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## **Migration and Security in Central Europe. How the Visegrad Group responded to the 2015 and 2022 Refugee Crisis. Part I**

Migracje i bezpieczeństwo w Europie Środkowej.  
Reakcje Grupy Wyszehradzkiej na kryzysy uchodźcze  
w latach 2015 i 2022. Część I

DOI: 10.34739/doc.2025.22.09

**Abstract:** Over the past decade, the security environment in Europe has changed radically. The problem of illegal migration has become one of the most serious for the EU member states. In that context, the four Central European countries – Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia – maintain a position that differs from that of Brussels. They categorically reject the quota principle for distributing migrants and are even willing to incur sanctions for this stance. Their attitude towards refugees from Ukraine, after the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, is completely different, this contrast is the focus of this article. It attempts a comparative analysis of the policies of the Visegrad Group (V4) countries towards migrants from the Middle East and North Africa, on the one hand, and towards refugees from the Russian-Ukrainian full-scale war, on the other. Using official documents of the Visegrad Group, statistical data, press materials, as well as scientific research, it highlights the distinctive features of these policies in both cases and explores the reasons for the differences. The conclusion is that the V4 countries' stances towards migrants from the Middle East and Africa versus Ukrainian refugees are shaped by the perceived impact on their national security in particular and on European security in general.

**Keywords:** Visegrad Group, migration crisis, quota principle, illegal migrants, refugees, Russian-Ukrainian full-scale war

**Streszczenie:** W ciągu ostatniej dekady środowisko bezpieczeństwa w Europie uległo radykalnej zmianie. Problem nielegalnej migracji stał się jednym z najważniejszych dla państw członkowskich UE. W tym kontekście cztery kraje Europy Środkowej – Polska, Węgry, Czechy i Słowacja – zajęły stanowisko odmienne od stanowiska Brukseli. Kategorycznie odrzuciły zasadę kwotową w rozmieszczaniu migrantów, a nawet wyraziły gotowość poniesienia sankcji za takie podejście. Ich stosunek do uchodźców z Ukrainy po rozpoczęciu rosyjskiej inwazji na ten kraj w 2022 roku jest zupełnie

inny, a ten kontrast jest przedmiotem niniejszego artykułu. Podjęto w nim próbę analizy porównawczej polityki państw Grupy Wyszehradzkiej (V4) wobec migrantów z Bliskiego Wschodu i Afryki Północnej z jednej strony, a wobec uchodźców z powodu wojny rosyjsko-ukraińskiej z drugiej. Wykorzystując oficjalne dokumenty Grupy Wyszehradzkiej, dane statystyczne, materiały prasowe oraz badania naukowe artykuł podkreśla specyfikę tych polityk w obu przypadkach i bada przyczyny różnic. Wnioski wskazują, że postawy państw V4 wobec migrantów z Bliskiego Wschodu i Afryki w porównaniu z uchodźcami z Ukrainy są kształtowane przez postrzegany wpływ na ich bezpieczeństwo narodowe i szerzej bezpieczeństwo europejskie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Grupa Wyszehradzka, kryzys migracyjny, zasada kwot, nielegalni migranci, uchodźcy, pełnoskalowa wojna rosyjsko-ukraińska

## Introduction

The Visegrad Group consists of the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary. Its primary goal is to deepen regional integration. Cooperation is carried out in the economic, cultural and security fields<sup>1</sup>. Over the past decade, the security environment in Europe has changed radically. The main factors behind this change are the migrant crisis of 2015 and the Russian-Ukrainian full-scale war of 2022, which caused the largest population displacement on the continent since World War II. The Visegrad Group countries responded to these two challenges in fundamentally different ways. With regard to the 2015 migration crisis, their policy differed from the official EU position – they categorically opposed the quota principle for the distribution of migrants. Their efforts focused mainly on aiding third countries and strengthening cooperation with them in order to address the root causes of migratory pressure. As a result, within the EU, the V4 countries occupy a deterrent position, in contrast to the welcoming position of the frontline countries (Italy, Greece, Bulgaria), and the attractive conditions of destinations as Germany and Sweden. This unified position has a dual effect: on the one hand it has bolstered the group's activity and influence in Europe, but on the other hand, it has led to EU sanctions against these states and even accusations of xenophobia<sup>2</sup>.

However, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia have shown empathy toward refugees from the Russian-Ukrainian full-scale war, accepting large numbers of them. This willingness

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<sup>1</sup> A. Szumowiecka, *Dyplomacja kulturalna Czech na forum Grupy Wyszehradzkiej*, "Doctrina. Studia Społeczno-Polityczne" 2022, no 19, p. 31-49.

<sup>2</sup> Ш. Хайнлайн, *Чехия се държи рестриктивно спрямо бежанци и мигранти*, <http://p.dw.com/p/1EHnq> (access date: 9.01.2025).

undermines claims that the Visegrad Group countries are unwilling to accept migrants out of fear of foreign cultures stemming from their historically limited contact and experience with foreigners. Although the four Central European countries did not face significant migratory pressure from the Middle East and North Africa (with the exception of Hungary in 2015), after 24 February 2022 they became the primary destination for Ukrainian refugees. Their initial reaction to Russia's military intervention in Ukraine was a strong condemnation. This reaction is unsurprising for several reasons. Ukraine is an important partner for the Visegrad countries, with three of them sharing a common border. It has also received the most assistance under the EU's *Eastern Partnership* initiative. Additionally, the political crisis in Ukraine from November 2013 to February 2014 (which ended with the overthrow of President Viktor Yanukovych and the election of the pro-European Petro Poroshenko), galvanized the V4, becoming a key topic at several meetings of the four's foreign ministers, parliamentary speakers, and prime ministers of the four countries. On March 14, 2014 – three days after the adoption of the Declaration of Independence of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol – the defense ministers of the Visegrad countries decided to create joint battle group<sup>3</sup>. After the annexation of that region, they voiced in favour of restoring the territorial integrity of Ukraine. In addition, in the fall of 2021, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia categorically rejected Moscow's proposal to revert the European security framework to its 1997 status (when these countries were not yet NATO members)<sup>4</sup>. The historical memory of the Soviet aggression (such as the invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968), along with a perceived threat to their national and regional security, have united these countries firmly behind NATO's stance.

### **Methodology and overview of sources used**

This article uses a qualitative approach combined with comparative analysis. It integrates historical context, policy and content

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<sup>3</sup> *Long term Vision of the Visegrad Countries for Deepening Their Defense Cooperation (Visegrad, 14 March 2014)*, <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/download.php?docID=253> (access date: 21.01.2025).

<sup>4</sup> Л. Шишелина, *Вишеград – Россия: отношения завышенной турбулентности*, “Вишеградская Европа” 2022, no. 2, p. 4-25.

analysis (covering key policy documents, official statements, and statements by V4 leaders from 2014 to 2024, as well as academic publications) with quantitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the V4 countries' policies toward migrants and refugees from the Russian-Ukrainian full-scale war. Official V4 documents examined include the programmes of the rotating presidencies during the period under review, along with joint communiqués and declarations. To support the qualitative findings, the study incorporates quantitative data from sources such as the statistical indicators from the UNHCR Operational Data Portal, Eurostat, and the European Commission on the number of third-country migrants in Visegrad countries, as well as data on asylum seekers and refugees from the Russian-Ukrainian full-scale war. To better illustrate the migratory pressure on the four countries, the number of asylum seekers is presented for each year from 2011 to 2017. Data from the national statistical institutions in the Visegrad countries on illegal migration and third-country nationals holding work-related residence permits are also used. These figures provide empirical context for understanding integration policies and the inclusion of foreigners in the labour market. The use of quantitative indicators aims to demonstrate that the Visegrád Group countries, which oppose the redistribution of migrants from the Middle East and Africa, are actually hosting a large number of refugees from the Russian-Ukrainian full-scale war – thus refuting claims of their xenophobia. However, these individuals require social assistance, medical care, education, etc., which undoubtedly has economic consequences. Since economic security is a key element of national security – alongside the protection of state sovereignty, citizens, and institutions – it is necessary to reform the security policies of the V4 countries. Changes in their national legislation in response to the growing number of third-country nationals are presented to illustrate the ways in which migration influences security policy.

