



**MIGRATION POLICY IN VISEGRAD, WB AND EAP
COUNTRIES**

(Case of Czechia, Slovakia, North Macedonia, and Georgia)



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This research report on policy papers, supported by the Visegrad Project N22410079 and developed by the representatives of four universities across Czechia, Slovakia, North Macedonia, and Georgia, examines migration policies. It presents individual analyses of each country's situation and policies, particularly concerning Ukrainian migration following the war.

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1. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF MIGRATION POLICY AND SETTINGS IN SLOVAKIA

This country report provides an overview of migration trends, policies, and challenges in Slovakia, with a particular focus on the experiences of Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia. As a member of both the European Union (EU) and the Schengen Area, Slovakia's migration landscape is shaped by a complex interplay of national and supranational factors. The report examines a number of key aspects of migration, including demographic trends, legislative frameworks, integration strategies and the challenges faced by the Slovak Republic.

From its geographical location, Slovakia is a landlocked country situated in Central Europe, with a total of five international frontiers: to the southwest, with Austria; to the west, with the Czech Republic; to the south, with Hungary; to the north, with Poland; and to the east, with Ukraine. Despite Slovakia's strategic location at the crossroads of major east-west and south-north routes, it has historically not been a traditional destination for immigrants, asylum seekers, or refugees.

Slovakia sits at the crossroads of Central Europe. The country has experienced a complex historical narrative that significantly influenced its contemporary immigration policies. Understanding this policy evolution requires examining Slovakia's transition from a socialist state to EU membership and its role within the Schengen Area. Slovak immigration policies have undergone notable shifts, reflecting the country's changing geopolitical and economic circumstances. The post-socialist era saw the emergence of new migration patterns, with Slovakia transitioning from a country of emigration to one grappling with the challenges and opportunities posed by immigration.

It can be observed that Slovakia has experienced a variety of migration patterns, initially characterised by emigration following the dissolution of Czechoslovakia. However, in recent years (post-EU accession in 2004), the country has witnessed an increase in immigration, including labour migration and refugees seeking asylum. Furthermore, demographic shifts have structural implications for the nation's economic and social dynamics. Over the three decades of the Slovak Republic's independence, the immigration of foreigners increased gradually, in line with the evolution of migration policies, Slovak EU membership, economic development and the country's democratic nature. Bargerová (2016) asserts that between 1993 (the year of the Slovak Republic's establishment) and 2004 (the year of its EU accession), the topic of migration was virtually absent from political, public and media discourse.

Similarly, the public and professional discourse about foreign migration and the situation of refugees was rather limited and marginal in all countries of Central Europe, exerting no discernible impact on the value and ideological preferences within the population, as well as the political narratives introduced by political leaders (Hlinčíková, Mesežnikov, 2016). This has undergone a significant transformation following the substantial influx of immigrants during the 2015-2016 period, which saw a considerable number of individuals from Middle Eastern and North African countries seeking asylum. In conclusion, this situation has given rise to a new wave of political populism, an increase in nationalism and far-right extremism, which has had a significant impact on the political development of Central Europe, including Slovakia. Stojarová is

in agreement with the preceding assertion that the two states of Czechoslovakia were characterised by emigration rather than immigration until the 1989 Velvet Revolution (Stojarová, 2019). In contrast to the Czech Republic, Slovakia retained its status as a country of emigration even after 1993 and remained a relatively uncommon destination for migrants until the present day. This status can be attributed to a number of factors, including the influence of Slovak nationalism and populism during the early years of state formation, political instability during the 1990s, the transformation of the economy, and the country's low income level. As a result, Slovakia has become a country of transit rather than a final destination for immigrants, with relatively low immigration rates and a significant number of high-skilled Slovaks leaving their home country.

The general overview of the border and immigration policy can be described as follows: In terms of border policy, Slovakia has been a member of the Schengen Area since December 2007. This allows for passport-free travel between the majority of European Union member states. This signifies that individuals may traverse the territory of Slovakia and other Schengen member states without being subjected to passport control procedures at internal border crossings. Slovakia's external borders are shared with a number of countries, including Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Ukraine. These borders are subject to monitoring in order to guarantee the security of the Schengen Area and to regulate the movement of people and goods. In February 2022, a specific measure was introduced in response to an emergency situation, based on humanitarian grounds and the resolution of the Slovak Government (Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, 2023). Third-country nationals are permitted to enter from Ukraine via the external border in the event that they are unable to fulfil one or more of the entry conditions set out in the Schengen Borders Code, such as the presentation of travel documents or a visa. From the perspective of Slovak Republic immigration policy, as an EU Member State, it is aligned with the European Union's regulations pertaining to visa policies and visa requirements. In summary, individuals from EU and EFTA (European Free Trade Association) countries are entitled to enter and reside in Slovakia without a visa. Non-EU citizens are typically required to obtain a visa or residence permit in order to live and work in Slovakia (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, 2023).

Additionally, Slovakia provides a range of residence permits for foreign nationals, encompassing both temporary and permanent residence permits. These permits are typically issued for purposes such as employment, education, family reunification, or business opportunities and investments. From the perspective of asylum and refugee policy, Slovakia is a participant in the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), which provides protection to individuals seeking asylum on the basis of international and EU law. Asylum seekers are required to undergo a legal process to ascertain their eligibility for refugee status. Despite the implementation of numerous initiatives aimed at integrating immigrants and refugees into Slovak society, this domain remains underdeveloped. The majority of existing programmes and policies pertain to language courses and cultural orientation, as evidenced by the literature (Plavnická, Šlosár, 2017; Štefančík, Lenč, 2012; Bargerová, Divinský, 2008; Divinský, 2005).

2. MIGRATION LEGISLATION IN SLOVAKIA

The legal foundations of Slovak migration policy are enshrined in both national legislation and EU directives. As an EU member state, Slovakia aligns its immigration regulations with broader European frameworks, contributing to the harmonization of policies across the Union.

Stojarová frames the legislation on migration in Slovakia into five stages:

- Alien Act from 1992 which was adopted during Czech and Slovak Federal Republic (Act no. 123/1992 Coll.)
- Slovak Alien Act (Act no. 73/1995 Coll.) and Refugee Act (Act no. 283/1995) which have been in force until 2002 and replaced by Act no. 48/2002 Coll. on Residence of foreigners that has replaced the original Alien Act and Act no. 480/2002 Coll. on Asylum which has replaced the Refugee Act
- Concept of the Migration of the Slovak Republic approved in 2005
- Concept of the Integration of Foreigners in the Slovak Republic from 2009 and the Act on Residence of Aliens (Act no. 404/2011 Coll.)
- Amendments to the Alien Act and the „migration crisis“ since 2011 (Stojarová, 2019).

Among the current strategic documents governing migration and asylum policy that constitute the major migration framework in Slovakia we include:

- Migration policy of the Slovak Republic with a view to 2025.

In the past, strategic documents were focused on the migration and asylum policy of the Slovak Republic:

- Migration Policy of the Slovak Republic overlooking the year 2020,
- Conceptual intentions of the Migration Policy of the Slovak Republic for the period 2011 - 2015,
- The Concept of the Integration of Foreigners in the Slovak Republic 2009-2011,
- The Concept of Migration Policy 2005 -2010.

The strategies, concepts and legislation mentioned above demonstrate Slovakia's comprehensive legislative framework for migration policy. Two acts form the cornerstone of migration law: the Act on Residence of Foreigners (404/2011) and the Act on Asylum (480/2002). These acts address the legal aspects of residence and asylum-seeking. EU directives and the Schengen Agreement further shape the country's migration approach.

In the period preceding Slovakia's accession to the European Union, no significant legislative documents pertaining to migration were adopted at the national level. The Principles of Migration Policy, adopted through Government Resolution no. 846/1993, constituted the inaugural document through which the Slovak Republic commenced the formulation of its migration policy in the aftermath of the dissolution of Czechoslovakia. Conversely, the Slovak government's attention was primarily directed towards asylum policy, rather than the broader framework of migration policy (Práznovská, 2020). However, the Principles failed to address the specific requirements and challenges pertaining to foreign migration within the country, and have consequently been subjected to critical scrutiny (Divinský, 2009; Bolečeková, 2010).

The initial strategic document to regulate migration following Slovakia's accession to the EU was the Concept of the Migration Policy of the Slovak Republic in 2005. This document is regarded as a pivotal milestone in Slovakia's history (Bolečeková, Olejárová, 2018). The primary objective of the Concept was to facilitate the transposition of EU directives into national legislation, thereby contributing to the EU's endeavour to establish uniform migration policies across all Member States. It delineated the fundamental tenets of migration policy, thereby laying the groundwork for the subsequent evolution of contemporary migration policy (Slovak Business Agency, 2015).

Following Slovakia's accession to the European Union, the country gradually became a destination for foreign migrants, rather than merely a transit country (Androvičová, 2015). Consequently, the issue of migration had to be addressed at a more strategic and complex level. This is corroborated by data and statistics from the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Since Slovakia's

accession to the EU in 2004, the number of legal foreign residents in Slovakia has increased almost twelvefold, from 22,108 migrants in 2004 to 278,595 in December 2022 (International Organization for Migration, 2023). In light of the aforementioned considerations, the Slovak Republic has adopted a Migration Policy. In 2011, the Perspective until the year 2020 was approved, which constituted the primary document and formed the basis for the development of a modern and purposeful policy of the Government of the Slovak Republic in the area of migration (Migration Policy of the SR: Perspective until the year 2020, 2011). In essence, the objective was to align national interests with the standards set forth by the European migration and asylum policy. Among the most significant aspects of the policy are the measures taken to combat illegal migration and ensure compliance with EU principles, including those pertaining to human rights and anti-discrimination measures (Práznovská, 2020). Conversely, a novel theme has emerged within the Slovak discourse on migration security, namely the notion of cultural threat and the proposed integration model, which bears resemblance to assimilation. This has the effect of engendering prejudice and stereotypes regarding migrants in a negative manner (Liďák, Štefančík, 2022; Androvičová, 2015).

The most recent migration policy of the Slovak Republic is as follows: In September 2021, the Slovak Government adopted strategic document – Migration Policy of the Slovak Republic with a view to 2025. The document addresses a number of key issues, including the fundamental objectives and priorities of Slovak migration policy in the following areas: legal migration, with a particular focus on well-managed economic and labour migration; emigration from Slovakia, with an emphasis on the return of the workforce; international protection; integration; irregular migration; readmission procedures and returns; combating human trafficking; humanitarian and development cooperation; and communication of migration topics. The document sets out a perspective until the year 2025. As stated in the report from Integral Human Development (2023), the primary objective is to facilitate well-managed labour migration, thereby ensuring the integration of foreign workers, the security of Slovak nationals, and the promotion of harmonious long-term coexistence. Conversely, the Human Rights League in Slovakia (2020) highlighted that the proposal fails to address the current realities of migration, lacks specificity and clarity, and is not aligned with the principles of open governance and participation.

The legislative standard relating to the issue of migration and asylum policy in the Slovak Republic is Act no. 480/2002 Coll. on Asylum. The content of the law is divided into nine parts which, in addition to the basic, common, transitional and final provisions, regulates:

- asylum procedure;
- the rights and obligations of applicants, asylum seekers and foreigners who have been provided with additional protection;
- initial integration;
- temporary shelter/asylum;
- asylum institutions;
- cooperation with the High Commissioner's Office and NGOs;
- readmission procedures.

Together with the Act no. 404/2011 on Residence of Aliens the Slovak Government has established a rather restrictive migration policy-making emphasizing border control mechanisms and regulating entry as well as residence of foreigners in Slovakia which has been criticized by NGOs mainly due to the creation of „*atmosphere of state and border endangerment by migrants*“ as well as „*more restrictive regulation of entry and stricter conditions for granting temporary residence for third country nationals*“ (Kodaj, Dubová, 2013; Bachtíková, Bargerová, Grethe-Guličová, 2012).

Pursuant to Section 8 of the Asylum Act, the Slovak Republic shall grant asylum to the applicant who has in the country of origin:

- justified concerns about persecution of racial, national or religious reasons;
- for reasons of holding certain political opinions or belonging to a certain social group and, in view of these concerns, cannot or do not want to return to that state;
- if the applicant is persecuted for the exercise of political rights and freedoms (Ministry of Interior of the SR, 2023).

Asylum can also be granted for humanitarians that may consider the administrative authority. However, there is no legal entitlement to this type of asylum. Of course, the asylum law also remembers the granting of this form of protection for the purpose of merging families (Ministry of Interior of the SR, 2023).

Pursuant to Section 13a of the Asylum Act, the Slovak Republic shall provide additional protection if the applicant has not granted asylum, but there are serious reasons to believe that it would be exposed to a real threat of serious injustice if returning to the country of origin. A serious injustice is:

- imposing a death penalty or his performance;
- torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;
- serious and individual threat to the life or inviolability of a person due to arbitrary violence during an international or national armed conflict (Ministry of Interior of the SR, 2023).

Pursuant to Section 13b of the Asylum Act, the Slovak Republic will provide additional protection for the purpose of family merger unless this Act provides otherwise:

- to the spouse of a foreigner who was granted supplementary protection under § 13a, if the marriage lasts and lasted even at a time when the alien left the country of origin and this alien agrees in advance with the merger in writing,
- free children of a foreigner who has been provided with additional protection under § 13a, or a person specified in a point higher up to 18 years of age or
- parents of the free alien who provided supplementary protection under § 13a, younger than 18 years or the person entrusted to personal care, if the alien to whom the supplementary protection was provided agrees in writing (Ministry of Interior of the SR, 2023).

A substantial difference in the granting of asylum and the provision of additional protection is the time for which the protection is granted. In the case of asylum, it is a permanent residence of a foreigner in the Slovak territory, in the case of supplementary protection it is a temporary stay for one year, which can be extended again for two years for justified reasons (Ministry of Interior of the SR, 2023).

3. MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES IN SLOVAKIA BEFORE 2022

In general, the Slovak Republic has introduced a mechanism of preferential immigration and integration policies, which include concepts of controlled economic migration, integration policy and migration of qualified labour force (Přívarová et al., 2022). The accession of Slovakia to the EU (2004) and the Schengen Agreement (2007) has resulted in a notable decline in illegal migration, while legal migration has increased considerably. However, the number of foreigners in Slovakia remains relatively low, accounting for only approximately 5% of the total population (IOM, 2023). Throughout 2022 and 2023, Slovakia witnessed a continuous influx of migrants, predominantly comprising individuals fleeing Ukraine, which was experiencing a state of war. Conversely, the influx of Ukrainians does not precipitate an abrupt surge in immigration to Slovakia, as it is

typically followed by an outflow of individuals returning to their country of origin. This phenomenon will be further elucidated in the subsequent sections of this country study. Table 1 below presents a comprehensive overview of the number of asylum applications, granted asylum, subsidiary protection, unfavorable decisions, and cessations of the asylum process over the years 1993-2023.

Table 1: Number of Asylum Applications and First Instance Decisions in Years (1993 - 2023)

Year	Applications Total	Asylum Granted	Subsidiary Protection Granted	Negative Decisions	Cessation of Procedure
1993-2003	33289	459	x	1560	28499
2004	11395	15	x	1592	11782
2005	3549	25	x	827	2930
2006	2849	8	x	861	1940
2007	2642	14	82	1177	1693
2008	909	22	66	416	457
2009	822	14	98	330	460
2010	541	15	57	243	284
2011	491	12	91	120	232
2012	732	32	104	264	340
2013	441	15	34	137	292
2014	331	14	99	99	137
2015	330	8	41	72	128
2016	146	16	12	56	35
2017	166	29	25	34	73
2018	178	5	37	46	69
2019	232	9	19	51	179
2020	282	11	27	40	177
2021	370	29	13	90	212
2022	547	23	48	76	387
31.10.2023	379	28	39	67	285
Total	60621	954	892	8158	50591

Source: Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, 2023a

Table 1 shows that Slovakia's EU accession in 2004 led to the country becoming a destination for international immigration and asylum seekers. The number of applications received reached a yearly high of 11,395. Since then, the number of applications has fallen, with only a few hundred granted asylum each year. The police report also mentions a new border control system with EU neighbours, which started on 1 July 2003. EU nationals now have a faster process at border crossings. Since 1 May 2004, these border crossings have operated as single-stop checks, and

regular checks between Slovakia and other EU Member States have been abolished. There were 5,178 illegal border crossings by migrants in 2005, a 38% decrease on the previous year. The Border and Alien Police say this is linked to attempts by illegal migrants to transit via Slovakia or exploit asylum procedures to legalise their residence and prepare for subsequent illegal entry. This hypothesis has been corroborated by repeated instances of illegal exits by asylum seekers aiming to cross the Austrian border (Yearbook of Border and Alien Police, 2005). The tables below present the most recent data on residence permits for foreign and third-country nationals, comparing 2020 and 2021. In 2021, most third-country nationals were Ukrainian, followed by Serbian, while EU nationals were primarily Czech, followed by Hungarian.

Table 2: Number of valid residence permits for foreigners (2020/2021)

Nationality type	on 31.12.2020	on 31.12.2021
Third country nationals	90 806	111 427
EU nationals	59 206	56 092
TOTAL	150 012	167 519

Source: Statistical Overview of Legal and Illegal Migration of Foreigners in Slovakia, 2021.

Table 3: Number of valid residence permits for third country nationals (2020/2021)

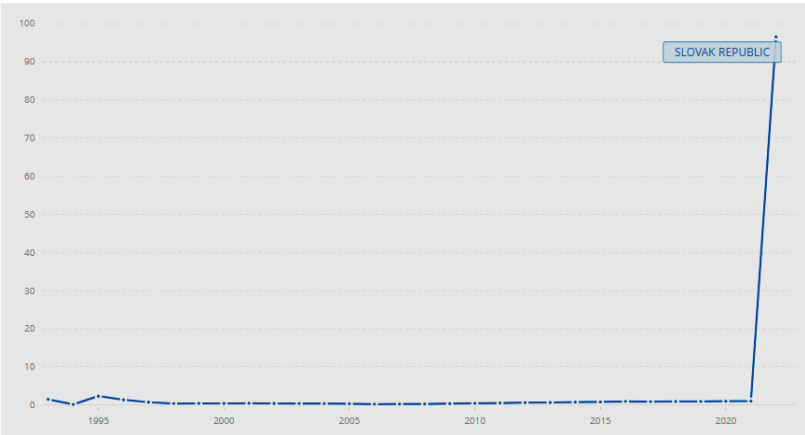
Type of residence	on 31.12.2020	on 31.12.2021
Temporary residence	69 978	85 286
Permanent residence	20 775	26 066
Tolerated residence	53	75
TOTAL	90 806	111 427

Source: Statistical Overview of Legal and Illegal Migration of Foreigners in Slovakia, 2021.

Over the last four years the UN has estimated the refugees in Slovakia as follows:

- Slovak Republic refugee statistics for 2019 was 965, a 2,88% increase from 2018
- Slovak Republic refugee statistics for 2020 was 1006, a 4,25% increase from 2019
- Slovak Republic refugee statistics for 2021 was 1046, a 3,98% increase from 2020
- Slovak Republic refugee statistics for 2022 was 96 563, a 9131,64% increase from 2021
- Slovak Republic refugee statistics for 2023 (November) was 105 104, a 8,85% increase from 2022 (Slovak Republic Refugee Statistics 1993-2023, 2023).

