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THE INFLUX OF WAR REFUGEES FROM UKRAINE – RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLAND BASED ON TURKEY’S EXPERIENCES¹

| Abstract

- ▶ *Goal* – the presentation of analysis results regarding the numerical comparison of migration crises caused by refugee displacements from Syria and Ukraine and the identification of challenges faced by Poland based on Turkey’s experiences related to the mass influx of refugees.
- ▶ *Research methodology* – the examination of Poland’s and Turkey’s official state documents, a review of articles and existing studies, the analysis of statistical data on the flows of persons from the following databases: the UNHCR, the UN Population Division, data from the Polish Chancellery of the Prime Minister and the Office for Foreigners. The research methods used also include synthesis and inference.
- ▶ *Score/results* – although the Syrian and Ukrainian migration crises show various differences, Poland can certainly draw on Turkey’s proven tools and avoid solutions having hindered integration and contributed to the exclusion of Syrian refugees. However, Turkey’s and Poland’s experiences represent evidence for other countries that it is necessary to have a clearly defined migration policy in place.
- ▶ *Originality/value* – the originality of the article lies in the comparison of the two largest migration crises of recent years and an attempt to identify challenges faced by Poland in connection with the influx of war refugees and possible solutions based on Turkey’s experiences. In addition, the subject has significant research potential due to the imminent economic crisis in Ukraine, which may trigger another wave of migration.

| **Keywords:** Russia-Ukraine war, migration management, Syrian refugees, Turkey’s policy, host country, war refugees, Poland.

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1. Introduction

As a result of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, having begun on 24 February 2022, several million persons have fled the war-ridden country and sought refuge in the neighbouring countries. Poland has become the country receiving the most refugees – it poses a major economic, social and political challenge.

A similar crisis affected Turkey, having played the main role in the Syrian migration crisis – it currently hosts the highest number of Syrian refugees [UNHCR, 2022]. The mass influx of Syrians started in 2011 and was spread over a period of several years. Initially, Turkey adopted an open-door policy, which changed diametrically at a later stage. Hosting such a large number of persons caused various socio-economic issues that Turkey needed to face. The development of the influx of refugees to Poland differs (with the level of one million registered refugees noted in Poland after two months since the outbreak of the war, whereas in Turkey it was exceeded after four years); thus, there is a need for immediate measures, which can be copied from Turkey's experiences.

The selection of the subject was inspired by the mass influx of refugees, unprecedented in Poland as it was in Turkey and posing a challenge to the host country, as well as the topicality and dynamics of the phenomenon. In addition, the subject has significant research potential due to the imminent economic crisis in Ukraine, which may trigger another wave of migration as well as to the existing gap in the literature and international research.

The study aims to present analysis results regarding the numerical comparison of migration crises caused by refugee displacements from Syria and Ukraine and the identification of challenges faced by Poland based on the Turkish experience related to the mass influx of refugees. The essential research issue considered in the article is the comparison of the scale and development of the migration crises connected with displaced persons from Syria and Ukraine and the identification of challenges facing Poland in the context of Turkey's experiences. The question about effective solutions aiming at the integration of war refugees into Poland's labour market and education system is extremely important at present, whereas the Turkish experience related to the implementation of instruments intended to manage the influx of immigrants may prove to be of major relevance. To this end, the article examines Poland's and Turkey's official state documents, reviews articles and existing studies as well as analyses statistical data on the flows of persons from the following databases: the UNHCR, the United Nations Population Division, data from the Polish Chancellery of the

Prime Minister and the Office for Foreigners. The research methods used also include synthesis and inference.

The composition of the article is as follows. The first part presents a comparative numerical analysis of the largest migration crises of recent years, related to refugee displacements from Syria and Ukraine. The second part discusses the most significant challenges facing Poland in connection with the mass influx of refugees and proposals for possible solutions based on Turkey's experiences.

2. The characteristics of the migration crises caused by refugee displacements from Syria and Ukraine in numbers – a comparative analysis

The start of protests in the Syrian city of Daraa in March 2011 became the sore point for the outbreak of the civil war in Syria [UNHCR, 2022]. The internal conflict intensified by the armed response on the part of the authorities caused mass displacements of the Syrian people into the neighbouring countries, thus contributing to one of the largest migration crises after World War II [Ince Yenilmez, 2017: 184].