### **Policy on the 2015 migrant crisis**

The main argument of the Visegrad countries in their debate with the EU over the migrant flows is the need to protect what they see as common values, such as Christianity and the sovereignty of nation-states. Researchers such as Vladimir Naxera and Vlastimil Havlík from the Czech Republic, Viktor Glied from Hungary, Małgo-

rzata Kaczorowska from Poland, Ondrej Filipiec from Slovakia note that, after 2015, the leaders of the Visegrad Group adopted similar rhetoric in their public communications, achieving a certain success with what can be described as populist messaging<sup>5</sup>. The divergence between Western European and Central European EU member states on the issue is rooted in historical and cultural differences that lead to different political outlook. The sense of post-colonial guilt in some Western European countries is foreign to the former Soviet Eastern bloc satellites, whose values emphasize national traditions, Christianity etc. According to the Visegrad Group countries' view, any loss of sovereignty or political self-determination of nation states – along with policies that encourage migration -will, in the long run, erode European values and identity.

One reason the Visegrad countries refuse to accept migrant quotas is the perceived opposition between EU – imposed rules and their national interests. According to Czech Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka (2014–2017), whose country chaired the Visegrad Group from July 1, 2015 to 30 June, 2016, asylum policy should be the sole prerogative of national governments. He stated that historically, the Czech Republic has accepted refugees only on a voluntary basis, in accordance with Schengen rules and Czech national legislation, and he stressed the intention to maintain this practice in the future. Sobotka also argued that building refugee camps in Europe cannot be a solution to the humanitarian crises in war-torn countries<sup>6</sup>.

The arrival of illegal migrants from Asia and Africa, both actual and potential, has sparked considerable concern among residents. In extreme cases, it has led to moral panic<sup>7</sup>. As the number of migrants arriving in Europe increased, the Visegrad countries each took individual actions to protect their interests, and their shared opposition to the quota system became a unifying element in the ne-

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<sup>5</sup> V. Naxera, *The Never-ending Story: Czech Governments, Corruption and Populist Anti-Corruption Rhetoric (2010–2018)*, "Politics in Central Europe" 2018, vol. 14, issue 3, pp. 31-54; V. Havlík, *Technocratic Populism and Political Illiberalism in Central Europe*, "Problems of Post-Communism" 2019, vol. 66, issue 6, pp. 369-384; V. Naxera, V. Glied, O. Filipiec, M. Kaczorowska, *To protect national sovereignty from the EU? The 2019 EP elections and populist parties in V4 countries*, "Revista UNISCI" 2020, no 54, p. 99.

<sup>6</sup> Echo24, *Sobotka: Česko může přijmout stovky migrantů, ale dobrovolně*, [echo24.cz/a/wPZiF/sobotka-cesko-muze-prijmout-stovky-migrantu-ale-dobrovolne](https://echo24.cz/a/wPZiF/sobotka-cesko-muze-prijmout-stovky-migrantu-ale-dobrovolne) (access date: 2.10.2024).

<sup>7</sup> A. Bobryk, *Postawy Polaków wobec uchodźców w świetle publikacji „Gazety Wyborczej” i „Naszego Dziennika”*, [in:] *Kryzys migracyjny. Perspektywa społeczno-kulturowa. Tom I*, ed. B. Pasamonik, U. Markowska-Manista, Warszawa 2017, p. 46-66.

gotiations with the EU. They presented themselves as a unit defending common interests, though in practice each country pursued its own strategy for handling the migration crisis. The rapidly increasing number of migrants (the number of irregular migrants entering the EU in 2015 reached 1.83 million, while only 1.25 million of them applied for asylum in the EU<sup>8</sup>) and the need to respond to the EU's legislative package on the relocation of migrants led to the convening of a special V4 summit, held on September 4, 2015, in Prague. At that meeting, the Visegrad Group countries endorsed the principle of solidarity only insofar as it reflected the specific circumstances of each individual state, and consequently rejected the mandatory quota system introduced by the European Union<sup>9</sup>. Thus, the negotiations at the Visegrad 4 level become a unifying platform that helps to formulate a clear common opinion. In the aftermath of terrorist attacks such as the January 2015 *Charlie Hebdo shooting in Paris*, the danger of the entry of Islamic State terrorists along with refugees was cited as another justification for opposing Brussels' migration policy<sup>10</sup>.