Chart 1: Refugee population in Slovakia 1993 – 2023 (in thousands)



Source: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and UNRWA through UNHCR's Refugee Data Finder at unhcr.org/refugee-statistics

Prior to the war in Ukraine, the UN estimated the number of refugees at approximately one thousand people per year throughout 2019-2021. The majority of these refugees originated from Afghanistan and Iraq, followed by Serbia, Kosovo, the Russian Federation and Romania. However, the situation in 2022 saw a dramatic increase in the number of people fleeing Ukraine, with almost one hundred thousand individuals seeking asylum. Additionally, there has been a slight increase in asylum applications. Slovakia has established another instrument that facilitates the asylum process for refugees from Ukraine in a more expedient manner than the conventional asylum procedure. This instrument is known as the Institute of Temporary Asylum (Integral Human Development, 2023). The chart below illustrates the flow of refugees to Slovakia over the last three decades. While the situation with refugees was relatively stable, with the number of total refugees counted only in hundreds during the first 29 years of Slovak independence, the last two years have shown a dramatic increase in the number of refugees from Ukraine.

3.1. UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN SLOVAKIA AFTER 2022

The Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic is responsible for maintaining records of the number of visits by foreign nationals from Ukraine to the Slovak Republic for the purpose of obtaining temporary protection. The data in Table 4 is organised according to three main age groups and gender, and is also presented in absolute value for each of the structured categories, as well as the total number of permitted stays of foreign nationals from Ukraine.

As of January 2024, the Ministry of the Interior registered 114,343 provision of temporary protection to citizens of Ukraine. To the highest extent, the displaced citizens of Ukraine are trying to go to the Bratislava region as close as possible to the center of the capital Bratislava. There are no significant differences between genders in the 0-17 age group. The more important prevalence of women over men is present in two other age groups of 18-60 years, and 60 or more. In the case of 18-60 years of age, women make up almost 75% of the temporary protections provided, in the age group of 60 or more, women represent approximately 66% of all temporary protections provided.

Table 4: The number of tolerated stays of foreigners on the territory of the Slovak Republic with the purpose of temporary protection according to the region, age and gender (data as of January 2024 from 28.2. 2022)

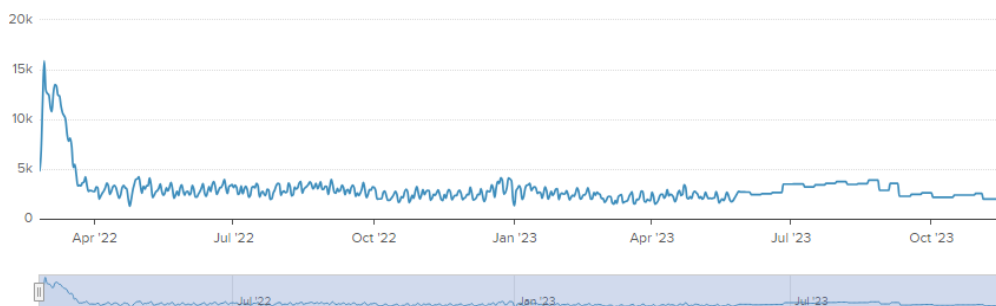
State Level	Age Groups									Total
	0-17		0-17 Total	18-60		18-60 Total	60+		60+ Total	
	Men	Women		Men	Women		Men	Women		
BB Region	1 193	1 124	2 317	675	2732	3407	187	424	611	6 335
BA Region	6402	6102	12506	7922	18761	26683	1016	2215	3231	42420
KE Region	2732	2388	5120	1772	6132	7904	521	1088	1609	14633
NR Region	1864	1752	3616	1567	5226	6793	203	537	740	11149
PO Region	1629	1528	3157	1134	3680	4814	311	640	951	8922
TN Region	1485	1440	2925	1134	4275	5409	169	410	579	8913
TT Region	1795	1653	3448	1289	4582	5871	213	579	792	10111
ZA Region	1990	1982	3972	1627	5354	6981	289	618	907	11860
Total	19090	17971	37061	17120	50742	67862	2909	6511	9420	114343

Source: authors processing according to data of Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, 2024

Legend: BB – Banská Bystrica Region; BA – Bratislava Region; KE – Košice Region; NR – Nitra Region; PO – Prešov Region; TN – Trenčín Region; TT – Trnava Region; ZA – Žilina Region;

The development of the number of crossed borders from Ukraine to Slovakia from Chart 2 shows the highest values at the very beginning of full military intervention in the territory of Ukraine. Higher daily numbers are registered until approximately the end of March 2022. The following periods indicate relatively balanced numbers. On the last updated date in December 2023, the total recorded number of border crossings with Ukraine has a value of 1,937,690. Since June 2023, the numbers are recorded at weekly intervals, indicating a gradual reduction of the number of border crossings.

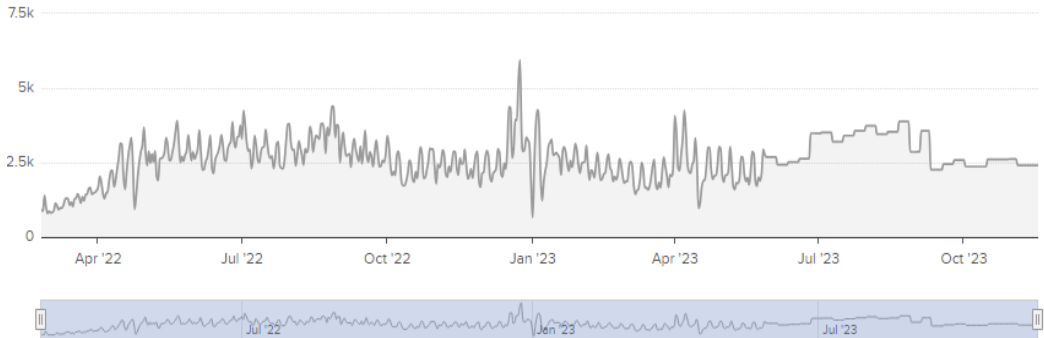
Chart 2 Border crossings from Ukraine – from 24.2.2022 to 16.11.2023 (from June 2023 the data reported on border crossings is on weekly basis)



Source: UNHCR, 2024.

The number of crossing borders from Slovakia to Ukraine has a different development curve compared to the opposite direction. Unlike arrivals to Slovakia, in the initial stages, shows the lowest departure rate to Ukraine. From about May 2022, the returns are gradually starting to get back to the place of the state of origin. Absolutely highest measured value in Chart 3 is from 24.12.2023 with a value of almost 6000 individuals crossing the border. In the later stages, since June 2023, the records of statistics changed from daily values to a week. Again, this shows a gradual reduction of the number of daily border crossing from Slovakia to Ukraine. According to the latest update from December 2023, the total number of border crossings values to 1 779 405.

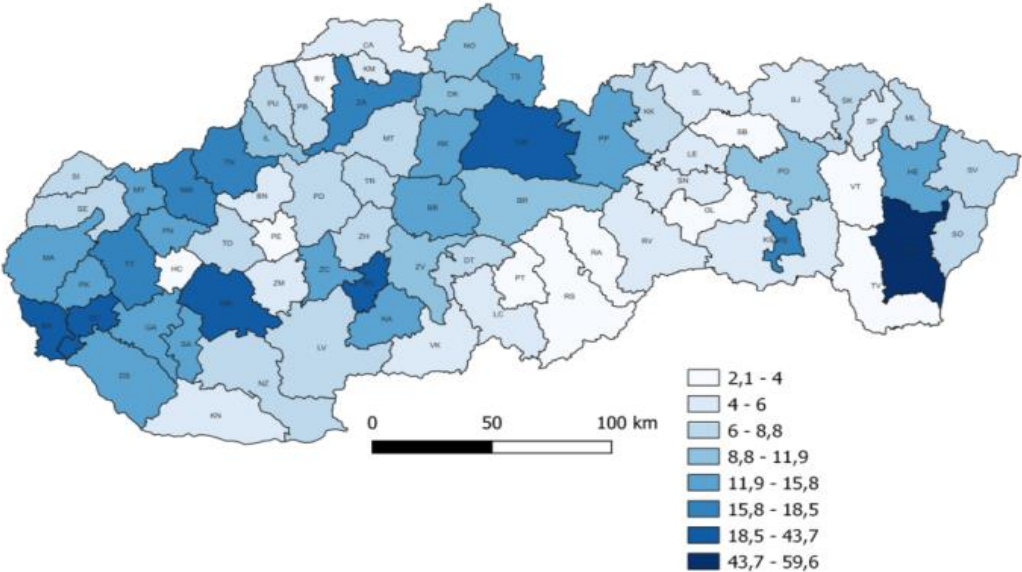
Chart 3 Border crossings to Ukraine - from 24.2.2022 to 16.11.2023 (from June 2023 the data reported on border crossings is on weekly basis)



Source: UNHCR, 2024.

The spatial distribution of temporary protections for people coming from Ukraine is located primarily to four main regions. According to Image 1, the highest concentration is recorded by the Michalovce district in the eastern part of Slovakia. The second most important area is recorded in the western districts of the nearby capital of Slovakia - Bratislava. The third important region is the northwest part with districts in Považie. As the fourth region with above -mentioned values of temporary protections is represented the north of Slovakia with the main district, Liptovský Mikuláš and attached surrounding districts.

Image 1 Spatial distribution of granted temporary protections (in thousands, data as of 21.6.2022)



Source: Ministry of Interior of Slovak republic, 2022: 8.

3.2. UKRAINIAN DISPORA CHARACTERISTICS BEFORE AND AFTER 2022

The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic maintains records of the population balance by nationality. The available statistics are current until the end of 2022, at the time of processing the country report, with the last update on 3 April 2023. The incorporation of data from the subsequent year is anticipated in the spring of 2024. Tables 5, 6 and 7 present data from 2014 to 2022, with a particular focus on the situation in 2022 in comparison to previous years, during which Russia's full military intervention in Ukraine commenced at the beginning of the year. Table 5 provides a clarification of the state of the balance of residents of Ukrainian nationality in absolute values, without consideration of gender differences. The number of residents of Ukrainian nationality at the national level in 2022 shows no significant increase in comparison to the previous period. In comparison to the data from 2021, there has been only a slight increase. The value for 2022 is most similar to that of 2017. This phenomenon may be attributed to the Slovak Republic's introduction of the temporary protection programme for citizens of Ukraine, which has been affected by war. The majority of displaced residents of Ukraine opt for this option upon arrival in the Slovak Republic. At the NUTS2 regional level, the eastern part of Slovakia records the highest number of residents of Ukrainian nationality, although this has decreased significantly since 2020. In contrast, the Bratislava region has demonstrated a consistent upward trend.

Table 5: Balance of residents of Ukrainian nationality 2014-2022: total for all genders (last data update 4.3.2023)

State Level/Year	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
SR	10 096	9768	11 455	11 025	10 501	10 033	9 639	9 253	8854
Bratislava Region NUTS2	2 272	2 108	1 873	1 647	1 502	1 404	1 288	1 189	1 030
Bratislava Region	2 272	2 108	1 873	1 647	1 502	1 404	1 288	1 189	1 030
Western Region NUTS2	1 626	1 550	1 386	1 306	1 234	1 155	1 082	1 014	954
Trnava Region	696	677	483	460	432	392	361	330	313
Trenčín Region	381	358	415	382	360	344	315	300	281
Nitra Region	549	515	488	464	442	419	406	384	360
Central Region NUTS2	1 076	1 060	1 056	1 026	1 007	954	920	887	871
Žilina Region	473	457	391	358	346	305	290	278	269

Banská Bystrica Region	603	603	655	668	661	649	630	609	602
Easter Region NUTS2	5 122	5 050	7 140	7 046	6 758	6 520	6 349	6 163	5 999
Prešov Region	2 911	2 899	4 178	4 180	4 120	4 048	4 012	3 972	3 930
Košice Region	2 211	2 151	2 962	2 866	2 638	2 472	2 337	2 191	2 069

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2023a

The largest number of men of Ukrainian nationality (Table 6) is concentrated, similarly to the general view, in the eastern part of the republic at the NUTS2 level. The values copy the difference in the general view between the year 2022 and the rest of the measured period, where they set only minimal shifts in all indicators and levels. A higher number of men are gradually moving to the NUTS2 Bratislava region.

Table 6: Balance of residents of Ukrainian nationality 2014-2022 by gender: men (last data update 4.3.2023)

State Level/Year	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
SR	4270	4105	4819	4621	4352	4129	3951	3759	3569
Bratislava Region NUTS2	1006	931	876	780	706	661	607	560	488
Bratislava Region	1006	931	876	780	706	661	607	560	488
Western Region NUTS2	738	703	567	528	500	464	427	384	355
Trnava Region	355	346	222	205	192	171	156	138	129
Trenčín Region	146	136	161	149	140	136	122	111	100
Nitra Region	237	221	184	174	168	157	149	135	126
Central Region NUTS2	447	437	423	405	394	367	357	340	334
Žilina Region	207	196	164	144	137	113	109	105	101

Banská Bystrica Region	240	241	259	261	257	254	248	235	233
Easter Region NUTS2	2079	2034	2953	2908	2752	2637	2560	2475	2392
Prešov Region	1147	1124	1696	1705	1669	1635	1627	1609	1590
Košice Region	932	910	1257	1203	1083	1002	933	866	802

Source: Staistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2023b

According to the data in Table 7, the balance of women of Ukrainian nationality on the territory of the Slovak Republic records a preponderance over men in the ratio of approximately 42.7% (men) to 57.7% (women). The values of the comparison of 2022 with the previous period, the regional distribution as well as the gradual migration towards the NUTS2 Bratislava region, record the same tendencies without significant differences.

Table 7: Balance of residents of Ukrainian nationality 2014-2022 by gender: women (last data update 4.3.2023)

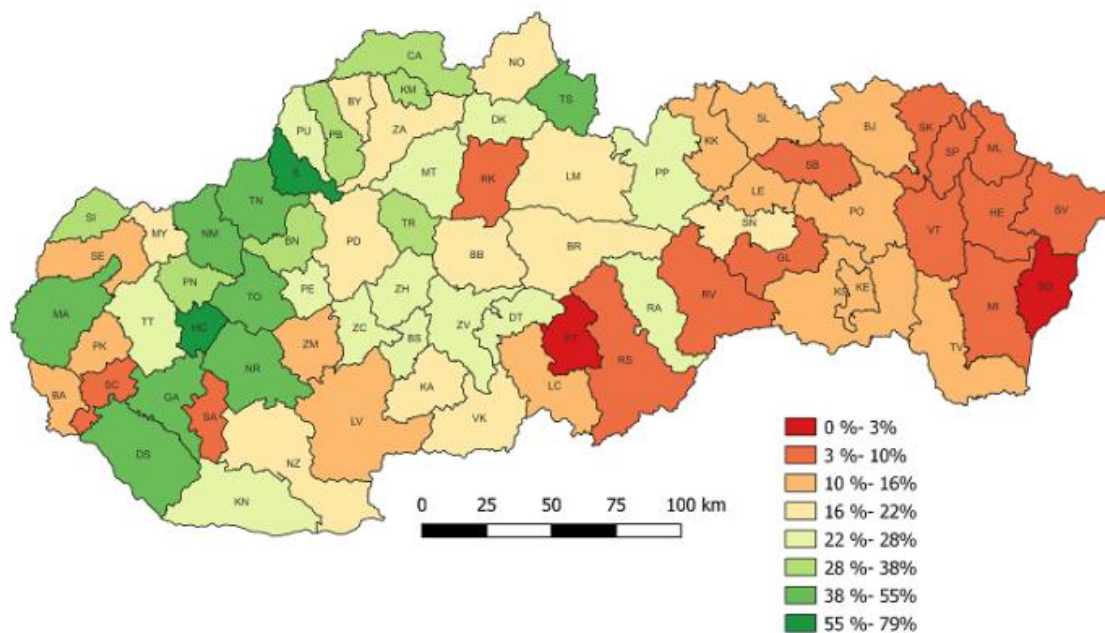
State Level/Year	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
SR	5826	5663	6636	6404	6149	5904	5688	5494	5285
Bratislava Region NUTS2	1266	1177	997	867	796	743	681	629	542
Bratislava Region	1266	1177	997	867	796	743	681	629	542
Western Region NUTS2	888	847	819	778	734	691	655	630	599
Trnava Region	341	331	261	255	240	221	205	192	184
Trenčín Region	235	222	254	233	220	208	193	189	181
Nitra Region	312	294	304	290	274	262	257	249	234
Central Region NUTS2	629	623	633	621	613	587	563	547	537
Žilina Region	266	261	227	214	209	192	181	173	168

Banská Bystrica Region	363	362	406	407	404	395	382	374	369
Easter Region NUTS2	3043	3016	4187	4138	4006	3883	3789	3688	3607
Prešov Region	1764	1775	2482	2475	2451	2413	2385	2363	2340
Košice Region	1279	1241	1705	1663	1555	1470	1404	1325	1267

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2023c

As illustrated in Image 2, the employment of individuals who have departed from Ukraine exhibits a discernible inclination towards the western regions of Slovakia. The regions with the highest values are located in the northwestern part of Považie, as well as in the central western Slovakian region and in Bratislava, the country's capital. These regions offer a wide range of job opportunities across various industries. However, the eastern Slovakian region does not appear to offer sufficient employment opportunities for those who have left Ukraine.

Image 2: Employment of emigrants from Ukraine (data as of June 2022)



Source: Ministry of Interior of Slovak republic, 2022.

As illustrated in Table 8, the majority of individuals who departed Ukraine were able to secure gainful employment in the industrial sector. Primarily, the automotive industry in Slovakia offers the most expansive range of job opportunities. The technical sector, with a share of almost a quarter, follows closely behind. Positions in the health sector, social sector, education, and public administration similarly represent approximately a quarter of the represented work sectors.

Table 8: Employment of emigrants from Ukraine by industry (data as of June 2022)

Sector	Industry	Technical work	Health & Social work	Education	Public Administration	Others
Rate %	42,5%	24,7%	15,7%	7,3%	2%	7,8%

Source: authors processing according to data of Ministry of Interior of Slovak republic (2022).

According to data from the Slovak Ministry of Interior in Table 9, assembly workers in industry are the most frequently represented profession. An approximately equally significant share is made up of workers in the construction industry. Cleaning services, line operators or catering services represent the remaining most significant represented professions of people who left Ukraine.

Table 9: The most frequently represented professions of employed emigrants from Ukraine (data as of June 2022)

Profession	Assembly workers	Auxillary works in construction, etc	Cleaning services	Operators	Food services
% Rate	22,48%	18,61%	8,86%	8,45%	6,75%

Source: authors processing according to data of Ministry of Interior of Slovak republic (2022).

3.3. UKRAINIAN DIASPORA'S LEGAL POSITION IN SLOVAKIA

In the extant legislative scheme, the issues of national minorities, migration, and asylum are mentioned exclusively in a general perspective, without specifics pertaining to selected national minorities. At the highest level, the Constitution of the Slovak Republic addresses the issue of national minorities. Currently, there is no comprehensive legislative act on national minorities. However, there are laws that address specific sub-issues, such as the use of the language of national minorities or the designation of municipalities in the language of national minorities. Additionally, the system of laws on national minorities is complemented by a legislative act relating to migration and asylum policy.

The Slovak Republic's Constitution addresses minorities in its preamble. These individuals are citizens of the Slovak Republic, having consented to its Constitution. National minorities and ethnic groups' rights are addressed in the fourth section of chapter two on human rights. Affiliation with a national minority must not result in detriment to the individual. Slovak law guarantees comprehensive development for national minorities, including the right to cultivate and disseminate culture, to form national associations, and to establish educational and cultural institutions.

