

**FINAL REPORT //**

**Policy Brief: The Russian invasion of Ukraine, analysing the refugees flows and possible implications for Cohesion Policy**

IRiE – Interregional Relations in Europe

Annex 24C // May 2022

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This document is an interim report.

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The final version of the report will be published as soon as approved.



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# 1 Introduction

In the early hours of February 24, for the first time since the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, one European country invaded another European country. However, it is worth remembering that this war did not start on February 24, 2022. At the European security conference in Munich 2007, the Russian president outlined his vision on a new security order in Europe, a vision of which the first step to materialize was taken by the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the self-proclaimed People's Republics of Luhansk and Donetsk by Russian separatists, backed by Russia later in 2014. Since then, a low-intensive war has been fought on the territory of the separatist regions in Eastern Ukraine. Prior to February 24, the refugee flows generated due to this were predominantly from one part of Ukraine to another. The brutality and indiscriminate violence against civilians in the wake of the invasion have made the refugee flows heading for the EU. The international community – led by the USA, the UK and the EU – have reacted in a decisive and coordinated manner, denouncing the Russian invasion of Ukraine and by imposing further economic sanctions on Russia, its economy and key individuals.

At the end of World War II, the Red Army pushed approximately seven million refugees westwards, and thereby creating the biggest refugee crisis Europe ever experienced. The last refugee camps in West-Germany closed in 1960. The refugee crisis in 2015 was far from that numerous – just about one million refugees. Many countries still struggle to recover from the impacts of that refugee crisis: social problems, high unemployment rates and massive failures to integrate the refugees into most Member States. At an EU level, the Dublin Regulation collapsed due to the 2015 refugee crisis. The Dublin Regulation is a European Union (EU) law that determines which EU Member State is responsible for the examination of an application for asylum, submitted by persons seeking international protection under the Geneva Convention and the EU Qualification Directive, within the European Union. The Dublin Regulation aims to determine rapidly the Member State responsible for an asylum claim and provides for the transfer of an asylum seeker to that Member State. The aftermath of the 2015 refugee crisis has been an infected political conflict on how to distribute the refugees, share the costs etc. Almost three months after Russia's military invasion of Ukraine, almost six million Ukrainians have left Ukraine as refugees. According to a UNHCR forecast for December 2022, 8.35 million people will have left Ukraine of which 3.4 m have resettled in Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary.

However disturbing Russia's invasion of Ukraine is it is important to remember that far from all Russians support the regime, nor the invasion. Over the last 15 years, millions of young, well-educated Russians have left the country. During this time, the repression on oppositional and intellectuals have increased and is back at Soviet Union levels. Since the Russian invasion on February 24, 2022, unconfirmed numbers of 200-300,000 Russians have left Russia. Most of them are young and well-educated, and the economic sanctions imposed on Russia offers little future for them. The land borders to Finland and Georgia are still open, otherwise a charter trip (with no intention to use the return ticket) to Turkey or Egypt offers an exit from the country.

Parallel to the increased political repression in Russia, a similar development has been ongoing in Belarus. Those who have had the opportunity to leave have done so, and those who have the chance to leave will do so in the future.<sup>1</sup>

This policy brief discusses the foreseeable policy impacts on the Cohesion Policy and on the regions in the EU related to the refugee flows of the Russian war on Ukraine. To construct potential policy impacts of the refugee flows related to the Russian war on Ukraine, four Cases have been implemented.<sup>1</sup>

**Case A** (low damage, short war). The conflict ends soon. Destruction follows in similar intensity to that recorded so far (15 of May 2022). Only part of the country is affected (8 regions). Reconstruction process begins with support from Western countries. As a result, a small percentage of Ukrainians decide to go further than their country of first contact. A large proportion returns to Ukraine. Most of the remainder stay in neighbouring EU countries (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania). The percentage of those leaving outside Europe is also small (ESPON Space).

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed description and technical information, see Annex 24D to the ESPON IRIE Final Report.

Migration from Russia and Belarus stops. New sanctions are not imposed. Nevertheless, the scale of returns is small. There is no mobilization for the army in these countries. First contact countries are not places of concentration of migrants from Russia and Belarus. The percentage of Russians leaving outside ESPON space is much higher than Ukrainians.

**Case B** (low damage, long war). The conflict lasts a long time, it is frozen. Destruction follows in similar intensity to that recorded so far. They cover only part of the country. The large-scale reconstruction process cannot begin since foreign funds cannot be engaged until war is completely extinguished, but non-impacted regions regain economic activity. As a result, more Ukrainians decide to go further than the country of first contact. Only some return to Ukraine. Many others remain in neighbouring EU countries (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania). The percentage of those leaving outside Europe is increasing (ESPON Space). Some people will come to the EU for economic reasons only. This may be seasonal work. Those who do not find a job will return or look for a job outside ESPON Space.

Migrations from Russia and Belarus continue. New sanctions are imposed on these countries. The scale of returns is small. Mobilization for the army in these countries begins. First contact countries are not places of concentration of migrants from Russia and Belarus. The percentage of Russians leaving outside ESPON space is much higher than that of Ukrainians.

**Case C** (major destruction, short war). The conflict ends soon. War impact has high intensity, but it does not cumulate over time. Territorial extent is wide, but only some regions suffer total economic failure. The process of reconstruction begins with the support of Western countries, but the cost is enormous. As a result, some Ukrainians return to their own country and some stay in neighbouring EU countries (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania). There is also a small percentage going outside Europe (ESPON Space). The rapid nature of the scenario should be considered, in particular the fact that people from the border and neighboring regions will benefit. Currently, there are also internally displaced people, the number of which cannot be estimated accurately (7.7 million people in Ukraine as a whole, according to the IOM - about 3 million in the western regions). So, if to take into account mentioned in general outlines assumption that refugees make up about 30% of the affected region, this percentage of Vinnytsia, Volyn, Zakarpattia, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, Rivne, Ternopil, Khmelnytsky, Chernivtsi regions and the number of internally displaced people in Western Ukraine, we get about 4.5 million refugees who are able to cross the border in a month or more.

Migrations from Russia and Belarus continue. New sanctions are not imposed, but the internal situation remains tense. However, there is no mobilization for the military in these countries. The scale of returns is small. First Nations are not places of concentration of migrants from Russia and Belarus. The percentage of Russians leaving outside ESPON space is much higher than Ukrainians.

**Case D** (major destruction, long war). The conflict lasts a long time. High intensity of war and high cumulation brings some towns and regions to collapse and rest of the country to economic failure. The reconstruction process cannot begin. The number of refugees will increase, and at the same time, first-line countries will no longer be able to accommodate the next waves of migrants. As a result, more Ukrainians go further than the country of first contact. Almost no one is returning to Ukraine. For this case, it can be assumed that approximately 30% of the population of regions that previously have not been significantly affected and about 50% of internally displaced people will become refugees. Additional migration from previously affected regions will also account for a certain share. In this case, there are new refugees who will remain in ESPON Space and beyond (diaspora) for a long time. The total number of refugees will be higher than 10 million. The percentage of those leaving outside Europe is increasing (ESPON Space).

Migrations from Russia and Belarus continue. New sanctions are imposed on these countries. The scale of returns is small. Mobilization for the army in these countries begins. First contact countries are not places of concentration of migrants from Russia and Belarus. The percentage of Russians leaving outside ESPON space is much higher than for Ukrainians.