It is no surprise, then, that illegal migration was identified as a key priority by two consecutive V4 rotating presidencies: The Polish presidency (July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2017) and the Hungarian presidency (July 1, 2017 – June 30, 2018). In the Programme of the Polish Presidency, it is listed as a primary area for enhanced coordination<sup>11</sup>. Regarding the reform of the Common European Asylum System - particularly the Dublin Regulation - the programme stressed that Member States must oppose any changes that would introduce a permanent, mandatory relocation mechanism or significantly reduce national competences in this area. In order to limit migrant flows, the Polish Presidency also continued to coordinate an initiative of joint parallel local humanitarian projects in countries like Jordan and Syria<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> H. Bauerová, *Migration Policy of the V4 in the Context of Migration Crisis*, "Politics in Central Europe" 2018, vol. 14, issue 2, p. 102.

<sup>9</sup> *Joint Statement of the Heads of Government of the Visegrad Group Countries Prague, September 4, 2015*, [www.visegradgroup.eu/home/documents/2015/joint-statement-of-the-150904](http://www.visegradgroup.eu/home/documents/2015/joint-statement-of-the-150904) (access date: 8.08.2024).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. D. Byrd, *Unfashionable objections to Islamophobic cartoons. L'affaire Charlie Hebdo*, Cambridge 2017; L. Eko, *The Charlie Hebdo affair and comparative journalistic cultures. Human rights versus religious rites*, Basingstoke 2019.

<sup>11</sup> D. Ivanova, *Migration Crisis - A Main Priority for the Fifth Polish Presidency of the Visegrád Group*, "International Conference Knowledge-Based Organization" 2018, vol. XXIV, no 2, p. 195.

<sup>12</sup> *Program of the Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group July 1, 2016-June 30, 2017*, [visegradgroup.eu/home/documents/presidency-programs/program-of-the-polish](http://visegradgroup.eu/home/documents/presidency-programs/program-of-the-polish) (access date: 15.12.2024).

In early May 2017, Slovakia and Hungary even filed a lawsuit with the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg against the EU's refugee quota plan<sup>13</sup>. The European Commission subsequently initiated infringement proceedings in the ECJ against Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic for failing to comply with the quota decision. (Slovakia, despite also rejecting the quota principle and challenging the Council's decision, avoided infringement because it agreed to relocate 16 migrants). However, these measures did not sway the V4 countries, and they maintained their position on the issue of illegal migration<sup>14</sup>.

In accordance with European norms, the four countries have developed procedures for the integration of foreigners. These policies emphasize learning the official state language, job training, and their inclusion in the labour market. It is important to note that the Czech Republic and Poland in particular attracted foreigners long before the beginning of the Arab Spring and the migrant crisis. Foreign residents in these countries come from diverse ethnic backgrounds – predominantly Ukrainians, Vietnamese, Russians (and in Poland, also many Belarusians). Therefore, nationality or religion alone has not been an absolute determinant of their acceptance. While Ukrainians and Russians are Europeans, Slavs and largely Eastern Orthodox Christians (traits which minimize cultural and linguistic differences with the local population), the Vietnamese community has completely different language and cultural traditions. What these groups have in common is that they arrived in Central Europe to work, and they have made efforts for their successful integration<sup>15</sup>.

Therefore, it cannot be categorically stated that the Visegrad countries are *afraid* of foreign cultures. Their concern is directed more toward the motives and behaviour of certain migrants. A large number of migrants from the Middle east and North Africa not only practice Islam (in some cases a radical form), but also come from territories without active conflict, they do not have documents, do not want to

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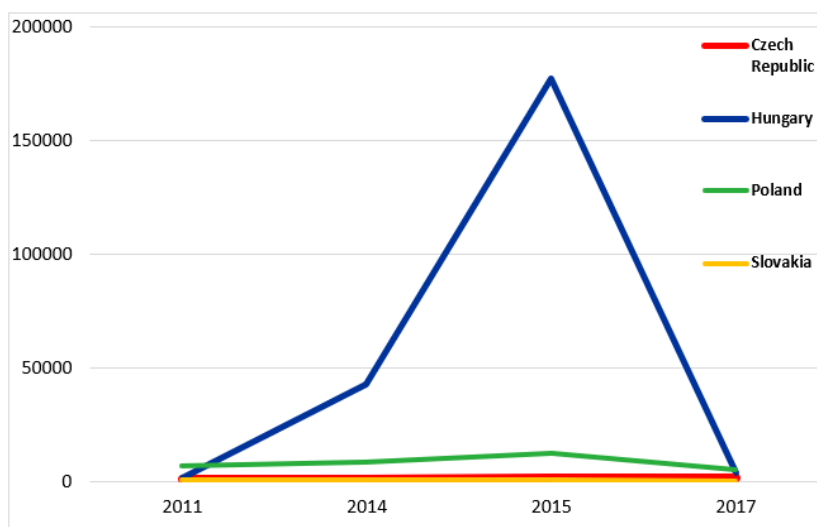
<sup>13</sup> Б. Ригерт, *Всички са длъжни да приемат бежанци и точка*, p.dw.com/p/2jSbX (access date: 10.08.2024).