Minorities have the right to an education in their language, to use it in official communication and to participate in decisions affecting them. These rights must not threaten Slovak sovereignty or discriminate against others (Constitution of the Slovak Republic, 2023). National minorities and ethnic groups are treated equally with respect to economic and labour rights. All individuals are entitled to freely elect a profession, establish a business or engage in other remunerative activities. All citizens are guaranteed the right to work. If they are unable to exercise this right, the state is obliged to provide them with material assistance. The Constitution of the Slovak Republic allows the state to legally establish a deviation in the aforementioned economic rights for foreigners.

Act No. 184/1999 Coll. on the use of languages of national minorities establishes conditions for the use of minority languages in official communication, local referenda, public information and related offences. The legislation is in line with Slovak and international law. All Slovak minorities have the right to use their language. A language of a national minority is a distinct language used by citizens belonging to a national minority. The legislation recognises the following minority languages as official: The minority languages are Bulgarian, Czech, Croatian, Hungarian, German, Polish, Romani and Ruthenian. Act No. 191/1994 requires separate traffic signs in the language of national minorities at the beginning and end of municipalities where at least 20% of the population is from that national minority. In official communication, municipalities are named in the state language. The annex to the law provides a list of municipalities in the Slovak Republic that use the designation of the municipality in the language of the national minority.

The legislative norm relating to the issue of migration and asylum policy in the Slovak Republic is Act No. 480/2002 Coll. about asylum. The content of the law, divided into nine parts, in addition to basic, common, transitional and final provisions regulates: asylum proceedings; rights and obligations of applicants, asylum seekers and foreigners granted supplementary protection; initial integration; temporary shelter; asylum facilities; cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner and non-governmental organizations and proceedings on transfer to another state (Act No. 480/2002 Coll. on Asylum).

A survey that would map the attitudes of displaced persons from Ukraine who were heading to Slovakia regarding the length of their stay or the next steps in the beginning of the military invasion of Ukraine is absent. Later in 2022, the IOM organization stated in the result of the survey that Slovakia was the most frequently intended country for temporary displacement due to the start of the war for 71% of the respondents - Ukrainian citizens who came to Slovakia (IOM, 2022).

In August 2023, the IOM organization published a summary of the results of a survey devoted to the prospects of the return of displaced persons to Ukraine as a result of the war. IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) allows data to be collected in surveys of individuals in countries neighboring Ukraine. The aim is to obtain information on displacement patterns, future intentions and needs of those returning to Ukraine. Out of the total number of 1903 survey respondents, up to 95% were women. In the category of men, the share of more than 60 annual respondents was up to 49%. According to the findings collected from April 10 to June 30, 2023, the main intention of returning to Ukraine is a short visit (56% of respondents) and a plan to stay in Ukraine (40% of respondents). Respondents prefer the same region as their region of origin as their planned return destination (81% of respondents). In the case of choosing regions other than the region of origin, the steps on return are mostly directed to Zakarpattia region (75%), Lviv region (7%) and the city of Kyiv (6%). As the most important reasons for a long-term stay in Ukraine, the respondents mentioned improvement of the situation (39%), reunification with family (22%), sadness for home (21%) or visiting someone (9%). According to the responses, the most important needs sought after return were health care (53%), financial support (22%) and employment/work (15%). Out of the surveyed group of respondents, up to 72% of them stayed primarily in Slovakia. Other countries included the Czech Republic (5%), the United Kingdom (2%) or Ireland (2). The highest proportion of respondents decided to leave Ukraine before and after the start of the full military invasion (26%) between January and March (2022). In this case, the duration of displacement lasted the longest (14 months on average). The months of April 2023 and May 2023, after periods of a percentage decrease in the share of respondents with initial displacement, were again months with a significant increase in the decision to relocate from Ukraine (IOM, 2023).

4. THE POLITICAL DIMENSION OF MIGRATION

Migration policy in Slovakia is managed by three ministries. The Ministry of the Interior, Foreign Affairs and Labour. The Ministry of the Interior plays a key role in migration-related matters, having set up and run the Bureau of Border and Foreign Police. The Bureau of Border and Foreign Police was set up in 2000 to keep Slovakia's borders secure and tackle illegal migration and trafficking. The Bureau has limited authority in asylum procedures and the enforcement of the Dublin Regulation (Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, 2021). It is responsible for regulating the residence and activities of foreign nationals in Slovakia.

The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs is responsible for visas and residence permits. It also repatriates migrants, implements deportations and prepares returns in line with readmission agreements. Since 2015, the Ministry has distributed humanitarian aid to refugees. It has also set up a scholarship programme for refugees to study abroad. A special mission ambassador for migration has been appointed at the Ministry, whose remit is external migration (Human Rights League, 2020). The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family coordinates the integration of foreigners and labour migration (Human Rights League, 2020).

The war in Ukraine has had a huge impact on Slovakia. Slovakia, a country new to managing refugee crises, has seen a large influx of Ukrainians through its four border crossings. The UNHCR says over a million Ukrainians and other third-country nationals have crossed the Slovak border. 78% were women and children, including the elderly, disabled and those with urgent health needs (UNHCR Ukraine Refugee Situation Operational Update, 2023). The UNHCR welcomes the Slovak government's decision to keep borders with Ukraine open. All levels of governance have responded positively to the influx of foreigners, providing information on protection, transportation and humanitarian aid. Many volunteers, private sector actors, civil society organisations and UNHCR personnel have been vital in providing aid (UNHCR Ukraine Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan, 2023). By February 2022, Slovakia had registered over 1.2 million crossings from Ukraine, with 10% applying for temporary protection. This status has been available since 1 March.

The Slovak Government works with UNHCR and other UN agencies, as well as with the International Office for Migration, civil society organisations, the private sector and volunteers to assist refugees. To speed up the refugee process, the Slovak Government set up hot spots on 27 February 2022. UNHCR and UNICEF have set up five Blue Dot Protection Hubs to help refugees. They work with many NGOs that support human rights, refugees and counselling (UNHCR Ukraine Refugee Situation Operational Update, 2023).

4.1. CHANGES IN SLOVAK LEGISLATION AS A REACTION TO THE CONFLICT OF UKRAINE

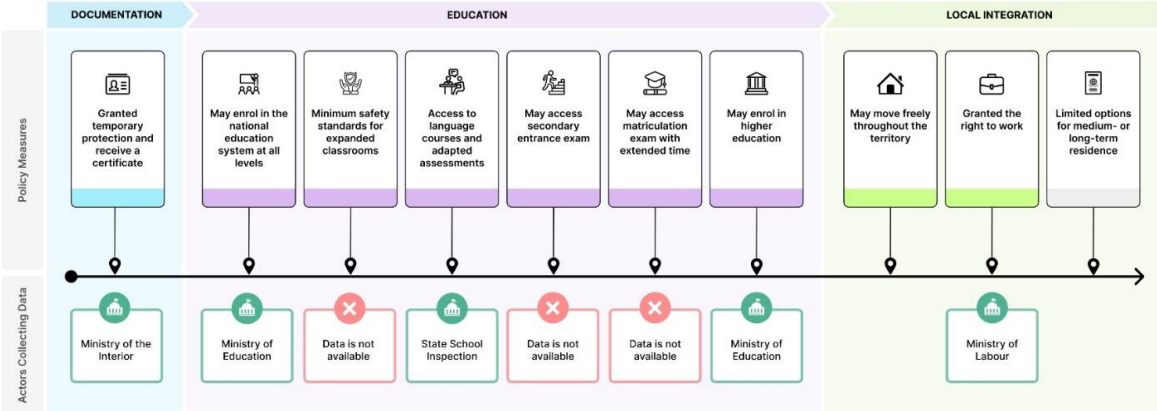
According to the decision of the Government of the Slovak Republic (Government of the Slovak Republic, 2022a) from the extraordinary session held on 28.02.2023, Ukrainians arriving on the territory of the Slovak Republic may apply for temporary protection. Temporary protection is intended to protect foreigners from war, endemic violence, the consequences of a humanitarian disaster or continuous mass violations of human rights in their country of origin; for the purposes of granting temporary protection, a foreigner is a national of a third country (Act No. 480/2002 Coll. on Asylum). According to the adopted Directive on Temporary Protection, the period of validity of temporary protection was originally set until 4 March 2023. In the Resolution of the Government of the Slovak Republic no. 185 of 16 March 2022 provided for the automatic prolongation of temporary protection until 4 March 2024 (Government of the Slovak Republic, 2022b). Law No. 92/2022 Coll., also known as Lex Ukraine, amended 32 specific laws to address

the humanitarian crisis and war situation in Ukraine (UNHCR Ukraine Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan, 2023). Temporary protection is the simplest way for people fleeing war to obtain protection that does not require a lengthy procedure. According to Lex Ukraine, temporary protection is granted to Ukrainian nationals:

- person who has been granted international or equivalent national protection in Ukraine before 24 February 2022;
- family member of Ukrainian national or person who have been granted international or equivalent national protection in Ukraine before 24 February 2022 (if the family member resided in the territory of Ukraine before 24 February 2022);
- foreigner, who as of 24 February 2022 had permanent residence permit in Ukraine and cannot safely return to the home country (UNHCR, 2023).

On the basis of the current amendment to the Asylum Act No. 480/2002 Coll., the Government may grant protection to residents of Ukraine and provide them with assistance and protection from the consequences of the military conflict caused by the Russian Federation, even without a decision of the Council of the EU. The simplest form of protection is temporary protection, which does not require complicated official procedures. Temporary protection gives Ukrainian citizens access to the labour market, health care and, for their children, the education system. It is a special form of protection that can be obtained almost immediately. By comparison, the entire asylum process can take up to 6 months administratively. In addition to temporary protection and the asylum procedure, it is possible to use the Institute for a 90-day stay on the basis of visa-free travel between Slovakia and Ukraine. However, unlike temporary protection, the Institute does not offer the possibility of obtaining a work permit, health care, accommodation or food (Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, 2022a).

Scheme 1: Policy pathway for Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia



Source: <https://www.unesco.org/en/ukraine-war/education/slovakia-support>

Temporary protection is available to Ukrainian citizens and their relatives without Ukrainian citizenship. One condition that significantly speeds up the process of examining an application for temporary protection is the ability to provide reliable proof of identity. In addition to an identity card or passport, applicants can prove their identity with a driving licence together with a birth certificate; a valid or invalid travel document and an identity document. Alternatively, a Ukrainian citizen may prove his or her identity with any other document with a photograph together with a birth certificate. A Ukrainian citizen is not eligible for temporary protection if he/she already has permanent or temporary residence on the territory of the Slovak Republic, is an asylum seeker or has already been granted asylum or subsidiary protection (Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, 2022a). The information leaflet published by the Ministry of the Interior (2022b)

contains a summary of the basic requirements of the Institute for Temporary Protection, which relate to accommodation and its change, transport, health care, employment, education, assistance with material needs, finances, sports and security.

The Solidarity Platform for Ukraine commended the Slovak Republic for its approach to accommodation, contingency planning, and temporary protection status. The accommodation allowance model is one of the most effective forms of assistance. The Slovak Republic, together with Estonia, was selected by the European Commission to present examples of good practice (Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, 2023d).

4.2. VIEWS OF THE MAIN POLITICAL PARTIES AND STAKEHOLDERS

After Russia invaded Ukraine, all major state institutions expressed their position on the situation through their representatives on official websites, social networks and other media. The Slovak PM, Eduard Heger, condemned Putin's actions and backed Ukraine's right to self-defence (Government Office of the Slovak Republic, 2022a).

Prime Minister Eduard Heger and the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic responded by convening an extraordinary meeting of the Security Council of the Slovak Republic, a speech by the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic and negotiations by the Government of the Slovak Republic. The subject was the current events in Ukraine. As a result, further steps and measures were taken by the Slovak government. On 24 February 2022, the President of the Slovak Republic, Zuzana Čaputová, issued a statement reacting to the beginning of the Russian military invasion of Ukraine. She condemned the actions of the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, emphasised Ukraine's right to self-defence and said that the establishment of peace was an absolute priority. Together with the President of the National Council, Boris Kollár, they attended the meeting of the Security Council of the Slovak Republic. The statement of the President of the Slovak Republic, Zuzana Čaputová, was a joint statement with the President of the Slovak Republic, Boris Kollár, and the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, Eduard Heger (President of the Slovak Republic, 2022). On 25 February 2022, an extraordinary session on the situation in Ukraine was held in the premises of the National Council. The result of the extraordinary session was the adoption of a draft statement on Russia's military aggression against Ukraine. On this basis, the NRSR condemned the actions of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and, at the same time, issued a statement calling on Russia to immediately cease its military operation (National Council of the Slovak Republic, 2022).

Of the current political parties elected to the NRSR in 2023, SMER-SD, HLAS-SD and SaS have taken a specific position where they published statements in response to the start of the military invasion. In the case of Progressive Slovakia and KDH, it is not possible to search for a reaction because there is no news archive for February 2022. The OĽANO party changed its name to Slovakia party, also without the possibility of verifying its position on the beginning of Russia's military intervention in Ukraine. The SNS did not react directly to the Russian military intervention in Ukraine. In a report of 23 February 2022, the SNS reacted to the speech of the President of the Slovak Republic, Zuzana Čaputová, criticising her for her inability to bring solutions to Slovakia (SNS, 2022a), and only in a report of 4 March 2022 did it call on all media to report objectively on the conflict in Ukraine (SNS, 2022b). In the published articles of its members, the SMER-SD party condemned the actions of Vladimir Putin, but at the same time there is an addendum about the rejection of a black-and-white perception of the situation in Ukraine (SMER-SD, 2022). In a press release of 22 February 2022, HLAS-SD called for a peaceful solution to the conflict, without directly condemning the Russian military intervention in Ukraine (HLAS-SD,

2022). In a statement of 22 February 2022, SaS strongly condemned Russia's actions against Ukraine. The party called Vladimir Putin an aggressor and said that SaS was clearly on the side of Ukraine. It supported Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty (SaS, 2022).

The Slovak National Security Agency blocked four disinformation websites in March 2022. This was the result of an amendment to the Cyber Act, which was also related to measures taken in response to the situation in Ukraine. The rationale was to prevent the spread of harmful or misleading content on the Internet. Opposition parties (SMER-SD, ĽSNS and REPUBLIKA) together with the non-parliamentary SNS spoke of censorship. The coalition's argument was that Slovakia could also be the object of a hybrid war by Russia (Zvercová, 2022). This information best illustrates the position of the coalition and opposition parties and the leaders of the Slovak government at the time. The Slovak government led by Eduard Heger (OLANO) and his coalition partners from SAS, SME RODINA and ZA ĽUDÍ immediately supported Ukraine and rejected the Russian aggression. It can be noted that all the highest representatives of the Slovak Republic, led by President Čaputová, called the "unprovoked invasion an act of military aggression and condemned the war" (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, 2023). The Slovak government also supported the EU's sanctions against the Russian Federation, also emphasising the economic and diplomatic isolation of Putin's regime. The Slovak government and diplomacy also sought peace negotiations in Bratislava, which was also supported by some opposition politicians (Ogrodnik, 2022). President Čaputová, Foreign Ministers Korčok and Káčer, and Defence Minister Nad' played the most important role in this.

On the other hand, opposition parties and leaders have boycotted sanctions against the Russian Federation, citing our economic, political and historical dependence on Russian fossil resources, including natural gas and oil. The opposition has also shown its position in the political and public debate on the stationing of NATO troops on Slovak territory prior to the Russian invasion, which ultimately strengthened the antipathy of a part of the Slovak population towards the US and NATO allied troops and supported the rise of polarisation, especially populist-nationalist rhetoric. Fico and Blaha (SMER-SD), Pellegrini (HLAS-SD), Kotleba (ĽSNS), Uhrík and Mazurek (REPUBLIKA) strongly opposed the US-Slovak defence agreement and called it the abolition of national interests due to its seemingly one-sided nature in favour of the US position (Mesežnikov, 2022). This is also one of the reasons why the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs got involved and created a section of myths and facts about Ukraine. They respond to the main arguments formulated by the opposition parties led by Robert Fico and Marian Kotleba (leader of the extremist ĽSNS) as well as Andrej Danko from the non-parliamentary SNS, such as:

- Sending weapons to Ukraine prolongs the war
- Ukraine rejects peace negotiations with Russia
- Citizens in the occupied territories of Ukraine voted in favor of joining Russia
- the Russian military operation is a forced response to provocation by Ukraine and the West
- the sanctions against Russia are not working
- there is a genocide of the Russian-speaking population in Ukraine
- Ukraine produces biological weapons (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, 2023).

SMER-SD, which is now the main governing party in Slovakia after the general elections in September 2023, has maintained its position of maintaining broad humanitarian support for Ukraine and Ukrainians, but the party opposes any military support. Motivated by their populist slogan "No more bullets for Ukraine", they argue that military support will only prolong the military conflict. This position was shared by the Slovak far-right and the Slovak National Party (Yar, 2023). The current Prime Minister Robert Fico (SMER-SD) has repeatedly confirmed that the

war between Russia and Ukraine is a frozen conflict that cannot be resolved by sending additional ammunition and military equipment to Ukraine. The opposition Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) also suggests that the main activities of the Slovak Republic should be humanitarian, while Progressive Slovakia, also in opposition, supports both military and humanitarian aid, including diplomatic support. The Freedom and Solidarity Party (SAS) strongly encourages Slovakia to support Ukraine against Russian aggression, which is in line with the OĽANO narrative, as they were the ruling coalition during the beginning and escalation of the full-scale military conflict in Ukraine in February 2022. Yar (2023) argues that there is an unclear position of HLAS-SD, led by Peter Pellegrini and other politicians who used to belong to SMER-SD, and their arguments or positions towards the war in Ukraine are rather populist oriented and there is no clear stance of the party or its leaders.

On the other hand, the then opposition parties (2020-2023), which now form the coalition government or are not in parliament, have all claimed that the Slovak Republic has adopted too many relief measures, financial incentives and support for Ukrainians, while ignoring the economic situation of Slovaks during the post-pandemic and energy crisis. While the news media, Facebook posts and other channels controlled by political parties and politicians (especially the far-right and radical left) are full of evidence of blaming Ukrainian refugees and anti-Ukrainian narratives, the most attention has been paid to other third country nationals - refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq (Dubóczy, Škríbová, 2022). These socio-economic and political circumstances also had a significant impact on the last parliamentary elections in Slovakia, allowing SMER-SD to win the 2023 elections as a pro-Russian oriented party.

4.3. THE ROLE OF REGIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN THE REFUGEE CRISIS

The regional and local governments in Slovakia belong to the system of decentralized state authority with the distribution of competences, finances and administration. There are eight self-governing regions and almost 3000 municipalities in Slovakia. In addition to the highest state authorities, the municipalities and regional governments have played crucial role in managing the massive influx of people from Ukraine fleeing the war. For example, the regional and local governments provided health care, shelters and accommodation, enrolment to kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, consultations, psychological counselling, children vaccination as well as social care. As interpreted in the Ukraine Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan (2023): *“local communities have taken a welcoming stance, with humanitarian actors, civil society, the private sector and community volunteers complementing the governmentled efforts by providing significant support at border reception points and urban areas.”* These efforts led to strengthening the capacities of local institutions providing services both for refugees and local communities *“to streamline the legislative framework and create a favourable protection environment to enable refugees’ socio-economic inclusion and integration”* (Ukraine Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan, 2023). Similar efforts have been introduced by regional authorities, especially in Prešov and Košice regions which are situated at the border with Ukraine. In Prešov the region set up accommodation for refugees in the former school which also includes social and psychological counseling.