## 2 The policy context

The difference in the policy contexts between the 2022 and the 2015 refugee crises is profound. When the refugees in 2015 walked through Europe, the Member States responded by imposing internal border controls to stop the inflow of refugees to their country. Today, the Ukrainian refugees are offered transport and help to a much higher extent than in 2015. While the refugee flows from Ukraine are dominated by women, children and elderly as the men fight and die for their country, the 2015 refugee flow was dominated by young, single men below 35 years of age.

Among the countries of first contact, Poland should be singled out; Poland has already received more than 3 million refugees, providing accommodation and social support to many of them. In Poland and the other countries receiving Ukrainian refugees display significant intra-regional disparities in the refugee's localization, with a significant attraction to large cities and centres of Ukrainian diaspora localization. The Ukrainian refugee flow is characterized by a high share of women and children, which might have a further impact on the EU labour market and social infrastructure. Intentions to continue staying in the EU are determined both by the current situation in Ukraine and by opportunities for adaptation and employment in the EU.

The liberation of territory occupied by Russian troops and the shift in hostilities, from north to east and south of Ukraine, displays an indication and willingness to return. However, the number of refugees returning to Ukraine is still small. Although the war is not mild, this situation is largely in line with Case A (short and mild), which also considers the small increase in the number of Belarusian and Russian migrants due to sanctions and political oppression. The main recipients of migrants in this case are the countries of first contact (Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania), with a prominent role of Germany and the Czech Republic.

The cases B-D (B long and mild, C short and hard, D long and hard) envisage a more significant increase in the flow of refugees, as well as an increase in their share in other EU countries, as well as outside the ESPON space. The consequences of cases C and D, leading to more migration waves with millions of refugees from Ukraine, as well as a significantly larger number of Russian and Belarusian migrants, may be particularly difficult. Responding to such challenges will require extremely effective measures both at EU level and in individual countries, among which first-contact countries will be particularly vulnerable.

Although most EU countries welcome the Ukrainian refugees, the friendliness can turn into hostility if the war becomes long lasting. Especially those regions in the EU that accommodate a huge number of refugees will experience challenges. Many of the regions accommodating refugees still struggle with social problems, high unemployment rates and massive failures to integrate the refugees from the 2015 refugee wave. Unless these challenges are solved, the refugees can destabilize a community socially and the attitude in the host society would become less immigrant friendly.

During the 2015 refugee crisis some Member States refused to host any refugees; today the very same countries are the ones hosting most Ukrainian refugees. In 2015, the refugees caused significant political quarrelling between the Member States. In the modern hybrid warfare, refugees are used as a weapon by the country creating the refugee flows. This hybrid warfare aims at destabilizing the receiving country by inflicting huge logistic, organizational and financial challenges. In many ways, EU is ill-prepared for this kind of destabilization actions. Turkey used this weapon in 2015 when its application for EU membership was put on halt, and Belarus tried to revenge the sanctions in 2021. The latter attempt was met by unity from the Member States. Creating the biggest refugee flow to Europe since the World War II would put a significant pressure on the EU and its Member States. If the EU reacts the same way as in the wake of the 2015 refugee crises, political quarrelling and disagreement is to be expected. The brutality and indiscriminate violence targeting civilians in Ukraine aims at creating a refugee flow to the EU, a refugee flow which aims to destabilize the EU and keep the Member States busy with internal conflicts.

In the worst-case scenario, up to 12 million refugees will leave Ukraine, Russia and Belorussia (see tables 2.1-2.3). About 10.4 million are Ukrainians. Such refugee flow will be about 10 times higher than the 2015 refugee crisis, which made the Dublin regulation collapse and re-bordered the EU. No doubt, such enormous refugee flow will put an enormous pressure politically on the EU and its Member States. To understand the magnitude of the policy impact such refugee flow will have, we first need to understand that this refugee flow is manufactured and that it is a part of the Russian war on Ukraine, but also on the Western civilization. The 2015 refugee flow was about real politics and not about war between civilizations.

**Table 2.1: Scenario assumptions for Ukrainians.**

	War damage	Length of war	Number of refugees	Share in the first contact country	Share migrating outside the ES-PON space	Comments
<b>Case A</b>	soft	short	3 500 000	88	10	Total number similar to present outmigration, taking into account returns to Ukraine (27%-30%)
<b>Case B</b>	soft	long	4 500 000	70	20	Case A + 1000000 of newcomers (internally displaced who decided to move abroad or escaped from the occupied territories)
<b>Case C</b>	hard	short	7 000 000	75	10	The second wave, first of all from the new regions
<b>Case D</b>	hard	long	10 500 000	55	20	Two assumptions. Syrian scenario (30% of population became refugees) and extrapolation from the highly affected Ukrainian regions (now the number of refugees is about 20-30% of such regions population).

**Table 2.2: Scenario assumptions for Belarussians.**

	War damage	Length of war	Number of refugees	Share in the first contact country	Share migrating outside the ES-PON space	Comments
<b>Case A</b>	soft	short	50 000	n/a	10	Status quo
<b>Case B</b>	soft	long	150 000	n/a	20	Sanctions consequences become more visible
<b>Case C</b>	hard	short	50 000	n/a	10	Even in case of more tough sanctions there are no short-term consequences
<b>Case D</b>	hard	long	200 000	n/a	20	More tough sanctions, more visible consequence, probable even new protests

**Table 2.3: Scenario assumptions for Russians.**

	War damage	Length of war	Number of refugees	Share in the first contact country	Share migrating outside the ES-PON space	Comments
<b>Case A</b>	soft	short	200 000	n/a	20	Status quo, but EU is not the end destination.
<b>Case B</b>	soft	long	500 000	n/a	30	Sanctions consequences become more visible and push people to move abroad
<b>Case C</b>	hard	short	300 000	n/a	20	Even in case of more tough sanctions there are no short-term consequences. However, more active mobilization will matter.
<b>Case D</b>	hard	long	1 000 000	n/a	30	More tough sanctions, more visible consequence, total mobilization

Estimates of the duration of the war and the degree of escalation differ significantly, given e.g., different assumption on the capacity of the Ukrainian and Russian armies', the likelihood of using nuclear and chemical weapons, the behavior of political elites, and how West's energy dependence on Russia is handled. The outcome of these aspects will pose a huge impact on the number of refugees related to Russia's war on Ukraine. Most of these aspects were completely missing in the policy context of the 2015 refugee flow.

## 3 Border traffic on a first contact country: the Polish case

### 3.1 Polish-Ukrainian border

Since independence in 1991, migration has been a common phenomenon for Ukrainians. Until 2014, this was mainly labor migration and the labour leaving Ukraine was generally low-skilled. Several educational reforms in Ukraine have gradually increased the educational attainment level among its population. Today it is highly skilled persons leaving Ukraine. The reasons for such migration are both economic and the possibility of access to higher standards of quality of life. About half of the stays abroad were short-term, and the most attractive destinations in the EU remained Poland, Italy, the Czech Republic, Germany, Spain, Hungary and Portugal. After 2014, visa liberalization and Russian aggression (annexation of Crimea and occupation of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts) were among the factors intensifying migrations. Pendular migrations remained particularly common to Poland.

Closing of the Polish-Ukrainian border due to the COVID-19 pandemics brought a more drastic drop of the cross-border traffic than this occurred on the Polish-Belarusian border (Polish-Belarusian segment of the border having the transit character). In 2019 the weekly average of the border traffic was at 418 000 crossings (both directions), while in 2020 it dropped to 150 400. During the year 2021 a systematic increase of the cross-border traffic was observed, up to 167 900 crossings a week. This traffic was generated primarily by the citizens of Ukraine. In the intensity of the traffic, one observes two Christmas-New Year peaks (2020 and 2022, the second one decidedly higher than a year before), the Easter peak, and the fluctuations due to seasonal jobs. The traffic of persons of other nationalities is marginal, when compared to that of the Ukrainians.