In the first year of the conflict in Syria, its residents were forced to leave their homes, which fuelled internal migration of Syrians towards Syria's external borders [Tumen, 2016: 10]. According to the UNHCR data, in 2011, there were approximately 19,931 Syrian refugees [UNHCR, 2022]. In the following year, after the escalation of the conflict in Syria, internal migrations became a mass refugee wave, which pushed the number of refugees to 729,012. In 2013, the estimated number of Syrians having fled their country exceeded 2.4 million. In the following years, the movement of refugees from Syria intensified; the most recent UNHCR data for 2021 indicated more than 6.761 million people.

After the internal conflict intensified in 2012, Syrians mostly fled into the neighbouring countries [Ibidem, 10]. According to the UNHCR data for 2012 (Table 1), the most Syrian refugees were hosted by Turkey – 34.1 percent. Other major host countries for refugees from Syria were Jordan (32.8 percent) and Lebanon (17.4 percent). Significantly fewer Syrians chose Iraq (8.7 percent) and Egypt (1.8 percent). Other countries hosted a total of 4.6 percent of all Syrian refugees. As the conflict in Syria proved to be a permanent one, refugees increasingly moved into the neighbouring countries whose absorption capacity gradually declined. Therefore, Syrians also chose advanced Western European

countries, in the hope of obtaining residence permits and no longer waiting for the civil war to end [ibidem, 10]. In 2021, the European Union Member States hosted 14.7 percent of all Syrian refugees (Table 1). Apart from the EU Member States' significant contribution to receiving refugees from Syria, an important subject is the role played by Turkey, the country to host the highest number of displaced Syrians – over 54 percent of all refugees, or more than 3.6 million in 2021 [UNHCR, 2022].

Table 1. The distribution of Syrian refugees in 2012 and 2021

2012						
Turkey	Jordan	Lebanon	Iraq	Egypt	Other countries	
34.1%	32.8%	17.4%	8.7%	1.8%	4.6%	
2021						
Turkey	EU Member States	Lebanon	Jordan	Iraq	Egypt	Other countries
54.5%	14.7%	12.6%	9.9%	3.6%	2.0%	2.7%

Source: prepared by the author based on the UNHCR data.

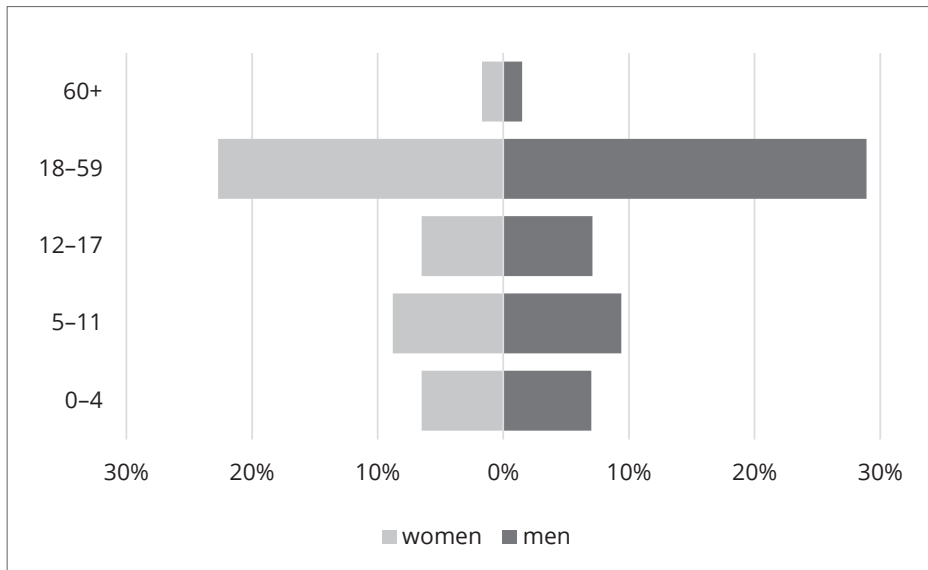
As late as one year before the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, the largest group of foreign nationals in Turkey were persons from Bulgaria (nearly 35 percent of all migrants) rather than Syrians [UN International..., 2019]. It is related to the difficult relations between Bulgaria and Turkey during the Cold War, with many deportations from Bulgaria to Turkey [Demirtaş, 2001: 27]. Before the conflict, Syrians represented a mere 0.4 percent of the total number of migrants in Turkey.

