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Migration Governance in Central and Eastern European Cities Post-2015

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Karolina Łukasiewicz · Marta Pachocka ·
Michał Nowosielski
Editors

Migration Governance in Central and Eastern European Cities Post-2015

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Editors

Karolina Łukasiewicz
Centre of Migration Research
University of Warsaw
Warsaw, Poland

Marta Pachocka
Department of Political Studies
SGH Warsaw School of Economics
Warsaw, Poland

Michał Nowosielski
WSB Merito University in Gdańsk
Gdańsk, Poland



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Chapter 1

Migration Governance in CEE Cities Post-2015: A Comparative Perspective



Karolina Łukasiewicz , Marta Pachocka , and Michał Nowosielski

1.1 Introduction¹

This book examines migration governance in Central and Eastern European (CEE) cities between 2015 and 2024—a decade marked by a series of critical events that brought migration to the forefront of political, social and urban agendas in the region. The starting point is 2015, when the so-called European refugee reception crisis prompted public and political debates on migration across CEE, and the endpoint is 2024, by which time the effects of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine and subsequent mass displacement continue to shape urban governance practices.

The focus on CEE is motivated by the region's original trajectory: while historically characterised by emigration and low levels of immigrant settlement, many CEE cities have recently become new destinations for migrants and refugees (Łukasiewicz et al., 2022). Despite this transformation, the region remains underrepresented in migration scholarship, particularly in studies of local-level governance. Since the

¹ This work was supported by Horizon 2020, MSCA programme under Grant no. 896115: “Migrant integration governance in CEE cities post 2015—MigIntegrEast”; Horizon 2020 under Grant no. 870952: “Investing in ‘Welcoming Spaces’ in Europe: revitalising shrinking areas by hosting non-EU migrants—Welcoming Spaces”.

K. Łukasiewicz

Centre of Migration Research, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland
e-mail: k.lukasiewicz@uw.edu.pl

M. Pachocka (✉)

SGH Warsaw School of Economics, Warsaw, Poland
e-mail: mpachoc@sgh.waw.pl

M. Nowosielski

WSB Merito University, Gdańsk, Poland

Centre of Migration Research, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland
e-mail: michal.nowosielski@gdansk.merito.pl

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1990s, migration governance in cities—defined as the management of migration by state and non-state actors at the local level—has attracted considerable attention in European public discourse and academic debate, mobilising a wide range of responses from actors at supranational, national and local levels (Çağlar & Glick Schiller, 2023; Caponio et al., 2018; Geddes et al., 2019; Pisarevskaya & Scholten, 2025).

In the CEE context, however, migration only entered public discourse and political agendas significantly after the 2015 European refugee reception crisis. Since then, it has remained a prominent issue, through the 2021–2022 crisis at the EU–Belarus border and the mass displacement caused by the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine (Eglitis & Kelso, 2022; Jaskułowski, 2019). Despite the growing significance of CEE cities as destinations for migrants and as sites of emerging integration policies, they remain underexplored in migration scholarship. This book seeks to fill this gap by offering a comprehensive analysis of how CEE cities govern migration, focusing on the interplay of macro-, meso- and micro-level factors across diverse urban settings. Specifically, it answers: (1) What roles do **supranational and state-level factors**—such as histories of statehood, civil society development, and migration patterns—play in shaping local governance responses? (2) How do **local-level dynamics**—including city migration histories, population size, foreign-born demographics, political representation, administrative structures and the presence of NGOs and grassroots groups—affect governance practices? (3) What is the influence of **individual-level characteristics**, such as the social and cultural capital of actors in local administrations, NGOs and community organisations?

Through a comparative analysis of CEE cities, the book develops an empirically grounded and theoretically informed model of migration governance. By focusing on the period when migration emerged as a central political and societal issue in the region, this study advances broader discussions on how cities govern mobility under shifting geopolitical and demographic pressures and emergencies.

It also contributes to the regionalisation of migration research—that is, by bringing Central and Eastern European contexts into focus, the book helps to correct the traditional Western bias in migration studies and to develop theories and methodologies better attuned to the specific political, social and economic dynamics of this region (Triandafyllidou et al., 2024). Drawing on an interdisciplinary and multilevel approach, this book:

1. **Empirically maps migration governance structures** in CEE cities by identifying key state and non-state actors, their roles, activities (including integration policies and programmes), changes since 2015 and observable outcomes.
2. **Analyses horizontal governance dynamics** by examining relationships among local actors—state, non-state and grassroots—and how these interactions shape governance on the ground.
3. **Investigates vertical governance dynamics** by exploring connections between local, national and supranational levels, including forms of coordination, alignment and disjuncture.

4. **Assesses the influence of macro-, meso- and micro-level factors** on migration governance, both:
 - *Vertically*: in terms of alignment or divergence from national-level policies.
 - *Horizontally*: through inter-actor relations and comparisons across different city contexts.
5. **Develops a theoretical model** of migration governance specific to the Central and Eastern European urban context.

This book tackles critically important questions that European societies struggle with. Public discourse and debates on migration governance in politics and academia have become particularly heated in Europe during and after several recent crises. During the 2015/16 European refugee protection crisis, the 2021+ humanitarian crisis at the Eastern EU–Belarusian border and the 2022 mass forced displacement from Ukraine, efficient governance of policies at the EU, national and local levels was needed to settle the increased number of newcomers in EU cities successfully. Yet, three CEE governments from the Visegrad Group²—Poland, Hungary and Czechia—refused to implement the relocation mechanism³ planned for 2015–2017 (based on Council Decisions 2015/1523 and 2015/1601) to address the crisis. Despite being affected by the 2015/16 emergency to varying degrees, these CEE governments responded with similar restrictive measures (Górczyńska & Szczepanik, 2016; Goździak & Márton, 2018; Judgement of the Court in Joined Cases C-715/17, C-718/17 and C-719/17; Pachocka, 2016; Pachocka & Caballero Vélez, 2025). Eventually, CEE societies stood out among other countries, with the highest opposition rates towards accepting refugees (54% of surveyed Hungarians and 36% of Poles, see Connor, 2018). At the same time, in opposition to government and right-wing media narratives, grassroots activism in Polish, Hungarian and Czech cities has developed to support refugees and integrate them into local communities (Łukasiewicz et al., 2022; Pędziwiatr & Magdziarz, 2023). While mayors of Polish cities also expressed support for accepting refugees, Hungarian mayors largely supported the anti-refugee government campaigns (Juhász et al., 2017). Social research to date has predominantly studied ‘the lack of solidarity’ of CEE governments related to the 2015 crisis and the anti-refugee discourse which emerged following the 2015 crisis (Goździak & Márton, 2018; Klaus & Szulecka, 2023; Sobczak-Szelc et al., 2022). Some studies have also focused on comparing the national-level international protection standards in V4 countries (e.g. V4NIEM Consortium, 2018). Yet, despite viewing immigrant integration as a local process (Gebhardt, 2016; Scholten & van Breugel, 2017) and

² The Visegrád Group (V4) is an informal regional cooperation platform bringing together four Central European countries: Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia (<https://www.visegradgroup.eu/home/about>).

³ Relocation was planned as an EU temporary, extraordinary and emergency response in accordance with Article 78(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. It aimed to deploy asylum seekers (persons clearly in need of international protection—both third-country nationals and stateless persons) from the EU countries most affected by the influx of forced migrants to other member states. The countries recognised as being in crisis were Italy, Greece and Hungary, but the latter refused to be covered by this solution (Pachocka, 2016; Pachocka & Caballero Vélez, 2025).

the calls to study localities comparatively (Çağlar & Glick Schiller, 2018), migration governance ‘post-2015’ in CEE cities remains underexplored. Our book will address these gaps.

While the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine on February 24th, 2022, reshaped migration dynamics across the entire continent, its impact was especially pronounced in Central and Eastern Europe. Until October 2022, as many as 7.7 million people, overwhelmingly with Ukrainian citizenship, had fled the country to Europe, while 4.4 million were registered for temporary protection or similar national protection schemes (UNHCR, 2025). A substantial number of people settled in CEE countries, with 1.5 million in Poland, 453,000 in Czechia, 98,000 in Slovakia, 30,000 in Hungary and 8400 in Romania. The sudden arrival of large numbers of forced migrants triggered the need to provide immediate emergency services. Over time, however, the need to reflect on how to manage long-term challenges, including housing, healthcare, education, social support and access to the labour market, has become increasingly apparent. While in the initial stages of the crisis, NGOs and civil society played the primary role (Fomina & Pachocka, 2024; Pawlak, 2022). Over time, local governments stepped in, yet without sufficient administrative or financial guidance from the central government (Jaroszewicz et al., 2022). Practices implemented in CEE cities in this context can serve as both a source of innovative knowledge about crisis response and medium- to long-term strategies for managing urban migration (see e.g. Bielewska et al., 2024; Hnatiuk, 2025; Pachocka et al., 2025).

To date, neither the migrant-support initiatives led by CEE mayors nor the pro-immigrant grassroots activism emerging in their cities have been examined in a systematic and comparative manner. Yet, this largely overlooked dimension of migration governance in Central and Eastern Europe holds significant social and theoretical relevance. Investigating it can help challenge dominant anti-refugee narratives, inform more inclusive policies and contribute to reshaping public attitudes across the region. It can also contribute to the academic discussion on integration governance in cities, which has been monopolised by cases from Western European and U.S. cities (Caponio & Borkert, 2010; de Graauw & Vermeulen, 2016; Dekker et al., 2015; Pisarevskaya & Scholten, 2025). The principal innovative aspect of this book is the development of theories on local-level migration governance by extending a list of factors shaping the migration governance processes in the so-far overlooked context of Central and Eastern European cities. The book’s principal empirical innovation is an in-depth comparative analysis of migration governance in urban, metropolitan, medium-sized and small urban areas in Central and Eastern Europe.

1.2 The Theoretical Framework of the Book

This book builds on a well-established field of local-level migration governance by adding insights from the so-far overlooked context of new immigrant destinations in the CEE (e.g. Bazurli & Kaufmann, 2023; Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017). The

increased interest in local-level migration governance, or the so-called ‘local turn’, in Western European and the U.S. cities emerged as a result of a growing awareness that immigrant integration is a local process (Filomeno, 2016). This approach was driven by an increasing scepticism towards national-level models of immigrant integration, such as multicultural or assimilationist models (Caponio & Bokert, 2010), and in a growing critique of ‘methodological nationalism’, which involves building national-level claims based on local-level studies (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002). Migration scholars usually viewed local policies as better tailored to local needs, more efficient and more innovative than national frameworks (Hooper et al., 2017).

Migration governance in cities encompasses the activities of non-state actors and their interactions with local and national governments. Local-level migration governance is usually understood as multi-scalar practices in which cities are recognised as actors shaping their own responses to migration through horizontal relationships with other cities and civil society organisations (Caponio, 2022; Lacroix & Spencer, 2022; Zapata-Barrero, 2022); it looks into the variation between cities and between various non-state actors and assumes vertical power-sharing across supranational, national and local-level governments.

Scholars have proposed a variety of models to conceptualise local-level migration governance, with the multilevel governance (MLG) framework being one of the most influential. Initially developed by Hooghe and Marks (2001, 2003, 2010), the MLG perspective focuses on the relationships between different levels of government—local, national and supranational—and how they interact in shaping migration-related policies.

Subsequent studies have built on this framework by examining how local governance varies depending on cities’ relationships with national governments (Scholten & Penninx, 2016), the target groups of local policies (e.g. based on legal status, income or country of origin) (de Graauw & Vermeulen, 2016) and the extent to which migration is mainstreamed into broader local policies (Scholten & van Breugel, 2017; Westerveen & Adam, 2019).

The MLG framework identifies several governance patterns, including insurgent and non-insurgent responses to migration (Bazurli & Kaufmann, 2023), as well as centralist (top-down), localist (bottom-up), multilevel (collaborative) and decoupled (conflictual or uncoordinated) modes of policy-making (Scholten, 2013; Scholten & Penninx, 2016). Despite its wide application, the MLG framework has been criticised for lacking conceptual precision and for undertheorising the dynamics of power and conflict between governance levels (Caponio & Jones-Correa, 2018).

Most recently, scholars have also analysed the so-called “second phase” of local turn scholarship (Pisarevskaya & Scholten, 2025) in cities with different volumes of diversity (Crul, 2016), secondary cities (Kihato & Landau, 2024), small and medium-sized cities across the Global North and South (e.g. Pettrachin et al., 2026; Triandafyllidou et al., 2024; Boese, 2024), border cities (Sohn et al., 2022) or networks of cities (Caponio, 2022; Lacroix & Spencer, 2022). This can also be described as the post-2015 second-generation research on local integration policies (Pettrachin & Caponio, 2026). Developed in North America, so-called ‘new immigrant destinations’ studies (e.g. Flippen & Farrell-Bryan, 2021; Janská et al., 2014) rarely analyse European

cities and the CEE region. However, the development of policies targeting migrants in such cities may differ from those in new destinations in traditional immigrant countries due to distinct political and socio-economic contexts and migration histories. In this literature, secondary cities are usually defined as cities that operate below the level of primary or capital cities in terms of size and influence, yet play a critical role in regional development by acting as hubs for economic activity, service provision and population distribution. Although there is no universal definition, they are increasingly recognised as functional intermediaries within urban systems—bridging rural and metropolitan areas and contributing to more balanced and sustainable territorial development (Brand et al., 2021; Roberts, 2014). Shrinking cities are those experiencing significant and sustained population loss, often accompanied by economic decline, deteriorating infrastructure and reduced public services. While shrinkage is most commonly associated with deindustrialisation in the Global North, it is increasingly recognised as a global phenomenon shaped by demographic changes, economic restructuring and shifts in urban–rural dynamics (Oswalt & Rieniets, 2006; Pallagst et al., 2014). Finally, border cities are those located near international borders, where the dynamics of cross-border interactions shape geopolitical, economic and socio-cultural interactions. These cities often function as gateways, buffer zones or points of friction and are influenced by national policies, transboundary mobility and the symbolic and material presence of the border itself (Lee et al., 2001; Prokkola, 2019; Sohn et al., 2022).

Authors have identified various factors shaping local-level migration governance. De Graauw and Vermeulen (2016) discuss (1) left-leaning governments, (2) large immigrant populations among the city electorate and local decision-making structures and (3) an infrastructure of community-based organisations representing immigrants' interests in local politics. Caponio et al. (2018) point more broadly to: (1) histories of migration and urban life; (2) local politics and political participation; (3) city identity and frames of migration and diversity, e.g. super-diversities, divided cities, border cities and (4) local policies of migration and diversity.

The literature on the 'local turn' in migration studies has been predominantly based on cases from cities in Western Europe and North America. Only recently have urban contexts from other parts of the Global North and the Global South been incorporated into this analytical framework (e.g. Triandafyllidou et al., 2024). While national-level anti-immigrant policies in CEE have attracted scholarly attention, the role of cities as actors in migration governance remains significantly underexamined. As a result, we still know little about whether the established factors shaping local migration governance apply to the CEE context, or whether other region-specific dynamics are at play.

Unlike the well-researched cities of Western Europe (e.g. Amsterdam, Berlin, Malmö, Rotterdam, London) and the U.S. (New York, San Francisco), Central and Eastern European post-socialist cities usually have a longer history of emigration rather than immigration, smaller immigrant populations, low levels of immigrant political participation (Glorius, 2021). The cities function within centralised, non-federal states and although some became new immigrant destinations, they still need to develop immigrant infrastructure. In CEE cities, there are also

fewer non-state actors, such as NGOs serving immigrant populations and grassroots activism, compared to large Western and immigrant gateway cities. Yet, faced with mass forced migration, some local governments and civil society groups developed distinctive local-level tools to accommodate their migrant populations. In contrast to some Western European and North American cities, these activities can hardly be framed as a ‘local turn’ and have often taken a less formal character. A handful of studies analyse these factors and processes in CEE cities⁴.

Even if some CEE cases are brought to a broader theoretical discussion on migration governance, the nuanced understanding of differences across CEE cities, on the one hand and similarities due to a shared CEE heritage, on the other, has been overlooked. Even if some CEE cases have been included in broader theoretical discussions on migration governance, the region is often treated as a monolith or contrasted with Western contexts, without due attention to the internal diversity of its cities. A nuanced understanding—one that considers both the variations in local governance approaches and the shared legacies of post-socialist transformation, welfare regimes and state-society relations—remains largely overlooked. This limits our ability to fully understand how regional specificity influences the management of migration at the local level.

This book makes a distinctive empirical and theoretical contribution to the field of urban migration governance by introducing original evidence from the underexplored Central and Eastern European region and proposing a context-sensitive model of migration governance in its cities. By examining local-level migration policy-making through the lens of CEE urban contexts, it extends the dominant Western European and North American perspectives with new theoretical and empirical insights. Drawing on—and contributing to—the multilevel governance framework, the book enhances our understanding of how local migration governance operates in settings shaped by post-socialist transformations, institutional fragmentation and evolving state-society relations.

While the multilevel governance framework provides a useful lens for analysing institutional relations, it often underplays the role of migrants themselves as active agents within governance processes. The concept of migrant integration is far from a neutral administrative process; rather, it reflects asymmetric power relations in which states define the terms of belonging and access to rights, often framing integration as a one-way process of adaptation to dominant norms (Grzymała-Kazłowska & Phillimore, 2018; Phillimore, 2021). Within such governance systems, the agency of migrants tends to be constrained by legal, institutional and discursive mechanisms that regulate inclusion and exclusion. However, recent scholarship highlights that migrants are not merely passive recipients of integration policies but actively shape their trajectories through practices of reciprocity, mutual aid and the creation of “social anchors”, as well as through engagement in horizontal forms of solidarity that may bypass or challenge state-led frameworks (Grzymała-Kazłowska & Phillimore, 2018; Phillimore, 2021).

⁴ For an exception see: (Duszczyk et al., 2018; Józwiak et al., 2017).

This perspective aligns with emerging approaches to local migration governance and municipalism, which emphasise the role of civic actors, informal networks and cross-sectoral cooperation in co-producing responses to migration. As shown in Chapter 11, governance often unfolds through the mobilisation of material, human and institutional resources by diverse local actors, including in contexts where formal state systems are fragmented or insufficient. Empirical chapters in this volume illustrate these dynamics across CEE cities. In Chapter 5 (Kraków), the response to the 2022 displacement from Ukraine involved the emergence of informal, horizontal networks that included migrant-led organisations and enabled the development of a dynamic support ecosystem. In Chapter 7 (Lublin), migrants—actively co-organised assistance, supported newcomers in navigating institutions and formed their own initiatives, demonstrating how migrant agency operates within and alongside local governance structures. At the same time, these cases reveal structural constraints, such as the limited institutionalisation of migrant-led organisations. Taken together, these findings suggest that migration governance in CEE cities is co-produced through interactions between state and non-state actors, in which migrants themselves play an active—though often structurally constrained—role.

Although specific characteristics and challenges experienced by Western European and North American cities are often emphasised, the characteristics and challenges faced by CEE cities are underrepresented in these discussions.

1.3 Book Research Design, Case Selection and Limitations

The methodology employed in the book is based on a comparative case study design (Yin, 2018) and utilises qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods (Guest et al., 2011). In the analysis, we included cases of cities located in Poland, Hungary, Czechia and Romania. Building on the existing literature on migration governance in cities (Caponio et al., 2018), the localities were selected for the study based on their (1) size (ranging from nearly two million to 60,000) and (2) local political makeup, ranging from right-wing to central. Other relevant characteristics of the cities included in the analysis were their migrant population size (ranging from over 230,000 to 2,500), migrant rate and rate increase following the 2022 forced migration from Ukraine (ranging from less than 5% to over 25%), as well as city type. The former include capital cities (Warsaw, Prague, Budapest), secondary cities (Kraków, Brno), shrinking cities (Brno, Lublin, Płock, Łomża) and border cities (Lublin, Oradea).

These, and other relevant features of the cities selected for analysis, are presented in the table (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Cities under study-characteristics

CITY, Country	City popula- tion at the end of 2021 (1), in thousands	Migrant popula- tion at the end of 2021, in thousands	Migrant popula- tion rate at the end of 2021 (% of the total popu- lation) (2)	Number of tempo- rary protection (TP) holders at the end of 2022	Migrant popula- tion rate at the end of 2022 (% of the total popu- lation)	City type: capital city, secondary city, shrinking city, border city	Local adminis- tration political makeup in 2022: right- wing/ central/ left-wing	Local Autonomy Index, country mean value for 2015–2022 (3)
WARSAW, Poland	1795.6 (4)	160 (5)	8.9	Over 100,000 (6)	13.9 (7)	Capital	Central	22.88
BUDAPEST, Hungary	1772	88.251 (8)	6	25–28,000 (9)	11 (10)	Capital	Central- left	15.93
PRAGUE, Czechia	1301.4 (11)	235.8	18.1	72,000 (12)	25.9	Capital	Central	23.07
KRAKÓW, Poland	754 (13)	48 (14)	6.4	30,000 (15)	10 (16)	Secondary	A broad coalition of the central left leading	22.88
BRNO (17), Czechia	382.4	41.4	10.8	22,400	17.3	Secondary, Shrinking	Right- wing	23.07
LUBLIN, Poland	332.9 (18)	22.6 (19)	6.8	8,418	8.5 (20)	Border city, Shrinking	Central	22.88
ORADEA, Romania	183.1	1.7 (21)	-	1,580 (22)	–	Border city	Central- right	18.31
PŁOCK (23), Poland	115	13.4	11.5	2,207	13.6	Shrinking city	Central	22.88
ŁOMŻA (24), Poland	60 (25)	2.5 (26)	4.2	505	4.8 (27)	Shrinking city	Right- wing	22.88

Comments and Sources

1. Unless stated otherwise, city population data is taken from UN data.
2. Migrant rate calculated as: $(\text{Immigrant Population} \div \text{Total Population}) \times 100$.
3. Local Autonomy Index, mean value for 2015–2020, based on: Ladner et al. (2025).
4. Based on Central Statistical Office in Poland statistical information: Główny Urząd Statystyczny (2021).
5. Based on Winiarska et al. (2026).
6. Based on the number of Ukrainian TP beneficiaries registered in Warsaw, the Republic of Poland's Open Data Platform 2022, <https://dane.gov.pl/pl>.
7. The migrant population for 2022 was estimated by adding the estimated 2021 migrant population and the number of TP beneficiaries registered in 2022. The total population of Warsaw included in the calculation is based on Central Statistical Office in Poland statistical information: Główny Urząd Statystyczny (2022).
8. Based on Matuszczyk and Bernát (2026).

Table 1.1 (continued)

9. Based on local experts' estimates (Matuszczyk & Bernát, 2026).
10. Note by local experts (Matuszczyk & Bernát, 2026). Precise statistical term: residence at birth by county and region. In the case of Budapest, this figure includes the ethnic Hungarians in neighbouring countries who have received Hungarian citizenship since 2010 under the Orban regime. A case in point is those born in Romania, who account for approximately one quarter of the total figure in this grid (54,000). It is reasonable to assume that the majority of them are ethnic Hungarians who migrated to Hungary in the 1990s and 2000s and obtained citizenship, as well as those who are dual citizens. These people can be considered as immigrants only in a very broad sense (their presence is a resource rather than an inclusion duty for the municipal government). Further, in the 2022 census, 27,845 Budapest citizens were Ukrainian born. They are likely to be also ethnic Hungarians (speaking Hungarian) and labour migrants (both speaking Hungarian and Ukrainian), thus a more diverse group than the Romanian-born ones. The displaced people are yet to be included in this figure as the census was completed before the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
11. Based on Brabec (2023).
12. Based on local expert estimates Jelínková and Zogata-Kusz (2026).
13. Residents registered in Kraków, based on Pędziwiatr et al. (2022: 12).
14. Pędziwiatr et al. (2022: 13).
15. Based on: Czerska-Shaw and Pędziwiatr (2026).
16. Where 2022 data on the immigrant population was unavailable, the migrant rate was calculated using estimates. Specifically, the total population was estimated by summing the resident (local) population and the migrant population for 2021, along with the number of Temporary Protection (TP) beneficiaries. The migrant population for 2022 was then estimated by adding the 2021 migrant population to the number of TP beneficiaries in 2022.
17. All of the data for Brno is based on local experts' estimates (Jaworsky et al., 2026).
18. Based on: Główny Urząd Statystyczny (2025).
19. Based on local experts' estimates (Podgórska & Jekaterynczuk, 2026).
20. Due to data limitations, the migrant rate was calculated using estimates. Specifically, the total population was estimated by summing the resident (local) population and the migrant population for 2021, along with the number of Temporary Protection (TP) beneficiaries. The migrant population for 2022 was then estimated by adding the 2021 migrant population to the number of TP beneficiaries in 2022.
21. As city-level data for Oradea is unavailable, see Mészáros (2026) estimates for Bihor County are used as a proxy.
22. Based on the number of Ukrainian citizens granted residence permits, see Mészáros (2026) in Bihor in 2022.
23. All of the data for Płock is based on local experts' estimates, Lewandowski and Nowosielski (2026).
24. Unless stated otherwise, all of the data for Łomża is based on local experts' estimates (Popławska et al., 2026).
25. Based on Popławska et al. (2026), data from 2022.
26. Data from 2018 (Popławska et al., 2026).
27. Where 2022 data on the immigrant population was unavailable, the migrant rate was calculated using estimates. Specifically, the total population was estimated by summing the resident (local) population and the migrant population for 2021, along with the number of Temporary Protection (TP) beneficiaries. The migrant population for 2022 was then estimated by adding the 2021 migrant population to the number of TP beneficiaries in 2022.