The upward tendency was also visible in the monthly setting, associated with the post-pandemic renewal of the cross-border traffic (thus, e.g., in January 2022 there were 433 600 inward crossings of the citizens of Ukraine, while in the analogous period of the preceding year this number was at less than 267 000). The increase of this number in February of 2022 (up to 669 000) occurred already in the context of the war against Ukraine.

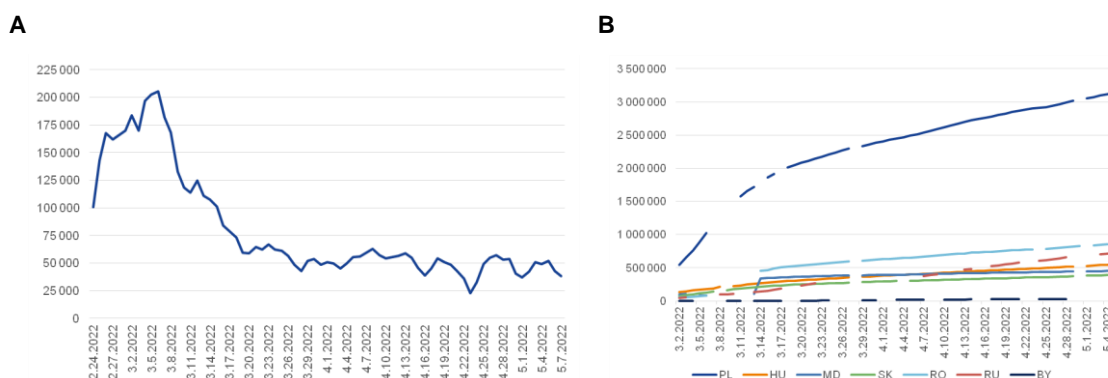
Following the Russian aggression against Ukraine a jump-like increase of the inflow of Ukrainian citizens was observed. At the peak moment (10<sup>th</sup> week of the year) more than 720 000 Ukrainian citizens crossed the Polish-Ukrainian border. The war also made other nationalities leaving Ukraine. Since the beginning of January until February 23<sup>rd</sup> the daily average inflow of Ukrainians was at 14 500 persons, while of persons of other nationalities (Poles excluded) – 577 persons per day. Then, in the period from February 24<sup>th</sup> to March 5<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup> the daily average inflow of Ukrainians was 62 900 persons, while that of citizens of other countries – 3 006. The biggest shares among the latter were constituted by the citizens of Germany, Russia and Uzbekistan (see Table 4.1). In January and February 2022, the number of border crossings to Poland from Ukraine was lower than for the same period for the years before.

**Table 3.1: Top 10 of the nationalities crossing the Polish-Ukrainian border (arrivals).**

Citizenship	January 2019	February 2019	March 2019	January 2022	February 2022	March 2022
Ukraine	774,968	704,701	795,109	433,609	669,042	1,944,111
Germany	3,882	1,503	1,985	3,483	2,218	6,172
Russia	687	445	570	465	999	5,483
Uzbekistan	19	19	13	31	2,100	5,299
USA	363	328	404	41	1,594	4,549
India	13	10	22	6	1,713	4,370
Georgia	249	224	264	275	815	3,568
Azerbaijan	72	59	77	33	322	3,467
U.K.	282	115	143	143	571	3,062
Vietnam	4	5	9	5	55	2,961

Source: Annex 24D to the ESPON IRiE Final Report

**Table 3.2: Border crossings at the Polish-Ukrainian border, A) Daily border crossings, B) Cumulated number of border crossings.**



Source: Annex 24D to the ESPON IRIE Final Report

The dynamics of refugee flows from Ukraine have been very high since the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. From the first days, the number of people fleeing the war exceeded 100 thousand, and at its peak the borders of Ukraine were crossed by more than 200 thousand people per day. After 16th of March the movement stabilised at the level of about 50 thousand persons per day (Fig. 4.1A). While the dynamics of flows for individual border sections is similar, it differs in absolute values. Definitely, the highest number of persons crossed the border with Poland (almost 4 times more than with the next largest country, i.e. Romania), while since mid-April a higher rate of increase in border traffic of Ukrainians can be observed on the border with Russia (Fig. 4.1B).

### 3.2 Polish-Belarusian border

The instant of closing of the Polish-Belarusian border due to the COVID-19 pandemics marks a distinct point of breakdown in the cross-border traffic. Two years later the magnitude of the cross-border traffic is still far from the intensities observed before the pandemics. Thus, in 2021 the weekly average of the two-way traffic was at 41 900 border crossings, while in 2019 it amounted to 169 500 crossings. The structure according to nationalities is clearly dominated by Belarusians. Yet, since the beginning of the pandemics one can observe a relatively slow increase of the border crossings by Belarusians. Two distinct peaks of the cross-border traffic can be seen, that is – during the Christmas-New Year periods of 2020/2021 and 2021/2022, along with smallish fluctuations of the traffic intensity in the Easter time and at the beginning of November (All Saints Day in Poland and the anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution in Belarus and the associated holidays). There is also a visible temporary increase of the arrivals of Belarusians after the Russian aggression against Ukraine, with simultaneous drop in the outward movements. As regards the remaining nationalities a very limited scale of the cross-border traffic can be noticed. During the summer vacationing period of 2021 there was a small increase in the cross-border traffic of Poles, along with small fluctuations in the traffic of the remaining nationalities in the second half of 2021, this being linked with the migration-related crisis at the boundary of Belarus with the European Union (concerning, in a particular manner, the Polish-Belarusian border).

When analyzing the cross-border traffic on the monthly scale according to nationalities one can observe a small increase of the arrivals of Belarusians during the first three months of 2022 in comparison with the analogous period in 2021. Regarding the nationality-wise structure there has been a perceptible inflow of Ukrainians across the Polish-Belarusian border in March 2022, that is – following the Russian aggression. One can also notice the marginal share of Russians in the cross-border traffic. In March 2022 the number of Ukrainians, arriving through the Polish-Belarusian border, increased eight times with respect to January 2022. In the analogous period there has been a drop by almost 40% of the number of border crossings by the citizens of Russia.

### 3.3 Polish-Russian border

Traffic across the Polish-Russian border is decidedly the smallest among the here considered border segments. At this particular segment of the border fluctuations of traffic intensity result, first of all, from the economic conditions, differences in the currency exchange rates and differences in the prices of various

goods and services. These traffic variations are to an extent also a derivative of the quality of the bilateral relations. Poles take mainly advantage of the lower prices of fuels on the Russian side, while Russians are attracted by the more diversified assortment of goods, offered on the Polish side, ranging from food up to construction materials. Besides, location of the Kaliningrad district causes that Russians have been frequently taking advantage of the tourist or entertainment offer of the Polish side.

In terms of temporal profile there is distinct concentration of traffic of the citizens of Russia in connection with the Christmas-New Year season, both in 2019 and in 2020, connected with shopping. The same peaks occur also for the persons, which are included in the category of "Other foreigners". On the other hand, in the case of Poles, there is a distinct decrease of interest in travelling to the Kaliningrad district immediately before Christmas and New Year season.