After the outbreak of the civil war, at the beginning of 2012, Turkey had 9,500 registered Syrian refugees [UNHCR, 2022]. A year later, the number sky-rocketed to 148,000. In 2014, Turkey hosted as many as over 0.5 million people from Syria. Until 2019, the number of registered refugees continued to rise and exceeded 3.6 million. 2020 saw a minor fall in the number of registered Syrian refugees, by approx. 46,000, followed by another increase; at present, there are more than 3.7 million registered refugees in Turkey.

The Syrian refugees arriving in Turkey are not characterised by a distinct overrepresentation of one sex (Chart 3). At present, men account for slightly

more than half of the registered refugees in Turkey – 53.9 percent. Working-age persons represent 51.6 percent of all registered refugees, 28.9 percent of whom are men. 45.3 percent of the refugees are under 18 years of age. Elderly persons aged 60 or over account for a mere 3.2 percent of all refugees.

Chart 1. Syrian refugees in Turkey by age and sex (in 2022)

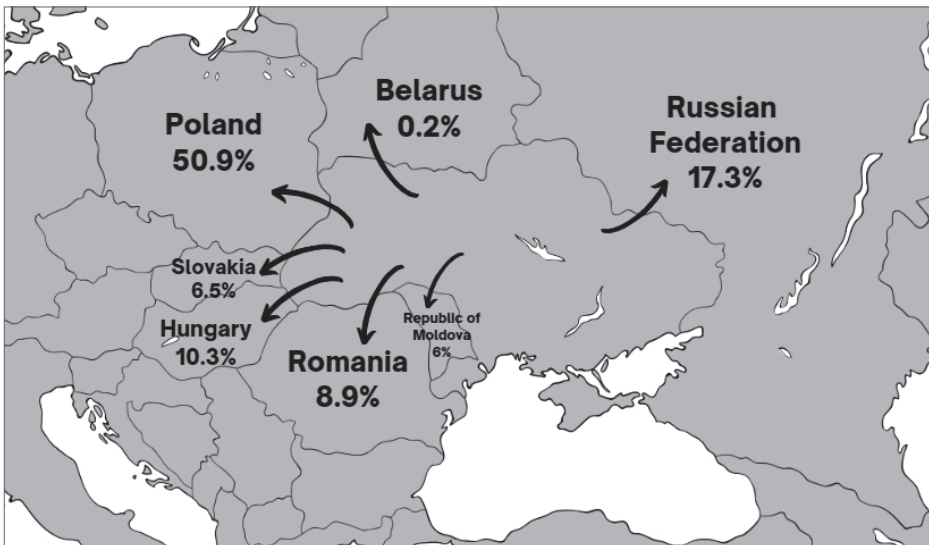


Source: UNHCR, 2022.

Due to the start on 24 February 2022 of another stage of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine which has begun in 2014, for the first time in history, there is a military conflict very close to the European Union's external border, threatening its security [Opióła et al., 2022: 7]. It is still hardly possible to specify its duration and possible military, geopolitical, economic and financial consequences [Astrov, 2022: 13]. But it is common knowledge that the conflict – in addition to the above-mentioned long-term effects – has caused a humanitarian crisis in the form of a mass influx of refugees from Ukraine. On the date of the outbreak of the war, nearly 80,000 people crossed the Ukrainian border [UNHCR, 2022]. On the following days of the Russian invasion, the number of border crossings was on the rise. After one month, nearly 4 million persons had crossed the border, whereas the number of border crossings had exceeded 5 million by the end of April 2022. As at 12 July, border authorities had registered more than 9 million people having left the territory of Ukraine.

As regards the countries chosen by refugees from Ukraine, most of them crossed the Polish-Ukrainian border – 50.9 percent (Figure 1). The distribution of border crossings to other countries was as follows: to Hungary – 10.3 percent, to Romania – 8.9 percent, to Slovakia – 6.5 percent, to Moldova – 6 percent and to Belarus – 0.2 percent². Surprisingly, 17.3 percent of persons having left Ukraine crossed the border with Russia. It is difficult to estimate the proportions of forced deportations and voluntary border crossings.

Figure 1. The influx of refugees from Ukraine to the neighbouring countries (in % by number of border crossings, as at 12 July 2022)



Source: prepared by the author based on the UNHCR data.