1.3.1 Data Challenges

Analysing migration governance in the CEE context poses significant challenges due to the lack of detailed data on migrant populations. As a relatively new immigrant destination (Grzymała-Kazłowska & Lesińska, 2017), the region has a limited immigration infrastructure, particularly in its cities, including systems for the systematic collection and use of migration-related data. Adding immigration status or background into existing administrative data and surveys at the national and local levels is under development in CEE. This results in existing data being selective, fragmented and difficult to compare across national and local contexts. A lack of granularity of administrative data is particularly challenging at the local level.

Even within these CEE cities that are relatively more experienced in migration governance, e.g. in Warsaw, administrative data are incompatible due to different definitions of migration-related terminology and fragmentary recording. This makes the task of assessing the migrant population size challenging (Winiarska et al., 2026). In other local contexts, e.g. in Oradea and Bihor County (Romania), data are only available for the entire county, not separately for the city of Oradea, regarding migrant numbers and labour-market participation (Mészáros, 2026).

Data limitations become additionally problematic when it comes to groups with varying legal statuses (from asylum seekers or temporary workers, through naturalised citizens) and across various nationalities and groups holding different marginalised statuses. In Czechia, for example, national statistics “only cover persons without Czech citizenship”, meaning that “once a migrant acquires Czech citizenship, he/she is no longer included in migration statistics”. Consequently, “Czechia has no data on Czech citizens of migrant origin” (Jelínková & Zogata-Kusz, 2026).

The 2022 forced migration from Ukraine, on the one hand, facilitated the creation of new data collection systems and/or the development of migrant data collection units within municipalities (case of Warsaw, see Winiarska et al. (2026)). On the other hand, without pre-crisis systems in place, smaller cities struggled even more to understand the migratory situation in their areas and were unable to implement systems that were available in larger cities (Lewandowski & Nowosielski, 2026).

In addition to these challenges, cross-city and international comparisons pose a separate difficulty due to the lack of comparable migration data and inconsistent definitions of immigrants.

Authors in this volume utilise various strategies to address these data limitations. First, they triangulate fragmented administrative data on immigration from different public registries, such as residence permits, social insurance, temporary protection; and which are registered in various districts of the city, with other types of data, such as qualitative expert interviews (Czerska-Shaw & Pędziwiatr, 2026; Jaworsky et al., 2026; Jelínková & Zogata-Kusz, 2026; Matuszczyk & Bernát, 2026; Mészáros, 2026; Podgórska & Jekaterynczuk, 2026; Popławska, et al., 2026; Lewandowski & Nowosielski, 2026; Winiarska et al., 2026; Zentai et al., 2026), quantitative survey data (Czerska-Shaw & Pędziwiatr, 2026; Mészáros, 2026; Zentai et al., 2026), other types of quantitative data sources, such as mobile phone use (Winiarska et al., 2026). Second, based on triangulated data sources, the authors provide estimates of the immigrant population (see Table 1.1).

1.4 Contents of the Book

The structure of this book reflects an empirically and theoretically grounded, comparative and multilevel analysis of migration governance in Central and Eastern European cities.

Part I focuses on **capital cities**—Warsaw, Budapest and Prague—examining how migration is governed in politically charged and often unwelcoming national contexts. Three chapters, authored by Aleksandra Winiarska, Michał Nowosielski, Kseniya Homel-Ficenes, Marta Pachocka, Dominik Wach, Karolina Łukasiewicz and Karolina Podgórska (Warsaw, Chapter 2), Kamil Matuszczyk and Aniko Bernát (Budapest, Chapter 3) and Marie Jelínková and Agnieszka Zogata-Kusz (Prague, Chapter 4), included in this section, explore the tension between local-level efforts and restrictive national policies, revealing resistance and adaptation within municipal governance structures.

Part II focuses on **secondary cities**, presenting case studies of Kraków and Brno. These contributions by Karolina Czerska-Shaw and Konrad Pędziwiatr (Kraków, Chapter 5) and Bernadette N. Jaworsky, Radka Klvaňová and Ivana Rapoš Božič (Brno, Chapter 6) highlight the challenges of rapid demographic change and the role of public attitudes in shaping local governance responses, particularly in cities undergoing significant transformation in their migrant populations.

Part III addresses **border cities**, including Lublin and Oradea, which have faced heightened pressures due to their geographical location. Two chapters, authored by Karolina Podgórska and Andrzej Jekaterynczuk (Lublin, Chapter 7), and Edina Lilla Mészáros (Oradea, Chapter 8), analyse how crisis contexts—particularly the influx of Ukrainian refugees—have shaped governance practices and labour-market integration strategies at the local level.

Part IV examines **shrinking cities**, such as Łomża and Płock, where demographic decline intersects with the arrival of forced migrants. Here, Joanna Zuzanna Popławska, Justyna Gać, Paulina Legutko-Kobus, Marta Pachocka and Dominik Wach (Łomża, Chapter 9), Arkadiusz Lewandowski and Michał Nowosielski (Płock, Chapter 10) explore emerging resilience policies and instances of intentional or de facto non-governance in response to new migration challenges.

Finally, **Part V** presents **comparative perspectives on migration governance in Central and Eastern European cities**. Here, Violetta Zentai, Margit Feischmidt, Eszter Neumann, Ildikó Zakariás and Csilla Zsigmond analyse different modalities of municipalism in Hungary in response to Ukrainian displacement (Chapter 11). Book editors, Karolina Łukasiewicz, Marta Pachocka and Michał Nowosielski, synthesise the book's findings in the concluding chapter, offering a novel CEE Local Migrant Governance Index (CEELMiG) to compare migration governance in cities, present cross-city analysis and identify common governance modes and key macro-, meso- and micro-level factors that shape migration governance across CEE cities (Chapter 12).

In sum, this book addresses a significant gap in migration scholarship by examining how cities in Central and Eastern Europe have responded to evolving migration dynamics between 2015 and 2024, a period marked by intensified geopolitical and humanitarian pressures. By turning analytical attention to CEE cities, it contributes to the regionalisation of migration research and challenges assumptions derived from Western-centric models of urban governance.

The findings presented throughout the book reveal both the diversity of local approaches and certain commonalities rooted in shared historical, institutional and

socio-political conditions. The identification of macro-, meso- and micro-level factors shaping migration governance across CEE cities not only helps make sense of regional dynamics but also offers a conceptual framework that may prove useful for future comparative studies of migration governance in other emerging or transitional urban contexts.

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Part I

Capital Cities

Chapter 2

Local Governance of Migrant Integration in Warsaw



Aleksandra Winiarska, Michał Nowosielski, Kseniya Homel-Ficenes, Marta Pachocka, Dominik Wach, Karolina Łukasiewicz, and Karolina Podgórska

2.1 Introduction

Warsaw, the capital of Poland, is a unique case in the Polish context because it is the largest city in the country (over 1.8 million residents) with the largest (estimated at over 250,000) and most diverse migrant population, the most developed immigrant infrastructure (including the largest number of migrant-support NGOs) and the most extensive package of migrant integration activities undertaken by local actors (See Wach & Pachocka, 2022; Winiarska et al., 2024). Unlike other large Polish cities (such as Gdańsk, Kraków, Wrocław) that have put in place local migrant-integration strategies targeting new arrivals, the Warsaw authorities have adopted an approach aimed at the local community in general. Diverse actions and policy measures targeting migrants (among other groups) have been developed over the

A. Winiarska (✉) · M. Nowosielski · K. Homel-Ficenes · M. Pachocka · D. Wach · K. Łukasiewicz · K. Podgórska
Centre of Migration Research, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland
e-mail: aa.winiarska@uw.edu.pl

A. Winiarska
Institute of Applied Social Sciences, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland

M. Nowosielski
WSB Merito University, Gdańsk, Poland

Institute for Western Affairs, Poznań, Poland

K. Homel-Ficenes
Institute of Social Prevention and Resocialisation, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland

M. Pachocka
Department of Political Studies, SGH Warsaw School of Economics, Warsaw, Poland

K. Podgórska
Institute of Sociology, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin, Poland

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last years but only recently (in 2020) has the municipality established a department dedicated to coordinating migration matters (see: Homel et al., 2023).

Over the last decade the population of foreigners in Warsaw has been growing dynamically.¹ This reflects Poland's shift to become a new immigrant destination (NID) (Fihel et al., 2023; Górny et al., 2010). A rapid increase in the number of migrants has created new needs for both public services and a migrant-support infrastructure. Despite important developments in this field, Warsaw has not adopted any explicit integration strategy or policy dedicated to residents with a migration background. The rationale for this is moving away from silos policies and aiming for intersectionality. Moreover, the structural conditions of the Warsaw municipal administration, which is divided into thematic offices but also territorial districts with significant autonomy, makes it necessary to develop mainstreaming standards. Lack of explicit policy targeted at migrants is also due to a lack of clarity around administrative responsibilities in this respect as well as the limited financial resources of Polish local governments. Between 2015 and 2021 Poland's right-wing ruling coalition substantially politicised and instrumentalised migration (Klaus & Szulecka, 2023). It pursued an anti-refugee discourse and defunded the asylum system, creating an unwelcoming context for immigration policy. At that time, many local authorities governed by the political opposition, including the mayoralty of Warsaw, avoided putting migrant integration issues at the top of the political agenda to avert political and financial risk (for an analysis of the consequences of political centralisation of power in Poland see e.g. Makowski, 2019). This situation substantially shifted after two major events: the 2022 forced-migration crisis that saw over 100,000 new Ukrainian migrants settle in Warsaw (with 1 mln across the whole of Poland); and a political turn at central level in late 2023, when a liberal and pro-European coalition won parliamentary elections in Poland. Forced migration from Ukraine induced mass international funding that allowed both national and Warsaw-based non-profit organisations to deliver services to migrants. Almost two years after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the new Polish government opened up to vertical cooperation with local governments; some time later, in October 2024, it announced a migration strategy (Regaining Control, Ensuring Security: Migration Strategy for 2025–2030, 2024), causing however much controversy among social actors.²

In this chapter, we aim to analyse migration and integration governance in Warsaw in a post-2015 context, including: policy measures—both declared and actually implemented—aimed at foreign-born residents; the cast of local actors involved in implementing such measures and specifically horizontal and cross-sectoral relations between actors engaged in migration governance (local government and third sector). We will also indicate some major local-level migration governance challenges, including cooperation and coordination issues. The vertical relations—which at the time of our research were to a large extent antagonistic—constitute a specific

¹ In this chapter we use interchangeably the terms “foreigners” (the term used in Polish legislation) and migrants.

² The document was published as we were finalising this text and sparked an ongoing and substantial debate, which we could not include in detail here. See Citizens' hearing on migration strategy, 2024.

context for our analysis of actual measures for migrant integration put in place. Although there is a significant amount of practice-oriented research addressing migration governance in Warsaw (e.g. Homel et al., 2023), only a handful of these studies have contributed to the broader academic debate on migration governance in cities in general (for exceptions see: Duszczuk et al., 2018; Wach & Pachocka, 2022). This chapter aims to address this gap. It is structured as follows. In the first part we briefly recapitulate the theoretical framework of local migration and integration governance, before outlining the specific historical and current context of migration to Warsaw. We also present some background information on migration governance in Poland and shifts in approaches to migration at state and local levels post-2015 and post-2022. The main body of the chapter includes the results of Warsaw-based research projects conducted at the Centre of Migration Research of the University of Warsaw (CMR UW).

2.2 Theoretical Framework of Local Migration and Integration Governance

With this chapter we contribute to a broader academic discussion on migration and integration³ governance in cities, i.e. how migration-related processes in cities are managed through cooperation between different local state and non-state (social and private) actors (Penninx & Garces-Mascareñas, 2016a; Geddes, 2022). Governance scholarship developed in opposition to the term ‘government’, shifting emphasis from centralised control and hierarchical decision-making to more participatory cooperation between different actors. The governance approach applies to different areas of public policy, including migration, and researchers have pointed to the multi-level nature of this phenomenon (Scholten & Penninx, 2016). Migration governance encompasses both the decisions and actions that various actors at different levels take, but also the actions they avoid, since ‘inaction is also an option’ (Geddes, 2022: 312). Some of these actions may be included in a policy document, although non-policy is also considered ‘a policy in itself’ (Penninx & Garces-Mascareñas, 2016a: 20).

Over the last decade, much academic attention has been paid to the multilevel governance (MLG) of migration and integration processes, i.e. the distribution of the decision-making power, resources and activities of diverse actors at different levels of government, in horizontal and vertical dimensions (see Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017). Gradually moving away from a dominant centrist approach in which national governments play a key role, researchers have pointed to a ‘local turn’ in migration

³ We follow Penninx and Garces-Mascareñas’s (2016a: 14) understanding of integration as the process of becoming an accepted part of society. This process-oriented approach to integration includes two parties (migrants and the receiving society) and three interrelated levels (individuals, organisations and institutions).

governance (Caponio & Borkert, 2010; Dekker et al., 2015; Penninx & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016b; Pisarevskaya & Scholten, 2022, 2025; Scholten & Penninx, 2016; Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017) and stressed the ‘vertical decentralisation’ of integration policy-making and implementation. Cities have been at the forefront of the development and implementation of migration and integration policies bypassing the national level (Jensen, 2018; Matusz-Protasiewicz, 2013). Given that migrant integration is broadly discussed across the political discourse, provokes strong responses from the public (see e.g. Hooghe & de Vroome, 2015) and is dependent on structural opportunities, the result may be incoherence, contradictions, divergence (Jorgensen, 2012; Poppelaars & Scholten, 2008) or even ‘decoupling’ between policy levels (Scholten, 2013, 2016; see also Gebhardt, 2014).

In the context of migration governance, the concept of mainstreaming has been applied to indicate a shift from specific to generic approaches targeting a ‘whole population’ and needs-based rather than group-based programmes and measures (Scholten et al., 2017; see also Scholten & van Breugel, 2018). Immigrant mainstreaming denotes both vertical and horizontal shifts at an administrative level, from state-centric to polycentric and multilevel distribution of responsibility. Yet as the literature shows, mainstreaming requires cooperation and coordination in order to prevent ‘decoupling’ between policy levels. It also needs to be combined with policies promoting inclusiveness, equal opportunities, non-discrimination, participation and belonging (op.cit). In contrast with this approach, Westerveen and Adam (2019) stress that mainstreaming has often been misunderstood in the field of migration studies, and has served to legitimise the shutting down of specialised immigrant integration services rather than to support their provision alongside needs-based services. Using the case of Warsaw we will contribute to this broader theoretical discussion.

2.3 Study Background: Polish Migration Governance in a Post-2015 Context

Before the political and socio-economic transformation of the early 1990s, communist Poland was essentially closed to immigration with restrictive admission of foreigners and a ‘no-exit’ policy for nationals (Sobczak-Szelc et al., 2023; Stola, 2010). Over the past three decades the country has developed policy measures from scratch, through the years transforming also from an emigration country to an immigration one. Poland’s accession to the EU in 2004 and entry into the Schengen area in 2007 facilitated emigration to western EU Member States (see e.g. Lesińska et al., 2011; Łodziński & Szonert, 2017). At that time, Polish migration policy developed and shifted from a Europeanisation phase (2001–2004) to a stabilisation phase (2004–2015) (see e.g. Górny et al., 2010; Weinart, 2006).

In the following years, the country’s migration character gradually evolved from net emigration to net immigration. Increasingly, Ukrainians became the dominant group of migrants in Poland (Górny & Kindler, 2023; Górny et al., 2010; Okólski &

Wach, 2020; Strzelecki & Pachocka, 2020). A positive migration balance in Poland was recorded for the first time in 2016 (CSO, 2024: 12) and this trend continued as the country became a NID. Poland diversified ethnically, linguistically and culturally as a result. However, these changes were not met by the construction of a migrant-support infrastructure or sustainable policies aimed at new arrivals; in fact very few policy measures were enacted (see, e.g. Górny & Kaczmarczyk, 2019; Górny et al., 2010, 2018; Kowalik et al., 2022). Post-2015, and as in other countries in the CEE region, Poland's right-wing government adopted anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies, refusing to participate in EU asylum-seeker relocation mechanisms; it also fostered negative media discourses, contributing to negative public attitudes towards migrants (see, e.g. Górak-Sosnowska & Pachocka, 2019). State funding aimed at migrant and refugee support and integration was dramatically cut, and previous government-led efforts towards the development of a migration and integration strategy were shelved. Legal instruments and practical measures were focused on security and control leading to ongoing processes that “criminalis[ed]” migration (Klaus, 2017a, 2017b).

At the same time, and paradoxically, the Polish government radically liberalised the labour migration regime. As a result, the country “became a European leader in newly issued residence permits and even a global leader when the seasonal foreign workforce was taken into account” (Duszczyk & Kaczmarczyk, 2022: 165). By the end of 2016 over 266,000 valid residence documents had been issued to foreigners in Poland, including over 100,000 to Ukrainians (although these numbers do not include the long-term visas issued to the majority of Ukrainian migrants in Poland at that time, who tended to undertake circular migration between Poland and Ukraine). By the end of 2021 the total number of migrants had doubled to almost 550,000, with 300,000 residence permits issued to Ukrainians, over 40,000 to Belarusians and over 200,000 to citizens of other countries (Office for Foreigners, Annual Reports, 2024). These increasing migration flows to Poland were shaped to a large extent by political and humanitarian crises over the Eastern border, including the start of war in the Donbass region, the annexation of Ukrainian Crimea in 2014 and later the repression of the political opposition in Belarus, which included unlawful actions undertaken by the country's government during elections in 2020. By this time circular and temporary migration from Ukraine (and to some extent also Belarus) had slowly begun to turn into more settled and long-term migration (Górny et al., 2023; Łukasiewicz et al., 2026, Chapter 1 in this book).

With the central government reluctant to support the integration of a growing migrant population, Polish municipalities remained at the forefront of migration governance. The City of Gdańsk was a pioneer in its adoption of the Immigrant Integration Model in 2016, Kraków introduced its Open Kraków programme also in 2016 and Wrocław put in place a strategy for intercultural dialogue in 2018. In Warsaw, the capital city, however, no single strategic plan was created to address the needs of the city's foreign-born residents. Instead, a mainstreaming approach has been adopted since the late 2000s to include migration cross-sectionally in various municipal policies (concerning e.g. healthcare, education, housing, social assistance etc.) All these local activities were initiated in a context in which no clear funding

or integration functions had been assigned to local administrators with the exception of responsibility for implementing Individual Integration Programmes for refugee status holders (these programmes include housing, language courses and vocational support (Wach & Pachocka, 2022).

February 2022 was a critical turning point; within months around 1 million displaced people from Ukraine had taken up residence in Poland (Gov.pl Statistical Portal, 2023). As a result of the European Council's implementation of the EU Temporary Protection Directive (CID, 2022/382; EU TPD CD 2001/55/EC) and the Polish Parliament's corresponding passage of the *Act on assistance to citizens of Ukraine in relation to armed conflict on the territory of this country* (Act on Assistance, 2022), Ukrainian TP holders were granted immediate access to the Polish labour market and welfare system (including healthcare, social welfare and education) as well as temporary residence permits. The state, local governments, INGOs and NGOs allocated substantial resources for the support of displaced people and there was significant engagement both on the part of public institutions and NGOs as well as civil society at large, including unprecedented numbers of volunteers. By the end of 2023, almost 1.9 million valid residence permits had been issued to foreigners in Poland, including a total of almost 1.5 million such documents issued to Ukrainian nationals, of which over 950,000 had TP status. Moreover, statistics indicate that around 118,000 residence permits were issued to Belarusians (including 6,500 people granted subsidiary protection status due to the political situation in Belarus) and 274,000 to citizens of other countries (Office for Foreigners, Annual Reports, 2024; Łukasiewicz et al., 2026, Chapter 1 in this book).

The policies, programmes and activities aimed at migrants resident in Poland and delivered by local administrations and NGOs in most cases have not been institutionalised. In the capital and some other large Polish cities with previous experience of immigration (e.g. Kraków, Gdańsk, Lublin), NGOs have played a critical role in providing various services to the migrant population (Cichocka et al., 2022; Homel et al., 2023; Wach & Pachocka, 2022). This was visible in 2022 but also earlier, especially in respect of support for migrants who do not have international protection and thus have less access to state support.

2.4 Warsaw's Migration Context

Various studies and statistical data reveal that increasingly diverse migrant communities have shaped the urban landscape of Warsaw over the last three decades (Duszczyk et al., 2018). According to Poland's Central Statistical Office, a total of 1.86 million residents lived in the capital in 2023. However, according to GSM data (City Report, 2023) the number of 'city users' (people regularly coming to the city during the day) reached 2.2 million. Warsaw itself has a centuries-long history; it became Poland's capital in the sixteenth century, and between the late seventeenth and early twentieth centuries was controlled to varying extents by different empires including Prussia, Napoleon's France and Russia (for a comprehensive history of Warsaw see: Brzostek,

2021; Drozdowski et al., 2017). The city's nineteenth century population included merchants, craftsmen, entrepreneurs and industrialists of German, French, Italian, Russian and Jewish origin as well as diverse religions including Catholics, Evangelicals, Orthodox believers and Jews (Jewish Historical Institute, 2024). During WWII the city was almost completely destroyed and most of its substantial pre-war Jewish population murdered. In the aftermath of WWII, the city became ethnically homogeneous to a large extent, in line with the nationalist and mono-cultural policies of the socialist Polish People's Republic. The 1950s were also a time of industrial development of the city's peripheral districts. The political transition of 1989 triggered internal and international migration, resulting in the steady growth of the city population, including migrants from neighbouring countries such as Ukraine and Belarus as well as those further away e.g. Vietnam (see e.g. Winiarska & Toruńczyk-Ruiz, 2018). The last decade has brought a visible growth, with particularly Ukrainians but also many others, including Indians, Turks and Chinese, coming to work and study in Warsaw, and 2022 representing an obvious turning point.

Due to the incompatibility of administrative data (as a result of different definitions, statistical categories and fragmentary recording), it is difficult to indicate the exact numbers of migrants living in Warsaw before and after the mass forced migration from Ukraine. Estimates are possible, however. GSM data (UMP, 2022a) indicate that the number of Ukrainians living in Warsaw before 2022 may have been around 100,000, and the total number of foreigners was around 8% of the city's population. In 2024, apart from Ukrainians, there were over 90,000 other foreigners representing 100 different nationalities among Warsaw's residents; they came from countries such as Belarus, Vietnam, India and Turkey as well as EU countries (municipal data on foreigners in Warsaw, 2024). Most of them were economic migrants, but over 30,000 were foreign students (according to RAD-on report, 2024). Of these, the top groups included Ukrainians, Belarusians and Turks. By comparison with nationwide statistics, a significant proportion of Warsaw's pre-2022 residents were people who had obtained international or national protection (Wach & Pachocka, 2022). Given the unwelcoming political context at the national level (described earlier), primary responsibility for providing support to these newer residents was left to the local government and NGOs, funded to a large extent by EU and European Economic Area (EEA) grants.

Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine caused forced displacement on an unprecedented scale (UNHCR, 2023). Warsaw was among the top temporary-reception and transition-hub destinations for people fleeing the war in Ukraine. Between February and May 2022, over 300,000 Ukrainian refugees were temporarily resident in Warsaw (UMP, 2022b) and in the following months over 100,000 settled in the city, according to data on active UKR status (The Office of Strategy & Analysis of the Municipality of Warsaw, 2023). In early 2024 the foreign population of Warsaw was estimated at around 14%. The majority of Ukrainian forced migrants (over 78%) were women and children (see also UMP, 2022c). In Warsaw, as in other places in Poland, the crisis also evoked unprecedented supportive responses and humanitarian aid from public and private institutions, NGOs and civil society as a whole (Jarosz & Klaus, 2023).

2.5 Methodology

This chapter principally uses data collected and analysed through two projects. The first, “Foreigners–Varsovians: Diagnosis and Recommendations for Integration Actions”⁴ was conducted between 2021 and 2022 at CMR UW. It focused on integration activities provided by various public and non-public actors in Warsaw. The second project, “Equal Access of Foreigners to Public Services: Warsaw”,⁵ was conducted between 2021 and 2023 at the Centre of Migration Research Foundation. It focused on countering discrimination and ensuring equal access for foreigners to public services in Warsaw. The project analysed public administration, education, health and social services, culture and sport. It consisted of research, educational activities and advocacy activities involving public institutions, experts, NGOs and representatives of migrant groups. Both projects drew on administrative data relating to Warsaw’s foreign population and analysed strategic policy documents. The two projects also included primary data, namely 65 qualitative interviews (in total) with representatives of the local administration, NGOs and migrant organisations operating in Warsaw. The interviews were conducted between 2021 and 2023 by a group of seven researchers, including authors of this paper. All interviews were transcribed and uploaded to Dedoose software for thematic analysis (Guest et al., 2012).

For the first project we also convened an expert panel of ten researchers and practitioners involved in migrant integration projects in Poland. This panel discussed the results obtained through our analysis of primary and secondary data and helped develop recommendations for the integration of foreigners in Warsaw. Panel events were conducted in November 2022, transcribed and thematically analysed.

The second project included two additional primary data sources:

1. A PAPI survey (in 5 languages) conducted between March and July 2022 with migrant residents of Warsaw on their experience of the city’s public services.⁶
2. Five cross-sectional participatory workshops conducted in April 2023 with representatives of the local public administration and NGOs on the needs of migrants and the prevention of unequal access to local public services in Warsaw.