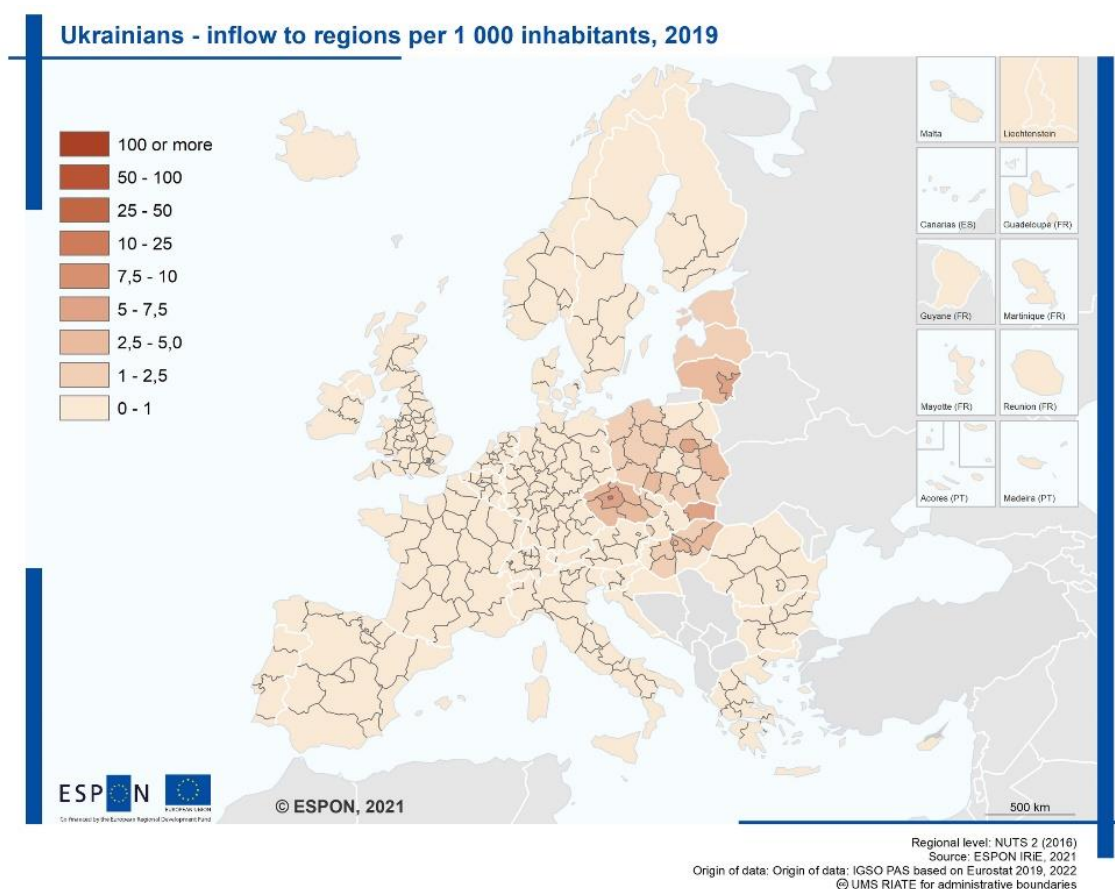
The scale of cross-border traffic distinctly dropped after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is most clearly seen in the case of the traffic of Poles, who cannot, until now, enter the territory of Russia (Russia has still not brought back the cross-border traffic on the general principles, i.e. those from before the pandemics). Currently, only very few categories of persons can enter the territory of Russia from the Polish side. In 2019 the weekly average of the border traffic was at 66 700 crossings (both directions), while in 2021 it dropped to 4 500. There has been a slight increase in the number of border crossings at the turn of the year 2022, but it concerned uniquely the citizens of Russia and other foreigners, which can be attributed, of course, to the holiday shopping. After the Russian aggression against Ukraine the traffic changed significantly. There has been a decidedly higher inflow of the citizens of Ukraine than before the aggression: while in February of 2022 only 193 arrivals have been registered, in March 2022 already 2 446. One observes also a dramatic drop in the arrivals of Russians to Poland. In the first quarter of 2019, that is – yet before the COVID-19 pandemics, the average number of arrivals of Russians was at 75 200 per month, while in the analogous period of 2022 it was at mere 6 100.

## 4 Pan-European distribution of refugees

### 4.1 Migration flows in the past

Before the Russian war on Ukraine, the number of Ukrainians per 1000 inhabitants in the regions was almost exclusively allocated in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Despite the highest absolute values, immigration to Poland was relatively less intensive than to the Czech Republic and Lithuania. The highest values of the indicator (at the level of 0.5% of the population) were recorded in three capital cities: Prague, Warsaw and Vilnius. A similarly high indicator was characteristic for eastern Slovakia. Increased values were also noted throughout Lithuania and in Hungarian regions, including Budapest. In Poland, apart from Warsaw, a relatively higher concentration took place in the Lublin region.

**Figure 4.1: Inflow of migrants from Ukraine per 1000 inhabitants by region, 2019**



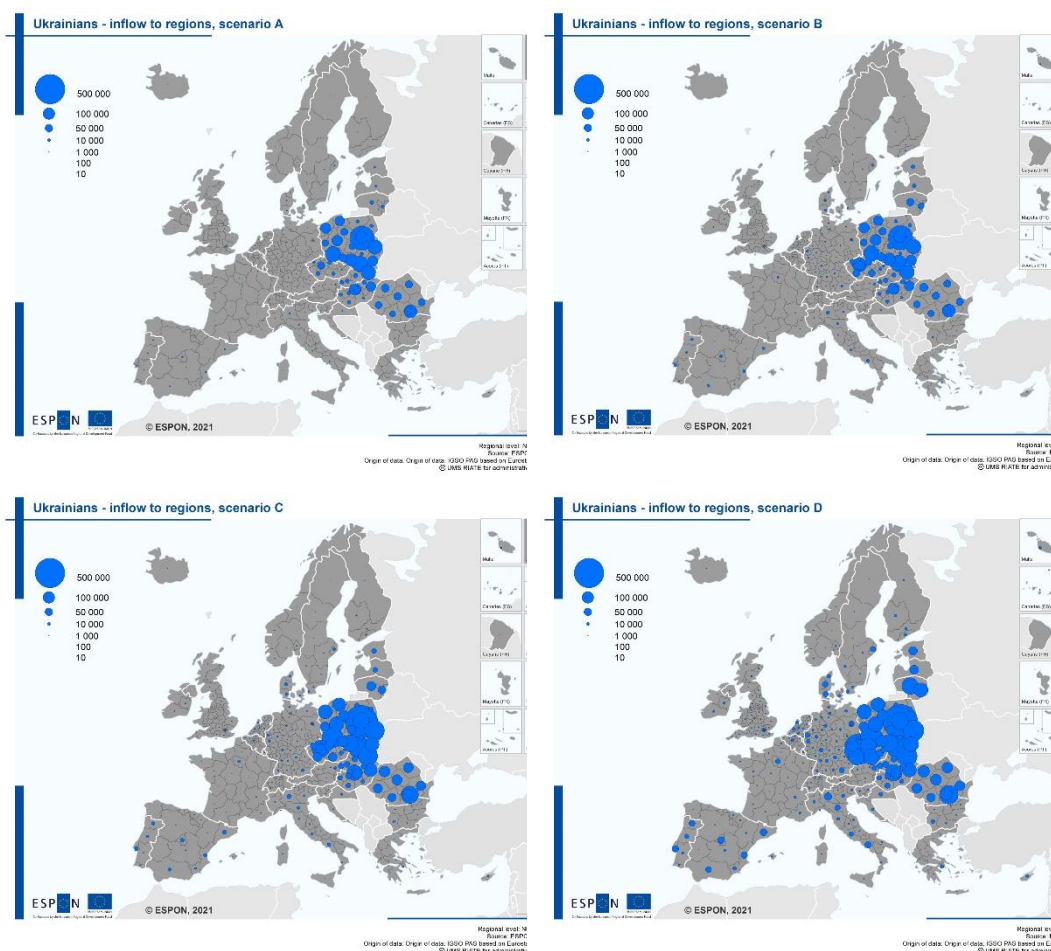
The territorial distribution of migrants from Russia in 2019 is quite different from the Ukrainians. Russian emigration is primarily directed to Western European countries (mainly Germany, 13.3 thousand in 2019), although the Czech Republic also occupies a high position (8.5 thousand). Regionally, Russian migration is concentrated mainly in metropolitan areas (Prague, London, Paris, Barcelona, Berlin) and regions attractive to tourists (Andalucía, Cataluña, Comunidad Valenciana in Spain). From the countries directly neighbouring Russia, the most significant in the migration inflow is Finland (4.3 thousand, of which 1.9 thousand people in the Helsinki-Uusimaa region) and the Baltic countries (Estonia - 1.5 thousand, Latvia - 1.3 thousand, Lithuania 1.2 thousand).