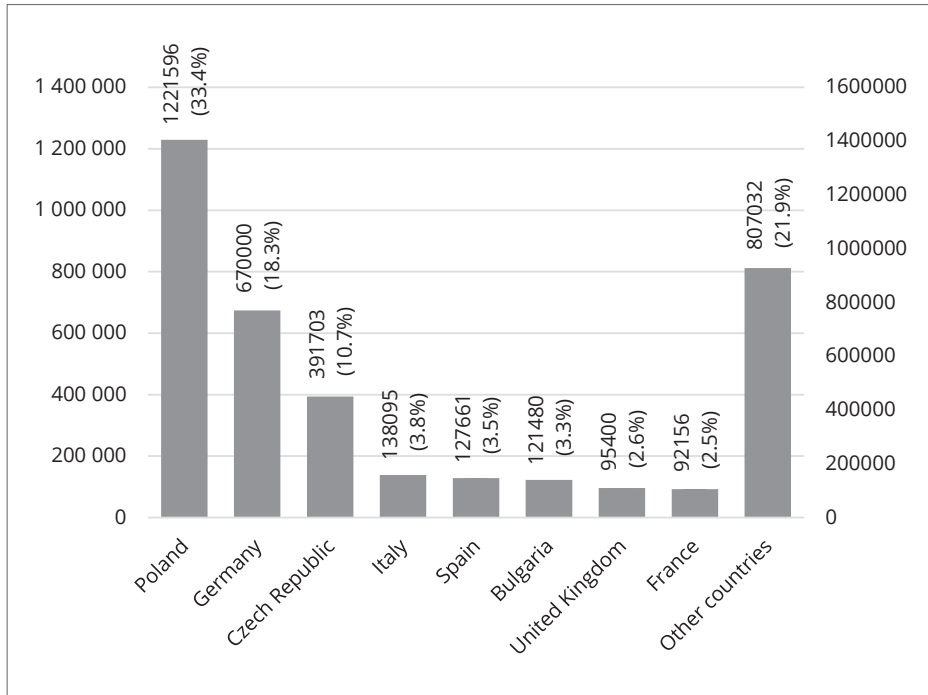
The European countries have been faced with the challenge of receiving more than 3.6 million refugees from Ukraine³. The most persons arrived in Poland: over 1.2 million, i.e. 33.4 percent of all registered refugees (Chart 2). Large groups of refugees are hosted by Germany (18.3 percent), the Czech Republic

² It must be mentioned that persons arriving in Moldova immediately leave for Romania, which results in double counting in statistics. Therefore, the percentages presented in Figure 1 add up to exceed 100 percent.

³ Those are registered persons enjoying temporary protection or similar national protection measures in Europe.

(10.7 percent), Italy (3.8 percent). Other European countries have been receiving significantly fewer refugees.

Chart 2. The distribution of registered refugees from Ukraine in the European countries – number and percentage of registration refugees (as at 12 July 2022)



Source: prepared by the author based on the UNHCR data.

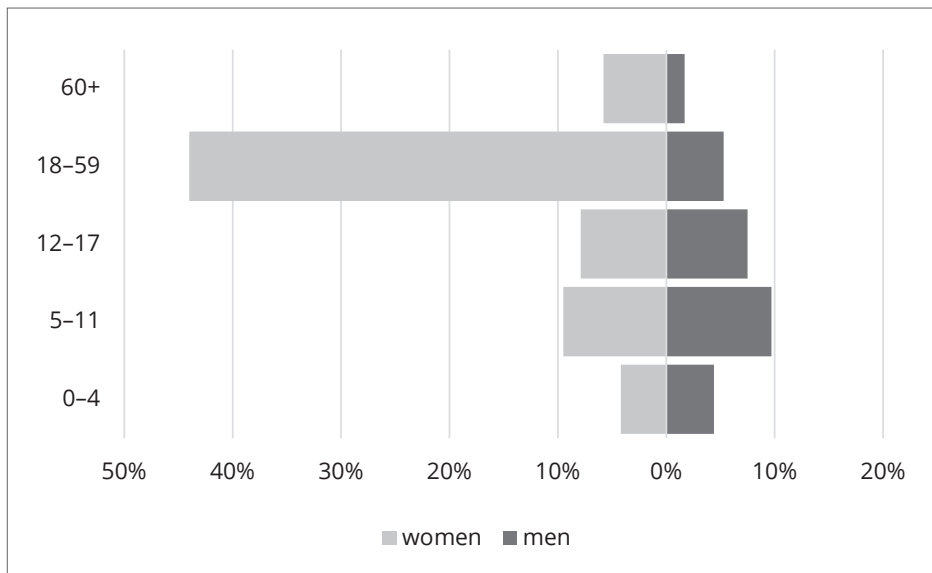
In 2021, before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, Ukrainian nationals represented the largest group of migrants in Poland – nearly 300,000 holders of valid residence permits [Office for Foreigners 2022]. Their inflow has markedly increased since 2014, mostly as economic migration, in connection with the deteriorating economic situation in Ukraine, the introduction of visa-free travel and easier access to the Polish labour market [Office for Foreigners, 2022]. Having built closer socio-economic relationships, as well as the geographic and cultural proximity have contributed to choosing Poland as the place for seeking refuge by Ukraine's residents fleeing the war.