⁴ The project was carried out at CMR UW by a team consisting of Kseniya Homel, Karolina Łukasiewicz, Michał Nowosielski (PI), Marta Pachocka, Karolina Podgórska, Dominik Wach and Aleksandra Winiarska. The project’s partners were the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Poland and the City of Warsaw.

⁵ The project was carried out at the Centre of Migration Research Foundation by a team consisting of Kseniya Homel, Michał Nowosielski, Marta Pachocka, Karolina Podgórska, Katarzyna Porwit, Dominik Wach and Aleksandra Winiarska (PI). The project’s partner was the City of Warsaw. It was funded by a grant from the Active Citizens Programme—National Fund (Norwegian and EEA Funds).

⁶ The questionnaires were produced in English, Ukrainian, Russian, Vietnamese and Polish. Interviews were conducted in person and all our interviewers (17 persons in total) were from a migration background. The research team collected around 400 completed questionnaires.

Data collection within both projects was taking place at the time of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, an event that dramatically altered the migration context in Warsaw.

2.6 Warsaw's Local Policies and Structural Conditions

Years before the Russia-Ukraine crisis escalated in 2022, strategic documents published by the city of Warsaw had addressed all of the city's residents rather than targeting migrants specifically. The #Warsaw2030 Strategy (2018) acknowledges the city's increasing diversity but does not refer to foreigners as a particular category of resident. Yet this was not considered a form of non-policy (as in Alexander's, 2003 typology) but rather, as municipal employees we interviewed explained, an attempt at a mainstreaming approach. The Warsaw strategy mentions efforts to attract foreign migrants who represent 'special talents and leaders', whereas other municipal documents only occasionally mention foreigners when referring to potentially marginalised groups or groups with 'adaptation and integration needs' (Strategy for Solving Social Problems, 2021: 20). However, as other interviewees noted (including also municipal workers and NGO representatives), these programmes have often failed to take a comprehensive approach to addressing the needs of the specified groups. Since 2022, the municipality of Warsaw has also been undertaking more or less systemic anti-discriminatory actions in relation to the Social Diversity Policy of the Capital City of Warsaw (2022). Moreover, in 2022, Warsaw signed the Eurocities Integrating Cities Charter, which entails certain obligations and standards around e.g. policy-making and service provision, with the aim of ensuring equal opportunities and inclusion for migrants. However, responsibilities are dispersed between diverse units of public administration with many activities, including crucial support such as language support, legal aid and psychological support, outsourced to NGOs. Scholars have referred to such approaches, in which NGOs play a significant role in a poly-centric model of migration governance, as 'mainstreaming by accident' (Jóźwiak et al., 2018).

As mentioned above, the city of Warsaw has no comprehensive migration or migrant integration policy. Its approach to addressing all residents in strategic documents is complemented by practical policy measures aimed at improving access to municipal services and programmes for all residents, including those who do not speak Polish. Examples of such measures include: multilingual provision on the municipal website (currently available in Polish, Ukrainian and, to a more limited extent, English and Russian); opening municipal hotlines and information points and support to access the labour market (Warsaw Employment Office, 2024) or start a business (Entrepreneurship Centre Smolna, 2024). Most activities relating to language support were, however, introduced post-2022 and directed predominantly at Ukrainians. This approach represents what has been described in other studies as 'front-line pragmatism' and problem-coping rather than consistent policy (Jensen, 2018; Poppelaars & Scholten, 2008).

The structure of Warsaw's public administration does not reflect the growing diversity of the city's inhabitants. As municipal workers we interviewed noted, foreigners have, by law, only limited access to positions in the administration and no common criteria have been developed in respect of cultural and language competences.⁷ A city advisory body through which migrants' voices can be heard is the Sectoral Social Dialogue Commission for Foreigners, which has operated for around a decade to date. It is a form of intersectional cooperation between the municipality and NGO sector in Warsaw and the Commission now includes representatives of over 40 organisations (Sectoral Commission, 2024). Since 2014, the municipality has also funded the operation of an NGO-run Multicultural Centre in Warsaw (Multicultural Centre, 2024). Moreover, the municipality has co-funded the activities of numerous migrant-support NGOs providing assistance to foreigners, including legal, educational and vocational provision. In addition to locally designed and implemented activities, a public-run and centrally funded Intercultural Centre for Social Development (based within the Warsaw Family Support Centre) has been recently established, dedicated to providing support for beneficiaries of international protection (Intercultural Centre for Social Development, 2024).

2.7 Horizontal Relations Between Local Actors

Activities aimed at migrants in Warsaw typically involve both local public institutions and social organisations specialising in support for migrants, including migrant-led organisations. At the time of our research (2021–2023), migration governance was coordinated by Warsaw's city administration through a dedicated team within the Office of International Cooperation. According to publicly available information, this team's main tasks included gathering and analysing data, initiating, coordinating and reviewing migrant-related activities and representing the municipal Office of International Cooperation around issues relating to migration. However, the implementation of policy measures, as indicated by interviewed municipal workers, was cross-sectional, i.e. it was carried out by various units within the Warsaw City Hall, including the Centre for Social Communication, the Office for Education, the Office for Social Assistance and Projects, the Office for Culture and the Office for Economic Development, as well as district offices, Social Welfare Centres and cultural institutions, often in cooperation with non-governmental organisations. City officials we interviewed emphasised that in recent years (before 2022) the city had moved away from programmes targeted at specific groups towards needs-based programmes aimed at the population in general. In Warsaw, public governance is often carried out in close cooperation with NGOs through grant competitions and the allocation of funding to organisations for specific projects. Given this, and in view of the focus

⁷ In 2024 an exception was made for Ukrainian citizens through amendments to the Act on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine.

of this book, we will concentrate here on horizontal cooperation between the municipality and representatives of the third sector in the local context of Warsaw; as an important indicator of the functioning of multilevel integration governance in the city. We will focus especially on a specific consultative body mentioned earlier, the Sectoral Social Dialogue Commission for Foreigners (BKDS), which at the time of research operated through the Office of International Cooperation of the City of Warsaw. Sectoral Social Dialogue Commissions are bodies facilitating consultation around city policies and dialogue between representatives of the municipality and third-sector organisations. Here we adopt BKDS as a specific case study through which to analyse the challenges involved in such cooperation and coordination as well as possible ways forward.

Interviews with local stakeholders revealed many challenges relating to the coordination of migrant-related activities in Warsaw. When asked about the functioning of BKDS as a platform for cooperation, both third-sector organisations and representatives of city institutional units tended to be critical. The main area of controversy in respect of BKDS's activities centred on divergent expectations and unclear goals in respect of how cooperation between NGOs and the municipality should work. Municipal workers criticised what they saw as BKDS's tendency to function as a platform through which NGOs could issue various demands and expectations. As one local government employee noted:

Generally speaking, it's a platform, kind of a venting ground for NGOs, their expectations and needs, rather than a dialogue on a given issue of primary importance. 16_LA⁸

On the other hand, social actors tended to see BKDS as failing to fulfil its primary consultative purpose. They cited examples of NGO proposals not being taken up in final decision-making, leaving social actors with the impression of having participated in a tokenistic dialogue process (2_NGO). Others indicated that BKDS fulfilled its function in the sense that it gave NGOs the opportunity to speak up. However, they did not feel their proposals were taken seriously or had been translated into concrete actions on the part of the local government.

Besides performing its willingness, the city doesn't really want any real debate or change [...] the city's [actual] role or willingness to cooperate is a completely different matter. [...] It just doesn't exist in terms of real change or allocating more money, or thinking about how money should be spent, and on what. 5_NGO

Some difficulties in cooperation were perceived as being the result of structural barriers. For example, due to an unwelcoming political climate around migration, NGOs were forced to compete for increasingly limited funds, rendering dialogue ineffective:

I see in Warsaw, really, over the years, this massive, unhealthy competition between NGOs. [...] The fight for grants... There's a huge fight for grants, which is understandable because there is not enough money. 11_LA

⁸ The codes for interviews are as follows: LA—local administration; NGO—civil society organisation; MO—migrant organisation.

Some of our informants, moreover, viewed BKDS as inflexible and inclined to focus on certain issues while ignoring others. This made it less effective in times of crisis. These opinions stood in contradiction to those of other respondents who believed that the 2022 crisis had proved the effectiveness of the body. As both NGO workers and city employees explained, an initial climate of cooperation had deteriorated over the time and lost its momentum.

From the very beginning, from its inception, this cooperation was super close, meaning we were involved from the start in many... Social Dialogue Commissions, in other consultative bodies at a city level. [...] They gradually lost all their impact, so to speak. [...] These bodies lasted and still exist, but they don't bring about any change. [We used to participate in more such bodies] because we saw the point of it, the exchange of information, the cooperation in solving various problems. Now we are there because the city expects it. 5_NGO

[...] these BKDSs have become ossified. It's not just the BKDS for foreigners, to be clear, and I think that's part of the problem, that they're not open to networking, forging links. [...] What's more, active and strong organisations are often open to certain groups of foreigners, but don't pay attention to others. It's not bad because it's not their job to deal with everything, but it eventually petrifies the system. 14_LA

It is not easy to pinpoint a clear cause for these problems in cooperation between city institutions and social actors. Our respondents' statements suggest several possible explanations, including for example, specific coordination and organisation issues around BKDS meetings that negatively impacted the functioning of this platform as well as increasing mutual tensions contributing to a decline in engagement.

[...]here were no meetings for several months. The meetings were quite spontaneous, and it was often unclear why, or what the real goal of gathering, meeting, and sharing the latest activities—or commenting on those events—was, when no notes were prepared, nor were there any concrete solutions the city could adopt. 2_NGO

It is characteristic that each side accused the other of being reluctant to develop authentic dialogue, complaining about a lack of constructive engagement, poor responsiveness and decision-making and focusing on structural problems relating to the municipality and NGOs rather than the actual needs of foreigners living in Warsaw.

I think it stems from the city... not that BKDS is poorly managed. It is... I mean, of course, BKDS has thousands of problems, but the main problem is that the city doesn't know what it's for. The city doesn't want to create space that would allow this organisational forum to be a decisive voice in any significant area. 5_NGO

We focus on the community's problems, the migrant community in Warsaw, not the problems of NGOs, which have included actions for the migrant community in their activities. 16_LA

Interestingly, BKDS was the platform for cooperation between the city and migrant-support NGOs that came up in interviews most often. Other important forms of partnership, such as the redirection of funds for integration support through grant competitions, were mentioned far less frequently. Local government actors sporadically recognised social actors as partners for cooperation beyond the context of BKDS and there would seem to be substantial potential here.

On the other hand, NGOs and migrant organisations were frequently critical of the municipality. NGO interviewees lamented the bureaucratic and formal nature of relations between NGOs and the city and saw this as both hindering cooperation and discouraging engagement (due to the perception of a lack of tangible results) (3_MO, 1_NGO). Other barriers to cooperation mentioned in our interviews included insufficient funding and a dispersion or sometimes even lack of knowledge within the municipality of issues related to migration and the city's migrant communities (1_NGO, 5_NGO). Another significant challenge was related to poor communication and information flows between the local administration and migrant communities in particular.

As noted earlier, 2022 was also a turning point in respect of cooperation and coordination between the municipality and social actors. The Sectoral Social Dialogue Commission for Foreigners (BKDS), both sides of which (i.e. representatives of the local government and social actors) reported many shortcomings and tensions pre-2022, at this time proved an important platform for information exchange and coordination of support during the humanitarian crisis caused by Russia's aggression and the influx of Ukrainian forced migrants. The extraordinary situation led, to an extent, to a deepening of partnership. Clearly, municipal units could not implement effective assistance actions alone: the establishment of a network of cooperation between the administration and social organisations, including Ukrainian-speaking city residents, was crucial. This cooperation was made possible thanks to communication channels established before the outbreak of full-scale war, including the BKDS platform, and the creation of new channels and platforms for exchange, such as the newly created Coordination Support Centre, through which social and public actors worked together to provide aid to forced migrants from Ukraine by coordinating the actions of dispersed municipal units and NGOs. The Centre was initiated by member-organisations of BKDS with additional funding from the Warsaw municipality. Thanks to this structural exchange, joint activities could be conducted more effectively.

2.8 Challenges to Migration Governance in Warsaw

Structural and operational challenges around migration governance existed in Warsaw before 2022. Based on our research, we can conclude that the structural challenges included:

- The development of an effective municipal-level system of data and knowledge exchange in cooperation with NGOs including also migrant organisations and their representatives.
- Developing coherent policy and funding.
- Developing coherent cross-sectoral cooperation and coordination.

As far as operational challenges are concerned, we might cite many aspects of the functioning of public services. Studies have shown that language barriers are often

the key challenge faced by migrants when it comes to understanding and making use of information of administrative and practical concern. Inclusivity from the point of view of language thus facilitates access to municipal services, allowing migrants to deal effectively with administrative issues (Czerska-Shaw & Kubicki, 2023; De Graauw & Vermeulen, 2022; Dolińska et al., 2022; Wach & Pachocka, 2022; Winiarska et al., 2024).

A lack of comprehensive information on e.g. how local services work and where and how to solve bureaucratic and administrative problems represents a second major barrier. This issue is linked to the problem of the diffuse nature of and lack of coordination between services for foreign residents of the city. Additionally, information is often not adequately communicated to migrant communities, resulting in low levels of participation. As Penninx and Garces-Mascareñas (2016a: 17–18) note: “Though general institutions are supposed to serve all citizens in an equal manner, they may impede access or equitable outcomes for immigrants (...) Thus, adequate functioning of general public institutions—and their potential to adapt to growing diversity—is paramount”.

Both organisational as well as the institutional levels are crucial for immigrant integration (see: Penninx & Garces-Mascareñas, 2016a). Our research indicates that migrant organisations need more support as they represent a direct channel for contact with migrant communities. Migrants most often need legal as well as linguistic assistance, which in the context of a decentralised model of governance relying strongly on the third sector necessitates durable funding for NGOs. Although the city of Warsaw finances numerous projects dedicated to the promotion of cultural diversity, challenges remain. For example, a shortage of intercultural assistants in schools has been consistently overlooked. Cultural assistants are especially helpful in supporting integration but until 2024 were still provided largely on a project-by-project

basis.⁹ Greater systematisation of procedures and integration policies is needed in education as well as other spheres of social participation (Tędziągolska et al., 2023a, 2024). A further challenge relates to the uncertainty of “street-level bureaucrats” (e.g. municipal officials, social workers, teachers etc. see e.g. Hupe et al., 2015) around migrant-support issues and the problem of a lack of clear policy direction and funding forcing these workers to solve such issues independently. More intercultural and anti-discrimination education is needed for representatives of public institutions as well as the host society more broadly. Moreover, the accessibility gap that has arisen between Ukrainians and migrants from other countries needs to be narrowed (Winiarska et al., 2024).

⁹ Institutional changes occurred in 2024 when amendments to the 2022 Act on Assistance made it possible for the local government to employ Ukrainian citizens in certain public posts and amendments to the education law allowed Polish schools to employ foreign nationals as assistants.

2.9 Conclusions

Since 2015, given critical political discrepancies between the central and municipal levels, migration governance in Warsaw has largely taken place in a conflictual context. As a result of the absence of national migration and integration strategies, the city of Warsaw, like other Polish municipalities, found itself in a difficult position facing administrative and financial challenges that it could not meet alone. Fortunately, the multilevel environment, including supranational bodies such as the EU and international organisations, served to bridge some gaps in administration and funding. The city's membership of the Eurocities Network and the Union of Polish Metropolises allowed representatives of the Warsaw municipality to actively cooperate with other cities, bypassing at least to an extent the national level. A significant number of migrant-support NGOs have also played a crucial role in governing migration, not only horizontally, but also, thanks to EU funds, vertically. Despite a lack of cooperation and coordination of migration policy at a national level and a shortage of explicit policy at the local level, we can nonetheless observe elements of multilevel governance in practice. It is important to underline here that the concept of multilevel governance not only describes the arrangement of actors actively participating in decision-making at different levels (supranational, national and subnational) but also emphasises how governance is organised within those levels. This fact is sometimes overlooked, with the focus put solely on relations between levels, forgetting the importance of horizontal cooperation among actors, particularly at the local level. In this context, taking into account the conflictual relationships with central government and institutions that existed up to late 2023, we might still dub such governance decoupled or disjointed rather than multilevel (see Scholten, 2013; Scholten & Penninx, 2016).

Since 2022 the situation has been very dynamic, given the unprecedented scale of forced migration from Ukraine and the need for cross-sectoral cooperation (with legal instruments in place) to provide support for this specific group of foreign citizens. Nevertheless, the increased diversity of Warsaw's population and growing numbers of migrants living in the city have already been visible before 2022. This did not lead, however, to the emergence of a specific local policy focusing on foreign residents. On the contrary, the city of Warsaw decided to implement a mainstreaming approach, which is more difficult to grasp and analyse than a specific policy and requires good cooperation between actors. We have attempted to analyse this 'policy in practice', focusing especially on the relationships between local actors institutionalised through a formal consultative body, BKDS. Given the significant barriers to cooperation on the vertical axis of migration governance in Poland in recent years, the horizontal axis of local-level integration policy-making has proved to be essential. In this chapter, we have identified various difficulties in cross-sectoral cooperation between local actors (including shortcomings in communication between municipal offices and social organisations) as well as challenges to integration.

Our results indicate that although all local-level actors are aware of the city's growing diversity and the increasing demand for migrant-support services, they

struggle with the challenges typically faced by decentralised local governments, including around effective coordination and exchange of know-how, good practice and essential competence as well as under- and unstable funding. Diverse activities and programmes are spread out across a maze of local regulations and institutions, while local offices and other actors (e.g. NGOs) responsible for implementing integration-related projects often fail to cooperate or coordinate their activities effectively. The reason for this may lie in the mainstreaming approach itself, which is more challenging, especially in terms of coordination, than a sector-based approach; lack of specific experience in implementing a mainstreaming approach may be an additional factor. It should be noted that the city has not institutionalised any ‘immigrant council’ or similar body, a model that has been seen as exemplifying good practice (see e.g. Nyseth & Ventura López, 2021) but which has been implemented in very few Polish cities. There is, however, a cross-sectoral consultation platform for NGOs as representatives of migrant-related issues, even if this body’s effectiveness has been the subject of challenge and controversy.

In our analysis we identified both structural and operational challenges to migrant-integration governance in Warsaw. While generally hostile relations with the central administration (before the elections of autumn 2023) have contributed to an overall underfunding of migrant services in Poland as a whole, local and international funding have filled some of the gaps, especially in the context of the war-related crisis that emerged after February 2022. However, local migrant-support organisations have identified lack of participation and directness in migration policy-making as an ongoing challenge, alongside coherent cross-sectoral cooperation and knowledge exchange. 2022’s mass forced migration exacerbated existing migration governance-related challenges as well as generated new ones. However, it also created opportunities for the development of easier access to public services for some migrants (though not for others) and a potentially more effective system for programming activities based on pre-crisis tools already operating in the city (e.g. cooperation platforms between the city government and NGOs, such as Sectoral Commissions for Social Dialogue). Paradoxically, the humanitarian crisis of 2022 strengthened cooperation between local government institutions and NGOs and enhanced cooperation through both the municipal consultation platform (BKDS) and other cross-sectoral initiatives (e.g. working table conferences etc.). To an extent, the case of Warsaw is evidence of the shortcomings of mainstreaming and its tendency to inhibit the production of durable policies and, in some cases, produce chaotic, crisis-driven governance. On the other hand, Warsaw can be seen as an example of a local context in which the gradual development of effective solutions in response to a crisis can serve as a basis for institutionalised policy in support of foreign residents as well as the development of coherent cross-sectoral cooperation and exchange. Despite signs of positive change in horizontal cooperation at the local level and some harmonisation of governance between national and subnational levels, gradually moving towards a multilevel governance model, the case of Warsaw demonstrates that challenges are very difficult to overcome and disjointed governance remains predominant.

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Chapter 3

A Policy of “no Policy”? Budapest’s Approach to Migration Management in a Crisis Context



Kamil Matuszczyk and Anikó Bernát

3.1 Introduction

The Hungarian opposition, of which I am a part, is showing solidarity with Ukraine. We have been accused of being pro-war. But it’s very important to note that when Ukrainian refugees fled to Hungary, Hungarians welcomed them warmly. People in Budapest welcomed them very warmly. They were very proactive in accommodating Ukrainians [Gergely Karácsony, Mayor of Budapest, 28.11.2022].¹

This excerpt from a newspaper interview with the Mayor of Budapest highlights the spontaneous welcoming response undertaken by the city’s government and residents in response to the rapid arrival of Ukraine war migrants after February 2022. The interview also communicates the local government’s oppositional stance in respect of central government migrant-reception policy. Incongruencies between local and central administrative policy responses to forced migration are characteristic of Europe and North America post-2015 (Bazurli & Kaufmann, 2023). At that time—2015—an intensification of political tension was observed in respect of immigration policy (Özdemir, 2022). In the Visegrad countries (Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary), where central-level decision-makers were particularly reluctant to resettle refugees and sought to prevent their entry, grassroots initiatives were developed to welcome migrants and create mechanisms for their social and economic inclusion

¹ Sergiy Sydorenko, Mayor of Budapest: “I Do Feel Shame Orban’s Hungary Seen as Country Siding With Russia”, Monday, November 28th 2022, European Pravda, Available at: <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/eng/interview/2022/11/28/7151344/>.

K. Matuszczyk (✉)
University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland
e-mail: kamil_t_matuszczyk@uw.edu.pl

A. Bernát
TARKI Social Research Institute, Budapest, Hungary

(Gruszczak, 2021; Klaus, 2017). Among such cases Budapest deserves special attention due to Hungary's highly centralised immigration policy, the extreme tightening of asylum policy that took place both in Budapest and across the country between 2015 and 2019, the post-2019 shift to opposition leadership at municipal and mayoral level and the introduction (even though they were not implemented in reality) of severe and punitive laws restricting the operation of civil society organisations and individuals supporting third-country migrants (Kyriazi, 2022; Stivas, 2023; Temesi, 2019).

Against this background, February 2022 marks a new chapter in the history of Hungarian policy responses to migration (Korkut & Fazekas, 2023). Existing research demonstrates the solid welcoming response extended to Ukrainian forced migrants by governments across Europe, both in word and deed. However, policy implementation in this area tended to be spearheaded by local governments and NGOs (Duszczyk et al., 2023; Eurocities, 2023); this was also a pronounced feature of how the refugee situation was managed in Hungary (Tóth & Bernát, 2024). Scholars ascribe this shift to the nationality of the forced migrants in the given case. The shift was particularly pronounced in the case of Hungary, which has rolled out one of the most extreme anti-migration and anti-refugee policy platforms in Europe since 2015, with a direct impact on social attitudes (Bernát et al., 2015).

The above notwithstanding, Ukrainians have tended to be treated differently in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries (Matuszczyk & Kowalska, 2024), including Hungary, compared to refugees arriving from the Middle East and Africa since the 2015 crisis or as a result of the crisis at the Polish–Belarusian border in 2021/2022 (Czyż, 2022; Korkut & Fazekas, 2023; Tóth & Bernát, 2024). The overwhelming majority of refugees from Ukraine were women with children, who comprised up to 87% of this subpopulation in June 2022 (UNHCR, 2022). According to UNHCR (2022) data, 70% of Ukrainian respondents in the host countries surveyed had completed university or higher studies. This fostered a new image of refugees in contrast to the stereotypes perpetuated in the media in 2015 and 2016 (Bernát & Messing, 2015, 2016; Stivas, 2023). As De Coninck (2023) has pointed out, this new image of refugees helped generate the largely positive attitudes of Americans and Europeans towards Ukrainian refugees in 2022. Cultural proximity has also contributed to a positive view of refugees (De Coninck, 2023) and has been an important factor fostering a more welcoming social climate towards Ukrainian refugees in Hungary (Tóth & Bernát, 2024). All these factors are highly relevant to the positive shift in public attitudes and policies towards Ukrainian refugees that has taken place both in Hungary and across Europe as a whole, especially compared to the reception of refugees from the Middle East and Africa post-2015.

In a Hungarian context, a significant additional factor behind the shift towards more welcoming social attitudes was the fact that many of the Ukrainian citizens who fled to Hungary were ethnic Hungarians from Zakarpatska oblast (Transcarpathia) in Western Ukraine—and held Hungarian citizenship. Yet other Ukrainian nationals also garnered more sympathy than migrants and refugees from the Middle East or Africa. This positive shift in Hungarians' views of forced migrants extends to public opinion on who should be responsible for helping refugees (e.g. the state/

municipalities, NGOs, charities, individual volunteers or no one). In 2015, roughly 8–17% of respondents (depending on the area of assistance surveyed, e.g. travel, housing, work, education) thought that no one should help the newly arrived refugees. Between 24 and 32% held the same opinion about the long-term resettlement of refugees (i.e. that refugees should look after themselves). This attitude has essentially disappeared in the case of refugees from Ukraine (1–3%). Hungarian society has thus made a significant shift in this regard. Hungarians no longer hold the view that people fleeing conflict (or, at least, refugees from neighbouring or culturally proximate countries) should be expected, either in the short or long term, to navigate alone the challenges of starting life in a new country without sufficient resources and language proficiency (Tóth & Bernát, 2024).