In turn, the Belarussian migration before Russia's war on Ukraine predominantly concentrated to countries neighbouring Belorussia or close by: Poland, Lithuania and Czech Republic. Also major cities and capitals in Western Europe host many Belarussian migrants. However, the migration flows from Belorussia were small compared to the Russian migration flows.

## 4.2 Four cases of future refugee flows

The inflow of refugees from Ukraine in case A (low damage, short war) will concern mainly the so-called first contact countries, i.e., neighbouring countries (Fig. 4.2). The inflow will be concentrated in Poland (1.567 million) and its surrounding regions. The largest number of persons will remain in the Warsaw-Capital region (348.1 thousand). A large inflow will also concern two regions (Małopolskie - 171.6 thousand, Dolnośląskie - 161.0 thousand), which are characterised by dynamic economic development and an already substantial number of migrants from Ukraine, who arrived before the outbreak of war in Ukraine. Moreover, the Lublin Voivodeship, bordering to Ukraine, will see a significant inflow (143.3 thousand), much higher than the Podkarpacie Voivodeship, which also borders with Ukraine but is treated more as a transit region. There is a reluctance of Ukrainian citizens to settle near territories belonging to the aggressor country and its ally (Belarus). In the case of Poland, the inflow of Ukrainian nationals is determined primarily from the network of existing migration ties, geographical, cultural and linguistic proximity. The large labour market is also important. More than 428.9 thousand Ukrainian citizens fleeing the war will arrive in Romania. In the regional layout, the dominance of Bucharest is marked (118.3 thousand) with a relatively even distribution in the other regions.

Figure 4.2: Inflow of refugees from Ukraine by region, cases A-D



Case A envisages more than 279,000 Ukrainian citizens arriving in Hungary, mainly in Budapest (98,300) and the region neighbouring Ukraine (Észak-Alföld, 73,200). For Slovakia, the number is estimated at 196.1 thousand, the vast majority of whom will remain in the Východné Slovensko region (141.2 thousand, or 72% of the total inflow) neighbouring Ukraine. In the remaining ESPON space countries the inflow of Ukrainians will be relatively small (303.3 thousand people in total). In these countries, the largest inflow will concern the Czech Republic (131.4 thousand), primarily Prague and its surroundings (Střední Čechy; total 70.4 thousand persons), and Lithuania (28.9 thousand).

In Case B (low damage, long war) the territorial distribution of inflows, both at national and regional level, will not change much. The main streams will still go to the first contact countries, above all to Poland (1.603 million persons). However, this inflow is slightly higher than in Case A. Regions with the highest values of flows will experience even higher streams (increase by 2-3% compared to Case A). Western European countries will be more affected by the inflow of people from Ukraine, although this will not yet be clearly visible regionally. The total number of persons outside the first contact countries will increase significantly to 866,400 persons. This may be due to the first signs of saturation of accommodation facilities in the first-contact countries and refugee reception capacities. Hence, refugees will head to other countries to a greater extent. However, geographical proximity and migration networks will continue to play a decisive role.

In Case C (major destruction, short war), severe war damage will result in an even greater outflow of refugees from Ukraine, both from war and non-war areas. The inflow of Ukrainian citizens to the first contact countries will be even higher, as well as to other countries, which will record approx. The inflow of Ukrainian citizens to first contact countries will be even higher, as well as to other countries, which will experience an increase of about 45% compared to case B. In some Western European countries there will be noticeable concentrations of people coming from Ukraine (in Italy: Lombardy - 17.8 thousand, Campania - 14.0 thousand; in Spain: Cataluña - 15.6 thousand, Comunidad de Madrid - 15.5 thousand, Comunidad Valenciana - 14.4 thousand, Andalucía - 11.5 thousand; in Portugal: Área Metropolitana de Lisboa - 14.3 thousand, Norte - 12.1 thousand; in Denmark: Midtjylland - 11.9 thousand). In addition, Lithuania, which is small in population, will experience a relatively large influx of people from Ukraine (120.4 thousand).

Case D (major destruction, long war) assumes the most refugees from Ukraine. Apart from the first contact countries, experiencing an inflow exceeding 4.6 million people (Poland - 2.9 million, Romania - 804.1 thousand, Hungary - 523.4 thousand, Slovakia - 367.6 thousand), the regions of other ESPON space countries will also be affected to the greatest extent (a total of 3.4 million people). The already mentioned case C will be joined by regions of Western European countries: in Italy - Emilia-Romagna (29.1 thousand) and Lazio (20.5 thousand), in Portugal - Centro (20.8 thousand), in Sweden - Stockholm (26.9 thousand), in Germany - Berlin (28.3 thousand), Oberbayern (25.8 thousand) and Düsseldorf (24.6 thousand), in France - Île de France (23.1 thousand). The inflow to the Baltic States will also significantly increase, especially to Lithuanian regions (Sostinės regionas - 138.8 thousand, Vidurio ir vakaru Lietuvos regionas - 186.2 thousand).

Regardless of the length and scale of the conflict, there will certainly be a process of family reunification once military action ceases. In the case of scenarios C and D, this may not mean returns, but migration of men to families residing in Europe. This would be another wave of migration that is difficult to estimate.

In relation to the population of the regions in case A<sup>2</sup>, very high levels of refugees from Ukraine are recorded in Central and Eastern Europe. In some regions of Poland (including Warsaw), Slovakia and Hungary, as well as in Bucharest, the level is about 10 per cent. These values correspond to the current (May 2022) actual level of migration inflow. Taking into account the structure of migration (dominated by women and children) such a level can be treated as a challenge for the labour market and even more so for the proper functioning of public services. In some regions of Poland, already in April, the number of refugees from Ukraine aged 0-18 was recorded at the level of 15% of the analogous age group in the Polish population. This is the result of an unbalanced demographic pyramid in Poland. Hence, child-care and school education seem to be one of the main dimensions which may limit further concentration of refugees in certain regions.

In the case of cases B and C, high inflows in relation to population already spill over practically the whole of Poland, Romania, the Czech Republic, Hungary and the Baltic states. Still the highest concentration of refugees takes place in metropolitan areas, especially in capitals. In other European countries, the relative level of inflows remains low. In Western Europe, the capital cities are not places of concentration of refugees to the extent observed in Central and Eastern Europe.

