy frameworks in place. The delayed introduction of long-term integration measures can be seen as yet another result of the lack of established policy frameworks, characteristic of NID.

The results of the analysis indicate that the analysed countries successfully established a range of relevant policies after the outbreak of the crisis, either through introduction of various policies specifically targeting the newcomers or covering them with the previously existing regulations addressing other groups. The policy responses implemented by the four respective V4 governments varied in their compliance with the 2001/55/EC Directive activated and introduced through national implementing acts. As a result, they still found themselves in a difficult and vulnerable position, because of the Directive’s provisions being implemented only partly. Still, the current crisis exposed how the EU regulatory framework can perform a role of a driver of policy reforms in the NID context, fostering legislative action benefitting migrants.

While the newly-established legislative tools were introduced after the crisis had broken out, only then tested and repeatedly revised based on an increasing experience of V4 public administrations, the scope of support offered to temporary protection grantees was still larger than this offered on a regular basis to asylum seekers. The forced migrants who arrived in V4 were provided with an access to a variety of assets that would have otherwise not been available to them. Importantly, both the above problems result largely from the lack of previous social and institutional experience in reception and integration of migrants and in particular forced migrants.

The NID characteristics of the analysed countries were reflected also in the problems with the implementation of crisis response. The deployment of support for refugees suffered because of the lack of established mechanisms of multi-level coordination and information exchange between involved stakeholders, such that would be included in a contingency framework, developed prospectively to respond to a potential, future refugee crisis. Resultantly, the activities of stakeholders on various levels of public governance, and this of independent stakeholders such as local communities and NGOs, were largely non-integrated, and in many times incoherent.

Even though the scale of a bottom-up, social mobilisation in all the analysed countries was enormous, the character and scope of such an engagement varied for particular stakeholder groups across the Visegrad Group, depending on the regulatory frameworks in place, a policy area, available financing and willingness of respective public authorities to cooperate with specific, external partners. This made the available support dependent on a particular place where a given refugee settled. What is arguably a conclusion applying more universally to countries with NID characteristics,

while the bottom-level stakeholders might attempt to make up for an insufficiency of regulatory and institutional systems in place, in case of a large crisis where significant humanitarian aid for migrants is required, it is hardly possible for them to address the problems in their entirety. This is the case, particularly in a long term after the assets mobilised in a bottom-up manner dry out and the need for coordination, additional capacity, time, stability and continuity of financing increases.

Concluding, the NID framework has been found relevant to the situation of the V4 countries during the ongoing humanitarian crisis. The lesson from refugee crisis management deployed in Central Europe since February 2022 is that, in the future, contingency planning addressing refugees' inflow should be promoted on the European level. Such a planning involving all kinds of stakeholders should allow the countries and local contexts that might in the future become NID to be able to smoothly respond to the new challenges, immediately after such challenges arise. Both the more established migrants' destinations and such local contexts, where the social and economic experience of migrants' presence is limited, should be taken into consideration. On a national and local level, existence of a relevant legal framework, including sufficient institutional preparedness, investments in know-how, pathways to temporary increasing capacities of relevant institutions, and development of informal networks of cooperation between public institutions and other stakeholders can be expected to increase effectiveness, coherence and efficiency of a policy response in a NID context.

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## Interviews

- Interview 1, 2022 – with a Czech academic expert (August 13, 2022).
- Interview 2, 2022 – with a Czech NGO representative (August 16, 2022).
- Interview 3, 2022 – with a Hungarian NGO representative (August 16, 2022).
- Interview 4, 2022 – with a Hungarian representative of a transnational humanitarian agency (August 9, 2022).
- Interview 5, 2022 – with a Slovak academic expert (June 29, 2022).
- Interview 6, 2022 – with a Slovak NGO representative (August 10, 2022).
- Interview 7, 2022 – with a Polish NGO expert (August 1, 2022).
- Interview 8, 2022 – with a Polish local government representative (July 18, 2022).
- Interview 9, 2022 – with a Polish local government representative (July 21, 2022).
- Interview 10, 2022 – with a Polish local governments' association representative (July 14, 2022).



## *List of Reviewers*

We gratefully acknowledge the contribution of the following reviewers, who reviewed papers for “Problemy Polityki Społecznej. Social Policy Issues” in 2021:

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