This chapter compares Budapest’s responses to the 2015 and 2022 forced-migrant reception crises. We also analyse factors influencing opportunities for taking action on the ground in Hungary’s capital city, including the politicisation of migration, administrative centralism and the limited agency of local administrators in Hungary. We argue that, despite their scale, severity and complexity, the 2015 and 2022 crises did not create an opportunity for the development of coherent, pro-immigrant or pro-refugee policies. Inspired by the concept of insurgent urban asylum policy (Bazurli & Kaufmann, 2023), this text pays particular attention to the vertical relationship between government policy and local government capacity in everyday migration governance. Especially striking given the central government’s hostile approach to immigration and refugees, Budapest’s pro-refugee policy turn during the Russia-Ukraine war stands in marked contrast to other cities and conurbations not only in Hungary but also across Europe, both before and after 2015.

This paper addresses these gaps by identifying similarities and differences between Budapest’s responses to the 2015 and 2022 crises, analysing the impact of the 2022 crisis on immigration and identifying the effects of central government policy on Budapest’s policy-making. This article builds on a review of academic literature as well as secondary data including the content of Budapest’s administration websites and 36 interviews with local actors and experts engaged in migration governance in the city. It contributes to a rapidly growing field of studies of migration governance by identifying determinants of the local turn in migration policy in post-socialist cities and advancing the existing literature on urban migration governance (Błaszczuk et al., 2024; Meeus et al., 2019; Ślęzak & Bielewska, 2022; Wach & Pachocka, 2022).

3.2 Theoretical Considerations: The Local Turn and Multilevel Governance in Turbulent Times

Since the 2000s researchers have increasingly focused on local-level migration governance (Caponio, 2010). Although states have insisted on maintaining their prerogative by defining the rules governing entry, work and residence in their territories,

they have begun to share some migrant-integration responsibilities with local actors in regions, cities and even villages (de Graauw & Vermuelen 2016; Łukasiewicz et al., 2024). In the context of this rescaling of migration policy, local governments, for the most part consciously and voluntarily, have become active and autonomous actors initiating innovative solutions (Scholten & Penninx, 2016; Ślęzak & Bielewska, 2022). As a result, the migration governance lens has become increasingly popular among scholars as a way of capturing the complexity of relationships between international actors, central administrations and regional and local authorities. Importantly, these relationships are dynamic and evolving, as Ślęzak and Bielewska (2022) highlight. Caponio (2010: 182–183) defines migration governance as a ‘process of state authority dispersion across different levels of government and/or non-state actors’. The actions taken by a city are embedded in national and international contexts (Matusz & Pawlak, 2020). Referring to the growing complexity of policies at various levels of government, Scholten and Penninx (2016: 105) conclude “we observe substantial fragmentation as well imposing the risk of ‘layering’; that is, policies are being developed at different government layers without structural connections”.

Researchers have identified endogenous and exogenous factors in the development of local integration policies (Łukasiewicz et al., 2024). Endogenous factors include the size and structure of the migrant population, especially those permanently settled in a given municipality. US-based research also suggests that larger communities with more highly educated residents tend to make more extensive efforts to integrate migrant populations (Khan-Welsh et al., 2023). The role of local leadership, especially left-wing local governments, is a key factor in creating inclusive urban policies, as de Graauw and Vermeulen (2016) point out. Among exogenous factors, the generally high degree of autonomy enjoyed by local governments and the de/centralisation of administrations have had the most significant impact in of fostering the development of urban migration and integration policies. However, it is difficult to identify common patterns in multilevel governance, with numerous studies showing that even central government interference in integration policy does not necessarily imply a clash with measures taken by local authorities. A study of Odense (Denmark) by Careja (2019) analyses how that city collaborates with central authorities to achieve a consensus between official integration policy and local needs and expectations.

In our case, the emergency context—i.e. the sudden arrival of forced migrants—reveals the major role of cities in creating ‘solidarity hubs’ (Özdemir, 2022). Such cities fill gaps in aid provision created by the inability of central administrations to respond quickly and effectively to emerging crises. Analyses of the responses of cities, regions and states to the arrival of Ukrainian refugees post-2022 highlights the involvement of multiple non-state actors, principally private actors and NGOs, as well as networks of cooperation between different actors providing assistance (Matuszczyk & Kowalska, 2024). It is cities that tend to have the resources, expert personnel and knowledge infrastructure to support newly arrived refugees (Meeus et al., 2019). During the 2015 Schengen crisis, some large cities were able to lay the foundations of a local refugee policy within a short period. Analysing case studies

of Barcelona, Milan and Munich, Bazurli and Kaufman (2023) observe that the authorities in these cities refused to follow directives from national governments, sometimes even breaching such rules. Bazurli and Kaufman propose the concept of “insurgent urban asylum policies” to analyse how some local authorities implement their own autonomous policies that stand in contradiction to the position taken by central governments.

To date, conurbations in post-socialist countries have been neglected in the local-turn literature (Błaszczuk et al., 2024). A few studies confirm the overall growing attractiveness for migrants of CEE countries, especially after EU accession in 2004. Influxes of mainly labour migrants to CEE countries have tended to be isolated in character, i.e. cities and regions with a favourable labour-market situation have become magnets (Lesińska & Matuszczyk, 2019). In the early 2000s Prague, Tallinn, Wrocław or Budapest all became destinations for ethnic businesses, highly skilled migrants and the self-employed. During that time none of those cities developed local solutions to facilitate the integration of migrants. This reflected a short-sighted view of migration across CEE countries, where migrants have generally been seen as temporary workers filling gaps in the labour market. Analysing Czech immigration policy, Stojanov et al. (2022) note that policymakers perceive migrants as an ‘unwelcomed necessity’ and have therefore failed to take decisive measures to support them to settle in the country. Priority has been given to employers’ economic interest in attracting low-skilled migrant workers. In this context, and as several authors have noted, the main focus of many studies has been on the structural consequences of demographic change and the formulation of policies designed to attract new residents in an attempt to counter depopulation and population ageing. Examples of such measures can be found in Poland (Lesińska & Matuszczyk, 2019) and Russia (Hofmann et al., 2016). In the last few years, and as in ‘super-diverse’ cities, bottom-up initiatives aimed at creating an inclusive urban policy environment have been initiated in some cities in Poland. These have gone against the grain of measures taken by the populist central government (Duszczyk et al., 2018; Wach & Pachocka, 2022). The main actors in the integration of newly arrived migrants have been local administrators, NGOs, migrant-led organisations, grassroots movements and initiatives started by local residents (Bernát et al., 2016; Błaszczuk et al., 2024; Matusz & Pawlak, 2020).

3.3 Background: Migration and Migration Policy in Hungary and Budapest

Due to its geographical location, Hungary, which has a population of 9.7 million, is considered one of the most important transit countries for irregular migrants (Beger, 2023: 191). Since 1990 Hungary has attracted immigration from post-socialist countries, including Ukrainians (Gödri & Csanyi, 2020)—principally ethnic Hungarians who enjoy minority status in neighbouring countries (particularly Romania, Slovakia,

Serbia and Ukraine). In 2015, Ukrainians accounted for one in every four migrants in Hungary. Between 1992 and 2017, almost 54,000 Ukrainians settled in the country (Gödri & Csanyi, 2020). Many more ethnic Hungarian migrants are not reflected in the statistics as they are already Hungarian citizens. The Fidesz government launched a simplified naturalisation programme for ethnic Hungarians living outside Hungary (it was particularly aimed at those living in neighbouring countries). This led to more than 1 million people around the world being granted Hungarian (and thus EU) citizenship between 2011 and 2019; this total included people without any practical ties to Hungary (e.g. residence, tax liability or family connections) (Pogonyi, 2017; Tóth & Bernát, 2022). Migration from Ukraine is of particular historical significance; data from 2002 indicates the presence of 156,000 Hungarians in the Transcarpathian region, which forms part of the border between Ukraine and Hungary. The naturalisation of ethnic Hungarians in Ukraine reinforced already intense labour migration (including circular migration) to Hungary and other EU countries. Hungarian citizenship also became an asset during the Russia-Ukraine war as it granted a wider array of rights to those Ukrainian refugees that held it; such people were, however, excluding them from temporary protection (TP) as citizens are not eligible for this status.

Budapest, with almost 1.8 million residents, has the most foreign-born residents of any city in Hungary. In 2018, almost one in every two foreigners in the country lived in Budapest. According to data from Eurostat, in 2021, foreigners accounted for approximately 6% of the city’s population (see Table 3.1). Between 2015 and 2021, Budapest’s non-EU-migrant population increased significantly. The same time period saw a minimal decrease in the attractiveness of the Hungarian capital as a destination for EU citizens. (This data excludes those who acquired Hungarian citizenship before moving to Budapest.)

A turning point in recent international migration to Hungary in general and Budapest in particular occurred in the summer of 2015, when large numbers of migrants, mainly from the Middle East and Africa, sought to cross the country on their way to Central and Northern Europe (mainly Austria, Germany or Sweden). Although Germany recorded the highest number of asylum seekers applying for international protection, Hungary had the highest share of asylum applicants per head of population. More than 177,000 people claimed asylum in Hungary, the equivalent of 1,800 asylum-seekers per 100,000 Hungarian citizens (Hoór, 2021).

Table 3.1 Migration background in Budapest, 2015 and 2021

	2015	2021
Budapest’s total population in millions	1759	1772
% of non-nationals in the total population	4%	6%
EU foreigners	26,709	22,651
Non-EU foreigners	40,544	65,600

Source Own elaboration based on Eurostat (2023)

Until the 2010s the Hungarian government had never pursued a comprehensive migration strategy. Instead, it had sought ad hoc solutions, including the adjustment of domestic immigration legislation to meet European Union requirements (Beger, 2023). Some measures, such as the 2013 Migration Strategy, were undertaken in the hope of obtaining EU funding (Melegh et al., 2021). Under Viktor Orbán’s second government (after 2010), many restrictive laws were put in place leading to a reduction in the number of forced migrants arriving in the country. Prime Minister Orbán and his government adopted anti-immigrant rhetoric, as any number of public speeches and government documents confirm. In 2016 Orbán famously announced that ‘the best immigrant is the one who does not come here at all’ (Gruszczak, 2021: 178). Such anti-immigrant policies and accompanying measures have resulted in Hungary being viewed as an example of a country ‘drifting away from liberal democracy’ (Melegh et al., 2021).

Immigration has become a securitised topic in a Hungarian political context, with this process accelerating post-2015 (Stivas, 2023; Temesi, 2019). In the second half of 2015 the government’s anti-immigrant rhetoric was physically embodied through the construction of a wall on the border first with Serbia and then Croatia (Czyż, 2022; Klaus, 2017). The country has also undertaken a complete overhaul of border and asylum legislation since 2015, including restricting people’s legal rights to submit an asylum application in Hungary. The result has been that the procedural burden of refugee care has been passed to neighbouring countries, including non-EU states (Tóth & Bernát, 2024). Post-2015, the government has striven to mobilise public opinion and foster fear and resentment towards migrants in Hungarian society through e.g. the erection of anti-immigrant billboards in public spaces, a series of ‘national consultations’ (these were a political communication too designed to support the impression of public consensus on controversial government policies, with often-biased questions sent to every household under the guise of a national opinion poll) and nationwide referendums on immigration issues. The result of these efforts has been the dismantling of migrant reception points and inclusion services across the country, a reduction in the number of migrant-support organisations, the tightening of immigration rules and a fall in the number of refugee arrivals (Kovacs et al., 2022).

The forced migration from Ukraine that unfolded in 2022 marked a new chapter in Hungarian immigration policy. Hungary ranked second after Poland in terms of the number of border crossings that took place during the first weeks of the crisis. At that time between ten and twenty thousand forced migrants from Ukraine were crossing the Hungarian border daily, often via Romania. Most stayed on Hungarian territory for only a few days as Hungary was not their intended final destination. Regardless of the forced migrants’ plans, the Orbán government faced a major geopolitical challenge. Commentators have noted the ambiguous stance taken by the Hungarian government in respect of Russia’s attack on Ukraine; there were several reasons for this, foremost among them the need to support minority Hungarians living in Ukraine, many of whom were dual (Ukrainian and Hungarian) citizens, and the fact that Hungary is a NATO member state. On the very first day of the 2022 crisis the government introduced TP status for Ukrainians, organised various kinds of humanitarian aid and enacted new decrees in the area of refugee protection. However,

most humanitarian aid was provided by NGOs, grassroots voluntary organisations, individuals and municipalities (Tóth & Bernát, 2024).

3.4 Data and Methods

This paper is based on a literature review, analysis of secondary data, findings from qualitative interviews with local stakeholders and participant observation conducted in Budapest. Some of our data was collected under the auspices of project called Migrant Integration Governance in CEE Cities Post-2015 (MigIntegrEast) conducted by the Centre for Migration Research at the University of Warsaw. Other data used in this paper comes from unfunded (volunteer-led) real-time monitoring of the refugee crisis in Hungary undertaken by the TÁRKI Institute for Social Research in Budapest. One of the authors of this chapter was actively involved in organising refugee support both in 2015 and for Ukrainians arriving in Budapest after February 2022. The content and conclusions of the qualitative research presented in the following section are therefore enriched with insider knowledge of migrant-support policy implementation and elements of participant observation. The unexpected emergence of a new migration crisis in 2022 compelled us to consider the importance of these new circumstances for an understanding of immigration-related policy-making in the CEE region. The time frame for our analysis is the period 2015–2023.

Our primary empirical material includes 36 expert interviews carried out as part of the two projects mentioned above. The first set consists of 10 expert interviews conducted between October 2022 and February 2023. Four of these interviews were conducted in person in Budapest in November 2022; the remaining six were conducted remotely. Research participants included local stakeholders (mostly NGO representatives) and academics with expertise in Hungarian immigration policy. Topics discussed included: the politicisation of immigration; grassroots initiatives undertaken by organisations in Budapest and the response of the city and its residents to the arrival of thousands of refugees in 2015 and 2022. Our second data source was semi-structured interviews with stakeholders (12 interviews with representatives of NGOs, charities, the municipal government of Budapest and international organisations) and NGO volunteers (14 interviews) between March 2022 and October 2023.

All conversations were recorded and then transcribed with the prior consent of the interviewees. Each interview lasted around an hour. This material was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

3.5 Results

Our analysis of the period 2015–2023 distinguishes three basic stages in the evolution of Budapest’s approach to immigration, reflecting the central government’s shifts from a permissive strategy through a restrictive policy towards slight liberalisation after 2022. Until 2022 Budapest did not have its own migration policy; before this date the city received only small numbers of refugees and, particularly between 2015 and 2019, was content to fall in line with central government policy.

3.5.1 *Stage 1: The 2015 Schengen Crisis on Budapest’s Streets*

During the 2015 crisis Budapest became a transit hub for forced migrants as a result of its geopolitical location. The Hungarian capital’s three railway stations became focal points for the activities of various actors seeking to meet the basic needs of the new arrivals (Bernat, 2019). Research participants interviewed for this study referred frequently to the events that unfolded at the stations in the summer and early autumn of 2015, during which time thousands of asylum seekers were arriving daily. The threat of a humanitarian crisis quickly emerged, mainly due to overcrowding in a relatively small space and the lack of any formal support from the state; the municipality of Budapest and resource-rich charity organisations also remained inactive during the crisis, toeing central government’s anti-migration and anti-refugee policy line. Non-state actors we interviewed pointed out the negligence of local authorities during the humanitarian crisis:

[J]ust to give you an idea of the scale of the negligence, there was literally no public toilet. No public toilet was available at the railway station where I was coordinating volunteers – I don’t just mean for refugees - even for the general public. The ones in the train station were being refurbished. And the public toilet in the underpass next to the station was closed and had been out of order for a very long time. We had to collect donations to pay for people to use the toilet at the train station cafeteria - people would pay 100 forint per use of the bathroom, which at that time was about 30 [Euro] cents. [NGO1, Budapest]

Another NGO informant highlighted the spontaneous organising undertaken by citizens of Budapest, which was mostly coordinated online. Responsibility for the provision of humanitarian aid fell upon the grassroots movements initiated by residents, who engaged in after-hours volunteering at the railway stations. While residents willingly organised to support of refugees, their activities were poorly coordinated, with logistical and infrastructural challenges arising as a result. Study participants also pointed to some positive outcomes, including the development of migrant solidarity at a local level and grassroots initiatives, mainly arising on Facebook.

Local entrepreneurs and ethnic businesses got involved in refugee support on the streets of Budapest, providing food or other necessities (Kovacs et al., 2022). According to one study participant, some businesses asked volunteers to keep the

help they were providing to asylum seekers secret for fear of repercussions from the government; such fears were reinforced by the introduction of a so-called “anti-civil society” law that specifically targeted NGOs helping refugees and explicitly banned certain kinds of support.

With thousands more migrants pouring into urban areas, the authorities in Budapest and other cities were limited in the support they could realistically provide to the new arrivals. This was a consequence of the aforementioned centralisation of immigration policy and legal restrictions on the activities of non-state actors in the area of integration and humanitarian action. Interviewees speculated that the circumstances that unfolded between June and September 2015 had a direct impact in terms of limiting responses to the crisis. Since the attack on the offices of the *Charlie Hebdo* newspaper in 2014, the Orban government had been using the spectre of immigration as a way of scaring the public.

Research participants blamed the Budapest authorities’ passive response to the forced-migration crisis on the municipality’s alignment with the ruling Fidesz party and support for the government’s anti-immigration stance. By contrast, the city of Szeged, which was governed by the opposition (mainly the Hungarian Socialist Party), took a more active approach to supporting migrants. Our interviewees saw the political alignment of Budapest’s municipality and mayor as responsible for the city’s failure to independently implement long-term refugee resettlement measures.

In Hungary the problem was that big cities were governed by the [national] governing party. For example, Budapest was under Fidesz control, the mayor was [István] Tarlós (...). So he carried out Fidesz policies (...) The municipality of Budapest did not provide any meaningful assistance [to migrants] at the time. The only municipality that did provide meaningful assistance - and this was also symbolically quite important - was Szeged. [Expert 3, Budapest]

Another factor in the inaction of both central and local government was their hope that migrants would continue to see Hungary as a transit country, as had been the case over many decades (with the exception of university students and ethnic Hungarians from neighbouring countries); for economic and linguistic reasons Hungary has never been an attractive destination for migrants. It is worth noting in this regard that, while 177,000 people applied for asylum at the Hungarian border in 2015, only a few thousand remained in Hungary for any significant period. Due to the lack of systematic measurement of the scale of this phenomenon, the exact number of migrants who remained in the country remains unknown.

The conduct of some Budapest city officials exacerbated the challenges rather than making things easier. One expert pointed to the problem of officials being reluctant to help, rendering it difficult for volunteers and organisations to put in place basic refugee support infrastructure.

So they didn’t have access to facilities. Some grassroots organisations helped the local government install this mobile toilet, which they had been unwilling to do. I think they did [put the toilet in] at Keleti station after a couple of days because they recognized that it was gonna be tough, not only for the migrants but for the locals too. Budapest has a mayor, but then each district has its own mayor [as well]. One of the harshest anti-immigrant and

anti-inclusion politicians was the mayor of the district that Keleti Station is in. [NGO5, Budapest]

On top of the city government’s reluctance, some non-state organisations were not only hesitant to get involved in supporting migrants but also spread hate speech. This was true of some faith-based organisations, as one volunteer remembered:

Big organisations such as the Red Cross, who would have had the infrastructure, experience and knowledge to manage the situation, decided to stay away from the refugee crisis completely in 2015 for very clear political reasons. You didn’t see the Red Cross in these places, or the Maltese charity, or the Catholic Church, because everybody fell into line with what the government expected. The Hungarian Catholic Church even made some pronouncements about how people should not provide assistance to refugees [NGO1, Budapest]

3.5.2 Stage 2: Local Authorities’ Responses to the Government-Led Tightening of Immigration Policy After 2015

After the events of September 2015, the Fidesz government introduced legislative changes that turned Hungary’s borders into some of the most tightly policed in the EU. Such measures, including the criminalisation of support for undocumented migrants, the Stop Soros propaganda campaign and the referendum on refugee relocation, had a direct impact on the immigration policies implemented at a local level in Hungarian cities. According to Özdemir’s (2022) typology, before 2022, Budapest, along with Prague, Madrid and Stockholm, could be classified as a city displaying limited urban solidarity with migrants. No local-level migrant-support policies existed in Budapest, whose Fidesz-led (until 2019 when Budapest fell entirely to the opposition) districts fell into line with the anti-immigrant policies being enacted centrally. In 2017, a so-called “anti-civil society” law came into force, severely restricting the agency of civil society organisations. As one NGO interviewee recalled, 2017 was the year in which the ‘crackdown on civil society’ began in the country:

In 2017 a new law was introduced in Hungary that compelled civil society organisations receiving funding of more than 20 000 from abroad, including from the European Union and the Commission, to register themselves as foreign-funded organisations and to put this label on themselves and all their publications. The Helsinki Committee, along with dozens of other organisations, publicly refused to obey the law. As a result, all such organisations were kicked out of all closed institutions [e.g. detention centers - Authors]. [NGO1, Budapest]

The tightening and centralisation of immigration policy in Hungary manifested itself at a local level through the limitations it placed on the agency of all kinds of civil society actors involved in refugee support:

Since 2016 there have been no [migrant] integration services. There is no housing support, no financial support, [there are] no Hungarian language classes. So refugees have to leave the centres after 30 days and then they just have to integrate into Hungarian society, however they can. And that’s very difficult. But of course if you are only talking about a thousand people, it’s not that visible that there are very big problems here. [NGO2, Budapest]

Several local actors cited as a major challenge the absence of a national integration policy and the limits this placed on the ability of local governments to implement migrant-support measures. Local governments, including the municipality of Budapest, were also led by politicians from the governing party, and so toed the line of the government's anti-immigration policies:

Integration policy does not exist in Hungary. It doesn't exist at a local level. (...) There is the Municipality of Budapest, but we also have 23 districts, I think, and each district has its own local government. Those governments act very similarly to the local government of any town. So it's not [a question of] the whole city, it's more about the different districts. [Expert 1, Budapest]

The seizure of municipal power in late 2019 by a coalition of opposition parties led by Budapest's new mayor, who represented an opposition party called Dialogue for Hungary, did little to shake the anti-migrant drift of local-level policy. De facto and de jure, the city authorities could only act according the Constitution or other laws passed by the right-wing nationalist Fidesz government. Increased centralisation had deprived local authorities of their autonomy in this regard. At that time, only a few forced migrants were arriving in Budapest due to the severity of the new border regime and the constraints imposed by the border fence. Yet the situation of migrant residents continued to be debated at the level of public discourse. Some interviewees were critical of the mayor's failure to proactively create an inclusive immigration policy following the example of Western European cities. Others lamented Budapest's city hall's failure to establish a department dedicated to migration or undertake horizontal cooperation with other municipalities around the issue:

We want to cooperate with other cities in Hungary. But the thing is, it's mostly the case that the migrants are here in Budapest and so we kind of meet them more in Budapest. Then later on they move to other cities and countries... Most of the time they're in Budapest, that's why everything tends to be so Budapest-centric. [NGO1, Budapest]

Perhaps surprisingly, the placing of legal restrictions on the activities of civil society organisations did not entirely scupper the work of at least some NGOs. However, the new measures significantly hindered civil society's capacity to operate and provide support to migrants on a day-to-day basis.

3.5.3 *Stage 3: A 'Closed Window of Opportunity'—Budapest's Approach to Migration Post-2022*

Unlike other migrants and particularly refugees from the Middle East and Africa who arrived during the 2015 refugee crisis, Ukrainian refugees have been portrayed and perceived by both the government (and its propaganda) and the general population as 'good' and 'deserving migrants' in need of solidarity and support. (see also Korkut & Fazekas, 2023). Our interviewees pointed to a change in discursive strategy, arguing

that Ukrainians were represented not so much as refugees and rather as people fleeing war.

Infelicitously, the war in Ukraine and the arrival of hundreds of thousands of forced migrants from Ukraine came at a time when Orbán’s ‘zero immigration’ policy and anti-refugee hate campaign had reached its apogee. The coalition of opposition left-liberal parties that governed Budapest was comparatively open to immigration and made efforts to integrate migrants into city’s life. Yet funding constraints made it difficult for them to act. As one expert noted:

Central government has been continually reducing the autonomy of the Hungarian municipalities over more than a decade. Historically, Hungary never let the municipalities set migration policy; it was always centralised national policy. Municipalities had zero say on [immigration]. But with the shrinking of autonomy, any additional funds they would have had for whatever programs or projects - it’s gone. [Expert 3, Budapest]

Our analysis of website content from the most prominent Hungarian migrant-support NGOs confirms their rapid response to the crisis, with assistance often being provided within hours or days. The assistance provided by such NGOs included preparing meals, providing information and connecting migrants to city residents prepared to host them in their homes. During the first weeks of the emergency, local residents and volunteers organised themselves via social media (Erőss, 2022). Field observation undertaken in March 2022 by Erőss (2022) is in line with our findings and points above all to the rapidly unfolding dynamics of urban emergency governance. Erőss distinguished three phases of this emergency-oriented response: (1) spontaneous action; (2) the institutionalisation of initiatives and (3) ‘disinfection’, involving the relocation of forced migrants from public spaces to dedicated assistance centres.