The temporary shelter has been used here by Ukrainian mothers with children. Trnava Region provided refugees from Ukraine with 51 beds at dormitory. They also provide food three times a day, as well as psychological and material assistance together with all important information. They helped the refugees to handle all administrative matters at the Foreign Police and the Labor Office. Additionally, the regional council of the Trnava Self-Governing Region canceled a memorandum on mutual cooperation with the government of the Leningrad region of the Russian Federation.

This symbolical gesture expressed disagreement with the unjust unilateral aggression of Russia against Ukraine, accompanied by numerous civilian victims. At the same time, it has approved several measures allowing the helpful steps of regional self-government against refugees from Ukraine, including EUR 100,000 for humanitarian purposes (TASR, 2022). Both Košice and Prešov regions have established free travel for Ukrainian citizens heading for Slovakia.

All regions have also introduced free hotlines for refugees from Ukraine to seek assistance, counselling and established humanitarian aid warehouses. Slovakia mobilized a broad wave of solidarity for a humanitarian response that involved state agencies, municipalities, individuals, and civil society organizations from the outset in a prompt, efficient, and humane manner. The UN agencies, such as UNICEF, UNHCR, IOM, and WHO, that provided support for Ukraine's refugee crisis response through its current municipal and government structures were warmly welcomed by the Slovak government (UNICEF, 2023).

The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, in cooperation with the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for the Development of Civil Society have prepared a new funding scheme for regional and local governments' authorities to financially contribute to humanitarian and integration activities and costs associated with such expenses. The primary effort was to focus on several key areas related to the quality of life, and therefore topics such as housing, education, employment, health or social care. These components of life of refugees from Ukraine in Slovakia are the aim of measures to support the integration of refugees at different levels and thus help the state to be most effectively integrated. Previously, the self-governing entities have used their own resources which was in direct opposition to government promise about reimbursing such costs. This funding scheme provided financial support to local governments in order to maintain their activities related to Ukrainian refugees lasting until the end of 2023 but using retroactivity since February 2022. The eligibility of the funding scheme was granted to municipalities and self-governing regions including entities established or founded by them. The total sum allocated for this call was more than 12 million EUR (Implementation agency of Ministry of Labour, 2023; European Commission, 2023).

Another call for applications was announced in March 2023 by the Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Informatisation of the Slovak Republic as a managing body for the Integrated Regional Operational Program. Financial contributions to support operations aimed at addressing migration challenges as a result of military aggression against Ukraine could have been reached by municipalities with a total fund allocation of EUR 126 916 400 (ZMOS, 2023).

5. CIVIL SOCIETY REACTIONS AND PUBLIC OPINION

Since the beginning of the full military intervention of the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine, various forms of assistance and activities in support of Ukraine have been provided by the Slovak Republic. These were ensured through various levels and institutions of state administration, local government, private and civil sector. Until 11.1.2024, the following were provided:

- from the level of state administration and main state institutions (Government of the Slovak Republic, National Council, President of the Slovak Republic, ministries): expedition of the diplomatic convoy of the Slovak Republic to Kyiv; humanitarian and development aid; condemnation of Russian aggression in a resolution of the UN General Assembly (SR voted for); reception of the ambassador of Ukraine; support for Ukraine as a member of the EU; preparation for participation in the reconstruction of Ukraine; creation of a system of interception points; information and media campaign for people coming from Ukraine;

creation of an institute of temporary refuge for people displaced from Ukraine; statements on the annexation of Ukrainian territory by Russia with a negative attitude; support for the establishment of an OECD office and analytical department in Kyiv; media information about the stories of refugees from Ukraine on public television RTVS; provision of military equipment; recording statistics and monitoring the situation; financial assistance scheme for people coming from Ukraine;

- from the level of municipalities: help with the creation of detention camps; border crossing assistance; financial and material assistance; restoration of interstate cooperation between Slovak and Ukrainian cities;
- from the level of the private and municipal sector: collections to help Ukraine - financial and material; preparation of the Slovak private sector for the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine; recording statistics and monitoring the situation; provision of health care; provision of psychological assistance; provision of social assistance; assistance assistance; remote assistance; temporary accommodation; provision of Slovak language courses; conducting interviews; providing accommodation; education; social inclusion; delivery of food and medicine; financial assistance for people coming from Ukraine;

The scheme of the main public institutions participating in the provision of aid and activities for Ukraine primarily includes: Government Office of the Slovak Republic; NRSR; President of the Slovak Republic; Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Affairs; Department of Defense; Ministry of the Interior; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family; self-government (cities and municipalities).

In the network of other organizations from the international, civil and non-profit sector actively involved in aid for Ukraine, there are, for example: IOM Slovakia; UNHCR Slovakia; ADRA Slovakia; Carpathian Foundation Slovakia; Center for Reproduction Rights; COMIN; FLOWER; Daruso si helping Ukraine; DHZ of municipalities and cities; IP country; Petit Academy Foundation; Our Way; Submit Next; NIVAM; Mareena; LDI; KC activity; Samaritan Slovakia; Scouting Slovakia; Slovak Humanitarian Council; TENENET; Smile as a Gift; Ukrainian House Žilina; UNICEF; We are together; WHO; Ukrainians for Ukrainians (UNHCR, 2023).

Research on the attitudes and public opinion of Slovaks towards the war in Ukraine was carried out by Papcunová, (2023); Milan Šimečka Foundation (2022); GLOBSEC (2022); Bratislava Policy Institute, STEM Agency (2022) and IOM (2022).

The author Papcunová (2023), in addition to summarizing the findings of the surveys carried out by the Milan Šimečka Foundation (MŠF, 2022) for the European Commission, the Globsec Institute with the help of the Focus agency (2022a), presents the results of two public opinion polls regarding the admission of refugees from Ukraine to the Slovak Republic. These were implemented in March and December 2022 by the Institute of Sociology CSPV SAV, so that it was possible to capture the development tendencies in the opinions of the respondents. The respondents, as shown in Table 10, were asked to express their views on whether, in their opinion, refugees from Ukraine should be allowed to come to Slovakia for a short time to work and then be required to return home; whether people from Ukraine who came to live in Slovakia should have the same rights as everyone else; whether every refugee should have the right to apply for asylum in Slovakia without any annual limits or whether refugees from Ukraine should have the opportunity to come to Slovakia for a longer period so that they have a chance to settle and integrate. The summary of the development of respondents' answers is presented in Table 10 and shows a gradual increase in negative tendencies for each of the survey questions. The moods of Slovaks in the given respects in relation to the reception of Ukrainians are slightly decreasing.

Papcunová (2023) supplements the existing results with a survey by the International Organization for Migration, IOM (2022), which states that for up to 71% of respondents - Ukrainian residents, Slovakia was the most often intended country.

Table 10: Support by Slovaks to accept refugees from Ukraine (March 2022 - December 2022)

Question	% share of respondents – March 2022 (strongly disagree + disagree)	% share of respondents – December 2022 (strongly disagree + disagree)
"People from Ukraine who came to live here should have the same rights as everyone else"	15,9	18,7
"Every refugee should have the right to apply for asylum in Slovakia without any annual limits"	26,4	34,5
"Refugees from Ukraine should have the opportunity to come to Slovakia for a longer period so that they have a chance to settle and integrate"	21,2	27,4

Source: processing by the authors based on Papcunova (2022)

The Bratislava Policy Institute together with the STEM Agency (2023) in the RevivEU project focused on researching the attitudes of the inhabitants of Slovakia on the issue of improving the quality of life. The survey was conducted in February 2023 on a set of 1,019 respondents, a year after the military invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation. According to the results, almost half of the respondents perceived the incoming refugees from Ukraine negatively, who, from their point of view, do not have a positive impact on the improvement of Slovakia as a place to live. The arrival of Ukrainian residents means a reduction in the quality of public services and a weakening of the economy, according to 56.6% of respondents. 70% of the respondents said that they feel that the state cares more for newly arriving refugees than for its own residents.

According to Eurobarometer findings, Slovak citizens expressed a similarly significantly lower willingness (53%) to provide financial support to Ukraine compared to the average EU population (77%) also according to available Eurobarometer statistics (2023a). On the other hand, at the turn of the winter of 2022/2023, 81% of Slovaks agreed to welcome Ukrainians to the territory of the Slovak Republic (Eurobarometer, 2023a). Answers and results to other questions of the Eurobarometer survey are offered in Table 11.

Table 11: The Invasion of Ukraine and its consequences

Question	Total Agree		Total Disagree		Dont know	
	SR	EU27	SR	EU27	SR	EU27
In general, how satisfied are you with response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine by ..? (%) - EU	39	56	55	38	6	6
In general, how satisfied are you with response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine by ..? (%) – The Slovak Government	34	55	61	40	5	5

Providing humanitarian support to the people affected by the war	86	91	11	7	3	2
Welcoming into the EU people fleeing the war	81	88	15	9	4	3
Providing financial support to Ukraine	53	77	42	19	5	4
Imposing economic sanctions on Russian government, companies and individuals	49	74	44	21	7	5
Financing the purchase and supply of military equipment to Ukraine	38	65	56	29	6	6
The war in Ukraine has serious economic consequences for our country	95	86	3	11	2	3
The war in Ukraine has serious financial consequences for you personally	78	63	20	35	2	2

Source: EUROBAROMETER, 2023b.

The public opinion poll conducted by Globsec (2022b) illustrated in Table 12, confirms negative attitudes towards refugees from Ukraine. Among the countries of Central Europe, compared to the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary, Slovakia reached the highest level (52%) of negative attitudes towards refugees from Ukraine. On the other hand, Poland (85%), Hungary (82%), the Czech Republic (73%) have a significantly more positive attitude towards Ukrainian refugees. Even at the beginning, immediately after the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, the Slovaks were very supportive of Ukraine and refugees coming from the place of conflict (MŠF, 2022). In a long-term perspective, however, the findings show a gradual decrease in support (Globsec, 2022a). Slovaks (Globsec, 2022b) are further divided into two poles when it comes to the question of who is responsible for the war in Ukraine - 43% Russia vs. 39% US/NATO. In addition, a negative attitude towards supporting refugees (68% of respondents) as well as a persistent feeling of fear of refugees, even without specific experience (68% of respondents), was demonstrated again.

Table 12: Perception of Ukrainian refugees in the V4

Question	Answers
How does the V4 see Ukrainian refugees? SR	Positively – 42%; Negatively – 52%
Would you agree to allow Ukrainian/other refugees enter to country?	Ukrainian refugees – 55%; Others – 54%
Have there been any changes to your life because of Ukrainian refugees coming to country?	Positive – 4%; No change – 65%; Negative – 29%
Support to Ukrainian refugees should be reduces?	Agree – 68%; Disagree – 25%
Who is responsible for starting the war in Ukraine?	Russia – 43%; Ukraine – 7%; US-NATO – 39%; Do not know – 11%

Source: Globsec, 2022b.

Before the parliamentary elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic in 2023, the news portal aktuality.sk conducted a poll with selected political parties, asking three questions about the foreign policy direction of the Slovak Republic. One of the poll's questions was the attitude towards the continuation of Slovak support for Ukraine, which is facing a Russian military

invasion. The portal aktuality.sk asked the above question of political parties: HLAS, KDH, OĽANO, Progresívne Slovensko, SAS, SMER-SD and SNS. After the elections, all political parties successfully entered the National Council of the Slovak Republic. The political parties SMER-SD and SNS did not respond to the questions asked by the news portal aktuality.sk. The political parties HLAS, KDH, OĽANO, Progresívne Slovensko and SAS, when asked whether they are in favor of the continuation of Slovak support for Ukraine, which faces the Russian invasion, answered the same, Yes (Aktuality.sk, 2023).

6. CONCLUSION

As evidenced in the report, Slovakia has experienced diverse migration patterns, initially characterized by emigration following the dissolution of Czechoslovakia. However, in the post-EU accession in 2004, the country has witnessed increased immigration, including labor migration and refugees seeking asylum. There also visible demographic shifts in the Slovak society which have structural implications for economic and social dynamics as well. Since 2004, the immigration of foreigners increased gradually which aligns also with the development of migration policies, Slovak EU membership, economic development and democratic nature of Slovakia. On the other hand, Slovakia remained the country of emigration after 1993 and it is not a traditional final destination for migrants until today.

The current strategic document governing migration and asylum policy in Slovakia is Migration policy of the Slovak Republic with a view to 2025. It has been constructed on the grounds of previous strategic documents: Migration Policy of the Slovak Republic overlooking the year 2020; Conceptual intentions of the Migration Policy of the Slovak Republic for the period 2011 – 2015; The Concept of the Integration of Foreigners in the Slovak Republic 2009-2011; The Concept of Migration Policy 2005 -2010.

There are also two major acts -The Act on Residence of Foreigners (404/2011) and the Act on Asylum (480/2002) that represent a cornerstone of migration law, addressing the legal aspects of residence and asylum-seeking. Additionally, adherence to EU directives and the Schengen Agreement shapes the country's approach to migration.

After EU accession, Slovakia gradually became one of the target, albeit in a limited manner, and not only transit countries for foreigners - the number of legal foreigners in Slovakia has increased almost twelve times from 22,108 migrants in 2004 to 278,595 in December 2022. The Slovak Republic introduced a mechanism of preferential immigration by implementing concepts of controlled economic migration, integration policy and migration of qualified labour force.

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Slovakia became one of the significant locations for Ukrainian refugees, which was conditioned by the land border with Ukraine. Along with EU directives, Slovakia adopted various types of normative acts that maximally ensured the protection of Ukrainian refugees' rights, granting them asylum and temporary protection, providing for their primary needs, and integration into society.

Despite the active involvement of state, private, and non-governmental sectors, according to various surveys, based on 2024 data, the attitude of Slovakia's population is changing from positive to negative - specifically, Slovaks do not support long-term assistance to Ukrainian refugees, which is intensified by political populism.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Until the 1990s, Czechia primarily served as a source of emigrants and a transit country for migrants, with Germany, France, and other Western European nations being the main destinations (European Commission, 2024). However, since then, Czechia has evolved into a destination country itself, now hosting approximately 14 times more migrants than it did in 1989. Initially, the rise in immigrant numbers was due to the influx of post-Soviet citizens seeking international protection. During the communist era, migration to and from Czechia was highly restricted, with limited inflow and outflow of people. However, after the transition to democracy in 1989 and subsequent integration into the European Union, the country experienced significant changes in migration patterns (European Commission, 2024).

Today, Czechia has a substantial immigrant population, with the largest groups coming from Ukraine, Slovakia, and Vietnam (Ministry of the Interior, 2023). The key reasons for migration to Czechia include work opportunities, family reunification, and seeking asylum or temporary protection. In the late 2000s, labor migration became a significant factor as the country experienced rapid economic growth (European Commission, 2024). The influx of Ukrainian refugees increased significantly after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. This led to the fact that Czechia has one of the largest refugee populations overall and per capita in the EU, being a key destination for Ukrainian refugees. In total, over 530,000 Ukrainians were granted Temporary Protection status in the country by the end of June 2023 (UNHCR, 2024). Today, the Czech Republic hosts over 340,000 migrants under Temporary Protection, making it the EU member state with the highest number of Ukrainian refugees per capita (Klimešová et al., 2022). This surge has put considerable strain on various sectors in the country, including the healthcare system, Labor market, and housing. It has also exposed gaps in the country's integration policies.

Two key legislative acts govern migration and employment of foreign nationals in Czechia. The Act No. 326/1999 Coll. on the Residence of Foreign Nationals differentiates between EU citizens and non-EU nationals. EU citizens enjoy free movement and labor market access. Non-EU nationals must navigate specific visa processes, including employee cards and long-term visas. **Act No. 435/2004 Coll. on Employment** (Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, 2004) regulates the employment of foreign workers, ensuring Labor market protections for Czech and EU workers. This act includes a Labor market test, which mandates that jobs can be offered to non-EU nationals only if no suitable EU candidates are available.

The first such support program was introduced in 1994, six years before the creation of the first Policy for the Integration of Immigrants. These initiatives prioritized language and training courses, along with assistance in accessing the Labor and housing markets. In 2012, the Czech government published annual action plans which highlight priorities such as proficiency in the Czech language, orientation in society, economic self-sufficiency, increased interactions within migrant and local communities, or the gradual acquisition of rights (European Commission, 2024).

So-called **Lex Ukraine** (European Commission, 2022) was the first established law in the institutional level that became effective on 21st March 2022 and governs the temporary protection. It is important because it sets conditions for the temporary protection of the displaced person (in accordance with the EU law) and divides competencies among three levels of state actors when it comes to the accommodation and health access (Filipec et al., 2024). On June 12, 2024, the government approved the amendment to the law Lex Ukraine 7, which was prepared by the Ministry of the Interior. The amendment enables Ukrainian refugees who are economically self-sufficient and independent of the benefit system to obtain regular residence status. Instead of temporary protection, they will now be able to obtain long-term residence under the Act on Residence of Foreigners (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1999). This will enable those Ukrainians who are economically independent, do not receive any benefits and who want to live in the Czech Republic for a long time, to stay and get long-term residence (Ministry of the Interior, 2024a).

2. UKRAINIAN MIGRATION

With the influx of Ukrainian refugees, the country had to adopt many new measures and policies to manage the situation that appeared almost immediately after the Russian invasion in Ukraine in February 2022. Inclusion of Ukrainian children into Czech schools has been one of many issues related to this topic that has been brought into the public discussion. Yet, the case of the Czech Republic and its experience is important as it shows the engagement of actors at the governmental and regional level (European Commission, 2024).

Migrants from Ukraine have settled in major urban centers like Prague, Brno, and Pilsen. These migrants tend to be young and possess advanced skills. Approximately 67% of those active on the Labor market are employed. Despite this, more than half of them work in low-skilled, poorly compensated positions (PAQ Research, 2023). Numerous factors contribute to this situation, including immediate work expectations upon arrival, bureaucratic hurdles, limited proficiency in the Czech language, and challenges in diploma recognition (so-called nostrification).

One of the key factors influencing the selection of refugee destinations is the presence of family or friends. Many Ukrainians choose destinations with large Ukrainian diasporas, making these locations primary targets for migration. The statistic on residence permits vary, with many permits being short-term, complicating the estimation of the actual number of people in the country at any given time. Despite not being a dominant destination during the pre-war migration crisis, Czechia ranks as an important destination for Ukrainian refugees (Botlík and Botlíková, 2022).

3. INSTITUTIONS

The Ministry of the Interior (MoI) is the key player in implementing state migration policies. Within the ministry, the Department of Asylum and Migration Policy (OAMP) manages residency and refugee status for foreign nationals. The Ministry of the Interior (2024b) develops strategies, legislation, and guidelines for immigration, asylum, and migrant integration, and it manages the state integration program for refugees. It regulates visas and permits, including work permits, study visas, and family reunification, and oversees long-term visas and residence permits. The Ministry of the Interior negotiates international migration agreements and uses the Concept of Integration of Foreigners to guide integration policy, outlining goals and identifying obstacles. The Police Directorate supports these efforts by handling residency checks, identity verification, deportations, and migration information systems.