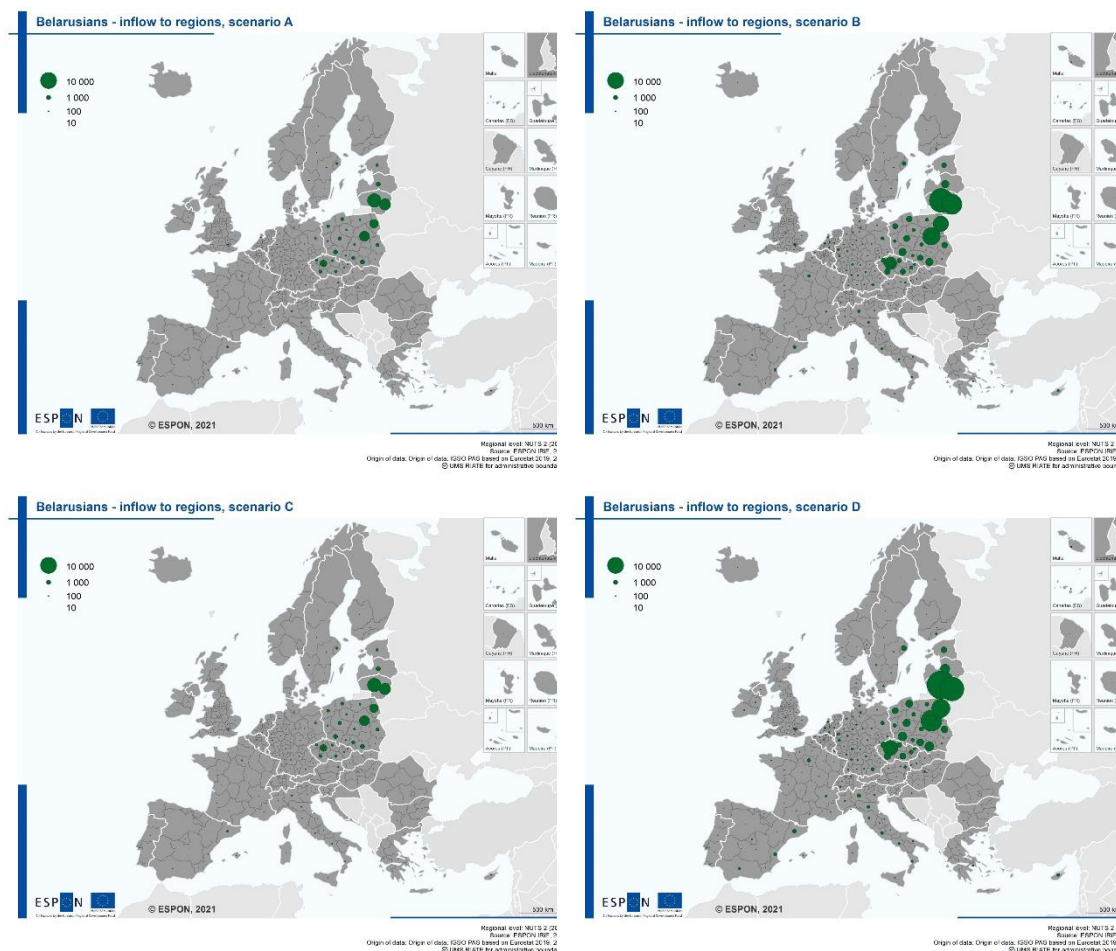
In Case D. Practically the entire territories of Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia record population growth of ca 10 per cent as a result of the refugee inflow. In Western Europe the figures are lower, but also in some regions they exceed 1% of the previous population (Portugal, Denmark and Stockholm). Internal differentiation is seen in Germany and Spain (concentration on the east coast). In France, Paris has the highest concentration of refugees.

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed description and technical information, see Annex 24D to the ESPON IRIE Final Report.

The development of the war in Ukraine may also influence the migration situation in Belarus, but at a lower scale. In all four cases, the territorial distribution of the inflow of migrants from Belarus will remain basically unchanged. Belarusians show much lower territorial mobility than Ukrainians, so the largest concentrations will be located in neighbouring countries (Poland and Lithuania) and the Czech Republic. In both cases A and C, the inflow of migrants from Belarus will be very similar, due to the short-term nature of the war. In both cases there are several dominant regions, i.e., Vidurio ir vakaru Lietuvos regionas (7.3 thousand) and Sostinės regionas (5.4 thousand) in Lithuania, capital Warsaw (4.3 thousand) and Podlaskie (3.4 thousand) in Poland and Praha (2.4 thousand) in the Czech Republic. The remaining ESPON space countries will experience a total influx of less than 10,000 Belarusian citizens.

**Figure 4.3: Migration inflows from Belarus by region, cases A-D**



In case B, a prolonged war may cause an increased migration outflow. The main directions remain unchanged, but these regions will face an inflow more than twice as large (in extreme cases up to around 20 thousand - Vidurio ir vakaru Lietuvos regionas). Outside Poland, Lithuania and the Czech Republic over 26 thousand people will emigrate from Belarus, mainly to Germany (6.5 thousand), Italy (3.4 thousand), Great Britain (2.3 thousand) and Spain (2.2 thousand). However, by region, this inflow will be hardly visible.

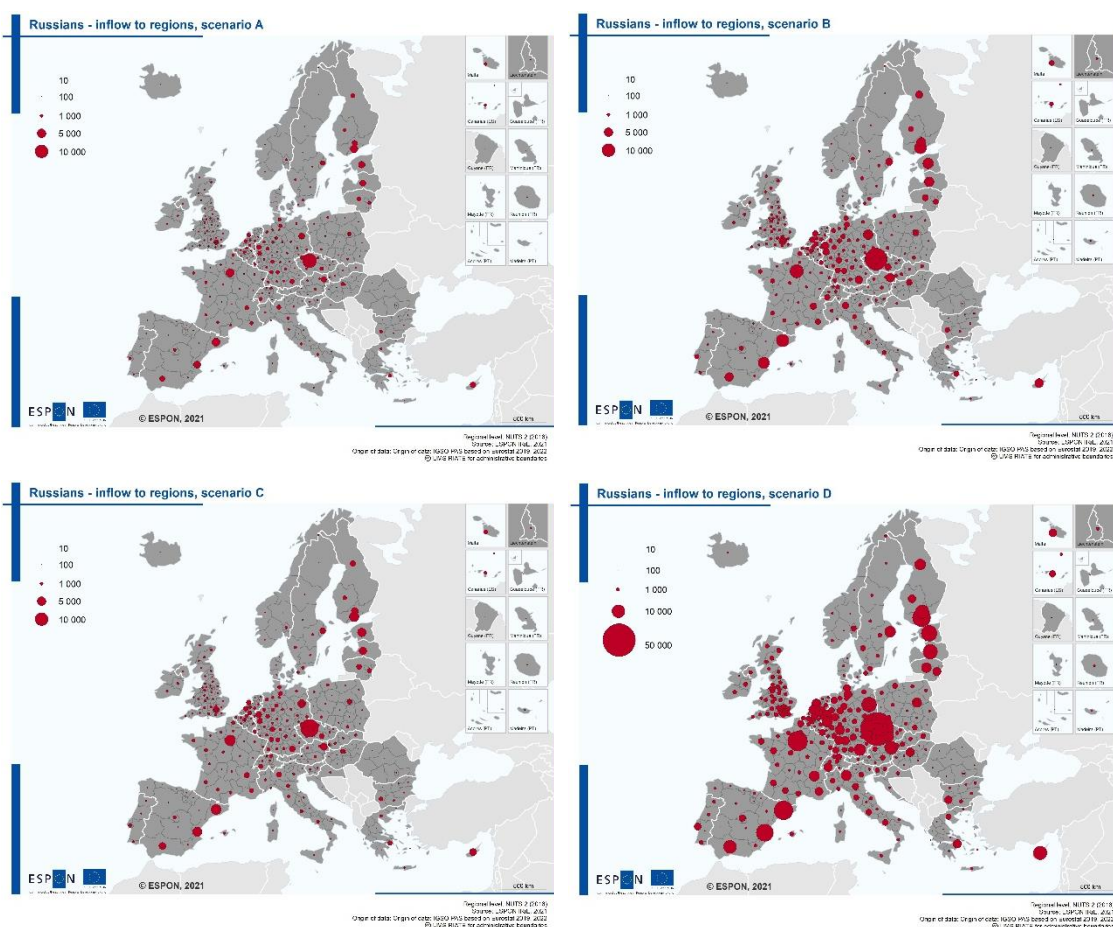
In case D (major destruction, long war), which assumes the largest scale of outflow from Belarus, apart from the main inflow regions, there will be other regions with relatively large numbers of migrants from Belarus. These will be: Cataluña (1.0 thousand), Stockholm (1.3 thousand), Berlin (0.8 thousand), Lombardy (0.8 thousand), Île de France (0.8 thousand). In addition, there will be relatively large concentrations in Latvia (3.8 thousand) and Estonia (1.8 thousand).