<sup>14</sup> V. Glied, Ł. Zamęcki, *Together, but Still Separated? Migration Policy in the V4 countries*, "Politics in Central Europe" 2021, vol. 17, issue 1S, p. 661.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. A. Barciak, *Podróże i migracje w Europie Środkowej*, Katowice 2012; *Polityka migracyjna Republiki Czeskiej, Słowacji i Węgier*, ed. M. Cesarz, Lublin 2024; *Integracja europejska: wyzwania edukacyjne i międzykulturowe w kontekście procesów migracyjnych w Europie Środkowej i Wschodniej*, ed. M. Kamionka, Y. Shchavinska, Warszawa 2025.

comply with local laws, refuse to work, and sometimes have aggressive behaviour<sup>16</sup>. These factors are what worry V4 governments and societies, rather than foreign culture. A comparative analysis of asylum-seeker data in the Visegrad Group countries during the peak migration crisis years (illustrated by Chart No. 1) shows that, with the exception of Hungary (which lies along the Balkan migration route), the other countries did not experience severe migration pressure in 2015. In the Czech Republic, the number of asylum applications remained relatively constant. Poland, the largest of the four Visegrad countries, saw an increase in 2015, but then the number of applicants fell by more than half by 2017. Slovakia actually recorded a decrease in asylum applications during the crisis peak years compared to 2011.

