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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[2] 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

[2] 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 that 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 (Bolečeková, 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; Kicinger, 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[3].

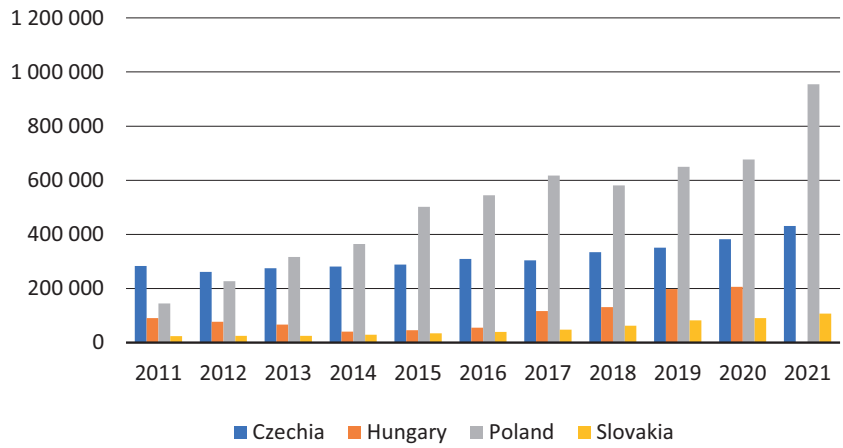

Chart 1. Number of valid residence permits (all types) held by foreigners residing in V4 countries, as of 31.12 each year (2011–2021)

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

[3] 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.

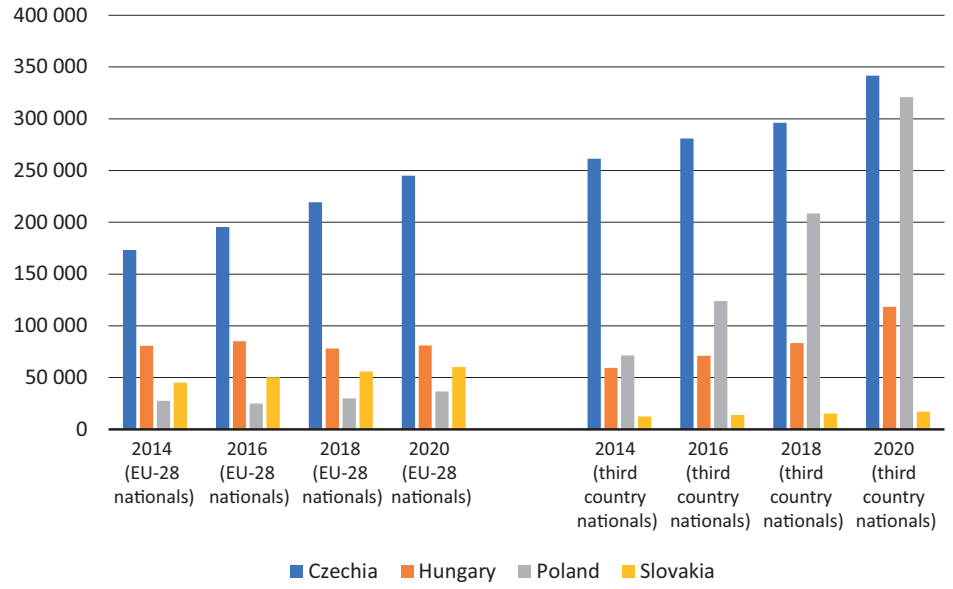

Chart 2. EU-28 nationals and third country nationals residing in V4 countries on the January 1, (2014–2020)

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

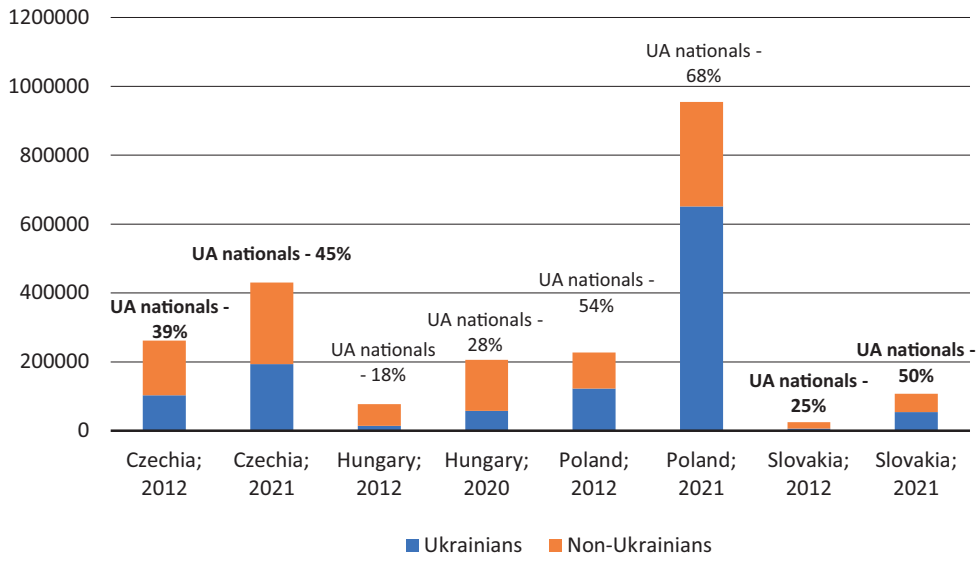

Chart 3. Increasing share of Ukrainian nationals among valid residence permits' (all types) holders in V4 countries, as of December 31 of each year (2012–2021)

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"[4] (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).

[4] 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
Czechia	740	695	1,145	1,515	1,475	1,445	1,690	1,915	1,160	1,405
Hungary	2,155	18,895	42,775	177,135	29,430	3,390	670	500	115	40
Poland	10,750	15,240	8020	12,190	12,305	5,045	4,110	4,070	2,785	7,795
Slovakia	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 an 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
Czechia	720	900	1,000	1,335	1,300	1,190	1,385	1,390	960	935
Hungary	1,100	4,540	5,445	3,340	5,105	4,170	960	710	475	60
Poland	2,480	2,895	2,700	3,510	2,480	2,600	2,500	1,995	2,000	3,610
Slovakia	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[5] (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

[5] However, one of the interviewed Hungarian experts suggested than 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 Ubľa, 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; Temesi, 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).