The war in Ukraine has greater migration consequences for Russia than for Belarus. Since the invasion, an outflow of Russian citizens is observed, mainly to Finland. The territorial distribution of the migration from Russia is different than for Ukrainians and Belarusians. It is concentrated in Western European countries.

In case A, this inflow is mainly concentrated in Germany (28.7 thousand), the Czech Republic (18.4 thousand) and the United Kingdom (14.7 thousand). In contrast, several major regions of inflow from Russia stand out in the regional setting: Praha in the Czech Republic (11.5 thousand), Île de France in France (4.8 thousand), Cataluña (4.3 thousand) and Comunidad Valenciana (3.7 thousand) in Spain, Helsinki-Uusimaa (4.0 thousand) in Finland. Thus, we are dealing with migration to metropolitan areas or to European regions attractive to tourists. The regions of Central European countries participate in this inflow to a small extent. It is also worth noting the migration inflow to the geographically distant Cyprus, which is treated by many Russians as a so-called tax haven.

The magnitude of migration inflows in case C differs little from case A. The territorial picture of migration inflows has therefore changed little. The additional migration inflow (compared to case A) has been "absorbed" by the already mentioned metropolises and tourist regions. However, it is worth noting the existing networks between the Baltic States and Russia, which bring ca 13,000 migrants from Russia (in case C).

**Figure 4.4: Migration flows from Russia by region, cases A-D**



In case of a prolonged war (case B), migration streams from Russia may increase. This will be reflected in the migration inflows to ESPON space on a regional basis. The regions mentioned in case A with the highest number of migrants from Russia will be joined by Berlin (6.4 thousand), Oberbayern (4.2 thousand) and Düsseldorf (4.2 thousand) in Germany, Etelä-Suomi (5.4 thousand) in Finland, Wien (5.0 thousand) in Austria, Stockholm (3.9 thousand) in Sweden, Lombardy (3.5 thousand) in Italy, among others.

In case D (major destruction, long war) the largest migration outflow from Russia is predicted. However, even with such a large scale of migration inflow, regions in Central European countries (apart from the Czech Republic), e.g. Warsaw capital city - 6.1 thousand, Budapest - 5.0 thousand, and Prague (50.6 thousand), Île de France (21.0 thousand), Cataluña (19.0 thousand), Helsinki-Uusimaa (17.7 thousand), Comunidad Valenciana (16.3 thousand) and Berlin (12.6 thousand) will be the most dominant in this inflow. There will also be large inflows to Estonia (14 300), Latvia (12 500) and Cyprus (10 800).

## 5 Policy challenges

Previous refugee shocks have taught us important lessons. First since 2005 in the Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla (the only European Union land border with Africa), then during the Libyan crisis that started in 2011 and mainly affected Italy, and later during the 2015 refugee crisis when Italy and Greece were the first contact countries. In all those cases, the affected countries wanted to build some sort of refugee redistribution system to share the burden of receiving a high number of refugees during a relatively short period of time. For one reason or another, this option was never developed. In the last case, the Visegrad countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) emphatically opposed this suggestion. The Ukrainian refugee crisis has already generated far higher numbers of refugees than the one in 2015. There is an imminent need for a policy change regarding refugee reception also for these countries; that a few EU Member States should carry all the burden has become unrealistic, also to these countries. As policymaking in the EU is a slow process, a quick policy response to alleviate and mitigate the situation for the countries receiving the most refugees right now can materialize through bi- or multilateral agreements between EU Member States. Asylum and Migration Integration Fund (AMIF) can also provide help from the EU. In case A, the one with little mass destruction of infrastructure or housing nor a huge number of casualties it may be possible to deal with the refugees, although they may be concentrated to a few countries. Complemented by a re-allocation mechanism from e.g., Poland to other EU Member States, and support from AMIF, the situation should be possible to deal with. It must be noted that this does not mean that it will be a simple task, but controllable.

The most difficult policy challenge emerges in case D – a war which lasts for a longer period and with mass destruction of infrastructure and housing as well as high number of civilian and military casualties – which can be assumed to cause massive refugee flows. Brutality and indiscriminate violence are deliberately used to create a huge refugee flow. During the war, few refugees will return to Ukraine, and after the war, many refugees have nothing to return to. The willingness to return to territories occupied by Russia will, for natural reasons, be low. As these refugees have limited possibilities to return, this raises the policy issue of the integration of Ukrainian refugees staying on a long-term basis in EU Member States.

Today, immigrant integration is in the competence of the EU Member States. What the EU can do is to provide complementary help for the Member States through AMIF, but the EU has not the competence to run immigrant integration programs itself. In a situation where the war is long and contains mass destruction of infrastructure and housing as well as high number of civilian and military casualties, we can expect a huge refugee flow from Ukraine. To give an example, if 10 million Ukrainians leave Ukraine as refugees for EU countries, it is not possible for any country to shoulder the enormous logistic, organizational and financial challenges alone. Cooperation and coordination are needed. In effect, this would raise the need to renegotiate the division of competences and discretion between the EU and the Member States. By handing over **some** social policy competence from the Member States to the EU could be a win-win solution for both parties: it can reduce both risks and costs for the single Member State and the overall EU aim of social cohesion can be stimulated if one single actor has a coordinating role.

Voluntary multilateral, or even bilateral, agreements between the countries receiving the most refugees and other countries willing to accept re-settled Ukrainians from Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania can also offer a solution. The Resilience and Recovery Fund is a multilateral agreement, in which the signatory countries indebt themselves to help each other to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. Another successful multilateral agreement is the Schengen agreement, which started as a voluntary agreement between a few countries.

A too strong territorial concentration of refugees – Ukrainians or any other nationality – will impact the cohesion policy. In case the refugees find employment and housing by themselves quickly as well as become integrated into the community in which they live, positive effects can be expected in terms of social, economic and territorial cohesion. However, far from all refugees manage to find employment and housing themselves, nor do they do so quickly.<sup>3</sup> A territorial concentration of non-OECD refugees will – given the long time to find

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<sup>3</sup> In a register study of all immigrants to Sweden, the findings displayed that it takes on average 17 years for a non-European refugee to find 12 months of consecutive employment. Gustafsson et al. (2017). Age at immigration matters for labor market integration: the Swedish example. *IZA Journal of Migration* 7:1, Doi:10.1186/s40176-016-0078-7

employment, living in distressed areas and the accompanying social problems – risk to widen the gap between regions with a low concentration of refugees socially, economically and territorially. Such development will put pressure on the cohesion policy. Flagship incentives such as Green Deal, Just Transition Fund and the Resilience and Recovery Fund do not address refugee related issues. AMIF does, but only as a complement to national policies. The Urban Agenda does address some immigration related issues, but not refugees. The recent Commission Action Plan for Rural Areas is less than one year old and, to our knowledge, no evaluation on how it has affected the situation for immigrants or refugees is done.