The Regional Integration Centers (2024) offer counselling, legal advice, language courses, and adaptation-integration courses for migrants, regardless of nationality. Most of these centers are under the Ministry of the Interior, except those in Prague, Southern Moravia, Hradec Králové, and Ústí nad Labem.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MoLSA) formulates Labor migration policies and regulations related to employment. It determines employment authorization conditions, provides information on employment and social security to foreigners and employers, and ensures legislative adjustments (Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, 2024). The Czech Labor Office, under MoLSA, regulates the Labor market, providing employment services and facilitating Labor migration. The Ministry of Industry and Trade (2024) is an important stakeholder for programs for highly skilled migrants.

The first NGOs working on migration in the Czech Republic included the Organization for Aid to Refugees in 1991 (OPU, 2024), the Association of Citizens Dealing with Emigrants in 1992 (SOZE, 2024), and the Counselling Center for Integration (PPI) in 1997 (Counselling Center for Integration, 2024). Other notable organizations, such as SIMI (2024), Multicultural Center Prague (2024), and the Expat Center Brno (2024), followed. The Consortium of Migrants Assisting Organizations (2024), established in 2003, is the largest platform for NGOs in the migration field. It includes eighteen major organizations and coordinates cooperation, advocacy, and contributions to the legislative process. The consortium focuses on migrant rights, fair conditions, and provides evidence-based policy recommendations. There are other significant organizations in the field (People in Need, 2024; META, 2024; the Center for Integration of Foreigners, 2024; AMIGA, 2024; InBáze, 2024 and Caritas, 2024).

4. MIGRATION STRATEGY

The Czech Republic's migration strategy (Ministry of the Interior, 2015), outlined in the "Migration Policy Strategy of the Czech Republic" (approved in 2015), focuses on a balanced and flexible approach to both legal and illegal migration. Its key principles include the need for integration of foreign nationals, security, and societal cohesion. The strategy recognizes migration as a dynamic process. Furthermore, Czechia aims to enhance family reunification pathways and improve job mobility for highly skilled workers. Additionally, the country is working on developing sectoral priorities to better align migration policy with economic growth and long-term planning.

Czechia's Labor migration strategy increasingly focuses on meeting Labor market needs while ensuring policy transparency and control. Quota-based systems define the maximum number of non-EU workers admitted annually, effectively managing economic migration. A significant strategy emerged in response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis, where the Temporary Protection Directive enabled over a hundred thousand Ukrainian refugees to work under the same conditions as Czech citizens. Government initiatives, such as the nasiukrajinci.cz platform, have facilitated job matching and integration, although challenges like accommodation and childcare persist. (European Commission, 2024; nasiukrajinci.cz, 2024)

The Czech Republic has developed strategic responses to the migration from Ukraine following the Russian invasion in 2022. The initial phase was focused on immediate support, while the ongoing medium-term phase prioritized stabilizing conditions for refugees, such as language courses, housing, employment, healthcare, and education. The third phase will look at long-term integration, depending on the progress of war. The strategy includes improving accommodation, integrating refugees into the Labor market, and enhancing educational systems to accommodate

a large influx of students. It also focuses on healthcare and social services for refugees (European Website on Integration, 2022).

5. POLICY GAPS

Among the possible policy gaps can be the lack of information sharing between different agencies and ministries. Improving the state integration services (and providing more free language courses) can be another way to help foreigners integrate in Czechia. The State Integration Program (SIP) is only available to recognized refugees and not temporary protection holders (Macková, 2024). Moreover, allowing the possibility of status change to recognized migrants is another key initiative which could help temporary protection holders. Currently, the option is being discussed for economically active temporary protection holders but not everyone.

Access to education, particularly in early childhood settings like nurseries, remains a significant challenge. According to the Czech School Inspectorate, one-fifth of nurseries are unable to provide the necessary places for all children. This shortage impacts not only the education and development of young children but also affects parents' ability to participate fully in the Labor market (European Commission, 2024).

Similarly, the healthcare system is under considerable strain, with increased demand leading to longer waiting times and overburdened facilities. Migrants often face additional barriers, such as language difficulties and lack of familiarity with the healthcare system, which can hinder their access to necessary medical services. Addressing these issues is crucial for ensuring the well-being and successful integration of migrants into Czech society (European Commission, 2024).

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1. HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

North Macedonia holds a unique geopolitical position at the center of the Balkan Peninsula. The country sits at the crossroads of migration routes from Asia and Africa to Central and Western Europe. This strategic location makes it vulnerable to illicit migration.

North Macedonia is a small landlocked country adjacent to Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Kosovo, and Serbia, with a historical record spanning 2,500 years, during which it has seen Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, and Yugoslav dominion.

Throughout history, the Republic of North Macedonia has been a region of constant migration. This epithet is a result of the country's geographical location, as well as its regional and strategic characteristics, which were sufficient to pique the interest of various conquerors. Historical events and the geopolitical changes of the territory have coincided with waves of migration to and from Macedonia.

In the latter years of the second decade of the 21st century, significant alterations in migration patterns have been seen across the nations of the Balkan Peninsula, particularly within the Western Balkans. Regular migration significantly influences a nation's political, security, social, economic, and demographic landscape, constituting an essential process that is challenging to regulate and even more arduous to halt.

Analyzing the geopolitical landscape, the Balkan region, particularly the Western Balkans subregion, functions primarily as a transit zone to the EU. It is significantly less characterized as a country of origin and minimally regarded as a destination for illegal migrants.

The Republic of North Macedonia, situated at a crucial geopolitical and geostrategic crossroad in the heart of the Balkan Peninsula, confronts issues pertaining to illegal migration.



Source: Prague Process Secretariat, 2024

The 2015 Mediterranean Crisis highlighted Macedonia's vital role in migration routes. Over 800,000 people crossed its borders during Europe's refugee and migrant crisis. Macedonia serves as a pivotal junction for migrant pathways. These routes originate from Asia and Africa and direct toward Central and Western Europe. Macedonia serves as a central hub in the Balkans, functioning not only as a key traffic and trade intersection linking Asia with Europe but also as a significant

junction for various routes associated with terrorism, illegal migration, migrant smuggling, and the trafficking of illicit drugs, weapons, and individuals from Asia and Africa to Western Europe. The annual increase in illegal migrants from these regions has been notable, peaking during the significant migrant crisis of 2015, which was triggered by the conflict in Syria (Mileski & Pacemka, 2022).

Macedonia, located at the heart of the Balkan Peninsula and driven by its political ambitions toward Europe, serves as a pivotal transit nation for substantial migration flows.

For a decade people fleeing wars, economic instability, and hunger – now often prompted by climate change – have crossed Macedonia as migrants and refugees. Most came from the Middle East or North Africa. Macedonia plays a crucial role in the so-called Balkan route, which moves from Türkiye and Greece, through South-East Europe to the central European countries that are usually the final destination of migrants.



Source: UNHCR

At the beginning of this research report, it is essential that we define the terms "migration," "emigration" "migrant," and "refugee."

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines migration as “the movement of a person either across an international border (international migration) or within a state (internal migration) for more than one year, regardless of the causes—whether voluntary or involuntary—and the means, whether regular or irregular, used to migrate.” This definition encompasses a wide range of migration types, including voluntary and forced migration, as well as internal and international movements, whether they are long-term or short-term. It considers various motives for migration, such as economic reasons, political persecution, and the pursuit of a better environment, family reunification, conflict, or a combination of these factors, without regard to the legality of the migration process.

Emigration on the other hand is defined as an act of leaving a resident country or place of residence with the intent to settle elsewhere (to permanently leave a country).

In terms of defining “migrant”, is “an umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons.” (Vitorino & Touzenis, 2019)

Refugees, on the other hand, are people who have fled their country of origin due to circumstances such as violence, conflict, persecution, or other situations that have significantly disrupted public order and need international protection. The concept of refugees is defined on an international level, as outlined in the 1951 Convention, various Regional Refugee Instruments, and the UNHCR Statute.

We frequently see the phrases “migrant” and “refugee” used interchangeably in public discourse, despite the fact that there is a significant legal distinction between them. The alignment of this terminology is problematic because it may lead to misconceptions not just in conversations about migration and asylum, but also among refugees and asylum seekers themselves, as well as the nations that must respond to these various movements. People frequently discuss whether we can use the term “migrant” to refer to “refugees” in general.

The Republic of North Macedonia has had a long history of dealing with migrants and refugees. Since the late nineteenth century, conflicts, including the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), the First and Second World Wars, the Greek civil war (1945–1949), the Kosovo conflict, and the 2001 internal security crisis, have caused successive waves of migration. More recently, the 2015 migrant crisis, which was caused by the armed conflict in the Middle East, especially in Syria and Ukraine, caused a migrant and refugee crisis that has deeply affected Macedonia.

During and after the Greek Civil War of 1946–1949, members or supporters of the defeated Communist forces fled Greece as political refugees. It has been estimated that by 1949, over 100,000 people had left Greece for Yugoslavia and the Eastern Bloc, particularly the USSR and Czechoslovakia. The Exodus of Macedonians from Greece refers to the displacement of ethnic Macedonians from Greece due to the Civil War.

The Communist party of Greece claims that the total number of political refugees was 55,881, an estimated 28,000–32,000 children fled the country during the Greek Civil War. A 1951 document from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia states that the total number of Macedonian refugees that left Greece because of the prosecution during the Civil War was at over 213,000 (Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, 1994).

Following independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, the country's migratory patterns were heavily influenced by socio-economic factors. The transition process significantly influenced the fragile economy, which experienced a recovery period due to the interruption or restructuring of economic relations with the former Yugoslav countries (Madjevikj, Apostolovska Toshevaska, Gorin & Ljakoska, 2016). The events in Kosovo in 1999 and the conflict in Macedonia in 2001 had significant impacts.

The Kosovo refugee crisis in Macedonia in 1999 was unique in terms of its unprecedented magnitude against its short duration. Macedonia in 1999 had a total population of nearly 2,200,000. In late March 1999, after the launch of the NATO air campaign against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, refugees from Kosovo began to enter the Republic of Macedonia. Within 9 weeks, the country received 344,500 refugees - 15 times more than expected, significantly altering the country's demographics.

In 2015, a significant shift occurred, particularly in the Republic of Macedonia, which became a focal point along the Balkan Route for irregular immigrants attempting to access the EU. Estimates indicate that over 1.2 million individuals entered the European Union through the Balkans (Glied, 2020). The territory of Macedonia emerged as a crucial transit route for a significant influx of individuals moving northward, placing the country in a position of heightened scrutiny from the

EU regarding the enhancement of its border control measures. A state of emergency was declared at the borders, accompanied by the government's adoption of a special act. This act permits migrants to register their 'intent to seek asylum' upon entry into the country, granting them a temporary permit to stay for 72 hours. This measure is predicated on the assumption that these individuals will subsequently depart for the EU. In 2014, there were 1,289 asylum applications submitted, resulting in 13 positive decisions. In 2015, this figure surged to 435,907 applications, but only 3 positive decisions were granted. Subsequently, the number of applications fell to 89,152 in 2016, with 6 positive decisions. These figures illustrate the significant fluctuations in immigration trends during this period (Greider, 2017).

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) noted in its 2015 report that the country was adhering to international standards in its legal framework and administrative procedures related to asylum. However, the report continues: "Despite these positive developments, UNHCR believes that significant weaknesses remain in the asylum system in practice..." Unfortunately, this weakness remains an issue even today.

Macedonia serves as a transit country for people traveling in mixed movements. Official statistics indicate that 19,895 individuals transited through the country in 2021, followed by 27,425 in 2022, and approximately 8,882 by the end of August 2023. This reflects a nearly 50% reduction compared to over 40,000 individuals transiting in both 2019 and 2020. The interest in seeking asylum in Macedonia among individuals on the move is relatively low, evidenced by the submission of only 100 asylum applications in 2021, 168 in 2022, and 206 applications by the end of July 2023. The primary countries of origin for these applicants include Syria, Morocco, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq. The recognition rate is notably low, with only two individuals (one from Afghanistan and one from Morocco) receiving subsidiary protection in 2023. The absconding rate has risen significantly, from 77% at the end of 2022 to 99% by the end of July 2023 (UNHCR's Global Law and Policy Database, 2024b).

UNHCR, in cooperation with state authorities and other relevant actors, is committed to ensuring the protection of forcibly displaced persons and stateless persons. According to reports and statistical data received by UNHCR from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, since the beginning of 2024, as of October, 269 people have submitted applications for recognition of the right to asylum and in the same period, 6 people have been recognized as refugees. Of the people submitting applications for asylum in the Republic of North Macedonia, the most numerous are those coming from Syria, Morocco, Türkiye, Congo, and China. (The data was provided by the UNHCR representative in Macedonia through personal communication, December 12, 2024)

2. EMIGRATION AND SKILLED MIGRATION

The Republic of Macedonia saw substantial changes in the area of legal migration in the years after 2015. These changes were shown in the form of a steady rise in emigration and notable shifts in the makeup of the migratory contingent. Immigration saw a modest growth, characterized by a relatively small volume predominantly including temporary residency of foreigners, while exhibiting notable alterations in their structural attributes. The observed changes and the present scope and attributes of legal migrations, their conditionality, along with the consequences and implications for the country's development, are examined within the framework of the measures and activities established by the Resolution on the Migration Policy of the Republic of Macedonia 2015-2020 and the new one for 2021-2025.

Macedonia through its history had experienced significant emigration. Over 700,000 Macedonian citizens reside abroad, which accounts for approximately 38% of the total population living in the

country. The influx of these emigrants contributes to the national economy, accounting for approximately 2 percent of GDP, based on the latest estimates (Ministry in charge of Diaspora, 2019).

Modern migratory trends overseas, mostly characterized by economic emigration that started in the mid-1960s, persist with unwavering vigor to the present day. There is currently no pertinent data on the "old" migration, their descendants (second and third generations), or those who returned to the nation because of the lengthy history of this emigration (which in some families is repeated in multiple generations). A further issue regarding the provision of statistics on emigration is the absence of pertinent data from domestic sources concerning the extent and fundamental features of individuals temporarily or permanently departing the country. Under these conditions, just data from international sources may serve as the foundation for identifying the patterns and peculiarities of the departure of Macedonian people abroad.

The absence of pertinent data regarding the volume and structural characteristics of emigration abroad in recent decades is attributable to the fact that only a small proportion of the citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia formally declare their transitory and permanent residence abroad. Attempts to rectify this circumstance have been unsuccessful. Therefore, the Ministry of Interior's database and the State Statistical Office's regular statistical survey currently only reflect the number of individuals who have formally reported their departure and residence abroad. Consequently, their coverage is extremely limited. Despite this, these data provide valuable insights into the demographic, social, and economic changes of individuals who have emigrated abroad, as well as the underlying factors that shaped these migrations after 2015.

In the period 2015-2019, the State Statistical Office data indicates that 2104 Macedonian citizens went abroad. The number people who moved abroad each year ranges from 141 in 2017 to 612 in 2019 (State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, n.d.). Despite the fact that these data do not reflect the actual volume of emigration, they are a confirmation that the most frequently visited European countries of reception by Macedonian citizens are Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, and Slovenia. Regarding overseas countries, there is still substantial interest in emigrating to Canada, the United States, and Australia. At the same time, the number of our citizens in the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and other countries is on the rise.

Data from foreign sources, including international organizations, institutions, and countries of reception, offer more precise assessments of the volume and composition of emigration from the Republic of North Macedonia. More detailed information regarding the number of immigrants and emigrants in specific countries of reception and origin can be sourced from the United Nations and the World Bank, as their numerical values typically align. The data indicates a steady rise in the total number of Macedonian citizens living abroad over the past ten years: 527,075 in 2010; 562,907 in 2015; 658,264 in 2019; and 693,900 in 2020. Their share in the EU countries of reception is 35.3% (2010), 38.4% (2015), and 37.5% (2019), while in other countries around the world, it stands at 64.7%, 61.6%, and 62.5%, respectively (United Nations, 2020).

According to data from the UN and the World Bank, there are 411,000 Macedonian citizens residing in non-European countries as of 2019. This may also be viewed as understated, particularly in relation to the receiving countries that are outside such as USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The official statistics from these countries indicate that the number of immigrants from the Republic of North Macedonia significantly exceeds the figures reported by the UN, the World Bank, and other international organizations (Government of North Macedonia, 2021).

In 2019, UN data indicated that North Macedonia had 658,264 emigrants, accounting for 31.7% of the total population. On average, emigration consists of a higher percentage of men (53.09%) compared to women (46.90%). Emigrants from North Macedonia primarily relocate to Türkiye (29.69%), Germany (13.75%), Italy (11.14%), Switzerland (10.16%), and Australia (7.84%). Additional destination countries are the United States, Austria, Croatia, Slovenia, and Canada (Datos Macro, 2019).

The majority of Macedonian emigrants are young, falling within the 25-49 age range, which aligns with their working age. The typical migration pattern observed among households involves men departing first, often in search of job opportunities that align with their educational qualifications. Subsequently, women and children tend to migrate later, once sufficient funds are accumulated to manage their travel costs. In terms of education, a massive portion of Macedonian migrants, specifically 43%, are classified as low-skilled, while 30.7% fall into the medium skill category. The situation changes depending on the destination country. Highly skilled Macedonians typically relocate to continental countries like the USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, whereas low-skilled migrants predominantly head to Europe, particularly Germany and Switzerland. Another noteworthy aspect to consider is that these migration flows primarily originate from the Southeast, Southwest, Polog, Vardar, and East regions. This phenomenon typically arises from push factors such as unemployment, low wages, job insecurity, and lengthy waiting periods for public sector employment, alongside pull factors that include attractive wages and sectoral bonuses in destination countries, as well as the favorable governance associated with these positions (Migrants & Refugees Section, 2022).

The strategy of Macedonia's government regarding migration policy for 2021-2025 explicitly identifies the significant emigration of highly qualified workers as a contributing factor to the Labor shortage, particularly in fields such as programming, engineering, medicine, computer science, technology, construction, electrical engineering, and nursing.

THE RESOLUTION ON MIGRATION POLICY IN the Republic of North Macedonia FOR THE PERIOD 2021-2025 addresses the challenges associated with emigration data, the registration of irregular migrants, and the diverse methodologies utilized by relevant state institutions in the registration and management of migrants. It is also focused on overcoming the current situation of the large permanent emigration of Macedonian citizen's abroad, especially young, and highly educated staff, as well as effective immigration management, specifically dealing with the challenges of the growing illegal immigration. The adoption of a new comprehensive and consistent migration policy for the period 2021-2025 corresponds to the changes in the legal and illegal migration and addresses the geopolitical position of the country as a transit area where the migration flows intersect in this part of the European continent.

The Republic of North Macedonia lacks comprehensive data on emigration. In line with the Law on Registration of Residence and Temporary Residence (Official Gazette 302/2020), citizens planning to reside abroad for over 3 months or work abroad for more than 12 months must notify their departure to a local office of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, border crossings, or consulates abroad. Nevertheless, the citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia frequently fail to register their departure due to personal reasons or a lack of awareness regarding their legal obligation to do so (Republic of North Macedonia, 2022).

3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF THE MIGRATION POLICY IN the Republic of North Macedonia

Under European and international law, states are obligated to uphold the right of individuals to seek asylum regardless of their country of origin. All EU members, as signatories to the 1951

Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, require states to provide protection to individuals who have a "well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion."

At the international level, the country has been a signatory to the 1949 ILO Migration for Employment Convention since 1991, as well as the 1975 Migrant Workers Convention that same year. However, Macedonia has not ratified the 1990 United Nations International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Furthermore, the state ratified the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees in 1994, the 1954 and 1961 UN Conventions on Statelessness in 1994 and 2020, and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, as well as the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea, and Air in 2005.