The stakeholders we interviewed identified a number of central government policy shifts taking place in 2022, including changes in overall approach and how funding was organised:

(...) Beginning in mid-March [2022] the government... it was very different to 2015, in that the government wasn’t hostile to refugees. So people were not discouraged from helping out. And then in the beginning or middle of March [2022], the government instructed the big charity organizations, Red Cross, Caritas and so on, to actually provide assistance. It started providing assistance and gave quite a significant amount of public funds to these charities to do so. [NGO4, Budapest]

Above all, the forced migrants who crossed the Hungarian border after February 2022 were quite different in terms of demographics to those who had arrived in 2015. Study participants clearly articulated these differences in nationality, race and religion:

When the war broke out during the first month I would say - the government was totally confused what to do about the refugees. Because they are white, they are Christians, many of them are even Hungarian, but then there’s no refugee support infrastructure anymore. No reception centres, no institutions that support refugees. So for the first few months they basically didn’t do anything. [Expert 2, Budapest]

The city's neighbourhoods and districts played a critical role in Budapest's migration governance. Some of Budapest's neighbourhoods, particularly those that already had migrant or (native) Roma residents, were more inclined than others to implement integration measures, albeit in 'small steps'. Although such districts lacked the capacity or resources to implement strategic solutions, some of them tried to establish their own policies. However, others among our respondents contended that Budapest has little room for manoeuvre in this area. Our interviewees also pointed to the role of the districts in steering the city's response to Ukrainian refugees fleeing the war:

But I think it's very important to note that some local administrations - the 9th district, for example - tried to respond to the Ukrainian crisis by inviting all of civil society - it happened in the 8th district as well, and in the municipality of Budapest - they called on everyone from the civil society of that district that might have something to [offer in responding to the] crisis, and tried to serve as an information hub [so people could] share information with each other. [Expert 1, Budapest]

Budapest's unique response to Ukrainian migrants from the Transcarpathian region needs to be distinguished from the reception of refugees who were not ethnically Hungarian. Among this latter group were non-Ukrainian citizens, often students from various Asian or African countries, who encountered inferior treatment and resentment. Roma people fleeing war found themselves in the worst position, despite many of them being Hungarian citizens. As one NGO representative noted, perceptions of this group had an extremely detrimental impact in terms of how they were treated.

In 2022, poor management of the crisis at a central level mainly impacted large cities. One example highlighted by our interviewees involved the coordination of humanitarian aid being handed over to a group of Catholic organisations, all of which had pointedly refused to get involved in helping asylum seekers from African countries in 2015. Similarly, at one point, the city authorities decided to allocate a sports facility as temporary accommodation for Ukrainian migrants unable to find host accommodation in Budapest.

3.6 Discussion and Conclusions

The aim of this paper has been to explain the evolution of Budapest's approach to migration governance. Our case study contributes to the literature on migration governance by revealing the limitations of local-level policy-making in the context of robust central-level governance influencing the actions of local administration. The politicisation of migration in Hungary, mainly by the governing Fidesz party, has limited the ability of local governments to implement bottom-up solutions for third-country migrants. Even a change of leadership in the city did not lead to a fundamental shift in Budapest's approach to migration policy. It is also important to highlight fundamental differences between the two emergencies—2015 and 2022—particularly in terms of the nationality of migrants arriving in Budapest (Korkut & Fazekas, 2023). As our data indicates, the city's geographical proximity to Ukraine

and, above all, the fact that many Ukrainian refugees held Hungarian citizenship, played a key role in the greater openness to refugees in 2022 compared to the 2015 Schengen crisis.

Our results suggest several fundamental similarities and differences between the assistance rendered to refugees in 2015 and 2022. The spontaneous, bottom-up responses of citizens and NGOs dominated during both crises, but especially in 2015. This was a consequence of the central government’s anti-immigration policies and, indeed, the centralisation of most social and public services. The assistance provided to forced migrants who congregated at railway stations and on the city’s streets in 2015 was grounded on the direct involvement of ordinary citizens and NGO workers. The government and specialist, faith-based humanitarian organisations intentionally disassociated themselves from this response. In 2022, by contrast, the central government engaged financially with the crisis as well as implementing support through collaboration with selected NGOs; aid was managed centrally through the same humanitarian faith-based organisations that had absented themselves from the scene in 2015. In the wake of the two crises, Budapest remains a city with no coherent integration policy directed at the reception and long-term inclusion of new arrivals. Our empirical research shows that this is partly due to the low number of migrants who settle in Budapest; hostile narratives around immigration and a lack of administrative autonomy on the part of local government were additional factors. Budapest’s local administration, moreover, has had little interest in encouraging immigration. As regards the administration’s greater engagement in the later crisis, it is important to note that the city’s approach to migration governance had significantly changed by 2022. This was partly the result of the national government’s “punishment” of Budapest and other cities run by the opposition through drastic budget cuts (Temesi, 2019). Budapest has thus enjoyed only minimal funding for non-core activities such as refugee support. Returning to the question posed in the title of our chapter, it can therefore be concluded that Budapest has continued to enact a ‘no policy’ migration policy. By this we mean that local authorities, where they have implemented any measures at all, have tended to take remedial action without a long-term vision aimed at solving specific problems or distributing roles among different urban policy actors. Despite a clear and significant shift in 2022—made possible, among other factors, by a change in leadership in City Hall—Budapest has not seized the opportunity to implement a coherent strategy and so far (to the best of our knowledge) has chosen not to develop an autonomous vision for the city’s migration policy.

Forced migrants from Ukraine who held Hungarian citizenship were not treated as refugees. Yet they nonetheless received a mixed reception ranging from welcome upon arrival through indifference and even hostility in the long run. Moreover, the measures implemented as a result of forced migration from Ukraine were not universally applied. Transcarpathian migrants with Hungarian citizenship received significantly more support than others. The opening-up of Budapest to refugees in 2022 therefore did not amount to a departure from the ‘zero immigration’ policy that has been established in Hungary since 2015.

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Chapter 4

Prague for All: Pioneering Migration Governance in a Capital City



Marie Jelínková and Agnieszka Zogata-Kusz

4.1 Introduction

Prague, as the capital of the Czechia and its most populous city, stands out for the number of migrants living there and the number of actors working with them, but also for the solutions the city has adopted with regard to the integration of migrants. Prague was the first city in the country and in the CEE region to formulate its own integration concept. This study examines the development of the integration policy in Prague and how it evolved in 2022. We aim to identify how the policy was formed there, what actors were engaged in the process and predominantly, what the relationships and influences of various actors engaged in the agenda were.

Our study builds on Scholten's (2013) typology of four ideal types of relationships between government levels: centralist, localist, multilevel and decoupled. The first one is a top-down approach related to clear central directives defining the division of labour and control mechanisms ensuring that local policy implementation aligns with central rules and goals. The second one is a bottom-up approach, where policy competencies adhere to subsidiarity and the local government not only implements policies but also formulates them, responds to local needs and exchanges knowledge horizontally with other local authorities. Multilevel governance entails collaborative interaction and coordination among different levels of government, without any

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M. Jelínková (✉)
Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic
e-mail: marie.jelinkova@fsv.cuni.cz

A. Zogata-Kusz
Palacký University Olomouc, Olomouc, Czech Republic

single level exerting clear dominance and where the policy results from mutual interaction. Finally, decoupled relations mean that meaningful policy coordination is absent. Consequently, policies within a particular domain may be disjointed and even contradictory across different levels (Scholten, 2013; Scholten & Penninx, 2016). Scholten developed this typology after analysis of the Dutch national migrant integration policies and the ones of Amsterdam and Rotterdam. We apply this typology not only to the relationships between the city of Prague and the Ministry of the Interior but also to the relationships of Prague with its districts and also with other actors dealing with the integration of migrants.

The chapter is divided into four main parts. The first one is of an introductory character as it provides general information about migration to Prague and a brief overview of the development of the integration policy and the research methods applied for the purposes of the chapter. The second part focuses on the national-level integration policy before 2022. This demonstrates an important context for the development in Prague that the third and fourth parts deal with. While the third part presents an analysis of the governance of the integration of migrants in Prague before and after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the fourth one discusses the type of relationships accepted in Prague and the factors affecting it.

4.1.1 Migration to Prague in the Context of Migration to Czechia

At the beginning of 2021, over one-third of the migrants¹ staying in Czechia lived in Prague. It meant that 16% of the 1.3 million inhabitants of Prague were not Czech citizens. In some municipal districts the share of migrants exceeded 20% and in one district migrants represented one-third of the population. As of 2021, the majority of foreigners residing in Prague originated in Ukraine (26%), Slovakia (15%), Russia (12%) and Vietnam (6%). Others came from diverse countries worldwide, with no other nationality forming a significant group. This situation contributed to Prague becoming a leader in the development of local integration policy in Czechia. As early as in 2014, the Prague City Policy for the Integration of Foreigners was put in place. The involvement of experienced Prague NGOs assisting migrants was essential for its development (Municipality of the Capital City, Prague, 2021).

Prague stands out in Czechia and the Visegrad countries² with a high number of migrants (661 thousand as of 2021) and a high share of migrants (6.2% of its population). At the end of 2021, Czechia had the highest immigrant population share among the Visegrad countries (Eurostat, 2024). Before the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine,

¹ Czech statistics only cover persons without Czech citizenship; once a migrant acquires Czech citizenship, he/she is no longer included in migration statistics. Therefore, Czechia has no data on Czech citizens of migrant origin (for more see Jelínková, 2023).

² The Visegrad Group is an alliance of four Central European countries: Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia.

Ukrainians were already the largest group of foreigners, accounting for almost 200 thousand (CSO, 2024). Before the Velvet Revolution in 1989, international migration was restricted. Since the 1990s, the situation has changed significantly (Baršová & Barsa, 2005). The fall of the Iron Curtain, the Yugoslav wars and the division of Czechoslovakia increased migration. The number of foreigners with permanent and long-term residency rose from 78,000 in 1993 to 438,000 in 2004, when the country joined the EU, reaching 564,000 by 2018 (CSO, 2024). This situation has raised questions about assistance to immigrants, with Czech NGOs playing a crucial role in their integration. By the late 1990s, the Czech government had also become actively involved in the integration of migrants.

4.1.2 An Overview of the Development of the Migrant Integration Policy

In the context of the deep political, social and economic transformation that Czechia has undergone since 1989, the state enacted the Aliens Act together with the Asylum Act in 1999, which both created opportunities for permanent legal settlement of migrants and increased the need for their integration (Čižinský, 2012; see below).

Regardless of the growing number of migrants, the issue of migration remained almost absent from public discourse, and was not politicised and securitised until 2015. In 2009, it appeared briefly in the media in connection with the impact of the global financial crisis on Czechia. The situation forced some municipalities, namely Havlíčkův Brod, Pardubice, Plzeň and some districts of Prague, to address the crises resulting from the increased number of unemployed migrants (i.e. mainly tensions between urban residents and unemployed migrants) with the help of ministerial emergency projects. The projects aimed at the integration of whole families, including children, in order to prevent the formation of segregated communities. A number of actors were involved in the activities, but a significant fact was that for the first time ten Czech municipalities took responsibility for the integration of migrants. After that, however, migration and integration were not discussed until 2015, when the crisis of European migration policy brought the mediatisation of the issues, regardless of the low number of asylum seekers (see Jelínková, 2019).³ This enabled anti-immigrant movements to emerge. Consequently, the established political parties also adopted anti-immigrant rhetoric. Finally, public sentiment turned negative. This shift resulted in the heightened politicisation and securitisation of immigration and integration policies. Not only migrants themselves but also Czech NGOs assisting immigrants became targets of (mostly verbal) attacks (Zogata-Kusz, 2020b). Fearing their political prospects, politicians became reluctant to advance migrant rights, and the immigrant advocacy work of NGOs became increasingly difficult. The crisis not

³ According to the Department for Asylum and Migration Policy of the Ministry of the Interior, asylum applications reached 1525, i.e. a modest increase compared to 2014 and far from the record high in 2001.

only affected issues such as Czechia's stance on the EU relocation and resettlement programmes⁴ but also had a detrimental impact on the rights of immigrants already residing in Czechia (Zogata-Kusz, 2020a). Only the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 calmed the situation down, since this new topic replaced questions of migration in the public discourse. Otherwise, at that time there was only few forced migration of migrants residing in Czechia. The state authorities rather extended the validity of the residence permits to migrants. It was also possible to observe a milder increase in economic migration stemming from economic growth and labour-market demand.

Before the 2022 arrival of Ukrainian refugees (specifically temporary protection holders), the governance of integration involved limited actors, primarily the Ministry of the Interior (MoI) and regional Centres for the Support of the Integration of Foreigners (hereinafter integration centres), most of which fell under the MoI. A few municipalities, i.e. Prague, Brno and Česká Lípa, developed their own integration policies as state-level policy did not require it (Jelínková, 2023). NGOs played a crucial role, often complementing or replacing authorities' activities, particularly where municipalities were inactive. Some NGOs formed the Consortium of Migrant Assisting Organisations in 2003, participating in policy-making, serving as think tanks and engaging in advocacy at various levels, including international platforms such as the Global Compact for Migration (Zogata-Kusz, 2022). Most NGOs, including the consortium, are based in Prague, which influences the city's integration policy.

4.1.3 *Methods*

The analysis of Prague's migrant integration policy draws from available strategic documents, including the 2014 and 2022 Prague City Policy for the Integration of Foreigners: Prague, a Metropolis for All (Municipality of the Capital City, Prague, 2021). The depiction of the developments related to the 2022 and 2023 events is based on the thematic analysis of the eight semi-structured interviews we conducted with key actors engaged in migrant integration in Prague in June and July 2023. The interviews lasted, on average, 70 min and included informants from the municipality, NGOs engaged in migrant integration and the state administration. Additionally, we utilised data from our long-term study of integration policies in Czechia and previous direct work in non-governmental organisations assisting migrants. This expertise and personal contacts allowed us to select and access the most key stakeholders, which is quite exceptional given their packed agendas (typically, interviews are provided to a very limited extent).

⁴ Czechia, like Poland and Hungary, was subject to proceedings before the Court of Justice of the European Union for refusing to participate in the EU relocation and resettlement programmes.

4.2 Overall Approach to Migrant Integration at the Central Level in Czechia

The Czech state integration policy represents an essential basis for the further development of migration governance at the municipal level. Consequently, in this section we present its development as regards its documents and actors, the factors affecting them and the key milestones related to it.

4.2.1 *Migrant Integration in Czech Public Policy Documents*

Shortly after the adoption of the Aliens Act 326/1999 and the Asylum Act 325/1999, Czechia adopted the Principles of the Concept of the Integration of Foreigners in 1999 and the Concept itself a year later (Government of the Czech Republic, 1999). Although the document recognised the importance of territorial self-government bodies for the integration of migrants, it did not create any obligations for regional and local governments to engage in the integration of migrants or to provide them with more extensive practical support. Rather, the documents provide a reference point for their potential activities in this area and, to some extent, a basis for funding some integration projects (see below).

Although the Ministry of the Interior viewed migrant integration from a security perspective, the three documents (the Aliens Act, the Asylum Act and the Concept of the Integration of Foreigners) manifest the government's positive approach towards migrants. The Principles aim for the equal participation of foreigners primarily in the job market and in relation to housing, education, healthcare and social care, as well as religion to support their integration (Government of the Czech Republic, 1999). The 2000 Concept of the Integration of Foreigners, revised in 2006, 2011 and 2016 (hereafter the concept), was of a general character but focused on foreigners' rights (Government of the Czech Republic, 2006, 2011, 2016). The revisions of the concept introduced a basic definition of integration emphasising bi-directionality and the role of the majority, and they addressed social integration, which was absent from the original version.

The documents were influenced by the Council of Europe, which also acted as a catalyst for the process of the preparation of the integration policy (e.g. it organised a round table on intercommunity relations; Baršová & Barsa, 2005: 232). Despite some weaknesses, regarding e.g. implementation mechanisms, the Czech integration policy remained one of the most progressive in the region.

The Czech integration policy primarily targeted third-country nationals (TCNs) residing on Czech territory for at least 90 days or permanently, along with the host majority. EU nationals were initially not included, but subsequent amendments added the group. In 2011, individuals in the pre-migrant period also became a target of policy measures, with the goal of preventing potential problems upon arrival, such as exploitation by intermediaries (Čermáková & Nekorjak, 2009). In 2016, partly in

response to increased migrant inflows in the EU, the concept was extended to include international protection holders. However, the integration of this group remains a separate agenda, with special programmes offered since the ones from the 1990s—currently the State Integration Programme (Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, 2024)—on which we do not elaborate here (Tollarová, 2008).

The 2006 concept sets out three key principles for migrant policies: (1) legal certainty, (2) fair access to services and (3) increasing rights based on duration of residency. It also outlines prerequisites for effective integration, including Czech language proficiency, economic self-sufficiency, societal orientation and building relationships with the majority. Additionally, it emphasises providing migrants with information on their legal and social rights and the available assistance. The 2011 amendment introduced voluntary adaptation and integration courses, mainly conducted by NGOs and the integration centres. Furthermore, it underscored the importance of information dissemination and awareness-raising for successful integration (*informedness*), leading to the development of numerous informational websites by ministries and other entities.

Each year, the Ministry of the Interior submits a Migration and Integration Report, evaluating the implementation of the previous year's concept. Following this evaluation, the government allocates tasks and resources to ministries via the Implementation Procedure for the Updated Integration Concept. This outlines an annual national integration plan, including goals and financial support. Ministries then issue calls for grant applications to implement migrant integration projects for the year, open to municipalities, NGOs and other entities (Government of the Czech Republic, 2006).

Despite the 2006 concept's initial goal of engaging all regions and municipalities in migrant integration efforts, this objective remains largely unmet. Nonetheless, regional authorities in the Pardubice, Ústí and South Moravian regions, in collaboration with NGOs, took the initiative and announced calls for migrant integration projects within broader funding programmes (Government of the Czech Republic, 2006). The 2011 concept failed to materialise the cooperation with local government bodies. Only Prague and partially the South Moravian Region pursued these goals. The 2011 update primarily emphasised the role of the integration centres that the MoI established in 2009 with EU structural funding. These centres, collaborating with regional NGOs (and in a few cases operated by NGOs), offer Czech language courses and counselling. They became the main tool of the implementation of the concept objectives (see further). The 2016 concept focused on integration centres as the main tool for local integration, with minimal emphasis on collaboration with regional or municipal authorities (Jelínková & Valenta, 2022). The 2016 concept continues to serve as the foundation of the Czech integration policy at the national level. Although the document should have been updated in 2021, in 2024 there has still not been political agreement on its new shape.

Besides the Concept of the Integration of Foreigners, other documents relevant to migrant integration are the 2015 Strategy on Migration Policy and the 2019 amendment to the Aliens Act. The documents stress the government's preference for economic migration and the preferred composition of migrants. The Strategy

emphasises security across migration areas and prioritises proactive integration policies at all levels. It also confirms the ‘desired volume of legal migration’ in line with the state’s *absorption capacity* (*absorpční kapacita*)⁵ and integration measures. The 2019 amendment to the Aliens Act strengthens integration measures through mandatory adaptation-integration courses for long-term resident migrants. Nevertheless, the legal framework for integration remains limited, especially at the local level (on the mutual influences of the integration policy and immigration control, see Zogata-Kusz, 2020a).

4.2.2 Key Actors, Key Factors and Milestones in a Multilevel Setting

The Ministry of the Interior coordinates the Czech integration policy. This role, is, however, criticised by civil society representatives (Čerychová et al., 2020) for prioritising security over social integration. Other ministries are expected to be actively involved in immigrant integration but frequently fail to fulfil the tasks the MoI assigned to them. Ultimately, expectations for their performance are modest, except for the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. In 2021, the latter, in collaboration with NGOs, introduced a reform of Czech language teaching in primary schools (Jelínková & Valenta, 2022; Pořízek, 2018).

NGOs, many based in Prague, play a crucial role in migrant integration. For over 25 years, they have offered free-of-charge Czech language courses, counselling and community events. Some engage in influencing the formulation of integration policy. NGOs’ activities are funded from various sources, including the state budget, local government bodies’ budgets, EU structural funds and international organisations. Although NGOs are recognised as key actors in integration policy, tension has arisen as the state prefers them to act as service providers rather than policy influencers.

As mentioned above, in 2009, the MoI introduced integration centres, which became crucial integration actors at the regional level. While most of them fall under the MoI, there are a few exceptions: in Prague, the centre is managed by the city, in the South Moravian Region by the regional authority and in the Hradec Králové and Ústí nad Labem Regions by NGOs. Originally functioning thanks to EU funds, since 2020 it has been possible to co-finance the centres managed by the MoI from the state budget. They serve as information hubs, implementers and catalysts for integration initiatives, and effective collaborators in regional strategy alongside other integration stakeholders. Following the 2019 revision of the Aliens Act, they have been arranging mandatory integration and adaptation courses. In regions with fewer migrants and without an NGO presence, integration centres are the primary actors engaged in

⁵ As Kušniráková and Čížinský observed, the repeated phrase *absorption capacity*, although not defined officially, means ‘the maximum possible number of foreigners that Czech society was able to accept without radicalisation’ (2011: 503).

migrant integration. Unfortunately, their voice—like those of other organisations such as NGOs—is poorly heard in shaping migration policy (Jelínková, 2023).

Other important actors engaged in migration governance are municipalities. The structure of the Czech public administration is decentralised and fragmented, which results in high levels of local autonomy, including in the field of integration policy-making. Czech municipalities remain the smallest in size across the OECD countries when measured both by population and by area (Jelínková et al., 2023; Plaček et al., 2020). Consequently, the districts of Prague have some independence from the Prague municipality and function as individual municipalities. The Prague City Hall offered them incentives and recommendations as regards integration, but they decided autonomously (as in the case of the implementation of the integration concept). As observed in all local government bodies, their participation in integration policy implementation has been voluntary. Before 2022, only a few municipalities engaged in that using so-called emergency projects, which later transformed into municipality projects. In 2021, this regarded only 22 municipalities and city districts, while in 2022 the number increased to 111 (MoI, 2023b).

Finally, we should mention a few more actors involved in migration governance. While unions aim to influence national policy decisions, individual employers hiring large groups of migrants could have a significant regional or local influence. Nevertheless, they usually do not use their potential, making only formal declarations on engagement in the integration of migrants. The next actors are the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, along with the National Pedagogic Institute, who support educators in teaching migrant pupils. Since 2021, students with different native languages are entitled to free language preparation and support directly in their schools, potentially enhancing their integration. Elementary schools that the local government bodies manage may also be significant actors at the local level. Finally, we should mention academics participating in the policy process as experts at various levels.

4.3 Migrant Integration Governance in Prague

In this key part of the chapter we focus on the development of the Prague approach to the integration of migrants before 2022 and later, in relation to the arrival of forced migrants from Ukraine.

4.3.1 Prague Integration Policy Before 2022

The City of Prague is one of the pioneers of migrant integration among local and regional government actors in Czechia. The city administration and city districts issue an annual grant programme through which NGOs, including migrant and church organisations, and municipality districts compete for funding of their projects. The

Prague City administration does not have the power to instruct districts in the field of migrant integration, and yet over time, many districts have become more involved in integration activities. The Integration Centre Prague (ICP), one of the above-mentioned regional Centres for the Support of the Integration of Foreigners, established in 2012, plays an indispensable role in migrant integration. The ICP is a public benefit corporation, with the status of a non-governmental, non-profit organisation. Its activities are 75% funded by the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic and 25% by the Prague City Hall. All services are provided free of charge. The ICP is the coordinating body for the area and guarantees the activities of the Regional Advisory Platform (RAP; see below). Within the Prague City Hall, migrant integration is mainly dealt with by the Division of National Minorities and Foreigners of the Municipality of the Capital City, Prague (MHMP, 2024b). It has five employees and has its own budget (see below). For historical reasons, it is a part of the Department of Culture and Tourism. This division is mainly responsible for coordinating the implementation of strategic materials and other integration-related activities, for which the City of Prague is the guarantor. The City Hall also houses the City Council Commission, a body of experts advising the political representation on the integration of migrants. The Council of the City of Prague on the Integration of Foreigners as a collective advisory body is composed of experts and political representatives, including some foreign-born Prague residents. There is also a Commission of the City Council for Grants in the Field of National Minorities and Foreigners, which deals exclusively with the allocation of city funds for the integration activities of actors, mainly from civil society (Čerychová et al., 2020; Fig. 4.1).

The first Prague Integration Concept was presented in 2014. It analysed the situation of migrants in Prague, defined the responsibilities of the actors involved and identified the general objectives, including migrants' access to social and related services. These objectives were achieved through specific action plans, tasks, implementation and evaluation. Implementation was based on cooperation between the local administration and NGOs. The latter provided legal and social counselling, language courses, outreach work, etc. Initially, four of the largest NGOs provided legal and social counselling for the ICP, but later the ICP began to provide these services itself. The ICP also took over some of the coordination of activities across the city districts. The Prague Municipal Department for Migrant Integration was responsible for planning structural changes in cooperation with other city departments, distributing grants and participating in the coordination of other platforms.