**Chart No. 1. Changes in the number of asylum seekers in the Visegrad Group countries in the period 2011–2017**

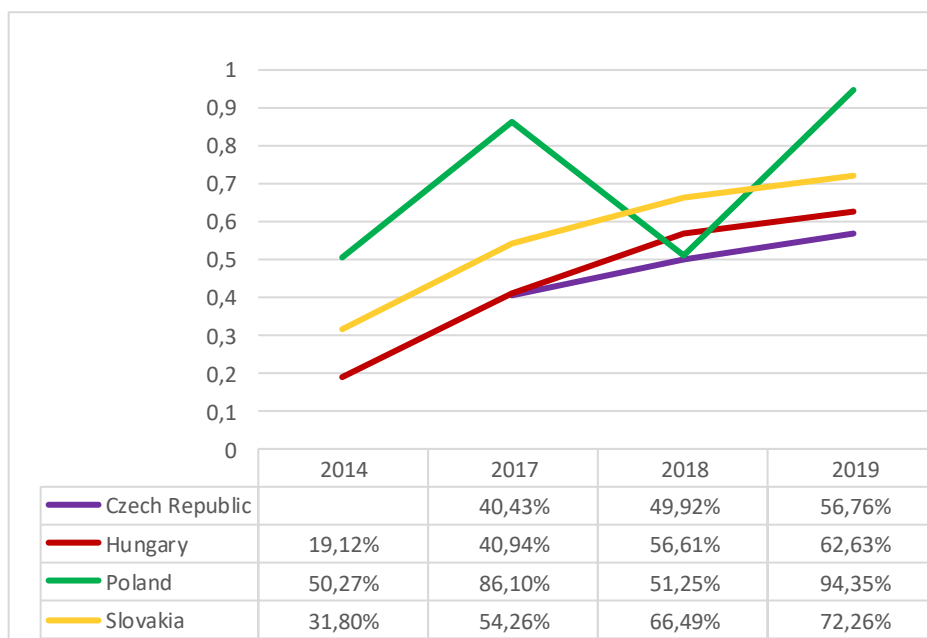


Source: The National Directorate-General for Aliens Policing, *Statistics*, [http://www.bmbah.hu/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&layout=item&id=492&Itemid=1259&lang=en#](http://www.bmbah.hu/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&layout=item&id=492&Itemid=1259&lang=en#); <https://csu.gov.cz/cizinci> (access date: 20.12.2024); Urząd do Spraw Cudzoziemców, *TOP 5 – ochrona międzynarodowa*, <https://www.gov.pl/web/udsc/top-5--ochrona-miedzynarodowa> (access date: 20.12.2024); Český statistický úřad, *Mezinárodní ochrana* <https://csu.gov.cz/mezinarodni-ochrana?pocet=10&start=0&podskupiny=292&razeni=-datumVydani> (access date: 20.12.2024); Národný kontaktný bod EMNv Slovenskej republike, *Prehľad EMN o azyle a migrácii (do roku 2023 Výročné správy EMN o migrácii a azyle)*, <https://www.emn.sk/sk/publikacie/vyroczne-spravy-emn-o-migracii-a-azyle.html> (access date: 20.12.2024); V. Glied, Ł. Zamecki, *Together, but...*, p. 647-673.

<sup>16</sup> Eurostat, *Asylum and first time asylum applicants by citizenship, age and sex – annual aggregated data*, [ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR\\_ASYAPPCTZA\\_custom\\_1142314/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR_ASYAPPCTZA_custom_1142314/default/table?lang=en) (access date: 10.12.2024).

Thus, a challenge that was serious for the EU overall had no significant demographic impact on the Visegrad countries in terms of migrants admitted. The policies of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia have been oriented toward integrating foreign citizens who come to work in one of them. In the period 2014-2019 – i.e. from the year before the migration peak to the year before the COVID-19 pandemic – each country saw a gradual increase in the proportion of residence permits granted for work purposes out of all first residence permits to third-country nationals (see Chart No. 2). The only exception was a decrease in Poland in 2018, but by 2019 the share of work-purpose permits there exceeded 94%.

**Chart No. 2. Percentage of first residence permits issued for work purposes in Visegrad Group countries, 2014–2019<sup>17</sup>**



Source: V4 national migration statistics (2014–2019).

Based on the statistical data and the relevant normative documents in force in the V4 countries, it would be one-sided and an exaggeration to explain the Czech, Hungarian, Polish, and Slovak

<sup>17</sup> The percentage is calculated based on quantitative statistical indicators, the sources of which are: Český statistický úřad – “Cizinci” (“Foreigners”) and “Ekonomická aktivita cizinců” (“Economic activity of foreigners”).

refusal of the EU migrant quota plan, primarily by xenophobia. These states are not against foreign citizens in general, rather they oppose illegal migration, which in 2015 reached 1.83 million unlawful crossings of the EU's external borders<sup>18</sup>. For this reason, the security measures implemented in the four countries are aimed at limiting the possibilities for illegal border crossings. One of the most common practices in countries facing strong migration pressure (like Hungary) is the construction of physical barriers<sup>19</sup>. Of course, the populism of the leaders in the Visegrad countries cannot be denied when they oppose the Brussels administration, but the EU's policy on the migrant crisis cannot be described as successful either. Perhaps to the greatest extent, the common position of the Visegrad Group on the problem is dictated by the pragmatism of the four countries.

### **Visegrad Group countries and the Russian-Ukrainian full-scale war – the broken unity**

The position of the Visegrad Group countries regarding refugees after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 is completely different from their stance during the 2015 migrant crisis. Nevertheless, some distinctions persist. Although the four countries uniformly rejected the quota mechanism for migrant distribution, their positions diverged with respect to the acceptance of Ukrainian refugees, despite their official declarations of support for Ukraine. In particular, Hungary stands apart, having adopted a different approach reflective of its government's policy stance. It is noteworthy that the first joint statement on behalf of the V4 was formulated just twelve days after the start of hostilities, during a meeting between the Prime Ministers of the V4 countries and the British Prime Minister in London on March 8, 2022. Ahead of consultations with the UK PM Prime Minister, the heads of government of the Visegrad countries reaffirmed their unwavering support for Ukraine in the context of the ongoing Russian invasion. To help alleviate the humanitarian aspects of the crisis, the governments and societies of these countries mobilized significant financial and human resources to send aid to Ukraine

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<sup>18</sup> *Подходът на ЕС към миграцията и предоставянето на убежище*, [www.europarl.europa.eu/news/bg/headlines/society/20170629STO78629/podkhod-t-na-es-km-migratsiyata-i-predostavianeto-na-ubezhishte](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/bg/headlines/society/20170629STO78629/podkhod-t-na-es-km-migratsiyata-i-predostavianeto-na-ubezhishte) (access date: 21.01.2025).