Macedonia possesses an excellent legal framework at the national level. This framework regulates both legal and illegal migration movements. It incorporates relevant migration policy instruments. Since adopting the first Resolution on Migration Policy in 2009, the country has maintained alignment. Migration legislation consistently follows European legislation, international law, and standards.

Macedonia's migration laws are shaped by the country's geopolitical situation, its aspirations to join the European Union (EU), and its role as a transit country for migrants moving from the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia towards Europe. The legal framework concerning migration in North Macedonia covers areas like asylum, border control, refugee protection, and the management of irregular migration. Here's an overview of the key aspects of migration laws in the country:

THE CONSTITUTION OF the Republic of North Macedonia (Article 29) ensures that foreigners in the Republic of North Macedonia enjoy the freedoms and rights protected by the Constitution, subject to conditions established by law and international agreements. The fundamental rights and freedoms of legal migrants, as outlined in the Constitution, are detailed in various legal documents: the right to enter and reside in the Republic of North Macedonia, along with their rights and responsibilities.

The primary law on migration in R. Macedonia is the **LAW ON FOREIGNERS** - In 2023, a new Law on Foreigners was enacted to regulate the rights and obligations of foreigners in the Republic of Macedonia, as well as the conditions for entry, exit, departure, residence, and return of Foreigners with illicit residence. The provisions of the law are applicable to all foreigners, with the exception of those who: seek international protection from Macedonia in accordance with the Law on International and Temporary Protection (unless otherwise specified by this Law) or those who enjoy privileges and immunities under international law, if the application of this Law is in violation of the undertaken international obligations and the principle of reciprocity. The Law on foreigners is enforced in accordance with the international agreements that the Republic of North Macedonia has ratified in accordance with the Constitution, which provide the alien with a more favorable position.

The Law on Foreigners is closely aligned with the applicable regulations of the European Union. It delineates a wider range of options for obtaining temporary residency through regional offices and adopts a case-by-case assessment approach. The law requires authorities to proactively provide information. A continuous evaluation is performed to examine the practical implementation of the legislation, highlighting the insights of the parties involved, the officials managing the issue, and the viewpoints of non-governmental groups. The new Law on Foreigners

include provisions designed to improve the position of foreigners in relation to obtaining temporary and permanent residence permits. The revisions to the Law on Employment of Foreigners have simplified the procedure for self-employed foreigners to acquire work permits and have provided enhanced clarity about residency rules. The members of the non-governmental sector questioned for this assessment assert that continuous improvement is vital to augmenting the efficiency and effectiveness of the processes.

Based on the Law on Foreigners, the following bylaws have been adopted for its implementation:

1. Rulebook on foreigners ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 190/2019),
2. Rulebook on travel and other documents of an alien (foreigner) ("Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia" No. 124/2020),
3. Rulebook on the house rules of the Reception Center for foreigners ("Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia" No. 93/2020),
4. Rulebook on the manner of issuing visas for foreigners, extension, reduction of their validity, revocation, and cancellation of visas, as well as on the visa form and on the record keeping ("Official Gazette of Republic of Macedonia" No. 71/2007),
5. Decree on the manner of maintaining the Integrated Database for foreigners, including data on asylum, migration, and visas, as well as the mutual relations of the competent authorities in the process of maintaining the Database ("Official Gazette of Republic of Macedonia" No. 119/2012),
6. Decree on ensuring confidentiality, protection and security of data contained in the Integrated Database for foreigners, including data on asylum, migration, and visas ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 119/2012),
7. Decree on the manner of granting access, access levels, criteria for determining the level of access, duration of access, procedure for determining termination and revocation of access to data in the integrated database for foreigners, including asylum data, migration and visas ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 119/2012).

LAW ON EMPLOYMENT AND WORK OF ALIENS (FOREIGNERS) The employment of aliens is regulated by this law. It has undergone numerous modifications since its adoption in September 2007. They were designed to simplify the process of obtaining a work certificate and to enhance the mobility of foreign employees who are employed by companies in the Republic of North Macedonia. Nevertheless, this Law, in addition to the provisions that prohibit any form of discrimination against aliens, also ensures the safeguarding of the domestic Labor market. The Law on the Employment of Aliens was most recently amended in 2016. They also delineate the conditions and procedure for the employment or employment of aliens in the Republic of North Macedonia, unless a ratified international agreement specifies otherwise. If an alien enters into a Labor relationship with an employer whose seat or place of residence is in the Republic of Macedonia on the basis of an employment contract, or if they acquire the status of a self-employed person in accordance with this or another law, they are considered to be employed (Law on Employment and Work of Aliens, 2007).

THE LAW ON BORDER AND THE LAW ON MOVEMENT AND RESIDENCE OF FOREIGNERS regulate all the movements and stays of foreigners in Macedonia. In June 2021, a new Resolution on Migration Policy (2021–2025) was developed for a sustainable and comprehensive framework for migration management. Resolution on Migration Policy for 2021-2025 and the Action Plan for its implementation/National Strategy for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration for 2021-2025/ Strategy for Integration of Refugees and Aliens (2017-2027), responsible bodies Ministry of Interior/Department of Border Affairs and Migration.

LAW ON ASYLUM AND TEMPORARY PROTECTION (2019) - Asylum Procedures: The Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection regulates the asylum process in Macedonia. It outlines the procedures through which individuals can apply for asylum, the rights of asylum seekers, and the responsibilities of the government in providing protection.

Types of Protection: The law defines diverse types of protection, including refugee status: Granted to individuals who have fled their home country due to fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Subsidiary Protection: Offered to individuals who do not qualify as refugees but still face a real risk of serious harm in their home country, such as death, torture, or inhuman treatment. Temporary Protection: This status can be granted in cases of mass displacement, like during crises. It allows people fleeing armed conflicts or large-scale violence to remain temporarily in the country.

The right to asylum is international protection granted by the Republic of Macedonia, under the conditions and in the procedure defined by this Law, to the following categories of persons: recognized refugee (refugee according to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees) and person under subsidiary protection (Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection, 2003).

The amendments to the Asylum Act (2019) allowed migrants to apply for asylum, granting them a seventy-two-hour period to determine whether to pursue asylum or exit the country. This legislative reform was a "game-changer" for Macedonia since it gave the government the legal justification to register migrants and legitimize them as long as they said that they intended to apply for asylum.

THE LAW ON INTERNATIONAL AND TEMPORARY PROTECTION (LITP), enacted in April 2018, generally aligns to international standards; however, two previously raised concerns remain: the two-year delay in family reunification for individuals granted subsidiary protection and the enforcement of measures limiting the freedom of movement for asylum seekers. The absence of a personal identification number for asylum-seekers is a substantial obstacle to the effective exercise of legally protected rights, including the right to work, the capacity to open a bank account, and the validation of educational credentials, among others.

The Law on International and Temporary Protection (2018) permits asylum seekers to attend and participate in elementary and secondary education in complying with the Law on Education, "until a final decision is made regarding their status". The Law on Social Protection mandates that the institution accommodating the asylum seeker is accountable for facilitating access to education. Migrant children without refugee status or subsidiary protection receive non-formal education organized at their residing reception center.

THE LAW ON PRIMARY EDUCATION (2019) proclaims the fundamental principle that children with foreign citizenship who reside in the Republic of Macedonia have the right to primary education under the same conditions as children who are Republic of Macedonia citizens, "free and quality education." The legislation forbids discrimination on the basis of sex, race, skin color, national or ethnic origin, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, citizenship, social background, education, religion or belief, political belief, other beliefs, age, marital status, property status, health status, social status, or any other criteria. Admission to primary school requires individuals to present proof of immunization. The requirement applies to both nationals and foreigners, regardless of their status.

THE LAW ON SECONDARY EDUCATION (1995) stipulates that "foreign citizens and stateless individuals may obtain secondary education, in the manners and under the conditions outlined in this law," without further explanation. The legislation prohibits discrimination based on "gender, race, skin color, national and social origin, political and religious beliefs, property and social status" and asserts that foreigners and stateless persons have the right to "pursue nostrification or recognition of the equivalence of a certificate obtained abroad."

During the years 2020 and 2021, considerable progress was made in the implementation of the legal framework, confirmed by the amendments adopted to the Law on International and Temporary Protection as well as the Law on Foreigners. The introduction of new legal solutions over the last two years by civil society and the academic community represents a significant move towards aligning national regulations with international instruments, promoting a more equitable approach in addressing the needs of migrants and asylum seekers.

THE NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR COMBATING HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND ILLEGAL MIGRATION FOR THE PERIOD 2021-2025 was approved in April 2021. The National Commission for Combating Human Trafficking and Illegal Migration supervises the implementation of the policy. The primary institutional aim of the National Commission is to attain decentralization through the formation of local commissioners at the municipal level.

LAW ON INTERNATIONAL AND TEMPORARY PROTECTION - The regulation outlines the conditions and procedures for acquiring the right to international protection for asylum seekers, individuals with refugee status, those under subsidiary protection, or individuals under temporary protection. Individuals affected by human trafficking are recognized as vulnerable, and their specific needs will be identified through a personalized assessment of their circumstances conducted by an appropriate public institution responsible for social protection. This Law also outlines the conditions under which the Republic of North Macedonia may grant temporary protection, along with the rights and responsibilities of individuals receiving temporary protection.

READMISSION AGREEMENTS - Readmission Agreements: Macedonia has signed readmission agreements with several countries, including the EU and its neighboring states, to facilitate the return of individuals who have entered the country illegally or who are found not to meet asylum criteria. These agreements ensure that people who have been residing in the country irregularly can be returned to their country of origin or to the country where they last resided legally.

After the ratification of the **NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS** (hereinafter the Strategy) in 2017, which serves as a principal document of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy governing the nation's approach to recognized refugees and foreign nationals, an Action Plan for the Integration of Refugees and Foreigners covering the period 2017-2027 was developed in 2018 (hereinafter the Action Plan).

The action plan is divided into 6 different areas of action in accordance with the Strategy: System Integration, Early Integration, Housing, Education, Employment and Naturalization. Each goal outlined in the action plan is scheduled within a particular timeframe, with a designated institution accountable for its execution.

The action plan anticipates numerous activities that will enhance the system for safeguarding refugee rights in the country, establishing a conclusive and operational Inter-ministerial entity tasked with periodically performing legal analyses of systemic inequities, including investigations into migration trends. The participation of institutions in the action plan is crucial since they must

implement frequent communication campaigns to enhance public knowledge of refugee-related issues. This is especially important when examining the hate speech and xenophobia directed at refugees and migrants in recent years, alongside politicians' efforts to sway public opinion, engendering insecurity and fear among citizens, which frequently culminated in hate crimes against migrants and refugees traversing the territory of the Republic of Macedonia (Macedonian Helsinki Committee, 2019).

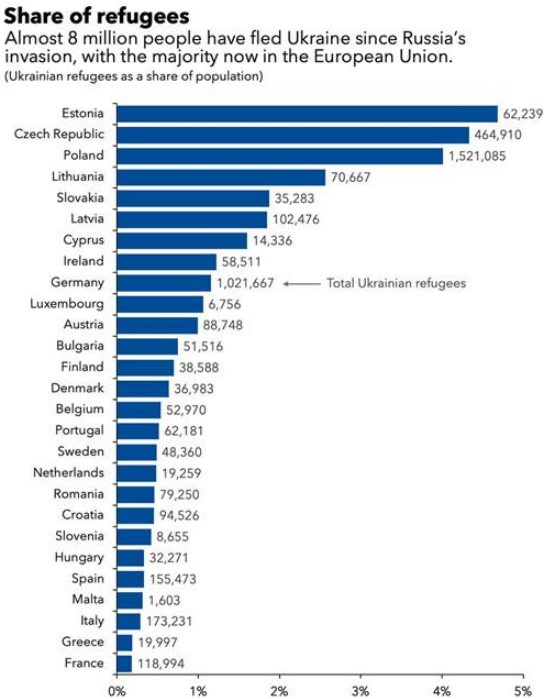
EU Cooperation: As part of the EU accession process, Macedonia is working to harmonize its migration and border control policies with EU standards, which includes the implementation of readmission agreements.

International Cooperation on Migration - Frontex and EU Border Cooperation: Macedonia cooperates with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) to strengthen border control and management, especially in the context of irregular migration flows from the Middle East and other regions. This cooperation includes joint operations, technical support, and training. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is active in Macedonia, providing guidance on the treatment of refugees, supporting the asylum process, and ensuring that the country meets international standards for refugee protection.

EU ALIGNMENT - As part of its EU accession process, Macedonia is gradually aligning its migration laws and practices with EU standards. This includes Strengthening asylum systems in line with the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), Adopting EU visa policies and border security measures and enhancing cooperation with EU member states on migration management, human trafficking, and border control.

4. UKRAINIAN MIGRATION – REFUGEE CRISIS AND MACEDONIA’S RESPONSE

The war in Ukraine from February 24, 2022, challenged the worst refugee crisis in Europe from the end of Second World War. As a result, Europe has opened its doors to more than eight million refugees fleeing from Ukraine for their safety.



Source: UNHCR; Eurostat; WEO Database; and IMF Staff Calculations.
 Note: Refugee numbers as of December 1st.



In response to Russia's military invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the EU acted swiftly and demonstrated solidarity by helping those in need. This encompassed direct humanitarian aid, emergency civil protection assistance, border support, and the provision of protection for individuals fleeing the war and entering the EU. The European Union activated the Temporary Protection Directive, establishing legal frameworks to address the “mass influx of the refugees.” From the point of view of this analysis, it is important to point to the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) adopted by the European Union in 2001, with the aim of simplifying the asylum procedures and providing shelter (including subsistence) for those escaping war and trying to get to the EU territory was originally designed in response to those displaced because of the 1998-1999 Kosovo War.

The Directive defines temporary protection as an exceptional procedure designed to offer immediate and provisional safety to displaced people from third countries facing a mass influx or imminent mass influx, particularly when there is a risk that the asylum system may be overwhelmed, potentially compromising its efficient functioning, thereby safeguarding the interests of both the affected individuals and others seeking protection (Council of the European Union, 2001). Consequently, the Directive serves as a mechanism to be employed in extraordinary circumstances where a nation's asylum system is unable to manage a sudden surge in asylum petitions from individuals requiring immediate entrance and assistance. The legal status that Ukrainians were granted is significant because it was the first time in the history of the EU that the European Commission proposed activating the Temporary Protection Directive, which was adopted by the EU in 2001.

The decision activating this directive (Council of the European Union, 2022a), in Article 2.1, enumerates the following categories to be granted temporary protection:

- a) Ukrainian nationals residing in Ukraine before 24 February 2022
- b) Stateless persons and nationals of third countries other than Ukraine, who benefited from international protection or equivalent national protection in Ukraine before 24 February 2022
- c) Family members of the persons referred to in a) and b)

Macedonia, despite being outside the EU, also activated temporary protection and incorporated it into its domestic laws, in particular in the Act of 2018 on International and Temporary Protection of Foreigners (chapter VIII).

On March 02, 2022, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia decided to grant temporary protection for humanitarian reasons to Ukrainian citizens, which was renewed by the Macedonian Government with Decision No. 41-6564/3 of July 30, 2024, which entered into force on August 09, 2024, extended the validity of temporary protection for one year until August 08, 2025.

The newly enacted government decision provides temporary protection to citizens of Ukraine and their family members who: A) enter the territory of North Macedonia due to war, threat to life, or escalation of hostilities against the civilian population; B) are in the territory of North Macedonia and cannot return to the territory of Ukraine due to war, threat to life, or escalation of hostilities against the civilian population (North Macedonia for Ukrainians, n.d.).

R. Macedonia is not an EU member state; however, it has made every effort to simplify the regulations for Ukrainian citizens who want to enter its territory. Consequently, it is possible to cross the border without a foreign passport. A national identity document, such as a Ukrainian passport or birth certificate, is sufficient. If you are crossing the border with a minor, you should have documents confirming your family or other relationship with the minor (birth certificate, parental consent to accompany and depart the child).

In order to obtain temporary protection in North Macedonia, you need to apply to the Ministry of the Interior - Sector for Foreigners (Сектор за странци) of the Ministry of the Interior, or to an inspector for foreigners at police stations in other cities for a temporary residence permit for humanitarian reasons.

“These citizens who have been granted temporary protection are entitled to:

- residence for a period of 1 year with the possibility of extension
- financial support in the RMG, in accordance with the economic capabilities of the country (as of 07.08.2024, no financial assistance was provided to Ukrainian citizens due to lack of funding).
- employment, pension, and disability insurance.
- basic medical services.
- primary and secondary education” (North Macedonia for Ukrainians, n.d.)