Demographic changes and migration pose a significant impact on territorial, economic and social cohesion. Hence, one could expect this to be covered in key policy documents. However, the role of immigrants and refugees is mentioned **once** in the Territorial Agenda 2030 when demographic and societal imbalances are mentioned.

“Ageing, domestic and intra-European migration, including depopulation, pose challenges to Europe’s welfare systems and to local and regional development. These demographic dynamics have severe social implications including increased social exclusion and inequalities, as well as challenges for public service provision, labour markets and housing. Ageing and migration point to further concentration in urban areas along with depopulation in rural and peripheral areas. This especially concerns remote areas that lack access to public services and economic and social opportunities. Extra-European migration flows, including outmigration of young and talented people and immigration of refugees, may exacerbate these challenges” (TA2030, p. 9).

In the 8th Cohesion Report, the share of foreign population in the Member States is reported and that measures should be taken to include them into the host societies. How this is to be done is described in sweeping terms. The Urban Agenda states that one of its aims is to

“manage integration of incoming migrants and refugees (extra-EU) and to provide a framework for their inclusion based on willingness and integration capacity of local communities. This will cover housing, cultural integration, provision of public services, social inclusion, education and labour market measures, chances of second-third generations, spatial segregation” (Urban Agenda, p. iii).

The rather vague declarations on how to deal with refugees in the EU key policy documents on what territorial impact refugees may have offers little surprise. The EU Member States have the competence in issues in the social policy area, which includes refugees and immigrant integration, and the EU can just play a complementary role to the national efforts.<sup>4</sup> The Territorial Agenda 2030 hit the nail right on the top when describing what territorial impact refugees may have. The question is how to deal with this challenge. Here the EU policy documents are silent, and the silence partly depends on the fact that EU has no discretion to act. Parallel to this, several Member States have serious problems with immigrant integration, and they are unable to deal with the challenge themselves. By manufacturing massive refugee flows, the hybrid warfare aims at destabilizing the host countries of the refugees. As single countries have difficulties of dealing with this hybrid warfare armaments alone, the best tool to disarm such destabilization attempts is joint action, unity and explicit ideas on how to turn immigration and refugees into an asset.

To manage the current refugee crisis requires **dialogues**, not only between the Ukrainian government and the government hosting most refugees during this refugee crisis, but also dialogues between the EU and its Member States as well as between the Member States. **Short-term measures** are needed to mitigate the situation for the refugees and host countries, but also **long-term measures** on how to manage future refugee crises. No doubt, there will be more of them. The only comparable refugee flow measured in number of refugees is the one at the end of the World War II, when seven million refugees were pushed westwards. It took until 1960 before the last refugee camp in West Germany closed. The refugee flow from Ukraine will exceed seven million during the summer. At a certain point, this politically sensitive question on how to share the refugee burden will make it to the top of the EU policy agenda. Hopefully, the EU will place it there to act proactively, rather than just to react on a fait accompli.

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<sup>4</sup> Daniel Rauhut & Franziska Sielker (2021). Social Aspects in the EU Cohesion Policy. In: Rauhut, D., Sielker, F. & Humer, A. (eds.) The EU’s Cohesion Policy and Spatial Governance: Territorial, Economic and Social Challenges. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, pp. 208-215. Doi: 10.4337/9781839103582.00027

## 6 Concluding remarks

The war in Ukraine causes an unprecedented impact on the EU economy and society, which, however, has a considerable territorial differentiation. The origins of this conflict in recent history were laid in the early 90s of the twentieth century, and for 30 years have been growing significantly. The main reason for the aggression is Russia's ambition to restore its empire and colonial influence in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union republics. From a Russian perspective, it is also a war on the Western civilization and 'Gayropa'. All steps taken by Ukraine to distance itself from the Soviet legacy and to integrate with the EU context have been met with considerable opposition, political and economic provocations from Moscow.

The size of the expected refugee flows varies depending on the case used. Each of the analysed flows (citizens of Ukraine, Belarus and Russia) is characterised by a different territorial distribution. Belarus is characterised by the lowest mobility and the smallest geographical range of the migratory inflow impact. The migration inflow is concentrated mainly in the two neighbouring countries (Poland and Lithuania, border regions) and the Czech Republic. Western European countries participate to a small extent in the migration inflow of Belarusian citizens.

The migration inflow from Russia is characterised by a wide range of influences. It is mainly concentrated in the regions of Western Europe and the Czech Republic. These regions are metropolitan areas (e.g., Prague, Paris, Barcelona, London, Berlin, Vienna, Helsinki) and tourist regions (Spain). The legacy of the USSR (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia) and economic ties (Cyprus - tax haven) remain strong. Central European countries (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania) do not generally participate in the migration flow.

For obvious reasons, the inflow of Ukrainian citizens should be treated differently from the migration flows of Belarusians and Russians. In the case of Ukrainians, the inflow is concentrated mainly in countries that are neighbours of Ukraine (the so-called first contact countries). In each case, it is Poland, Romania, Hungary and Slovakia that experience the largest influx of people from Ukraine. In the regional system, the main attracting factors are the existing migration networks (concerns not only Poland, but also e.g., Spain, Italy), geographical proximity and metropolitan areas with attractive labour markets.

From the policy side both short- and long-term action are needed. In a short-term perspective, support to the countries receiving most refugees to mitigate the burden. This can be done through the e.g., AMIF and through bi- or multi-lateral agreements. In a longer perspective several issues need to be addressed. One deals with the competence between EU and the Member States. It is not reasonable that Poland, Romania, Hungary and Czech Republic should carry the logistic, organisational and financial burden of the immigration themselves for the 2022 refugee flow, just as it was unreasonable the Italy and Greece carried the 2015 refugee crisis, and for Italy and Spain the previous ones. In hybrid warfare, refugees are used for destabilization, and if the EU Member States find joint strategies against this, the country orchestrating the hybrid warfare has failed with its aims. Instead of internal disputes and disintegration, unity make EU stronger.

As the refugees are not distributed in a territorially even way, some regions will be more affected than others. Some refugees will find jobs quickly, others not; some refugees can arrange their own housing, others not, etc. If the concentration of those who cannot find jobs and housing is too high in some regions, this will impact the policy ambitions of the territorial cohesion. Again, it is the single Member States which has the competence in these matters and if resources are scarce, needed actions to prevent the gap between refugee dense regions and regions with few refugees will not take place. In the worst case, the attitude against immigrants – i.e., social cohesion – will change in a negative direction. If the labour market integration of refugees fails, there will also be consequences for the economic cohesion. The EU Member States decided to indebt themselves collectively to finance the Resilience and Recovery Fund addressing the negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. To indebt themselves to finance refugee reception is not needed but agreeing and imposing joint strategies are.

Yesterday, it was Spain, Greece and Italy hosting refugees, with Sweden and Germany acting in solidarity, and today it is Poland, Romania, Hungary and Czech Republic taking the cost. Tomorrow it may be other countries. The long-term measures needed are politically very sensitive, but at a certain point they can no longer be overlooked. Hopefully, the needed decisions will be made before the next refugee crisis.





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