On 16 March 2022, Poland launched the registration of applications for a PESEL number for Ukrainian citizens fleeing the war [Ministry of the Interior

and Administration 2022]. It allowed estimating the number of refugees in Poland. It is difficult to exactly determine the size of the group as the allocation of a PESEL number is no condition to lawfully reside in Poland. Within the first week after the launch of the registration procedure, the authority received more than 250,000 applications for a PESEL number [The Polish Chancellery of the Prime Minister 2022]. As at 12 July, the number of applications filed by Ukrainian refugees exceeded 1.2 million.

Among the registered Ukrainian refugees, women dominate with a share of 71.4 percent (Chart 3). As regards age groups, working-age persons (aged between 18 and 59 years) account for the highest share of 49.3 percent, of which women represent 44 percent. The respective shares of those aged 60 years or over and of children under 18 years of age are 7.5 percent and 43.2 percent.

Chart 3. Ukrainian refugees in Poland by age and sex (as at 12 July 2022)



Source: prepared by the author based on the UNHCR data.

The comparative analysis of the migration crises caused by refugee displacements from Syria and Ukraine – faced by Turkey and Poland as the respective countries hosting the largest groups of refugees – must take into account the information presented above. Both migration crises have forced millions of people to leave their home countries. Due to the outbreak of the civil war in Syria, more than 7 million Syrians have fled since 2011, or for around a decade. But

the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine with Russia in February 2022 has caused a mass exodus of and seeking refuge by over 3 million refugees registered in the host countries during a period of less than six months of the war. Just as Turkey, Poland has received the highest number of refugees among all the host countries. By July 2022, more than one million refugees were registered in Poland. A total of over 3.5 million Syrian refugees have arrived in Turkey, but the first million was not registered until 2015, after several years of the war in Syria. Hosting refugees from Ukraine has not been such a social challenge; as early as 2014, Poland already experienced job migration by Ukrainians, having settled in and functioning in Polish society. In contrast, Turkey faced a serious challenge because Syrians had represented a minority of immigrants before 2011. Refugees arriving in Turkey were both men and women, with a slightly higher share of men, including working-age persons and children. The challenge facing Poland is that war refugees mostly represent women with children and seniors.

3. Challenges facing Poland – recommendations based on Turkey's experiences

The mass influx of Syrian refugees into Turkey had become an unprecedented challenge to the host country, the breakthrough point for the development and implementation of changes in Turkey's specific migration policy. The migration crisis management by Turkey can be divided into four subsequent stages [Gökalp-Aras, Sahin Mencutek, 2020: 100]: initially, it was an open-door policy based on no legal acts, having transformed into a stage of using international solutions and introducing appropriate documents for crisis management. The third stage was a policy reversal to a 'closed-door' strategy; finally, Turkey started encouraging returns.

As compared to other European countries and in contrast to Turkey, Poland has limited experience with regard to the reception of refugees. Turkey had already experienced such mass influxes of people. For example, in 1991, during the Persian Gulf War, the military attack by Saddam Hussein on the northern part of Iraq – inhabited by Iraqi Kurds and other minorities – forced nearly half a million people to flee to Turkey [Kirişçi, 2014: 7]. Those were mainly Kurds and Turkmens, refused entry by the Turkish authorities [Gökalp-Aras, Sahin Mencutek, 2015: 198]. Poland was previously treated as a transit country, as reflected in a high number of discontinued procedures initiated by

filed applications for international protection [Polakowski, Szelewa, 2016: 16]. Therefore, receiving more than one million refugees from Ukraine in a period of several months has become an enormous challenge, in terms of their stay and integration, not only for those in power, but also for Polish society – mainly due to the absence of a coherent and clearly defined migration policy [Duszczyc, Kaczmarczyk, 2022: 165].