Since March 2022, Macedonia has been hosting refugees from Ukraine. According to UNHCR, by September 2023, 67.151 Ukrainians have arrived in Macedonia, 47.846 of which left the country. By April 30, 2024, according to UNHCR there are 19.305 refugees recorded in Macedonia. By June 2023, 405 Ukrainians had received temporary residence in Macedonia on humanitarian grounds and by April 2024, 41 Ukrainians applied for asylum. Under the Law on foreigners, temporary residence means the right to legally reside in the country for 1 year with the possibility of extension. (UNCHR Operational Data portal - Ukraine Refugee Situation)

Other European countries

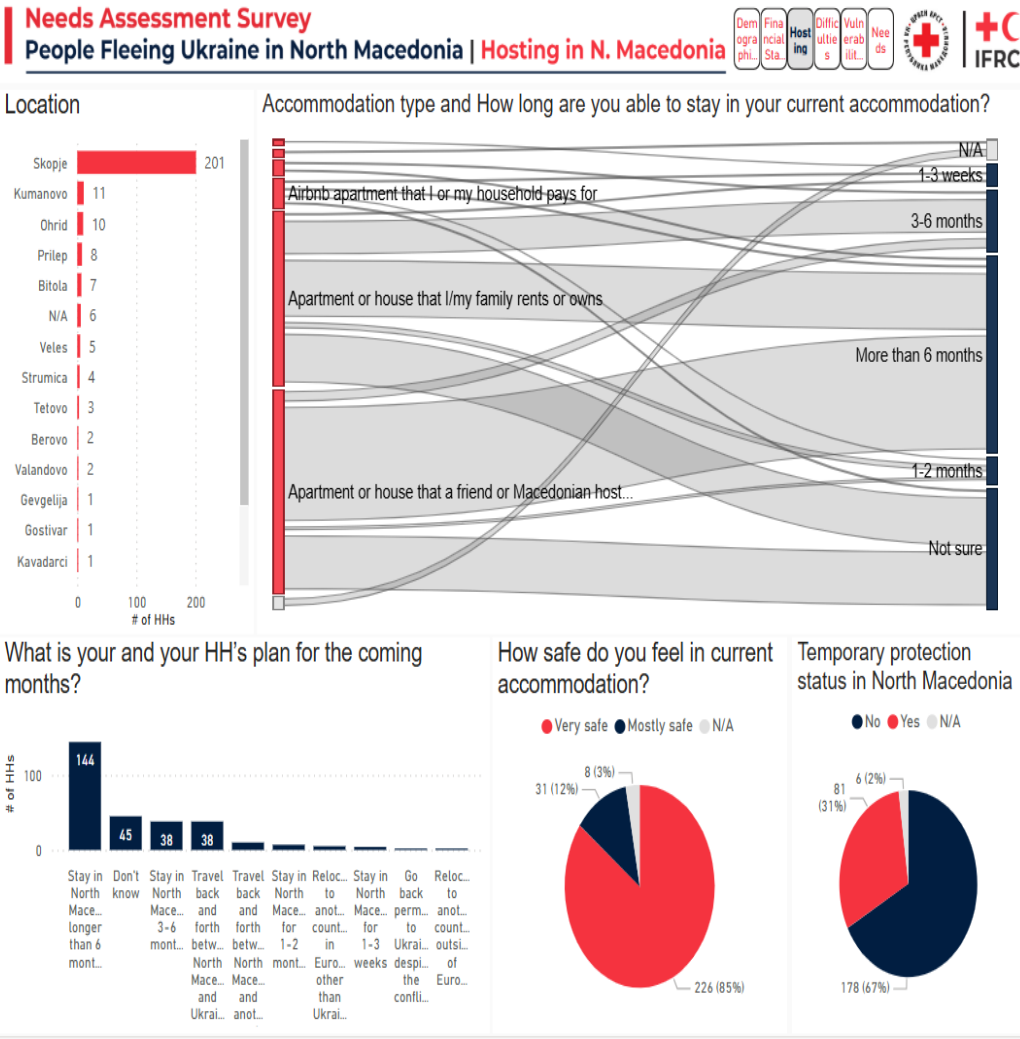
Country	Data Date	Refugees from Ukraine recorded in country as of date ⁽¹⁾	Refugees from Ukraine who applied for Asylum, TP or similar national protection schemes to date ⁽²⁾
Albania	5/31/2024	8,930	35
Armenia	7/17/2023	605	605
Austria	10/31/2024	84,620	122,975
Azerbaijan	10/1/2024	4,655	195
Belgium	9/30/2024	85,465	90,165
Bosnia and Herzegovina	10/31/2024	265	265
Croatia	10/31/2024	27,130	28,525
Cyprus	9/30/2024	18,740	23,425
Denmark	10/27/2024	37,825	57,760
Finland	10/31/2024	68,620	76,625
France	9/30/2024	64,840	111,220
Georgia	8/30/2024	28,640	1,625
Germany	11/2/2024	1,222,695	1,147,875
Greece	9/30/2024	32,315	32,570
Iceland	9/30/2024	3,950	4,790
Ireland	9/29/2024	110,960	110,960
Italy	9/30/2024	173,870	200,605
Liechtenstein	11/6/2024	675	1,085
Luxembourg	10/18/2024	3,855	7,160
Malta	9/30/2024	2,565	3,010
Montenegro	8/31/2024	21,245	12,155
Netherlands	9/30/2024	120,100	163,495
North Macedonia	4/30/2024	19,305	425
Norway	10/31/2024	77,005	88,610
Portugal	9/30/2024	64,125	71,615
Serbia and Kosovo: S/RES/1244 (1999)	10/31/2024	10,400	3,345
Slovenia	11/1/2024	12,670	12,230
Spain	10/31/2024	216,955	226,500
Sweden	10/30/2024	26,655	74,105
Switzerland	11/7/2024	67,530	111,485
Türkiye	11/14/2024	36,235	2,930
United Kingdom	11/12/2024	251,835	1,435
Total		2,905,280	2,789,805

Source: UNHCR, Operational data portal, <https://data.unhcr.org/>

When it comes to hosting people Macedonia, conducted in July-August 2022, showed that only 4% stayed in hosting accommodation, 46% were hosted by family of friends and 49% stayed in rented accommodation (IOM North Macedonia, 2022). At the beginning of the migrant crises, even the

Hoteliers on the Ohrid Riviera were ready to cede 30 percent of their facilities to refugees from Ukraine. On the list submitted to the Government, close to 3,000 hotel rooms with 5,000-6,000 beds were offered, and together with private facilities, it was possible to accommodate around 10,000 Ukrainian refugees.

According to IOM in North Macedonia, between February and August 2022, it was the capital of Skopje which housed 67% of refugees, the next being Ohrid (8%), Prilep (6,6%), Bitola (5,6%). In this case, four cities absorbed 87% of all those who arrived after February 24 (IOM North Macedonia, 2022).



Source: IFRC GO

Extraordinary measures aimed at facilitating border crossings by Ukrainian refugees were implemented at the reception phase in Macedonia. In reaction to the substantial influx of Ukrainian migrants across Europe, the Macedonian government implemented measures to facilitate their access into the country.

One of these measures involved an exemption from the requirement to pay international car insurance for vehicles transporting refugees across the border. The exemption, which was implemented in March, remained in effect until 30 June 2022 for all vehicles bearing Ukrainian license plates that were transporting refugees to Macedonia or utilizing its territory as a transit route. The decision was reached through collaboration between the National Insurance Bureau and the Insurance Supervision Agency. It is important to highlight that this achievement was made

possible through the consensus of all 11 non-life insurance companies operating in Macedonia. The guarantee fund of the National Insurance Bureau covered all potential costs associated with damage caused by such vehicles. The government has announced that Ukrainian citizens will be exempt from the requirement to submit a negative PCR test result when crossing borders. Ukrainians have the option to register with the Public Health Insurance Fund, with the government covering their monthly fees, thereby enabling access to health services (360 Stepeni, 2022).

According to the reports and statistics UNHCR received from the Ministry of Interior at the time of drafting this report in December 2024, approximately 1071 individuals from Ukraine currently reside in the Republic of Macedonia, enjoying a regulated status on various grounds. Thus far, the largest group consists of 685 individuals who hold temporary residence on humanitarian grounds, as stipulated by the Law on Foreigners. This status provides the right to reside in the country, but the people do not have access to other rights. This is followed by a group that includes 351 people who have regulated their residence on various grounds, such as marriage, work, etc. (The data was provided by the UNHCR representative in Macedonia through personal communication, December 12, 2024).

5. MAJOR STATE AND NON-STATE ACTORS RELEVANT FOR MIGRATION AND REFUGEES

The Government of Macedonia and the Ministry of Interior, which includes the Department for Border Affairs and Migrations, the Sector for Foreigners, and the Sector for Asylum, are the major state actors relevant to migration and refugees. The Ministry of the Interior is responsible for matters related to the control of movement and stay of foreigners in the state. It also issues travel documents for refugees: the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the Employment Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia, the Immigration Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia, and the Sector for Border Affairs and Migration.

Open Gate - La Strada (La Strada, n.d.) and the Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA, n.d.) were two of the most active organizations in Macedonia, specializing in collaborating with migrants and providing assistance to Ukrainian refugees. Their dedication to combating human trafficking and providing legal assistance to asylum applicants made these organizations significant providers of legal support to those fleeing Ukraine.

The Association of Ukrainians Lesya Ukrainka in Skopje, representing the Ukrainian diaspora in R. Macedonia, became known as a supporter of refugees and an advocate for the Ukrainian cause within the country. Refugee arrivals prompted the creation of a new Ukrainian NGO, 'Joint Home for Mothers and Children from Ukraine-Skopje,' which provides humanitarian assistance to women and children. This organization operates with a humanitarian focus, collaborating directly with refugees and leveraging the support of established entities such as UNHCR, the Red Cross, and La Strada. Until December 2025, 1,300 people from Ukraine will receive assistance in accordance with the Response Plan for North Macedonia (IFRC Macedonia, 2023).

6. CHALLENGES AND CRITICISMS

On the aspect of implementation of Asylum Procedures, we must add that while the legal framework exists, there have been challenges in the implementation of asylum procedures, such as delays in processing applications and limited access to services for refugees and migrants. On the aspect of irregular Migration and Border Management, as a key transit country for migrants traveling through the Western Balkans to the European Union, Macedonia faces significant challenges in managing irregular migration. This includes overcrowded refugee camps, the

treatment of migrants, and the pressure of managing large numbers of people with limited resources.

On 08 August 2023, the Government of Macedonia activated temporary protection for persons from Ukraine for a period of one year, and on 30 July 2024, extended its validity for another year, i.e., until 09 August 2025. At present, the country has granted temporary protection to a total of 35 individuals. Despite the activation of temporary protection and the recognition of this type of status, the Law on International and Temporary Protection does not provide people from Ukraine with effective access to rights such as social protection, employment, and health education. This is due to the inconsistency of legal norms in other laws that regulate these rights, including the Law on Social Protection, the Law on Employment of Foreigners, and the Law on Health Insurance. UNHCR has promptly addressed these challenges with state authorities, anticipating the adoption of legal amendments in the upcoming period.

In practice, language barriers present challenges, and Skopje serves as the central hub for services, particularly for individuals from various cities across the country who must visit Skopje to apply for temporary protection or renew their personal documents. At the same time, the temporary protection identification document is not often recognized by officials, including those working in banks, and therefore they do not have access to certain services.

In conclusion, Macedonia's aspirations to join the European Union, its role as a transit country, and the challenges associated with managing migration while protecting the rights of refugees and migrants continue to shape its evolving migration laws and policies. The legal framework covers a wide range of areas, including asylum, border control, Labor migration, and refugee protection. Challenges remain, particularly regarding the treatment of migrants, irregular migration management, and integration of refugees. While the country has made considerable progress in aligning its policies with EU standards, the country faces ongoing challenges, especially in terms of border management, asylum procedures, and human rights protection.

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1. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF MIGRATION

Georgia, located at the intersection of Europe and Asia, has a unique migration landscape influenced by its geographical position, historical events, and socio-political factors. Over the past few decades, the country has experienced various migration trends, including substantial emigration of its citizens seeking better opportunities abroad and the influx of migrants from neighboring regions. This dynamic has created both challenges and opportunities for the state.

The importance of understanding Georgia's migration policy and legislation cannot be overstated. It has implications for labor markets, social integration, and the protection of human rights. Furthermore, Georgia's approach aligns with international standards and practices, as the country seeks to position itself within the broader European and global context.

Understanding Georgia's migration history requires examining key phases and events. These developments significantly influenced migration patterns over the years.

Soviet Era (1921-1991) - During the Soviet period, Georgia was part of a larger political entity that promoted internal migration across the Union. Many Georgians moved to other Soviet republics for work or education, while individuals from various parts of the USSR settled in Georgia. The Soviet regime's policies aimed to redistribute the population and industrialize the region, leading to significant demographic changes. As a result, Georgians experienced both economic opportunities and challenges due to the state's-controlled migration policies (Kveshenava, 2010).

Independence and Civil Conflict (1991-2000) - Georgia regained independence following the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991. This marked the beginning of a tumultuous period. The country faced political instability, economic hardship, and civil conflict. Wars in Abkhazia and South Ossetia during the early 1990s caused mass displacement. Hundreds of thousands of people fled these regions, including ethnic Georgians. The economic struggles led to significant emigration as many Georgians sought better opportunities abroad, particularly in Western Europe, the United States, and neighboring countries (Shenfield, 2015).

Post-Conflict Reconstruction and EU Aspirations (2000-Present) - The early 2000s marked a phase of rebuilding. The Rose Revolution in 2003 ushered in democratic reforms and a renewed focus on integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures. Many Georgians continued to migrate for work, driven by economic necessity. Labor migration became significant, particularly to countries like Greece, Italy, and Russia, creating a diaspora that contributes to Georgia's economy through remittances. Concurrently, Georgia has attempted to attract foreign migrants, particularly skilled workers, and investors, as part of its economic development strategy.

The demographic impact was notable, with thousands displaced from conflict zones and many seeking refuge or better economic opportunities abroad. In particular, the displacement from Abkhazia and South Ossetia created a large internally displaced persons (IDPs) population, comprising approximately 300,000 and 40,000 residents, respectively (Georgia UNHCR, 2020). These displaced communities have significantly influenced migration trends and policies.

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, Georgia mostly experienced out-migration driven by economic hardship. Many young professionals emigrated to Russia and Türkiye, seeking employment opportunities unavailable domestically. This period also saw the emergence of a Georgian diaspora, mainly in Russia, which remains one of the largest Georgian communities abroad (Grosse & Quitzow, 2018).

2. CURRENT MIGRATION TRENDS

Today, Georgia’s migration landscape reflects a complex interaction of internal movements, inbound migration, and diaspora activities, with implications for the country’s socio-economic development.

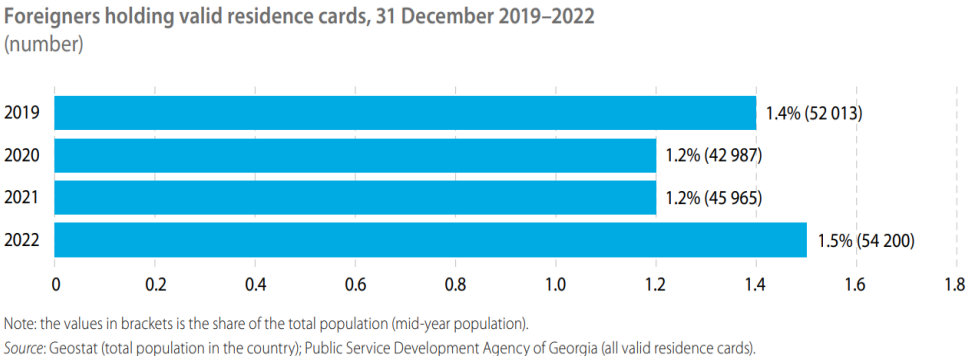
Georgia’s diaspora is estimated at around 1.5 to 2 million individuals, representing one of the largest in the region relative to its population (World Bank, 2022). Russia hosts the largest Georgian community due to history and geographical proximity. Other sizable communities exist in Greece, Türkiye, Israel, and the United States. The diaspora plays a crucial role in Georgia’s economy through remittances, which account for approximately 10-15% of the country’s gross domestic product (World Bank, 2022). These financial flows support families, fund small businesses, and foster development initiatives.

Migration within Georgia is predominantly rural-to-urban. Urban centers such as Tbilisi, Batumi, and Kutaisi have experienced rapid population growth, fueled by economic opportunities and internal displacement. Rural depopulation poses challenges for regional development, infrastructure, and social services (Kveshena, 2010). Young people are particularly inclined to migrate to urban areas or abroad for better employment and educational prospects, leading to an aging rural population.

Labor migration remains prominent, with many Georgians engaging in seasonal or temporary work abroad. Sectors such as agriculture, construction, and tourism often depend heavily on migrant labor, especially during peak seasons (Grosse & Quitzow, 2018).

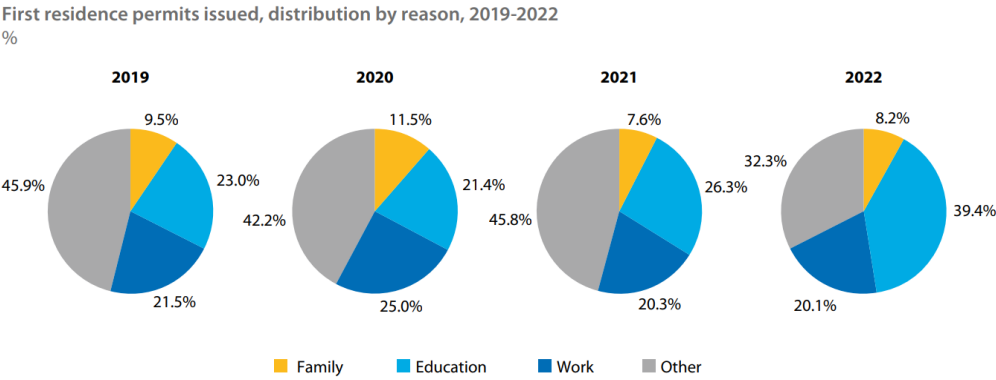
In recent years, Georgia increasingly attracts migrants from neighboring conflict-affected countries like Syria and Ukraine, although on a smaller scale compared to its neighbors. The country’s reputation for political stability, relative safety, and visa facilitation has made it an attractive destination for asylum seekers and refugees (UNHCR, 2020). Additionally, Georgia’s evolving reputation as a tourism hub and its open immigration policies have led to increased foreign residence, especially among international students and seasonal workers.

According to EMN statistical data, the visualization of migration inflows is as follows:



As of December 31, 2022, 54,200 foreign nationals held valid Georgian residence cards, which is nearly the same as the numbers seen in 2018 and 2019. Compared to 2020, when the number significantly decreased due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a 26% increase by 2022. In 2022, there were more valid temporary residence cards than permanent ones, a change from 2021 (EMN Annual Report, 2023). That year, 55% of foreign holders of valid residence cards were male, a gender distribution that has remained relatively consistent over the past five years.

In 2022, most residence permits granted to foreign citizens were temporary and primarily issued for study (43%), work (20%), and family reunification (8%) purposes. Since 2019, the trend has shifted, with study permits surpassing work residence permits. Additionally, the number of study residence permits issued in 2022 was double that of the previous year (EMN Annual Report, 2023).



Source: Public Service Development Agency of Georgia.

In 2022, 4,712 temporary work residence permits were issued to foreign nationals. In 2019, the number of these permits fell sharply compared to 2018 and reached its lowest point in 2020. Since then, the numbers have been on the rise, reaching pre-pandemic levels by 2022. That year, the majority of work residence permits were granted to citizens from China, Russia, and Türkiye (EMN Annual Report, 2023).

Distribution of work residence permits issued by year and citizenship

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Iran 2 449	China 1 333	China 1 274	China 1 518	China 969
China 1 294	Turkey 616	Turkey 540	Turkey 737	Russia 755
Turkey 1 190	Iran 525	Ukraine 210	Russia 249	Turkey 720
India 404	India 259	Russia 203	Iran 173	Belarus 411
Russia 294	Russia 241	Iran 195	Ukraine 162	India 339
Other 1 545	Other 1 083	Other 863	Other 1 058	Other 1 518
Total 7 176	Total 4 057	Total 3 285	Total 3 897	Total 4 712

Source: PSDA

As of September 1, 2022, the “Establishment Skills Survey” indicated that 8% (3,884) of enterprises employed a total of 17,851 foreign nationals, representing 2% of all employment.

Compared to the previous year, the number of foreign workers in Georgia increased by 78% in 2022 (EMN Annual Report, 2023).

In 2022, a total of 10,046 study residence permits were issued, nearly doubling the number from 2021 and surpassing pre-pandemic levels recorded in 2019. The majority (52%) of these study permits were granted to citizens of India (EMN Annual Report, 2023).

Distribution of study residence permits issued by year and citizenship

2018		2019		2020		2021		2022	
India	4 486	India	4 068	India	2 292	India	1 917	India	5 259
Iran	326	Iran	607	Iran	456	Nigeria	475	Jordan	735
Nigeria	268	Nigeria	321	Nigeria	316	Iran	440	Egypt	682
Egypt	158	Egypt	215	Egypt	213	Egypt	435	Nigeria	541
Jordan	96	Jordan	158	Jordan	167	Jordan	371	Russia	513
Other	723	Other	663	Other	701	Other	1 273	Other	2 316
Total	6 057	Total	6 032	Total	4 145	Total	4 911	Total	10 046

Source: PSDA

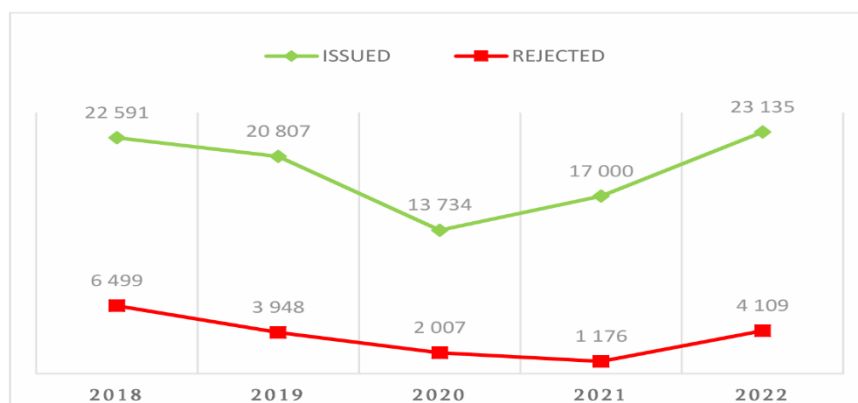
In 2022, 1 826 temporary resident permits were issued for the purpose of family reunification, equal to pre-pandemic level of years 2018-2019.