The ICP started to organise the bi-monthly Regional Advisory Platform that brings together all the actors involved in local integration in Prague and has become a much-used place for the exchange of experiences and presentation of interesting projects and news in the field of migrant integration and networking, but also for training on relevant topics (the field of social work with migrants, involvement of the academic sphere, issues related to migrants' access to healthcare, etc.). The platform is regularly attended by 60 to 90 participants. Because of the need to deal with issues related primarily to Prague's neighbourhoods, another platform (the Advisory Platform for Representatives of Prague's Districts) was created around 2014. Its task is to bring

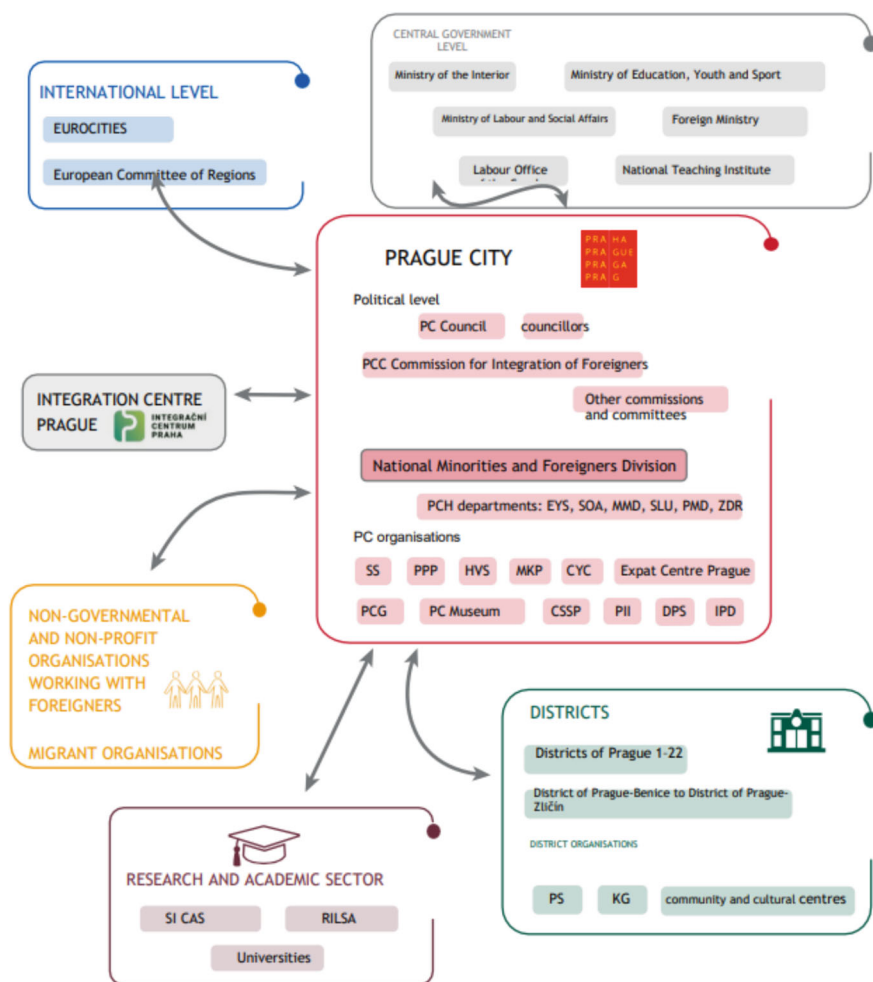


Fig. 4.1 Cooperation between the City of Prague (PC) and other participants involved in the governance of integration (*Source* Municipality of the capital city, Prague: City of Prague policy for the integration of foreigners. Prague, a metropolis for all [2022–2027]: 14)

together municipal officials who are (or should be) involved in the integration of migrants in their districts.⁶ In 2016, the Platform for Representatives of Municipal Education Departments began its work, focusing on the education of children and pupils with different mother tongues and providing a space for closer professional discussion on the issue. As with the other platforms, there are regular meetings where, for example, legislative changes and news from the districts are shared, difficulties

⁶ Prague also attempted to involve active migrants through another platform (The Migrant Platform); this attempt failed after several years because only a few migrant representatives attended the platform.

and their solutions are discussed and guests are often invited to the platforms to enlighten those present on a chosen topic.

In 2017, the Prague Integration Concept was updated (MHMP, 2017). The updated concept added new integration measures, such as mainstreaming the integration agenda, and emphasised the need for authorities to be more open to migrants and to increase intercultural competences. The updated concept introduced the slogan ‘Prague—a metropolis for all’ (in Czech: Praha metropole všech) to emphasise the importance of including migrants in the public life of the metropolis. As a result of the policy, the city’s website *metropolevsech.cz* (MHMP, 2024a) was developed, providing key information about Prague and migrants, as well as information for migrants, in five languages. In addition, the ICP created the Prague mobile app *Praguer* (Praguer, 2020), which provides information in Czech and six other languages (Czech, English, Russian, Vietnamese, Ukrainian, Chinese and Arabic) about everyday life in Prague, such as how to contact useful institutions, and maps showing where they are located.

In 2021, the document *Prague City Policy for Integration of Foreigners. Prague, a Metropolis For All, 2022–2027* (see MHMP, 2021) was enacted. It was developed over a period of three years by over 70 people representing 54 public, non-profit and private sector organisations that participated in its preparation. The strategy is mainly focused on the nationals of third countries who prevail in Prague. However, the target group also includes EU nationals and (newly) holders of asylum or another form of international protection. The concept comes with five strategic objectives: (1) institutional facilities and infrastructure, (2) multilateral cooperation, (3) services for foreigners, (4) education, (5) coexistence, and priorities based on them, each supported by SWOT analysis (Municipality of the Capital City of Prague, 2021: 18). As in the previous period, an action plan is drawn up every two years for this concept, which includes tasks for stakeholders. An important implementation mechanism is the Prague City Council’s annual grant programme in the field of migrant integration.

The local stakeholders who were interviewed viewed Prague’s approach to migrants as successful but also named several areas which remained particularly challenging before 2022. These are: (1) that the integration of migrants remained a marginally perceived agenda, (2) that the situation of migrants was only marginally reflected in some city strategies, (3) that the city districts and the municipality had limited staff capacity to facilitate migrant integration, which in practice limited the implementation of some projects or participation in them and (4) some pressing issues faced by migrants (e.g. the low admission rate to secondary schools as a result of low Czech language proficiency, the difficult situation of ageing migrants, etc.) were also not taken into account. A certain “invisibility” of migrants led to the situation that the necessary measures were implemented very slowly (Valentová, 2023). On the other hand, by the beginning of 2022 Prague had done a lot: (1) there were excellent strategic documents, (2) evaluation of the achievement of set goals was ongoing and (3) experts met regularly. Also, (4) the City of Prague allocated funds annually for a grant programme to NGOs to implement its priorities in the field of migrant integration. These funds, as well as those allocated to the Integration Centre Prague, have increased over the years. Dedicated positions were established and made stable

within the City Hall. Further, (5) the ICP had a good working relationship with the municipality and relations with other NGOs were cooperative. Although migrant integration policies were not an important issue for Prague councillors to promote, they did not oppose them either. In addition, there have always been local politicians who have taken the issue in their stride. A more heterogeneous but overall positive development was also observed at the district level, where migrants gradually became more involved in the management of municipal affairs (Valentová, 2018). It was the arrival of Ukrainian refugees that showed that the degree of readiness of the city authorities and its municipal districts was often a key factor in how the districts approached Ukrainian refugees on their territory.

4.3.2 Migrant Integration Policy in Prague After 2022

As a result of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, 120,000 (MoI, 2023a) forced migrants arrived in Prague. The main influx of migrants lasted for about four weeks. In response, two weeks after the invasion of Ukraine, the government of the Czech Republic activated the Temporary Protection Directive, enacting the so-called Lex Ukraine (Act No. 66/2022 Coll., on Measures in the Field of Employment and Social Security in Connection with the Armed Conflict on the Territory of Ukraine Caused by the Invasion of Russian Federation Troops, as Amended and Other Related Laws [Lex Ukraine], 2022) which offered fleeing Ukrainians access to the labour market, the education system—including subsequent compulsory schooling for children—special social benefits, and housing assistance.

As early as March 2022, it was clear that refugees arriving in Czechia were mainly heading for Prague. Although the city authorities were aware of this fact, they initially took no significant steps (Zvěřina, 2022). As the trains from the Polish-Ukrainian border went directly to Prague, the initial support of the Prague authorities for the free movement of people fleeing the war in Ukraine gradually diminished. By mid-May 2022, a quarter of the total number of people fleeing from the Ukrainian war to Czechia had settled in Prague, and the city's mayor, Zdeněk Hřib, asked the government to create a national-level mechanism for redistributing forced migrants to other regions of the country (ibid.). Prague was no longer able to cope with their arrival, in particular to provide accommodation, healthcare, education and other services. In response, the Minister of the Interior ordered the construction of a tent camp in Prague (ibid.), but no national relocation mechanism was adopted. As discussed in the media, the argument for not creating such a mechanism was that the relocation of refugees should be based on motivation rather than coercion.

During the first days, the assistance to forced migrants was organised mainly on a bottom-up basis (Zogata-Kusz et al., 2023). Volunteers and NGOs, as pointed out in the interviews, played the key role. The first reception centre for forced migrants was opened in the city library. Soon it became overcrowded and moved to a large congress centre as a Regional Centre of Assistance to Ukraine (KACPU). Similar KACPUs were open in all 14 Czech regions on the basis of a decision of the National

Crisis Staff. Forced migrants could obtain their residence documents (temporary protection), work permits, health insurance and information on employment and social welfare and receive free pre-paid SIM cards or information on the possibility of opening a free bank account, often with a financial bonus from the banks. During the first few weeks, the KACPU also assisted with finding accommodation. The main coordination of the KACPU was performed by the Fire Brigade in cooperation with the Crisis Staff of the Prague City Hall. Later on the Czech Red Cross got involved. Other important actors who were engaged were hundreds of volunteers, interpreters, intercultural workers, childcare providers and organisations working with refugees with special needs, and many others had to be coordinated (Zogata-Kusz et al., 2023).

Overall, the coordination of the response to forced migration was described by those involved at the time as vibrant and full of challenges. Our interviewees agreed that there was a lack of clear leadership and that the situation was largely managed by civil society, volunteers and a range of NGOs and other organisations taking on (or being given) a larger role based on their capacity and expertise, which was then organised (e.g. childcare, crisis intervention). When asked how such a large reception centre could function without sufficient coordination, the answer was usually 'there was the will'. Those who were involved and interviewed in this study considered the general atmosphere at the time to be extremely important, when the will on the part of all parts of society to accept and support Ukrainian refugees was evident. For example, the favourable and quickly adopted legislation (two weeks after the full-scale Russian invasion), the involvement of the local offices of the Asylum and Migration Policy Department of the Ministry of the Interior and the cooperation of the health insurance companies were crucial to the operation of the KACPU. According to the stakeholders who were interviewed, the most problematic link was the involvement of the long-understaffed Labour Offices, which Ukrainians had to visit in person to claim the first benefit of the so-called humanitarian assistance.

NGO actors who were interviewed (civil servants and local politicians are somewhat more muted in their criticism) pointed to the difficulty of cooperation between officials of different municipal departments and the lack of communication between local actors (horizontal level). The ambiguous use of the expertise or work of NGOs was also frequently mentioned: NGOs were sometimes consulted in moments of crisis, but somewhat neglected in the search for solutions to longer-term problems. A number of 'crisis' issues were dealt with directly by telephone. An NGO employee who was interviewed recalled calling the mayor directly about forced migrants being fined on public transport, or about the need to pay attention to unaccompanied minors. The NGO employee who was interviewed mentioned the efforts of their organisation which, in cooperation with academia, had prepared a simple needs questionnaire focusing on needs of accommodated migrants, but there was no institution (or rather, no institution that accepted this responsibility) in charge of the follow-up to the crisis management.

In contrast to other social issues, the business community was supportive of Prague's response to forced migration (Kucerova, 2018; Vrabcová & Urbancová, 2021). Private companies provided significant financial and material support and sometimes human capacity. Telephone companies offered free-of-charge pre-paid

SIM cards to the forced migrants; banks facilitated the opening of free-of-charge accounts with an initial financial bonus. A number of businesses also vacated their little-used facilities and converted them into temporary shelters for people fleeing from Ukraine. Some businesses funded accommodation in their vacated facilities for over a year for tens or hundreds of (gradually rotating) Ukrainian women with children, for whom private donors paid for accommodation, food, social support and other necessary costs involved in becoming self-sufficient.

It should also be noted that Prague's response to forced migration varied, depending on who the forced migrants were. As documented in several reports (Ochránc, 2022), Ukrainian Roma had to wait longer than other Ukrainians to obtain residence permits, were selectively asked to affix a Schengen border crossing stamp in their passports or were not allowed to enter the assistance centre unless accompanied by an NGO worker.

An important actor involved in the 2022 response was international organisations (IGOs). Of the IGOs active in Czechia in 2022 (mainly UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM and the WHO), UNICEF played the most significant role in Prague. It funded the establishment of the Follow-up Support Centre for Ukrainian Refugees (Czech acronym CNPUU) in Prague, which is responsible for improving access to schooling and pre-school education for refugee children, social services and work related to the care of Ukrainian child refugees, strengthening communication resources and information for Ukrainian refugees, access to health services, psychosocial support for refugees; and the effective management and coordination of these services.⁷ At the same time, UNICEF funding enabled, among other things, an increase in the number of municipal staff, including in the Department for National Minorities and Integration. The impetus for this UNICEF project was to develop a system similar to that in Warsaw.

However, according to the interviewees, the plan related to the CNPUU and other UNICEF investment in Prague was prepared in haste (in August 2022) to ensure its adoption before the Prague City Council elections in September 2022.⁸ This haste resulted in a lack of needs assessment or consultation with a wider range of experts (Jelínková et al., 2024).

Our informants thought that the activities that were funded had been very useful and that Prague would not have been in a position to provide the necessary services without this significant amount of funding. On the other hand, they mentioned that a significant part of the funding was not used, the rules for spending the money changed during the implementation of the project and the main part of the funding ended at the end of 2023, sometimes without further provision of the services used.

⁷ For details, see the Resolution of the Prague City Council No. 39/5 of September 8, 2022 and its annexes.

⁸ UNICEF decided to take advantage of the strong support for the Ukrainians of the Prague authorities, which could have influenced the elections. Similarly, post-election negotiations would have significantly delayed the adoption of the plan.

4.3.3 *Temporary Centre for Follow-Up Support for Ukrainian Refugees*

In order to support basic services for Ukrainian forced migrants, the Centre for Follow-Up Support for Ukrainian Refugees (Czech acronym CNPUU) was established on the basis of the document Strategic Framework for Supporting Ukrainian Refugees in the City of Prague,⁹ adopted within the framework of the UNICEF Support Plan (hereinafter the Plan). The CNPUU aimed to: (1) enable Ukrainian refugees living in Prague to address their livelihood needs in one place, (2) strengthen the capacity of the NGO sector, (3) transfer information to various city departments and (4) generally strengthen the cooperation among local actors. Initially, it was considered that the CNPUU would become a part of the ICP or the Prague Social Services Centre, but it ended up being a completely different and temporary institution.

As our informants stated, the CNPUU initially faced a number of challenges, including the relocation of the centre after three months of operation, and several months of delays by the municipality in connecting computers, allocating telephone numbers, etc. Despite the difficult administrative barriers, the services of the CNPUU were highly sought after by Ukrainian forced migrants, in particular assistance with housing, school enrolment and healthcare. However, the aim of the CNPUU was also to get Prague City Hall officials much more involved in the Ukrainian refugee agenda while at the same time providing incentives for the necessary structural changes. Despite the enormous commitment of the Centre's managers, it was not in their power to exert pressure for the more far-reaching changes that were needed, e.g. in terms of increasing school capacity or providing more vacant apartments. Although the list of structural changes is rather short, there have been a number of necessary changes in the social sphere and access to healthcare. Some of our informants mentioned structural changes achieved as a result of the operation of the CNPUU, including increased capacity of the Military University Hospital. The CNPUU also managed to initiate multilateral negotiations that enabled funding for outreach social workers and intercultural workers in Prague.

The CNPUU was closed as a result of UNICEF's decision to severely limit further financial support to Prague in December 2023. From its inception, the main limitation of the CNPUU's work was its temporary nature. Many municipal actors, being unfamiliar with migration management, were initially reluctant to accept the CNPUU's work. However, over time, the presence of Ukrainian refugees has brought about significant changes in the municipality's approach; the issue of migrant integration has become the core of the municipality's work, which was perceived as marginal before the beginning of 2022, but in 2022 and 2023 the issue was being addressed by most municipal departments. Municipal officials gradually became accustomed to dealing with migrant-related issues in their agenda. Although the integration of Ukrainian forced migrants and other groups of migrants living in Prague have been

⁹ In Czech: Strategický rámec podpory ukrajinských uprchlíků na území hlavního města Prahy.

addressed separately (also because of funding sources), the responsible actors are aware that it is only a matter of time before these agendas are merged.

4.4 Migration Governance in Prague and Factors Affecting It

In its policy-making Prague employed a multilevel approach (Scholten & Penninx, 2016): it cooperates closely with numerous actors, mainly NGOs assisting migrants that for years proved to be highly professional and experienced not only at the micro level of work with individual clients but also at the mezzo and macro levels, playing an essential role in migration governance (Zogata-Kusz, 2022). The multi-level approach resulted from a centralist tendency on the part of the state, long-term bottom-up activities, the involvement of social entrepreneurs and Prague's willingness to assume ownership of the agenda. Through stressing participation, inclusiveness and an evidence-based approach, the Prague approach is gradually becoming more distinct from the central-level one. Nevertheless, at the same time the municipality of Prague does not question the national integration policy and strives to maintain good relationships with the MoI, who may support their migrant-oriented activities even in times of an unfavourable political situation at the local level.

4.4.1 *Vertical Aspects of the Migration Governance Structure in the City*

Our analysis allowed us to identify factors affecting migration governance in Prague. At a central level, the factors include the history of migration to Czechia dating back to the beginning of the 1990s, as well as the national-level migration and integration policies, including e.g. requirements related to the extension of a stay (Zogata-Kusz, 2020a). The national-level integration policy gives the Prague policy a basis—and boundaries—for its own integration concept.

The influence of the MoI is, however, much more multifaceted. In some respects, it stabilises local policy-making. As one-third of the migrants in Czechia live in Prague and its suburbs, the MoI views Prague as an important integration actor and tries to be supportive. The MoI exerts its influence mainly through funding and personal contacts. Prague's main financial allocations in the area of migrant integration are channelled through the AMIF, which is administered by the MoI.

Although the MoI required convergence between Prague and the national integration policy frameworks, it refrained from direct intervention when the city authorities took (partly divergent) more inclusive and participation-oriented measures, as long as these measures were supported by distinct funding sources. Given the political

context, such a non-insurgent policy (Bazurli & Kaufmann, 2023) is preferred by Prague officials.

The **local-level factors** affecting the city integration policy include the exceptional position of Prague as the capital city. Just like in the case of other countries (Van Gent & Musterd, 2016), migrants in Czechia choose the capital for reasons of better opportunities and other aspects (e.g. migrant communities or the availability of organisations assisting migrants). The diversity of the actors with an interest in engaging in the governance of migration, which was evident during the works over the integration strategy, definitely affects its shape in Prague. The physical availability of national and regional authorities and international organisations, together with scholars and other experts dealing with topics related to migration and integration, can be seen as significant factors affecting integration policy-making and policy implementation. Another element influencing migration governance in Prague is the city's structure of numerous districts with their own specificities (e.g. historical development of the district, local population, transport links, etc.). Finally, something that turned out to be critical for migration governance in Prague was the Prague City Council's long-term political consensus to support the local integration policy—or at least not to hinder it.

Concerning the ICP, although it was established by the city and does not belong among the centres governed by the MoI, the ministry maintains significant influence over it through its financial control (see above). The city, providing just a quarter of the centre's budget, wanted the centre to be the main unit managing the refugee crisis. Nonetheless, because of blurred expectations and unclear competencies the centre did not take charge of this.

Migration governance in Prague was also shaped by the **supranational level**. This includes e.g. the EU common policy regarding its members' nationals and the EU support (mainly financial) of its members' integration policy or the engagement of other international organisations (e.g. the Eurocities network) and international non-governmental organisations assisting immigrants, e.g. sharing their know-how with NGOs or authorities.

Finally, there is a set of **individual-level factors**. In the case of Prague, their influence is visible in particular when we look e.g. at the experienced and active individuals—policy entrepreneurs—in positions that enabled them to push the idea of mainstreaming the integration of migrants.

4.4.2 Horizontal Aspects of the Migration Governance Structure in the City

The structure of migration governance in most Czech regions follows a centralised, top-down approach (Capano et al., 2012). While the MoI attempts to exercise control over all migration-related policies, Prague has retained a certain degree of autonomy

in this regard. The governance of migration in Prague is therefore close to the multi-level approach (Bache & Flinders, 2004). The Prague approach can also be described as interactive governance (Torfing et al., 2012), as it involves a large number of actors in the formulation and implementation of integration policy.

Further, the mainstreaming of migrant integration (see Baláž & Čemová, 2019) is slowly succeeding in the city of Prague. First and foremost, it is thanks to active individuals who are agents of change (Cels et al., 2012), i.e. people with experience with assisting migrants who got into positions enabling them to promote the migrant integration agenda within a wider framework. Increasingly, this was achieved within the education department, and later on within the social affairs department.

4.4.3 Impacts of the Refugees' Arrival on Migration Governance in Prague

The challenges posed by the reception of thousands of Ukrainian refugees in Prague were largely overcome thanks to the quality of the relationships between local actors, built up over decades. The critical situation strengthened the existing relationships, but it also showed the value of local actors for cooperation. Some relationships, which were already complicated before 2022, were then stretched to their limits. The arrival of the Ukrainians also mobilised new actors involved in migration governance, such as international organisations.

The crisis uncovered some problems—such as structural racism in the case of refugees of Roma origin. It also exacerbated other vulnerabilities within migration governance, e.g. insufficient mainstreaming of migration and the unwillingness of some City Hall departments to deal with the integration of migrants, which they perceive as an additional bothersome agenda.

The crucial change in 2022 brought migrant issues into the spotlight of the public and political agenda. Consequently, it dawned upon every public official that the circumstances surrounding foreign nationals pertained directly to their respective roles and responsibilities. Mainstreaming—and this also influences the setting of the agenda—occurred organically. Although some departments remained reluctant to fully embrace this agenda, it is at least evident that migrant issues cannot be ignored. On the basis of our interviews with Prague stakeholders it seemed that the more reluctant departments are also more reluctant to deal with the needs of native-born clients. This is e.g. the case of the housing department.

The arrival of thousands of Ukrainian forced migrants acted as a successful stress test for the Prague integration concept. The stakeholders representing both the municipality and NGOs who were interviewed agreed that the situation proved that the last concept is inclusive enough to fit this situation and there is no need to modify it. Moreover, the municipality and NGOs agreed that in the upcoming years, the agenda of Ukrainian refugees would be merged with the agenda of other migrants.

The willingness to address these agendas collectively remains strong at the municipal level.

As confirmed by our NGO communication partners, during the initial emergent phase of the crisis, city officials relied on NGOs and often adhered closely to their guidance. However, as time progressed, the city leadership chose to disregard the expertise provided by these NGOs. This shift seemed to reflect a desire to take full control over the situation, which lacked space for critical debate, rather than merely executing decisions made by others. This pattern resembled the stance of the Ministry of the Interior, which consistently asserted that assistance to Ukrainians was a temporary measure, and for an extended period avoided discussions about their integration.

Overall, the arrival of thousands of Ukrainian refugees in Prague created such pressure that the city, which was only partially open, had to adapt more extensively. As a result, with both larger and smaller challenges, Prague has taken further steps towards becoming a *metropolis for all*.

4.5 Conclusions

Prior to 2022, Czechia had a well-established integration policy expressed in integration-related concepts and measures, as well as a network of actors involved in the integration of migrants at various levels. At the same time, it faced several difficulties, such as weak mechanisms for implementing the visions that had been set out (Jelínková, 2023; Pořízek, 2018). Similarly, despite the fact that integration takes place within local communities, the local element of the policy remained feeble in most Czech regions. In regions with lower numbers of migrants and few NGOs assisting migrants, the approach to the division of responsibilities between government levels remained top-down. However, this approach did not correspond to the ideal centralist type distinguished by Scholten and Penninx (2016) since the central government lacked control mechanisms over the regional or local government bodies implementing the measures.

The case of Prague represents a typical model of multilevel governance in which other, sometimes contradictory, tendencies collide. These tendencies are linked to the historical development of Prague's integration policy towards migrants. Originally, Prague's policy developed as a localised approach to integration policy, linked to the activities of NGOs, which acted and continue to act as key policy entrepreneurs. Their involvement brings to the policy a distinctly proactive approach, an emphasis on innovation, responses to emerging issues and an emphasis on inclusiveness and human rights. Nevertheless, the Ministry of the Interior, a key actor at the national level, has actively supported the development of migrant integration in Prague, but has also sought to assert its centralist tendencies, particularly through funding. Despite the obvious differences, however, there is no tension between the national and Prague levels.

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Part II

Secondary Cities

Chapter 5

Managing the Radical Transformation of a Migrant Population: A Case Study of Kraków



Karolina Czerska-Shaw and Konrad Pędziwiatr

5.1 Introduction

Until 2022, the foreign-born population of Kraków had been characterised by economic immigration, including highly qualified middle-management personnel in multinational corporations and international students. In total, the number of economic migrants reached 54,000 out of a total of 800,000 city residents in 2022, which accounted for just over 7% of the city's population (Pędziwiatr et al., 2022a). By contrast, less than one hundred asylum seekers or beneficiaries of international protection lived in the region before the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine (Pędziwiatr et al., 2022b). For decades, Kraków enjoyed its positioning in a 'sweet spot' of diversity management (Czerska-Shaw & Kubicki, 2023), attracting high-skilled migration without incurring undue strain on its public services or radical socio-cultural transformations.