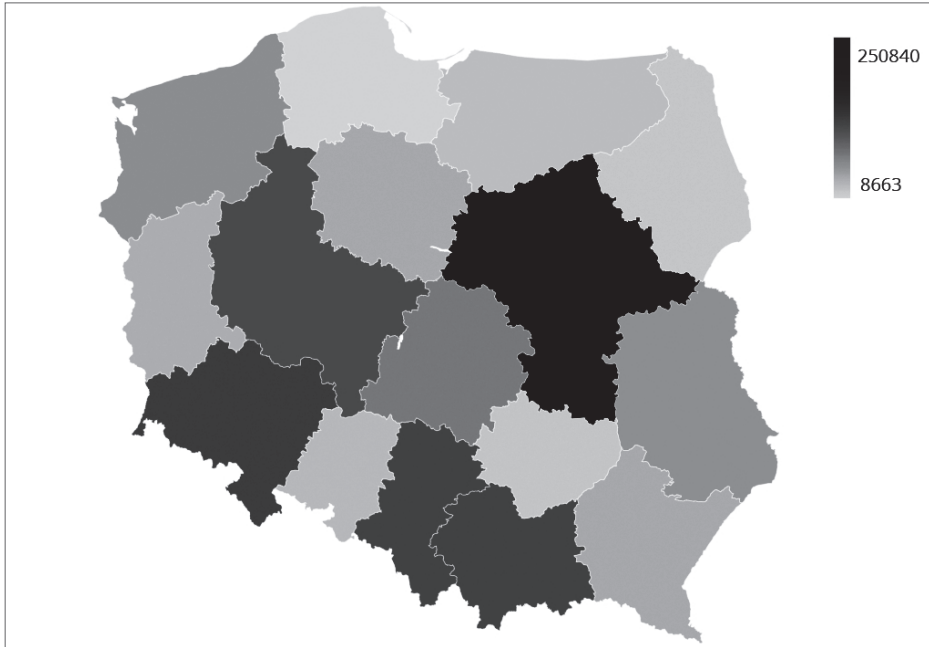
In the first weeks of the influx of refugees, Poland – just as Turkey – adopted an open-door strategy; every person arriving in Poland as a result of the Russian aggression received the necessary assistance, whether from public authorities or as disinterested help from individual citizens. On 12 March 2022, in order to facilitate the legalisation of residence in Poland for refugees from Ukraine, the Sejm of the Republic of Poland adopted a relevant Act as early as around two weeks after the Russian invasion of Ukraine⁴. The new provisions primarily concerned the legalisation of residence in Poland and access to the job market, health care, education and other public services [Public Information Bulletin..., 2022]. Poland was rather quick to enact a document governing the influx of refugees, in comparison with Turkey's actions consisting in only issuing recommendations and introducing relevant legal acts after several years.

It is unlikely for the war in Ukraine to end quickly. Presumably, the Ukrainian army and nation, especially after deliveries of weapons from supporting countries, will be able to effectively defend Ukraine's independence [Duszczyc, Kaczmarczyk, 2022: 37]. Therefore, the mass influx of foreign nationals into Poland is challenging; the key problems faced by Poland are those relating to housing, education, health care and the labour market. As regards the provision of temporary shelter, the majority of refugees from Ukraine have been living at Poles' private houses and flats [ibidem, 169]. Additionally, some of them have been staying at hotels and boarding houses, large sports or exhibition halls, whereas others were received by their family members having arrived in Poland prior to the war. Therefore, the refugees are dispersed across the territory of Poland (Figure 2).

On account of uncertainty about subsidies for Polish families hosting refugees and limited possibilities to stay at tourism establishments due to the high season, Ukrainian nationals are often forced to leave their temporary accommodation.

⁴ Act of 12 March 2022 on assistance to be provided to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the armed conflict in the territory of Ukraine (Journal of Laws 2022, Item 583).