Distribution of family reunification residence permits issued by year and citizenship

2018		2019		2020		2021		2022	
Iran	907	Iran	856	Iran	381	Russia	336	Russia	641
Turkey	219	Russia	171	Russia	260	Iran	273	Iran	267
Russia	137	Turkey	149	Ukraine	160	Ukraine	160	Belorussia	192
India	128	India	124	Turkey	132	Turkey	156	Turkey	151
Azerbaijan	86	Azerbaijan	80	India	102	Azerbaijan	102	Ukraine	135
Other	400	Other	362	Other	414	Other	511	Other	440
Total	1 877	Total	1 742	Total	1 449	Total	1 538	Total	1 826

Source: PSDA

Regarding the refusals on granting resident permits, in 2022 it also significantly went up compared to 2021 year.



Migration in Georgia is driven by a multitude of factors - economic, political, and social - that often intersect:

- **Economic Factors** - Economic hardship is the primary push factor. Georgia's unemployment rate has historically fluctuated between 15-20%, and wages remain relatively low compared to European standards (National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2023). Limited industrial diversification and underdeveloped infrastructure create an environment where many young Georgians seek opportunities abroad. Remittances, serving as a lifeline for families, further indicate economic migration's importance (World Bank, 2022).
- **Political Factors** - The ongoing conflict in regions such as Abkhazia and South Ossetia has had a profound impact on migration patterns in Georgia. Displacement from these conflict zones has created a large internally displaced population, which continues to influence migration policies and socio-economic conditions within the country (UNHCR, 2020). Political instability and regional tensions discourage foreign investment and economic development, prompting many Georgians to seek better opportunities abroad. Furthermore, Georgia's aspirations for closer integration with European institutions and the European Union have stimulated a desire for migration opportunities that align with visa liberalization and mobility agreements.
- **Social Factors** - Social networks and family reunification are significant aspects influencing migration decisions. Many Georgians migrate to join relatives abroad or to access better healthcare, education, and social services that are perceived as unavailable locally. The diaspora, with its extensive networks, facilitates migration by providing information, financial support, and social connections. Additionally, access to international education and the perception of Georgia as a steppingstone for further migration opportunities contribute to ongoing mobility trends.
- **External Drivers** - Global economic conditions also shape migration patterns. Economic crises in destination countries, fluctuating wages, or restrictive migration policies can alter Georgia's migration flows. Additionally, climate change and environmental degradation threaten rural livelihoods, pushing residents toward urban areas or abroad in search of alternative income sources (Grosse & Quitzow, 2018). The recent COVID-19 pandemic further complicated these dynamics, temporarily reversing migration flows and impacting the livelihoods that sustain many migrant families.

3. OVERVIEW OF EXISTING LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Georgia has developed a comprehensive legal framework to regulate migration, aligning its legislation with international standards and regional commitments. The legal framework encompasses national laws, regulations, key institutions responsible for migration management, and international treaties to which Georgia is a party.

The primary legal norms regulating migration in Georgia are as follows:

- Constitution of Georgia.
- Organic Law of Georgia on Georgian Citizenship.
- Law of Georgia on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons.
- Law of Georgia on Labor Migration.
- Law of Georgia on International Protection.
- Law of Georgia on Combating Human Trafficking.
- Law of Georgia on Occupied Territories.

- Law of Georgia on the Procedure for Registering Citizens of Georgia and Aliens Residing in Georgia, for Issuing an Identity (Residence) Card and a Passport of a Citizen of Georgia.
- Law of Georgia on Compatriots Residing Abroad and Diaspora Organizations.
- Law of Georgia on the State Border of Georgia.
- Law of Georgia on the rules and procedures for Georgian citizens exiting and entering Georgia.

A key feature of Georgia's migration law is its emphasis on facilitation and liberalization of visa regimes, particularly following the introduction of visa-free travel arrangements with the European Union and Schengen countries (European Commission, 2019). The country also maintains regulations concerning border control, including the use of biometric data and border surveillance, to prevent irregular migration and ensure compliance with international security standards.

In addition to the primary law, Georgian legislation includes amendments to the Law on the Permit System, which regulates work permits, residence permits, and long-term visa issuance. The legal framework provides for differentiated procedures for various categories of migrants, including labor migrants, students, and refugees, reflecting Georgia's approach to policy inclusiveness (Government of Georgia, 2019).

Georgia has ratified numerous international treaties that influence and complement its national migration legal framework. Notably, Georgia is a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, which define the rights of refugees and establish the obligations of states to protect them. Its national asylum law aligns with these treaties, emphasizing the right to seek asylum and ensuring legal protections for refugees (UNHCR, 2020).

Additionally, Georgia is a signatory to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which obligates the country to uphold human rights standards regardless of migration status. The ECHR has implications for detention procedures, legal remedies, and protections for migrants and asylum seekers under Georgian law (Council of Europe, 2010).

Georgia actively cooperates with the European Union through the Visa Liberalization Action Plan (VLAP), which requires adhering to certain legal standards related to border control, readmission agreements, and migration management. The country has also entered into bilateral agreements with neighboring states, such as Russia and Türkiye, concerning border management and migration issues.

Furthermore, Georgia is part of regional initiatives like the Common Platform on Migration and Asylum in the Black Sea Region, aimed at strengthening legal cooperation and harmonizing migration policies across neighboring countries (Boka & Kandelaki, 2020).

The European Migration Network (EMN) Annual Report on Migration and Asylum 2022 offers valuable insights into Georgia's efforts to manage migration flows, protect vulnerable populations, and align with international standards.

The report highlights key developments in Georgia's migration landscape during 2022. One of the most significant aspects is the impact of the war in Ukraine on Georgia's asylum system. With a surge in asylum applications, particularly from Ukrainian citizens, the report underscores Georgia's role in providing support and protection to those fleeing conflict (EMN Report, 2023). In response, the government implemented measures to streamline entry procedures and provide essential services, demonstrating a commitment to humanitarian principles.

In terms of legal migration, the report emphasizes Georgia's ongoing efforts to modernize its labor migration framework. Amendments to the Law on Labor Migration aim to enhance the management of labor flows, improve data collection, and strengthen the protection of migrant workers (EMN Report, 2023). By regulating labor immigration and establishing an electronic registration system for foreign employees, Georgia seeks to formalize its labor market and reduce exploitation.

The report also provides insights into the challenges of irregular migration and human trafficking. Despite efforts to strengthen border management and combat trafficking, the number of foreigners found to be illegally present in Georgia increased significantly in 2022 (EMN Annual Report, 2023). The report also touches on identified victims of THB of two citizens of Azerbaijan and one citizen of Georgia (EMN Annual Report, 2023). This indicates the persistent need for improved detection mechanisms, enhanced cooperation with neighboring countries, and targeted interventions to prevent and address trafficking.

Moreover, the EMN report addresses Georgia's policies and programs related to integration and inclusion. Recognizing the importance of language skills for successful integration, the government has developed a new state language program for migrants, designed to promote linguistic and civic competencies (EMN Annual Report, 2023). Integration and support programs emphasize social cohesion and participation in the labor market, reflecting Georgia's commitment to fostering inclusive communities.

The report further details legal and policy changes concerning citizenship and statelessness. Amendments to the Organic Law on Georgian Citizenship aim to facilitate access to citizenship for former Georgian citizens and individuals originating from Georgia. Additionally, the abolishment of service fees for stateless status determination reflects Georgia's dedication to addressing statelessness, particularly through collaboration with UNHCR (EMN Annual Report, 2023).

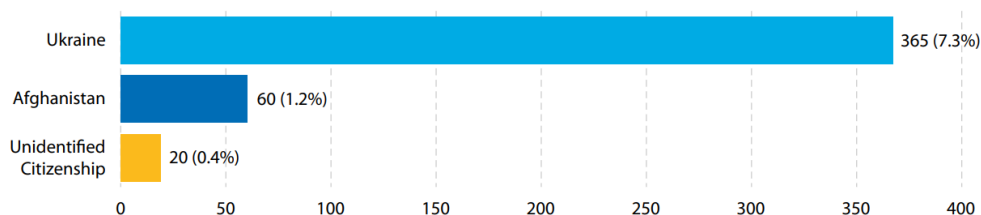
The EMN Country Factsheet 2022, published in August 2023, presents the most recent data and policy updates, offering a snapshot of the evolving migration dynamics in the country.

One of the key takeaways from the factsheet is Georgia's adoption of the "Vision 2030 Development Strategy," which includes goals related to the 2021-2030 Migration Strategy. This integration of migration into broader development planning reflects a strategic approach to leveraging migration for economic and social progress (EMN Factsheet, 2023).

The factsheet also provides statistical data on key migration trends. While foreigners holding valid residence cards increased in 2022, the number of short-stay visas issued decreased. These trends offer valuable insights into the changing patterns of migration flows and inform policy responses. The three countries whose citizens were most often granted short-stay visas are China, Egypt, and India (EMN Factsheet, 2023).

Another significant development is the simplified entry procedure implemented for individuals fleeing the war in Ukraine. The provision of temporary housing, financial assistance, healthcare, and educational opportunities demonstrates Georgia's commitment to providing immediate support to vulnerable populations affected by conflict (EMN Factsheet, 2023). This proactive approach underscores Georgia's role as a humanitarian actor in the region.

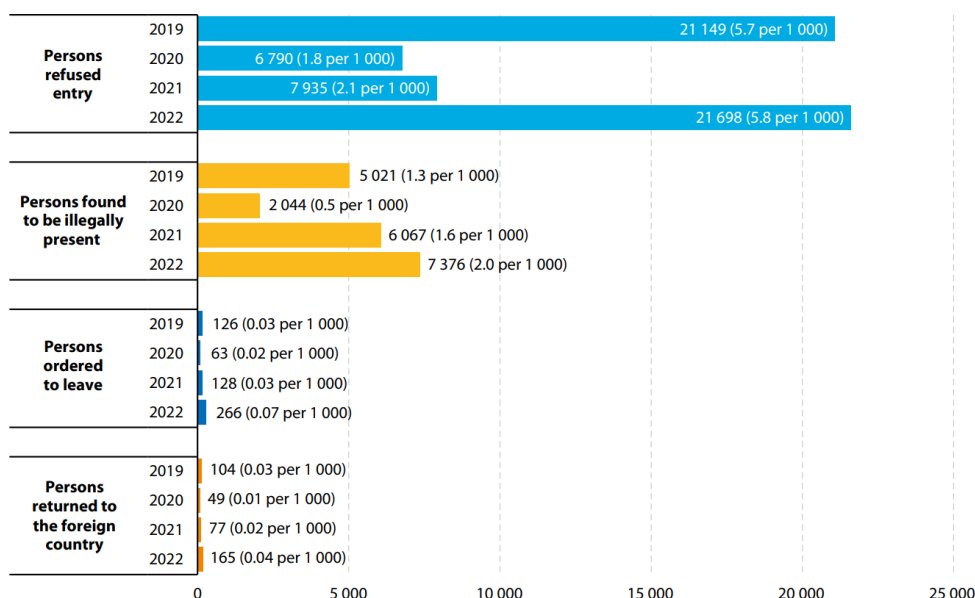
Three countries whose citizens most often received positive first instance asylum decisions, 2022
(rounded number of decisions)



Note: the values in brackets is the share of all positive first instance decisions.
Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia.

The notable trend is the significant increase in the number of foreigners subject to immigration law enforcement, with a growing number of them facing refusal entry. This underlines the need for strengthened border management and regional cooperation to address irregular migration flows.

Number of foreigners subject to immigration law enforcement, 2019–2022



Note: the value in brackets is the number of foreigners subject to immigration law enforcement per 1 000 people.
Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia.

4. GEORGIA'S MIGRATION POLICY IN REGIONAL CONTEXT

Georgia's migration policy is embedded within the broader regional context of the Caucasus and Eastern Europe, reflecting its strategic geographic position, geopolitical significance, and aspirations for European integration. Its approach to migration management aligns with regional cooperation initiatives, international standards, and partnerships aimed at fostering stability and development in the area.

Regional Context

Georgia's migration policy must contend with complex regional dynamics, including cross-border flows, shared challenges related to conflict, and cooperation among neighboring countries. The

Caucasus region is characterized by significant migratory movements, including labor migration, displacement due to conflicts, and transit migration. Georgia shares borders with Russia, Türkiye, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, each with their own migration policies, which influence Georgia's approach to border management, security, and migration cooperation (Boka & Kandelaki, 2020).

In the context of the wider Eastern European region, Georgia's migration policies focus on balancing security concerns with economic development. The country has adopted a flexible visa policy, including visa-free regimes with the European Union and several neighboring states, to promote legal migration and facilitate travel for business, tourism, and community ties. These policies are designed to be mutually beneficial, supporting Georgia's economic growth and regional integration efforts (European Commission, 2019).

Additionally, Georgia faces challenges related to human trafficking and irregular migration, which are prevalent across the Caucasus and Eastern Europe. The country participates in regional frameworks aimed at combating trafficking, such as the **Black Sea Border Management Initiative** and **Regional Conference on Migration**. These platforms encourage information sharing, joint patrols, and harmonization of border security measures to address trafficking and irregular migration flows effectively (Boka & Kandelaki, 2020).

International Partnerships

Georgia's engagement with international organizations plays a critical role in shaping its migration policies and strengthening regional cooperation. The country maintains close cooperation with the **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**, which supports the development of refugee protection, asylum procedures, and integration programs. The partnership focuses on capacity-building, legal reform, and enhancing the recovery and social integration of internally displaced persons from conflict-affected regions (UNHCR, 2020).

Furthermore, Georgia collaborates with the **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** on migration governance, voluntary return programs, and border management modernization. IOM's activities aim to improve legal migration pathways, combat trafficking, and develop capacity within the Georgian migration authorities (IOM, 2021). The organization's technical and financial assistance has been vital in implementing reforms such as the Digital Migration Platform, which has streamlined visa and residence permit processing.

Georgia's partnership with the **European Union (EU)** is particularly prominent. Through the **Visa Liberalization Action Plan (VLAP)**, Georgia has committed to aligning its migration policies with EU standards on border management, readmission agreements, and anti-trafficking measures. This partnership underscores Georgia's strategic goal of closer integration with European institutions and future EU membership ambitions (European Commission, 2019).

Additionally, Georgia actively participates in **regional forums and multilateral initiatives**, including the **Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)** and the **South Caucasus Regional Security Platform**, which aim to foster cooperation on border security, counterterrorism, and migration management. These multilateral frameworks provide avenues for Georgia to share best practices, harmonize policies, and enhance regional stability (Boka & Kandelaki, 2020).

5. CHALLENGES IN MANAGING MIGRATION

Georgia's migration management system is confronted with a range of challenges that impact both migrants and the broader society. Addressing these challenges is crucial for developing effective

policies that promote the well-being of all individuals involved. Here are some of the key challenges:

- Irregular Migration - Many individuals attempt to enter or stay in the country without proper documentation, making complicating efforts to manage borders and enforce immigration laws. Irregular migrants may be more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, complicating human rights protection efforts and putting pressure on public services.
- Asylum and Refugee Management - The increasing number of asylum seekers and refugees presents challenges in processing claims efficiently while ensuring due process and the protection of rights. Delayed processing times and insufficient resources can lead to overcrowded reception centers and inadequate living conditions, straining resources and decreasing public support for asylum policies.
- Integration Issues - Integrating migrants, particularly refugees and asylum seekers, into Georgian society remains a complex task. Language barriers, cultural differences, and limited access to employment can hinder successful integration. Without effective integration policies, migrants may face social exclusion, leading to tensions with host communities and preventing them from contributing to the economy.
- Human Rights Concerns - Migrants, especially asylum seekers and irregular migrants, often face human rights abuses, including discrimination, exploitation, and limited access to justice. Protecting the rights of all migrants is essential, as violations can lead to social unrest and undermine Georgia's international commitments to human rights.
- Public Perception and Xenophobia - The public perception of migrants in Georgia can be mixed, with some segments of society expressing xenophobic sentiments or viewing migrants as economic competitors. Negative public perception can complicate efforts to create inclusive policies and programs. Media representation and political rhetoric can influence societal attitudes towards migrants and refugees, impacting their acceptance and integration.
- Integration Policies - While initiatives exist to support the integration of migrants into local communities, challenges remain in areas such as language acquisition, employment opportunities, and access to social services. Effective integration strategies are essential to fostering social cohesion and ensuring that migrants can contribute positively to society, yet limited resources and outreach can hinder these efforts.

6. POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS REFORMS IN MIGRATION POLICY

Despite the various progressive steps that Georgia has taken in the past 10 years, there are still some gaps in the legal frameworks, which in turn affects the country's migration policy. The mentioned challenges need to be overcome somehow, which is impossible without serious further developments, especially:

- **Improved asylum procedures** - Implementing faster and more efficient procedures for asylum applications to reduce waiting times and improve living conditions for asylum seekers. Strengthening the capacities of institutions responsible for processing asylum and making decisions through training and resource allocation.
- **Comprehensive integration programs** - Developing robust programs for language and professional education to equip migrants with the skills needed for labor market integration. Promoting initiatives that encourage interaction and understanding between migrants and local communities to foster social cohesion.
- **Labor market adaptation** - Conducting labor market analyses to identify sectors with labor shortages and creating pathways for qualified migrants to fill those gaps. Simplifying

visa processes and work permit procedures for foreign workers to attract talent while ensuring protection of workers' rights.

- **Strengthened human rights protections** - Reviewing and amending migration laws to align with international human rights standards, ensuring protection for all migrants. Establishing monitoring and reporting mechanisms to ensure transparency and accountability in the treatment of migrants.
- **Improved data collection and research** - Investing in better data collection systems to track migration trends, assess policy effectiveness, and inform future planning. Promoting research to understand the impact of migration on local communities and the economy.
- **Enhanced border management** - Modernizing border controls and improving cooperation with neighboring countries to address irregular migration and human trafficking. Using technology to improve the efficiency and security of border operations.
- **Return and reintegration policies** - Developing humane and efficient return policies for persons who do not qualify to remain, including support for voluntary return. Creating reintegration programs to help returned persons reintegrate into their countries of origin.
- **Public awareness and education** - Implementing public awareness campaigns to promote understanding and tolerance toward migrants and refugees. Working with media, civil society, and educational institutions to combat stereotypes and promote positive narratives about migration.
- **Regional and international cooperation** - Deepening cooperation with neighboring countries and international organizations to address shared challenges and share best practices. Participating in regional initiatives to develop harmonized approaches to migration management.
- **Economic integration of migrants** - Creating policies that facilitate the economic integration of migrants, including recognition of foreign qualifications, support for entrepreneurship, and access to financial services.

These reforms should be guided by the principles of human rights, non-discrimination, and sustainability, ensuring that Georgia's migration policy serves the interests of all stakeholders while addressing current challenges and preparing for future opportunities.

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