With the outbreak of the new phase of the Russo-Ukrainian war in February 2022, an estimated 32 thousand forced migrants from Ukraine settled in the city.¹ Thus, in a very short period of time (within only a few months) the city's migrant population increased significantly. While the level of education and skills of newcomers remained relatively high (Pędziwiatr et al., 2022a), their needs became much more diverse and pronounced. Issues of access to public services, particularly education,

¹ In April 2022, the peak of the inflow of Ukrainian forced migrants to Krakow, the city's Ukrainian population was estimated at 177,000 or 19% of Krakow inhabitants (Wojdat & Cywiński, 2022).

K. Czerska-Shaw (✉)
Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland
e-mail: karolina.czerska@uj.edu.pl

K. Pędziwiatr
Kraków University of Economics, Kraków, Poland
e-mail: pedziwik@uek.krakow.pl

and the strain on these services became apparent. The psychological trauma of war, particularly on refugee youth, remains a cause of major concern. Housing shortages and concomitant sky-rocketing prices on the real estate and rental markets have persisted, and the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and proximity to a war zone have had a significant impact on the tourism industry in the city.

Given this critical juncture of war-induced migration to the city, the major challenge to diversity management has become, on the one hand, to accommodate the needs of the Ukrainian population, which accounted for the majority (74%) of all foreign nationals in the city in 2023 (Pędziwiatr et al., 2024). On the other hand, the city has to continue supporting other growing migrant populations—particularly from Asia, South America and Africa. Their needs ought to be addressed and potential conflicts reduced, e.g. between Russian, Belarusian and Ukrainian communities.

The scale, intensity and complexity of migration to Kraków have thus dynamically changed the city's social fabric, marking a shift towards 'super-diversity' (Vertovec, 2007) and an 'up-scale' city positioning (Glick-Schiller & Çağlar, 2009). The latter is a part of four categories of scale (top-scale; up-scale, low-scale and down-scale) developed to analyse cities' positioning in a globalised context, referring to their differing political, cultural and economic power within regions, states and the globe. Importantly, Glick-Schiller & Çağlar underscore the importance of migrants themselves in the dynamic process of rescaling cities' potential, particularly towards up-scale and top-scale positions. Migrants play the role of 'scale-makers' as cultural diversity becomes a marketable asset for a city's image, and migrants' transnational ties, connected to the transfer of goods, services, ideas and capital, may have a significant impact on the city's urban governance development and social structures (Glick-Schiller & Çağlar, 2009).

In this contemporary context, where the 'up-scale' city positioning is coupled with the challenges of accommodating large forced-migration flows, we observe the emergence of new actors in the space of migration governance: clusters of civil society organisations, including those that are migrant-led, operating joint public projects of integration; private businesses and multinational corporations involved in large-scale humanitarian aid projects; diasporic entrepreneurs; as well as the short-term but significant presence of international donors and INGOs. At the same time, the city's flagship 'Open Kraków' integration strategy has undergone a major reassessment.

The chapter aims to shed light on the dynamics of change in the local migration governance ecosystem, focusing on three significant factors: (1) the radical shift in the migrant population, (2) changes to local policies of migration and diversity management and (3) the rise of migrant-centred organisations and networks. We analyse the categories of actors that have been included and excluded in the process, the structure of relations that have emerged from the mobilisation of civil society and local government in the face of forced migration from Ukraine, and new challenges for the future of diversity policies in the city. We mostly employ the term diversity management here in lieu of integration, multiculturalism or interculturalism frames, positioning ourselves within the critical literature that supports a shift away from traditional paradigms towards more intersectional approaches that go beyond a migrant vs. host society dualism (Schiller, 2015; Schinkel, 2018). We

further analyse these developments through the lens of ‘institutional ambiguity’ (Stel, 2020), noting the delicate balance between relations of formality vs. informality in building diversity governance on the local level.

The concept of institutional ambiguity was developed in the analysis of refugee crisis management in Lebanon, outlining three dimensions of migration governance through the lens of ‘systematic ambiguity’, namely: (1) informality, (2) liminality and (3) exceptionalism (Stel, 2020). Informality refers to relations between different actors and levels of governance, characterised by a blurred, unclear responsibility for actions. While the burden of delivering aid or support for migrants often falls on non-state actors, state actors are also involved, yet in often informal, unofficial ways, hence blurring their responsibility and accountability. Liminality refers to the in-between space of uncertainty about future rules and actions—a systematisation of permanent temporariness in migration and integration governance. This leads to ad hoc actions without long-term strategic planning in the policy process. Lastly, governing through exceptionalism justifies actions outside of standard rules and regulations, allowing some groups to remain beyond regulations, either by exclusion or preferential treatment. In this chapter, we focus primarily on the first and most significant dimension of our case study, namely informality, yet other aspects of institutional ambiguity can be noted.

5.2 Methodology

The data used for the analysis consists primarily of in-depth semi-structured interviews (n:34) with key stakeholders in the field of migration governance active in Kraków: public administration (n:4), NGOs active before February 2022, including Ukrainian diasporic organisations (n:11), grassroots movements mobilised in response to the war, including refugee-led initiatives (n:11), international NGOs and intergovernmental agencies (n:4) and business (n:3). The interviews were conducted between September and December 2022 by three researchers within the project “The Mobilisation of Help to Ukrainian Refugees in Kraków”,² one of whom is the co-author of this chapter. Interviews were mostly conducted in Polish and English, with a small number in Ukrainian and Russian with the help of Ukrainian research assistants. The interviews were translated, transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis as well as participatory mapping (Emmel & Clark, 2009). The latter projection method consisted of respondents drawing and explaining their own mental map of key stakeholders in the city’s forced-migration response, including their own positioning. This allowed the researchers to re-create a rudimentary social map of connections, boundaries, structures and relations between different actors in the city’s

² Project title “Mobilizacja pomocy uchodźczynom i uchodźcom ukraińskim w Krakowie: Wyzwania i szanse zarządzania niepewnością”, realised by Czerska-Shaw, K, Krzyworzecka-Jelinowska, A. and Mucha, J, report commissioned by the Multiculturalism and Migration Observatory of the Cracow University of Economics, 2022.

space of mobilisation. This mapping process was supplemented with engaged participant observation within city-level structures of migrant integration. One focus group interview was conducted within the framework of the Mobilisation of Help project in conjunction with a second research project, “Pro-Migrant Networks”,³ bringing together representatives of formalised (n:3) and informalised organisations (n:3) working in the field of migrant integration. The analysis focused on the interactions and differences of approaches between these two categories of organisations. Next, a survey among Ukrainian refugees was conducted between May and July 2022 on a sample of 500 forced migrants in Kraków (Kohlenberger et al., 2023). Explorations were also conducted of various population registers, including the register of persons who have residence permits in Kraków (MUW); who have social insurance (ZUS)⁴; who have temporary protection (UKR) and who are registered in different districts of the city (UMK). Finally, a document analysis of city-level strategies and research results of an audit of the ‘Open Kraków’ programme informed the first and second subsections of this chapter, respectively. The methods used for the Mobilisation of Help project were approved by the Ethics Committee of the Institute of European Studies at the Jagiellonian University.

5.3 The Radical Shift in the Migrant Population

Before we shed light on the changes in migration management in Poland’s second-biggest city, it is essential to paint a broader picture of the transformation of the city’s migrant population. As Poland has transformed over the last two decades from a major EU economic emigration country to a major economic immigration country (Eurostat, 2019; Pędziwiatr et al., 2022a), Kraków has become an important CEE migration hub. Some of the key factors that have contributed to this transformation are the relocation of the services of numerous international companies to the city (Kraków as a hub for IT and financial and communication businesses); a large pool of highly educated young persons (Kraków as a major academic centre in Poland) and the rapid growth of the tourist sector (the city itself, together with the neighbouring Wieliczka Salt Mines, Zakopane and the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum are very popular tourist spots; Pędziwiatr et al., 2021, 2022).

Yet the imminent migration transformation was not evident even at the beginning of the 2000s. Even though the city became an increasingly important international tourist destination, few foreigners decided to settle in Kraków. High unemployment rates and scarce economic opportunities stimulated more emigration than immigration (Pędziwiatr et al., 2021). Before the 2004 accession of Poland to the EU and

³ Project title ‘Pro-migracyjne sojusze’, led by “Lepszy Świat” Association, Dr Katarzyna Chajbos (Adam Mickiewicz University), Salam Lab Association and the Centre for Migration Research (Adam Mickiewicz University), financed by the Academy of Civic Organisations Foundation (FAOO) in the framework of the EEA and Norway Grants Active Citizens Regional Fund programme, 2022.

⁴ Obligatory for all persons working in the Polish labour market.

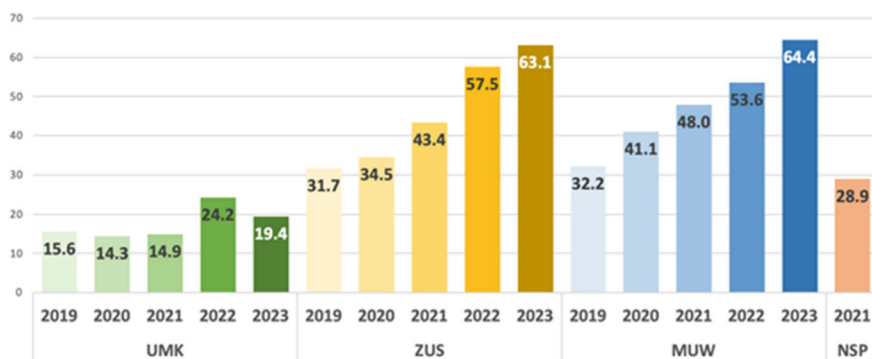


Fig. 5.1 Size of the migrant population in Kraków between 2019 and 2023 (*Source* Own elaboration based on data from UMK, MUW, NSP and ZUS)

for many years thereafter, more Poles were immigrating than foreigners arriving to Kraków. This situation started to change around 2014, at the time of Russia's illegal occupation of Crimea and invasion of the Donbas region of Ukraine. At that time, Ukrainians, mainly males, started to arrive in larger numbers to Kraków (Maly-nowska, 2021). In the following years, immigration to the city continued to grow, including during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵ The number of foreign residents in the city holding valid residence cards doubled between 2019 and the end of 2023, from slightly above 32,000 (in 2019) to 64,000 (in 2023) (MUW, 2023). There has also been a growth in the number of foreigners paying social insurance in the city, from just under 32,000 at the end of 2019 to over 63,000 by the end of 2023 (ZUS, 2023). While only about one-third of newcomers registered their domicile in the City Hall, this is not an obligatory procedure (UMK, 2023). Alongside the growth of the migrant population in Kraków, the number of migrant-led organisations and initiatives has also been growing (Pędziwiatr, 2019; Pędziwiatr et al., 2024; Fig. 5.1).

The largest group of foreign-born Kraków residents holding valid residence permits remain citizens of Ukraine. In 2023, over 31,000 Ukrainians had short or long-term residence permits in the city. According to the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS), this number was even higher and reached 36,000. However, the share of Ukrainian citizens in the total number of the diversifying population of foreigners in the city is decreasing. In 2023, other dynamically growing groups of economic immigrants originated from Belarus (over 6500), India (over 3000) and Georgia (almost 2000) (MUW, 2023). Within the ten largest groups of migrant residents of Kraków, among those paying social insurance were also Turks, Italians, Spaniards, Azerbaijanis and Indonesians (ZUS, 2023).

⁵ As mentioned earlier, various types of register data is used to shed light on the profile of the immigrant population in Krakow. The combination of UMK, MUW, ZUS and UKR sources allows us to paint quite a detailed picture of the size and key characteristics of the immigrant population in the city.

2022 marked the most substantial change in the city's migrant population. Prior to 2022, only a handful of persons with some form of international protection had settled in Kraków, but after February 24th, 2022, the city became a hub for forced migrants. Most people who reached Kraków between February and April 2022 continued their journeys to other parts of Poland, Europe and beyond. Yet a substantial number of forced migrants escaping the war decided to stay in Kraków longer. The arrival of a large number of women, children and elderly who fled the war in Ukraine constituted a major challenge for the city and regional authorities. Some of the key issues included the provision of housing in the context of an unaffordable real estate market, access to education, medical care, psychological assistance for traumatised persons and coping with the general strain on other public services. Moreover, the authorities had to deal with tensions and conflicts between the Ukrainian community and other communities (Pędziwiatr et al., 2022).

Following the EU legal framework (2001 EU TPD), the Polish Act of 12 March 2022 on assistance to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of Ukraine was introduced. As a result, slightly over 16,000 Ukrainians registered in Kraków in the first months to benefit from this specific protection status (see Fig. 5.2). Their number grew significantly in the following months and by November 2022, the number of TP holders in the city almost doubled, reaching over 30,000. By November 2023, the number of TP beneficiaries grew to almost 32,000 (Pędziwiatr et al., 2024). Thus, the overall number of registered economic and forced migrants from Ukraine in Kraków accounted for around 65,000 in 2023, making up around 10% of the city's inhabitants.

Kraków also remains one of the major academic cities in Poland with over 130,000 students, including foreign-born. In the academic year 2013–2014, there were 4,481 foreign students in the Małopolska region, accounting for 2.4% of all students (Brzozowski & Pędziwiatr, 2015: 219). Two years later, the number almost doubled (7300). Almost all foreign-born students studying in the region chose Kraków's universities.

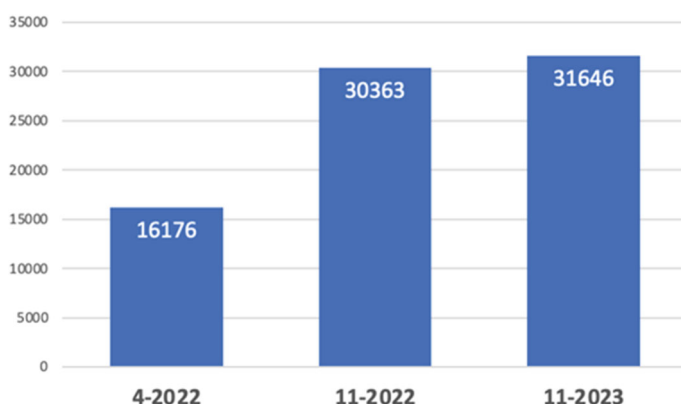


Fig. 5.2 Number of Ukrainian TP holders in Kraków in 2022–2023 (Source Own elaboration of UKR status data taken from Dane.gov.pl website [Dane.gov.pl, 2022a, b, 2023])

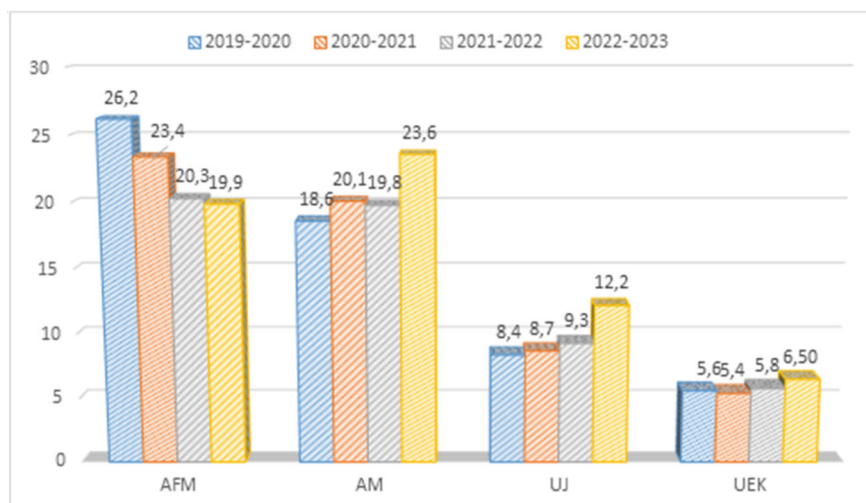


Fig. 5.3 Share of foreigners among all students of selected universities in Kraków in the academic years 2019–2020, 2020–2021, 2021–2022 & 2022–2023 (Source Own elaboration of USKrk data from 2020, 2021, 2022 & 2023)

In the academic year 2022–2023, over 9000 foreigners studied in Kraków and an additional 600 in the Małopolska region. Of those, 3700 students chose the Jagiellonian University, one of the oldest in CEE (founded in the mid-fourteenth century). In terms of the share of foreigners among the student body, the leaders are private universities, including Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski Kraków University (AFM), where a decreasing but still considerable number of students (1388) are foreigners, making up one-fifth of all its students (see Fig. 5.3).

While one may observe a significant growth, transformation and diversification of the city's migrant population in recent years, it remains by and large a highly skilled population. Kraków has maintained its favourable positioning in the globalised system of production. In line with Glick-Schiller and Caglar's city categorisation, Kraków's role in the global system has gained an 'up-scale' positioning (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2009). It is a city that has experienced an accumulation of cultural and political capital, a favourable position and an attractive global image, with an increasing role of migrants and diasporic communities in the development of the city's competitiveness (Czerska-Shaw & Kubicki, 2023). At the same time, there is a growing strain on public services and housing, which has potential for increased socio-political tensions. Here, the city's public policies play a crucial role in the integration of migrants and the management of cultural diversity, something which needs to be briefly explored in the next section.

5.4 Changes to Local Policies of Migration and Diversity Inclusion

Diversity management in Kraków has developed since the early 2010s through various publicly funded programmes subcontracted to non-profit organisations or higher education institutions. The city's flagship diversity-awareness programme, 'Open Kraków', was introduced in 2016, although its origins go back at least five years earlier. The intention of the programme was to prepare the city and its residents to "appropriately respond to the influx of foreigners" (Kraków City Council, 2016).

In 2011, the city administration initiated a programme of diversity management in cooperation with a local NGO (the Association Interkulturalni.pl) through a project called "Against Racism and Xenophobia: Developing a City Strategy of Prevention and Response". The project resulted in a "draft strategy of prevention and response to acts of racist and xenophobic nature in the city public space—a proposal for the local self-government of the City of Kraków (2012–2016)" published in 2012 (Kraków City Council, 2018). The 'Open Kraków' Programme used data collected in another project, "Analysis of situations and needs related to the integration of foreigners with Polish society based on Małopolska", implemented in 2014 (Brzozowski & Pędziwiatr, 2014).

These early lessons of diversity management led the city authorities to conclude that "immigration and the phenomenon of multiculturalism must be first seen in terms of a chance and new opportunities, not just as a threat" and they must be "adequately managed" not only at the state level but above all at the regional and local levels (Kraków City Council, 2016: 2–3). Importantly, the administrators also noted that "experiences of other countries accepting foreigners allow us to conclude that these activities should not be delayed until immigrants appear in large numbers but rather planned in advance, when the group of newcomers is still relatively small" (ibid, 2–3).

The main objective of the Open Kraków Programme was "to implement and execute the policy of openness of the city of Kraków to the representatives of national and ethnic minorities and foreigners". The Programme wanted to achieve this overall goal through a set of smaller objectives that aimed at: "1) building a sense of solidarity, awareness and knowledge about the culture and customs of other nationalities among the residents of Kraków; 2) shaping a tolerant attitude towards foreigners, national and ethnic minorities; 3) identifying and solving problems related to functioning in the community of an intercultural society". Some of the more specific goals were: "the provision of equal access to the services and benefits offered by the Municipality to foreigners and members of national and ethnic minorities; building an institutional framework for cooperation between the representatives of national and ethnic minorities and foreigners and the Municipality; creating a social platform for consultation and the development of openness and multicultural policies; implementing mechanisms for responding to racist and xenophobic incidents as part of an inclusive policy and building intercultural awareness of the population" (Kraków

City Council, 2016: 8). All of the aforementioned general and specific goals of the Programme have been in coherence with the wider development strategy of the city.

The Programme functioned mainly as a migrant integration strategy but partially as an attempt at city rebranding: a city open to foreigners and proud of its multicultural past. It was implemented by the Kraków City Office (the Department of Social Policy and Health) in cooperation with partners from civil society and academia that formed the Interdisciplinary Team for the Implementation of the Programme (set up in June 2019). Activities were based mainly on small-budget cultural events and fora for interaction among the city's migrant communities and multicultural organisations, an Information Point for Foreigners and, since 2021, a Multicultural Centre. The city also dedicated resources to developing a research unit to analyse migration dynamics and multicultural relations within the urban space, a joint initiative between the Municipality and the Kraków University of Economics in the form of the Multiculturalism and Migration Observatory. Apart from this, every year, the Municipality prepared a report on the implementation of the Programme and published it on the Programme's website (www.otwarty.krakow.pl). The results were evaluated largely on the basis of quantitative rather than qualitative indicators (Pędziwiatr, 2019). A 2023 evaluation of the Open Kraków Programme was subcontracted to the Jewish Association Czulent and other non-profit partners. While one of the conclusions was that the Programme lacked effectiveness and impact from the perspective of systemic solutions and cooperation between individual departments within the Municipality, there were positive reviews of many of the activities carried out as a part of the programme (Kwapisiewicz, 2023).

5.5 The (in)formality of Change: The Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine as a Critical Juncture

Through our analysis, we observed that the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine had a galvanising effect on diversity management in the city. This is not only due to the high influx of forced migrants who benefitted from Temporary Protection (TP) status in Kraków, but also the mobilisation efforts of civil society, local businesses and state actors who helped to develop and reshape the structure of migration and diversity governance in the city.

In the following subsections of the chapter, we outline the categories of social actors and their networks that have been included and excluded in the process of diversity management coordination, as well as new developments in the structure of relations between and within these networks. Data in this section was taken from in-depth interviews as well as participant observation outlined in the methodological section. We conclude by analysing the challenges and opportunities to migration governance within these new structures.

5.5.1 New and Old Social Actors

On the day after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, a meeting of local civil society actors, including migrant-led NGOs, municipal authorities, concerned and active citizens and academics, among others, came together in the space of the Kraków City Hall to discuss the city's response to the impending refugee and humanitarian challenge. Under the auspices of the city's Open Kraków programme analysed above, a loose coalition of partners, working groups and communication channels were set up in an ad hoc manner to deal with the multi-layered response needed. The 'Open Kraków Coalition' was established as a platform for exchanging information and facilitating cooperation and coordination. By 2025, what was left was a WhatsApp group that occasionally exchanged useful information and opinions on ongoing issues with the accommodation of refugees, training sessions, grants and exchange of goods. The number of organisations and individuals on the list reached 116 in 2023. A common view among our respondents and our own observations was that the coalition did not produce much beyond its basic function, remaining a rather informal network without official status or internal structure.

What the Coalition did allow for, however, was to gauge the diversity and development of this loose ecosystem of support and accommodation of migrants and refugees. Within a short space of time, previously inactive civic actors, such as businesses, were entering into this space and forging unlikely networks. Those actors who were in the multicultural/migrant-centred space beforehand needed to reconsider their roles, especially as none of them had worked in humanitarian aid beforehand. Many small-scale, socially-oriented NGOs who had not dealt with migration issues before the war were repositioning themselves to work with incoming forced migrants, whether through logistics, housing, delivery of goods, more educational activities, psychological help or neighbourhood-run integration programmes. For example, as we learned from interviewed stakeholders, one small initiative which emerged in 2021 to provide material aid in the form of foodstuffs on the Polish–Belarusian border turned into a formalised, professional organisation. It became one of the leading hubs for the short-term accommodation of Ukrainian forced migrants as well as a centre for psychological and legal support. Another informal neighbourhood initiative paired people fleeing war in Ukraine to Kraków, with city residents willing to share their homes. That initiative soon became a well-functioning neighbourhood organisation focused on providing a space for children while parents (mostly women) participated in workshops and language courses. It went on to be mostly run by those incomers with forced migration experience themselves, joining several other refugee-led organisations that have been developing in the city since 2022.

The fate of many local NGOs, bigger and smaller, depended on their cooperation with international charities and United Nations-led agencies that funded their activities. International actors made their presence in Kraków within the first few weeks of the full-scale invasion, largely due to the city's positioning relatively close to the border with Ukraine (just under 300 km) and internationalised transport and tourism

infrastructure. As has been acknowledged in other publications (Czerska-Shaw et al., 2022; Jarosz & Klaus, 2023), cooperation with international actors was something of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the influx of financial support, some needed humanitarian know-how, training and international networks were appreciated by interviewed NGO stakeholders. Yet, the boom-bust economy of humanitarian aid work left many NGOs, which underwent rapid internal transformations and growth during the initial period, in a more precarious state two years on than before the war. By the end of 2023, many international actors had redirected funding to other more pressing conflict-ridden regions of the world. Only a few, including the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), remained for longer-term projects. Beyond the often unequal power relations noted by local social actors vis-a-vis international donors and their lack of on-the-ground knowledge (Konsorcjum Migracyjne, 2022), the rather abrupt end to what was envisaged to be longer-term support came as a shock to some interviewed local civil society actors. At the beginning of 2024, a number of small and medium-sized organisations previously supported by international donors were overtly airing their financial struggles. The space for international funding had shrunk drastically, pointing to a new phase of increased local competition for grants and financial support.