Figure 2. Distribution of refugees in Poland based on registered applications for UKR status (a PESEL number) (as at 12 July 2022)



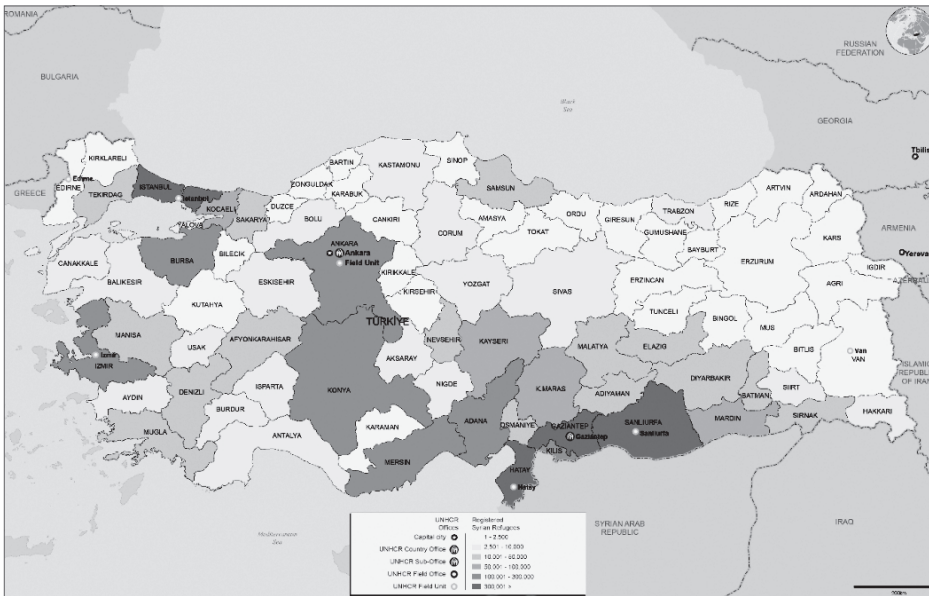
Source: prepared by the author based on data from the Polish Chancellery of the Prime Minister.

Therefore, it is necessary to obtain support from other countries in relocation and to prepare temporary dwellings in the form of modular housing estates. For example, such solutions are Turkey's camps for refugees, called by "The New York Times" 'perfect refugee camps' due to proper management and the provision of essential services [McClelland, 2014]. Such camps are located in the provinces of Hatay, Adana, Osmaniye, Kilis and Kahramanmaraş, currently hosting the most refugees (Figure 3).

Another challenge facing Poland is the issue of education as the refugees, apart from women, are mostly children. It is difficult to estimate the number of minors who will actually stay and wish to receive education in Poland on a permanent basis. Therefore, it is advisable to develop remote schooling for pupils planning to return to Ukraine and to prepare those wishing to reside in Poland permanently for the Polish education system [Duszczyk, Kaczmarczyk, 2022: 38]. As regards Turkey, the situation in education may vary between regions and depending on the permit held [Bircan, Sunata, 2015: 228]. It is related to the three pre-determined education paths:

1. learning at camp schools with the Syrian curricula in the Arabic language;
2. available to persons living outside camps, with residence permits that allow them to attend Turkish public schools;
3. for those living outside camps without valid residence permits – such persons can go to Syrian schools teaching in the Arabic language, run by various non-governmental organisations and Syrian teachers doing voluntary work.

Figure 3. Distribution of Syrian refugees in Turkey (as at July 2022)



Source: UNHCR, 2022.

With regard to the issue of health care in Poland, the most significant difficulty appears to be the language barrier [Duszczyk, Kaczmarczyk, 2022: 38–39]. It seems necessary to facilitate access to translators and interpreters as well as to medical documentation translated into Polish. Furthermore, hosting over a million additional potential patients in Poland is likely to extend the waiting times for treatment, quite long already. It may contribute to tensions between Poles and Ukrainians [Duszczyk, Kaczmarczyk, 2022: 38]. In Turkey, as in Poland, the main problem was the lack of appropriate infrastructure and the shortage of medical personnel. Moreover, the staff were burdened with additional administrative activities rather than with medical tasks, due to the need to qualify

patients for health care [Chen, 2021: 56] – unregistered Syrians in Turkey have limited access to primary and secondary health care [Assi, Ozger-Ilhan, Ilhan, 2019: 149]. Therefore, the solution proposed for Poland, also suggested to Turkey, is the inclusion of persons from Ukraine in medical teams, thus speeding up the integration of displaced specialists, improving the quality of health care and the welfare of refugees who speak the same language as well as addressing the existing personnel shortages [Chen, 2021: 57].