<sup>19</sup> W. Klaus, *Closing Gates to Refugees: The Causes and Effects of the 2015 "Migration Crisis" on Border Management in Hungary and Poland*, "Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe" 2017, Vol. 15, No. 3, p. 11–34.

and to provide care and assistance for refugees from Ukraine. They agreed on a support package of 1 million euros through the International Visegrad Fund<sup>20</sup>, focused on improving the situation of Ukrainian in the Visegrad countries – especially vulnerable groups such as youth and children. An extraordinary grant was opened for non-governmental institutions, organizations and municipalities from the Visegrad countries and Ukraine to apply for projects financed by the Fund<sup>21</sup>.

In the joint statement of the leaders of the four countries and the United Kingdom, the five prime ministers jointly condemned the Russian aggression against Ukraine and characterized it as a “brutal, unprovoked and deliberate attack on a sovereign, peaceful, democratic state”. They described Russia’s actions as a gross violation of international law and the UN Charter, which undermines European security and stability<sup>22</sup>. Viktor Orbán (Prime Minister of Hungary, 1998–2002; 2010–present), Peter Fiala (Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, 2021–2025), Mateusz Morawiecki (Prime Minister of Poland, 2017–2023), Edward Heger (Prime Minister of Slovakia, 2021–2023) and Boris Johnson UK Prime Minister, (2019–2022) declared full support for the President, Government and people of Ukraine, who are defending their country’s sovereignty. Among other points of the agreement in the statement were: the need to impose the strongest possible sanctions against Russia (including referring its invasion to the International Criminal Court); support for the growing number of refugees; and a commitment to reduce dependence on Russian fossil fuels as part of improving collective energy security<sup>23</sup>.

Subsequent joint statements and documents clearly show a radically different attitude toward refugees from Ukraine compared to migrants from the Middle East and Africa. The citizens of the V4 (except Hungary due to government policy) – who have been willing to accept Ukrainian refugees since the beginning of the war – are

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<sup>20</sup> The International Visegrad Fund was established in June 2000 to support cooperation in the fields of culture, scientific exchange, education and student programs both between the member states and with countries from Eastern Europe. *About Us*, <https://www.visegradfund.org/about-us/the-fund/> (access date: 21.01.2025).

<sup>21</sup> Joint Communiqué on Providing Joint V4 Assistance to Refugees from Ukraine 8 March 2022, <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/home/documents/joint-communication> (access date: 20.12.2024).

<sup>22</sup> *V4 + United Kingdom Joint Statement of Prime Ministers 8 March 2022, London*, <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/home/documents/v4-united-kingdom-joint> (access date: 18.12.2024).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*.

overwhelmingly sympathetic to the Ukrainians, and the reasons for this are complex – civilizational, social, and geopolitical. Their civilizational and cultural proximity is obvious. All parties share a European, predominantly Christian heritage, and it is notable that parts of western Ukraine were for long period within the same states as the V4 countries (i.e., the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Poland-Lithuania), creating historical ties<sup>24</sup>. Slavic languages (with the exception of Hungarian) also provide a degree a mutual intelligibility or at least familiarity, and even in Hungary many older people has learned Russian, easing basic communication with the Ukrainian refugees. Another factor is the existing presence of many Ukrainian migrant workers who were already integrated into V4 societies prior to war – some of whom have relatives among the new refugees. Moreover, those arriving from Ukraine have been mostly women, children and the elderly, whereas migrants from the Middle East and Africa in 2015 were predominantly men, the vast majority of whom appeared do not want to work<sup>25</sup>. This contrast in the composition of refugee groups influences public perceptions and acceptance.

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<sup>24</sup> Until the end of World War I, the western territories of present-day Ukraine, as well as most of the territories of the Visegrad countries, were within the Habsburg Empire. After its collapse in 1918, Transcarpathian Ukraine became part of Czechoslovakia, and from 1939 until the end of World War II - also of Hungary; Galicia was within the borders of Poland, and after the division of the country according to the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, the eastern part of Galicia (Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk and Ternopil regions) was annexed to Soviet Ukraine.

<sup>25</sup> United Nations, *International Migration Report 2015. Highlights*, New York 2016.

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