The last issue which must be raised in the context of challenges facing Poland is the domestic labour market, providing employment mostly to Ukrainian men before the war [Duszczyk, Kaczmarczyk, 2022: 169]. At present, the main groups of Ukrainians in Poland are women and children. Difficulties in that regard will include the provision of child care, teaching and learning the Polish language and participation in upskilling courses for women to adapt to the Polish job market. Besides, access to the labour market has been made easier under the introduced Act of 12 March 2022; Ukrainian citizens may very easily take up employment if they have a valid residence permit, without the need to obtain a work permit⁵. It shows that Ukrainians have definitely easier access to the Polish job market than Syrians to the labour market in Turkey; the latter could only apply for work permits six months after the completion of the temporary protection registration procedure [Danish Refugee Council, 2021: 3]. Another difficulty for refugees was the territorial restriction, only limiting the validity of the work permit obtained to the province of residence.

4. Conclusions

The Russian aggression against Ukraine, initiated in February 2022, triggered a mass exodus from their home country of 3.6 million Ukrainian citizens registered in the host countries. As a neighbouring country, Poland was the main destination for 50.9 percent refugees from Ukraine. The mass influx of refugees, unprecedented in Poland, poses a major economic, social and political challenge to the host country.

⁵ Article 39 of the Act 12 March 2022 on assistance to be provided to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the armed conflict in the territory of Ukraine (Journal of Laws 2022, Item 583).

It follows from the conducted comparative analysis of the migration crises caused by refugee displacements from Syria and Ukraine that the former and the latter forced 6.7 million and 3.6 million persons respectively to flee their home countries. Poland and Turkey, having received 54.5 percent of Syrian refugees, have become the main host countries; however, the challenge faced by Poland has been considerably greater as it received one million refugees over a period of two months. Turkey had significantly more time; the level of one million registered Syrians was not reached until four years after the outbreak of the war. Today, Poland hosts 1.2 million registered Ukrainian refugees, accounting for approx. 3.2 percent of the Polish population of 37.8 million in 2021 [World Bank 2022]. At the beginning of 2022, Turkey recorded 3.7 million Syrian refugees; with Turkey's population of 85 million in 2021 [World Bank 2022], the group has a share of 4.4 percent. It must be also be noted that Poland experienced the influx of immigrants crossing the eastern border even before the Russian invasion – Ukrainian citizens accounted for the largest proportion of registered foreigners in Poland in 2021. That experience has also facilitated the reception of such a high number of refugees. In contrast, Syrians represented an insignificant share of migrants in Turkey before the war. Another difference is the structure by sex and age of persons entering the two countries. In Turkey, men represent 53.9 percent of all Syrian refugees, which reflects a balanced sex structure. In contrast, Poland mostly hosts women (71.4 percent) with children, which aggravates challenges related to housing, access to health care, the labour market or education. The task for Poland is not only to integrate the women into the Polish job market, but also to ensure childcare and the children's access to education.

To recapitulate, the main differences between the two migration crises under examination include the rate of the influx of refugees and their structure by age and sex, constituting the greatest difficulty for Poland and giving rise to doubts whether Poland is able to cope with the current mass influx of individuals from Ukraine. At present, the most significant challenges facing Poland include the issues of housing, health care, education and the labour market. As regards accommodation, Poland may draw on Turkey's experiences as it specialised in the construction of refugee camps, also in connection with its initial policy towards refugees. Poland must immediately seek relevant solutions as the current hosting of refugees at private dwellings or costly leases are no long-term measures. Nevertheless, the solutions introduced by Poland with regard to the labour market inspire hope for the soonest possible integration of refugees from Ukraine, particularly women, and for avoiding socio-cultural conflicts. In

the area concerned, Turkey applied no measures to facilitate access to the job market. Poland must definitely consider how to resolve the difficulties related to the health care and education systems for refugees; here, Poland should not rely on the Turkish authorities' solutions, creating barriers and depriving individuals of possibilities to meet their basic needs.

Although the migration crises under examination show various differences, Poland can certainly draw on Turkey's proven tools and avoid solutions having hindered integration and contributed to the exclusion of Syrian refugees. But Turkey's and Poland's experiences represent evidence for other countries that it is necessary to have a clearly defined migration policy in place.

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