In the meantime, an unlikely yet important actor emerged in the refugee support ecosystem, namely large businesses and small and medium-sized local entrepreneurs. As has been noted in other research (Czerska-Shaw et al., 2022; Czerska-Shaw & Dunin-Wąsowicz, 2024; Jarosz & Klaus, 2023), there was an awakening of social corporate responsibility and civic-minded entrepreneurship at this time. As explained by our respondents from businesses, companies developed lists of trusted organisations where their employees could engage in volunteer work hours. Kraków's refugee support hubs run by NGOs, such as the 'Goodwill Wardrobe'—a charity shop in a large disused shopping centre where TP holders could get clothing for free—benefited from the presence of multinational corporations and a booming business sector with ample human capital in the city. Other companies were active in helping with logistics, such as creating apps, organising transportation and caring for the families of their Ukrainian employees. Others still actively provided services to forced migrants through NGO partnerships, such as workshops on navigating the Polish labour market. Some big multinational companies stationed in Kraków built partnerships with NGOs supporting migrants and refugees, helping to develop integration hubs and more community-orientated and long-term solutions. What transpired from our interviews, however, was that behind the scaffolding of international or multinational companies, it was oftentimes the work of a few motivated leaders with good social networks and informal relations with key stakeholders that moved things along. As one respondent from the business sector noted:

This is Kraków. Kraków is a very particular city. [...] In moments of crisis, the distinction between businesses, local authorities and NGOs is very blurred. In our company, we have a lot of unfulfilled activists, so those contacts were always there. I don't call some [nameless] administrative office, but directly Kryśia, Kasia - hi, we have an issue to solve, let's do it. [Business_01]

In the meantime, state authorities on different levels, both local and regional, were activated to respond to the humanitarian crisis. On the municipal level, the Department of Social Policy and Health of the City of Kraków was naturally positioned to lead the response due to its position as coordinator of the Open Kraków programme and having connections with migrant-centred civil society actors. Yet other municipal state departments also quickly got involved, such as the Centre for Crisis Management, the Municipal Social Services Centre, the Mayor's Office and International Relations department under it, the Department of Education, as well as public cultural institutions. The regional government (Voivodeship) response was strikingly swift according to our interviewed NGO stakeholders, with a plenipotentiary position created to coordinate and cooperate with civil society actors supporting refugees from Ukraine, as well as one for the general reception thereof. By 2024, these activities remained important, and the regional Voivodeship authorities went further to develop the first regional strategy for the integration of migrants and refugees under the name of 'Open Małopolska'.⁶ It is the first of its kind in Poland, the outcome of a project supported by the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). This step towards long-term strategic planning on both the regional and municipal levels provided evidence of a break from the liminal state of 'permanent temporariness' (Stel, 2020) and ad hoc planning that was commonplace during the first year and a half of mobilisation in the war effort.

5.5.2 *Developing a Migration-Support Ecosystem*

As various new and old social actors entered in and out of this space, the relations between them began to reshape the local migration-support ecosystem. Our interviewed study participants, coming from a range of state authorities on local and regional levels as well as civil society actors and businesses, certainly acknowledged each other's presence. They often spoke warmly of personalised and informal relations that emerged between them, making coordination more flexible and efficient. A key hub that emerged in the cooperation between local structures and civil society was the Multicultural Centre and Information Point for Foreigners,⁷ both publicly funded projects under the Open Kraków programme, operated by a key NGO and a handful of well-networked migrant-centred organisations.

Yet, as we deduced from the participatory mapping analysis, there were tensions between different levels of governance and their positioning in this ecosystem, as well as insufficient communication between different municipal departments. Moreover, there was a general sense from interviewed civil society actors that although the doors

⁶ The *Programme of Immigrant Integration in the Małopolska Voivodeship: 'Open Małopolska'* constitutes an annex to bill nr 2010/23 of the Małopolska Voivodeship Office from 24 October 2023, realised by the Voivode of Małopolska and the Voivodeship Office, co-financed by the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund.

⁷ https://otwarty.krakow.pl/aktualnosci/255729,1992,komunikat,centrum_wielu_kultur.html.

were wide open for cooperation and relations were mostly warm, much of the burden for humanitarian support was placed on NGOs without a clear sense of management from the state authority levels. As one respondent from civil society noted, “*When we need anything [from the authorities] we always get a warm response, but the question remains - should we [NGOs] be doing all of this in the first place*”? [NGO_1]. It is thus that while some other cities, like Lublin, saw a more formalised structure of support emerge through the cooperation between local authorities and civil society and business actors (Podgórska et al., 2024), in Kraków, this cooperation and communication remained largely informal, the Open Kraków Coalition a token of its superficial nature.

5.6 Discussion: New Foundations, New Status Quo?

In this fast-growing migration and diversity governance ecosystem, we note a variety of new structures and social actors that have emerged. These sometimes competing, sometimes cooperating and overlapping networks of mobilisation and action in the sphere of migrant and refugee support and inclusion are likely to change dynamically as the makeup of the city’s migrant population changes. Yet we posit that this new status quo will serve as a foundation for what develops in this space for the foreseeable future.

Firstly, we note the growing importance of the regional level of governance. The Open Małopolska strategy for migrant and refugee integration, mentioned above, is a small yet significant step in this direction. The need to attract incoming migrants and refugees to smaller urban centres is apparent in light of the depopulation of the countryside and prohibitive housing prices in the regional capital of Kraków. Regardless of their political affiliation, regional authorities have caught on to the fact that migration will be needed to fill labour shortages outside of the capital. Yet whether the regional and local-level authorities join forces remains to be seen, as this is a sphere where political interests take centre stage and interpersonal relations are crucial to multi-scalar cooperation.

It is also important to recognise the role of the Open Kraków programme in providing a platform for cooperation that extended to the loose framework on which the Open Kraków Coalition was founded. As for horizontal cooperation between different municipal departments, we argue that what we could term *ad hoc mainstreaming* may be the most appropriate lens for understanding the rise in migration matters after two years of mobilisation. This refers to the uncoordinated and circumstantial proliferation of migrant and refugee-related issues across different municipal departments, yet without deep institutional reform and awareness-raising in aspects such as non-discrimination, diversity and inclusion. This is echoed in the assessment of the programme mentioned previously. Whether this is the first stage to deeper integration across departments and sectors or a new status quo of ad hoc and uncoordinated efforts is left to be seen.

Next, it is important to emphasise the growing importance and presence of migrant-led organisations, particularly Ukrainian ones. Several of these organisations were already very well positioned in the public and cultural space of the city before the onset of the full-scale war. Yet through the intensity of mobilisation, crucial know-how and interpersonal relations, these organisations helped to cement their place in the bi-cultural and increasingly multicultural public sphere. New Ukrainian organisations, some led by Temporary Protection (TP) holders, have also made their way into this space. The boom-bust economy of international partnerships and funding will likely have a major effect on how many of these initiatives survive. Whether the most powerful organisations will use strategic essentialism (Spivak, 1988), whereby groups reify their identities in the struggle to claim rights and position themselves in the public and political spheres, is yet to be seen. The significant statistical dominance of Ukrainian nationals among the migrant population, as well as the critical nation-building agenda in the face of the existential threat to the Ukrainian nation, may have a significant effect on intercultural relations with other migrant groups and with the wider society.

Moreover, the diversification of actors in the migration governance ecosystem is apparent and likely to persist in the context of Kraków's position as a city of tourism, a hub for Shared Services Centres and the Business Process Outsourcing (SSC/BPO) sector and a centre of higher education. While large-scale company volunteering has subsided, strong connections with diversity-minded businesses and active social corporate responsibility departments are likely to continue to develop. This is propelled by the fact that companies are attracting increasingly diversified employees from across the world, with Kraków showing up in the top ten Business-Friendly rankings by Forbes, among other 'Super Cities' awards (Kraków.pl). It is also worth highlighting the growing importance of social enterprises and philanthropic ventures in this part of Europe, which were activated after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. On the other hand, stronger neighbourhood hubs are emerging, with community initiatives and organisations building on the shared experience of mobilisation at the beginning of the refugee flows into the city. In the absence of marked geographical migrant enclaves in the urban space, there is a chance that more diversified neighbourhood initiatives will continue to grow and develop in an intercultural framework.

While no clear leadership or overarching governance structure came out of the mobilisation for the war effort and reception of refugees from Ukraine, some steps have been taken to institutionalise migration and diversity management in the city. As noted in the section on the reassessment of the Open Kraków programme, a soul-searching exercise took place in regard to the future approach and municipal structures for managing diversity. A positive direction forward is the allocation of a physical space for the Multicultural Centre and Information Point for Foreigners, symbolically in the heart of the 'innovation cluster' where many of the city's thriving start-ups reside. What is also important is the Centre's mission to provide a contact point for cultural and social activities of diverse ethnocultural groups and individuals, and to work in an intersectional manner by promoting activities that foster diversity and intercultural inclusion. A more formal partnership between the Multicultural

Centre and two migration research centres located at two leading universities in the city also offers more scope for cooperation, reflection and analysis of migrant integration processes. The Centre has also formalised links with a number of immigrant organisations, including Zustricz,⁸ a prominent Ukrainian NGO.

5.7 Conclusions

Before the outbreak of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine and concomitant refugee inflows, Kraków had the markings of an ‘up-scale’ city (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2009) making its way into the globalised system of nodes and flows, an attractive place for high-skilled migrants, students and international business alike. With the doubling of the foreign-born population between 2019 and 2023 and the first substantial experience of refugee accommodation, the city has been propelled into the mainstream of migrant-receiving urban centres. This moment of transformation provides a unique snapshot of the reshaping of local migration governance structures, the forging of relations and networks, the entry and exclusion of certain social actors and the settling of a new status quo.

The findings of our mixed-methods study, taking into account survey data, in-depth qualitative interviews, participant observation and document analysis, conducted over the course of one and a half years (2022–2023), may provide several points of observation on the development of migration and diversity governance in this iconic urban CEE city. Firstly, the mobilisation for the reception of refugees and humanitarian support reveals the ability of local bottom-up initiatives to professionalise and adapt quickly to changing dynamics—the informal connections between social actors across sectors allowed for fast and flexible mobilisation and coordination of activities. A strong presence of migrant-led social actors has been critical. It will continue to be instrumental in the next phase of diversity management and migrant communities’ claims to rights and positioning in the public and political space of the city.

In the space of diversity and crisis management, NGOs, neighbourhood initiatives and business partners filled the void where local authorities lacked competencies or financial resources. From the side of local and regional authorities, we saw an informalisation of relations with civil society actors and an increase in contact with business and international donors, allowing for the building of informalised spaces of interaction and easing bureaucratic hurdles in the face of responses to crises. Almost three years after the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, there has been a move back to more bureaucratic relations between state authorities and civil society. Yet these momentary pockets of informality and ad hoc horizontal cooperation—or at least coexistence in the same space—have allowed for the activation of previously inactive municipal departments and civil servants in the field of migration and refugee accommodation. While piecemeal, the mainstreaming of migrant

⁸ <https://zustricz.pl/>.

and refugee reception and integration has begun. The outcome is the passage from primarily surface-level celebrations of cultural diversity to multi-scalar social and labour-market adaptation projects and regional strategies, albeit ad hoc and without long-term strategic financing.

The case of Kraków allows us to reconsider the potential benefits of informality which have been introduced in this chapter through the lens of institutional ambiguity, based on refugee governance research in Lebanon (Stel, 2020). In regions of protracted conflict where ‘crisis mode’ is a constant feature, the system of unsystematicness may become a form of ‘stalemate’ governance in and of itself, where ‘permanent temporariness’ reigns. In cities like Kraków, however, this crisis mode was temporary, thus the ad hoc informality spurred by the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine had its tangible benefits, such as more agile and directed responses and cooperation among multiple scales of stakeholders. We may thus conclude that ‘pockets’ of informality may in fact be beneficial to building a resilient system of migration and diversity management, provided that longer-term planning and solid foundations, such as municipal strategies for integration, are also present.

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Chapter 6

Incorporating Urban Residents' Perspectives into Multilevel Governance Theories of Migration: A Case Study of Brno



Bernadette Nadya Jaworsky, Radka Klvaňová and Ivana Rapoš Božič

6.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to contribute to theories of multilevel migration governance (Scholten, 2016; Scholten & Penninx, 2016; Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017) in two ways: (1) by exploring the link between municipal-level contexts of reception and attitudes towards migration among native-born urban residents; and (2) reflecting upon the tensions in immigrant reception between the national and municipal levels. We argue that to understand how cities respond to migration, we need to overcome the divide between the analysis of municipal approaches to migration and the migration attitudes of native-born urban residents. We also suggest that we need to pay attention to the role of locally available cultural repertoires in informing immigrant reception on the municipal level.

We use the case of the city of Brno, the second largest city in Czechia, with a population of 396,101, as of 2023. Brno, like other medium-sized CEE cities, has been overlooked in the literature on migration governance, despite rapid growth in the city's foreign-born population, doubling from 2004 to 2014, and again from 2018 to 2022, reaching 16.5% (data.Brno, 2023).¹ The city stands out within Czechia with its

¹ The latest growth in the foreign-born population is a consequence of large-scale inflow of Ukrainians seeking refuge from the war in Ukraine (ongoing from 2022). Between 2020 and the end of 2022, when this study was conducted, foreign-born residents accounted for around 8% of Brno's residents (MVCŘ, 2024).

B. N. Jaworsky (✉) · I. Rapoš Božič
Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic
e-mail: jaworsky@fss.muni.cz

R. Klvaňová
Mendel University, Brno, Czech Republic

proactive migration governance framework attracting foreign workers and targeting their integration. It is important to bring attention to “secondary cities”² such as Brno in the study of immigration. These cities play an important role in globalising economies, and they attract increasing numbers of newcomers who then contribute to the growth of diversity of urban population (Janská et al., 2014).

In this chapter, we utilise a combination of primary and secondary data to look at how locally available cultural repertoires embedded in historic, social and demographic characteristics of the city feed into local municipal approaches to migration and migration attitudes among native-born urban residents. We use an interpretive, critical and cultural-sociological approach to the data analysis (Alexander & Smith, 2003, 2018; Jaworsky et al., 2023). We argue that understanding migration governance and the role of the local-level policy-making in forming migration attitudes requires us to examine how city characteristics are meaningful to city residents. In the context of rapidly changing CEE cities, the perspective of local urban residents is particularly important, though often overlooked. Moreover, to grasp the processes conducive to the reception of immigrants on the local level, we need to account for the role of native-born urban residents and their attitudes towards migration. In this chapter, we do exactly that by using two theoretical concepts: (1) the cultural repertoire (Lamont & Thévenot, 2000), and (2) theories of symbolic boundaries and boundary work (Jaworsky, 2016; Jaworsky et al., 2023; Lamont & Molnár, 2002). In the case of Brno, a dominant cultural repertoire is “city in transition”. Integral to this cultural repertoire is a notion of Brno as a city that has shifted from an urban periphery to a European metropolis open to increasing diversity and a cosmopolitan flavour. Foreign-born residents represent important actors in the city’s transition, but they appear as variously visible/included and invisible/excluded. The grounds for the boundary work that make some foreign-born residents—especially high-skilled workers—more visible and more accepted than others, are the positive contributions they make to the city’s development. There are, nevertheless, some “blank spaces”, with regard to the exact nature of Brno’s purported cosmopolitanism and the structure of its labour market for newcomers.

6.2 Theoretical Framework

This chapter builds on and further expands the theoretical framework on the multi-level governance (MLG) of migration, focusing specifically on the local, municipal level. Bazurli and Kaufmann (2022: 5–6) distinguish between the vertical and horizontal axes of multilevel governance. The former indicates relations between central and local government tiers, the latter between the local state and non-state

² Following Williams and Pendras (2021: 1), we define secondary cities as “cities that fuel, compete with and are otherwise relationally connected to larger and putatively more ‘successful’ neighbouring cities, but which simultaneously maintain a degree of independent history and identity”. The authors stress the relationality and positioning of the cities on the regional, and not necessarily the national, scale.

actors. Even as migration governance in cities has become increasingly local (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2009) and decentralised, or even fragmented (Scholten & Penninx, 2016), the persistence of centralised national policies, and the growth of EU and regional policies can play an important role in relation to the local level (Zapata-Barreto et al., 2017). At the same time, however, studies of multilevel governance reveal that the vertical relations between central and local levels can become “decoupled”, which means that policy processes on the national and supranational levels become “disconnected, possibly resulting in policy contradictions and sometimes even conflicts” (Zapata-Barreto et al., 2017: 4). The same is true also for the horizontal level, in which the involvement of NGOs and other non-governmental actors can both complement or contradict prevailing approaches to integration and migration management (Fry & Islar, 2021).

Our study aims to further nuance understanding of the horizontal axis of MLG by focusing on the local municipal level. There is ample reason to study policies at the local level, and many scholars of migration have honed in on the topic (Alexander, 2003; Dekker et al., 2015; Filomeno, 2016; Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017). However, existing approaches have two important shortcomings. First, despite growing recognition of the role of non-governmental actors in the MLG of migration, existing studies tend to overlook the role of local residents, who arguably contribute to the reception of immigrants through everyday encounters. As primary recipients of local policy-making, they can steer municipal approaches to migration through voting and other forms of civic and political action. Second, most studies on local-level governance treat the historic, demographic, geographical and cultural characteristics of cities as objective facts (for an exception, see Crul et al., 2023). They neglect the ways in which these characteristics are made meaningful—often selectively—by local policymakers and residents alike and consequently inform their approaches to migration. Our study bridges these gaps by embracing a critical and cultural-sociological perspective (Jaworsky et al., 2023) that works to reveal the structures of meaning underlying such spaces and the relevant social actors in a given social context.

6.2.1 Cultural Repertoires and Symbolic Boundary Work

We call upon the tenets of a critical cultural sociology to examine the ways in which municipal policymakers and native-born residents of Brno engage in meaning-making about the city with respect to migration. Cultural repertoires are structures of meaning, collectively shared and imagined, taking on the form of frames, narratives, scripts and boundaries that actors draw upon when they relate to the outside world (Lamont & Small, 2008). Cultural repertoires are “relatively stable schemas of evaluation that are used in varying proportions across national contexts” (cf. Hotchkiss, 2010; Lamont & Thévenot, 2000: 8). They are also available to social actors operating in their specific local (urban) context (Rapoš Božič, Synek Rétiová, & Klvaňová, 2023b). Invoking Soja’s urban imaginaries, or “our mental or cognitive mappings

of urban reality” (2000: 324), Hoekstra (2018: 355–366) notes that cities are spaces that facilitate certain problematisations and policy actions while inhibiting others, depending on specific experiences and meaning-making processes in a given locality. Hoekstra further advocates a “discourse-analytical approach”, similar to our interpretive approach of structural hermeneutics (elaborated below), which helps to uncover how people draw symbolic boundaries and create differences as problematic (or not).

Symbolic boundaries can be defined as the “conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorise objects, people, practices and even time and space, tools by which individuals and groups struggle over and come to agree upon definitions of reality” (Lamont & Molnar, 2002: 168). They are constantly enacted, drawn and re-drawn, delineating the parameters of difference, namely, between “us” and “them”. These distinctions can result in social consequences under the right conditions: “Only when symbolic boundaries are widely agreed upon can they take on a constraining character and pattern social interaction in important ways and become social boundaries” (ibid.: 168–169). In Czechia, both symbolic and social boundaries drawn around “migrants” and “refugees” are generally very “bright”, namely, solid and impermeable (Alba, 2005). However, it is not as simple as saying that Czech residents are “anti-immigrant”; their attitudes represent a very complex construction, subject to ambivalence and contradictions, furthermore influenced by the local contexts of the cities in which people live. On the national level, the perception of migration referring to the Czech or the broader European context is strongly informed by the mediation of the mid-2010s migration “crisis”. Consequently, Czech residents associate “migrants” with threatening images of “invasion”. Yet, the localised perception is more experiential and nuanced, and native-born urban residents are more prone to recognise the contributions of foreign-born residents (Jaworsky et al., 2023). In this chapter, we unpack the ways in which such attitudes relate to migration governance in the city of Brno.

6.3 The Immigration Context of Brno

Since the 1990s, immigration to Czechia has been gradually increasing. Between 1993 and 2022, the number of foreign nationals rose from 78,000 to 1,113,698, representing almost 10% of the total population and making Czechia a major destination for immigration. The immigration includes both qualified and low-skilled labour (Czech Statistical Office, 2023). Following the 2022 forced migration from Ukraine, more than half a million Ukrainians were granted temporary protection in Czechia, which hosted the highest proportion of refugees per capita in Europe (Eurostat, 2024; MVCR, 2023). While the capital city of Prague has been the most common immigrant destination and has so far attracted the most research attention, in this chapter, we focus on Brno, the second largest city that has become an increasingly important destination for immigration as a result of economic growth in the region, demand for workforce, and in response to the war in Ukraine (Zvara, 2023). At the time of our research in 2021, the foreign-born population accounted

for approximately 8% of the residents, and it later doubled to 16.5% with the arrival of Ukrainian refugees (MVCR, 2024).

Brno is located in the Southern Moravian region, the most dynamically developing area in the country (#brnoregion, 2024). In line with Pendras and Williams (2021: 2), we conceive Brno as a secondary city that strives to position itself in the broader Central European region against its main “more successful” regional competitors, such as Prague, Vienna and Bratislava but “which simultaneously maintain a degree of independent history and identity”. The website of #brnoregion highlights the connection of Brno to global centres: “Located in the centre of Europe, our excellent geographical position makes it easy to maintain relationships with other tech hubs and centres of global business and science...” (#brnoregion, 2024). Brno hosts fast-growing research and development industries, attracting both low-skilled and high-skilled workers from abroad (77,000 in 2021) and international students (14,400 in 2021) (#brnoregion, 2024). As we show, foreign workers play an important role in the city’s transformation into a cosmopolitan European metropolis. The diverse national composition of the residents in Brno includes citizens of nearly 150 countries. As of 2023, the largest groups of foreign-born residents came from Ukraine (33,893),³ Slovakia (8500), Vietnam (2875), Russia (2853), India (1185), Romania (891), Turkey (850) and Kazakhstan (717) (Zvara, 2023). The citizens of Slovakia and other EU countries are likely underrepresented in the statistics, as they do not need to officially register for residence as long as they have a valid working contract. For instance, in 2022, the city labour office registered almost 25,000 workers with Slovak citizenship in Brno (Úřad práce Brno-město, 2022b), which is almost three times higher than the official statistics. The number of foreign citizens include people from the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa. Foreign-born nationals account for a substantial proportion of the labour force in Brno: 59,422 foreigners were registered by the municipal labour office in 2022.⁴ A substantial proportion (36%) of foreign workers occupy high-skilled positions but there is also a significant number of those working in low-skilled occupations (24.5%) (Úřad práce Brno-město, 2022a).

The importance of immigration to the city and the increasing diversity of its residents has recently been recognised by the city council, with the adoption, in 2020, of the first municipal strategy for the integration of foreigners called the “Strategy for integration of foreign nationals in the city of Brno 2020–2026” (Brno City Municipality, 2020). Brno is exceptional among Czech cities in its proactive approach to the integration of foreign-born residents, predominantly regulated at the national level (For more information see: Chapter 4, Jelínková & Zogata-Kusz, 2026). The integration of foreign-born residents in Brno is guided by the national-level strategy (“The Concept of Integration of Foreign nationals—In Mutual Respect”), accepted in 2000 and last updated in 2016. It not only set up integration measures at the national level

³ This number reflects the arrival of war-displaced Ukrainian refugees, who arrived after we concluded our research. Nevertheless, with 10,764 residents, Ukrainians were the largest national group of foreign-born residents in Brno already before the war (MVCR, 2024).

⁴ Unfortunately the data on the proportion of foreigners in the labour force in Brno are not available.

but also declared a need for integration policies at regional and municipal level, even as support for local integration has decreased over time in the conceptual documents.

In Brno, the integration of foreign-born residents became a subject of political debate during the mid-2010s' migration "crisis" when migration invoked unprecedented political controversies in Czechia and the reinforcement of anti-immigrant discourse (Jaworsky, 2021), as well as increasingly negative perceptions of migration among the Czech public (Verkuyten, 2021). At the same time, there was a favourable political constellation⁵ in the municipal government when activists from progressive political party *Žít Brno* joined the city council and gained significant influence on the local politics of social inclusion after municipal elections in 2014. This move assigned the new agenda for integration of foreign-born residents under the responsibility of the municipal-level Department for Social Inclusion. Since 2017, the city of Brno has successfully applied for the "Municipal projects to support the integration of foreign nationals at the local level", a government grant programme announced by the Ministry of Interior every year (Brno City Municipality, 2020). Municipalities can apply for funding of large-scale integration activities aiming at residents from non-EU countries (third-country nationals). The preparation of the Strategy, ratified by the city council in September 2020 and implemented between 2020 and 2026 through two action plans, was an unusually participatory process, involving many actors from different public, private and NGO sectors, thus revealing the horizontal dimension of MLG. It was funded mainly from EU funds, a crucial source for funding integration policies in Czechia (Jelínková & Valenta, 2022).

6.4 Methodology

Our methodological approach is rooted in a critical, cultural-sociological approach that epistemologically privileges both the process of meaning-making and the idea that "knowledge itself has a politics" (Reed, 2011: 68). The goal is the structural-hermeneutical reconstruction of manifest and latent collective meanings (Alexander & Smith, 2003). Structuralism allows for the relative autonomy of culture and the construction of theory, while hermeneutics highlights the reconstruction of culture as a rich text saturated with meanings (Alexander & Smith, 2003: 26). Accordingly, we use qualitative, interpretive methods following Flick (2014: 5) that involved collection of linguistic material—primary (in-depth interviews with local residents) and secondary (migration-related municipal policies, documents and statistics) data—and their analysis through reading, coding and interpretation that aimed at identification of implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material.

⁵ Also, the then mayor Petr Vokřál publicly expressed municipal support for acceptance of refugees in contrast to the majority of Czech politicians (see e.g. Bastlová, 2015).

6.4.1 *Data Collection and Data Used*

We draw our analysis on 23 in-depth, semi-structured interviews among adult native-born residents of Brno,⁶ conducted between September 2020 and February 2022 as part of the larger project, “The Thirteenth Immigrant? Exploring the Public Perception of Migration in the Czech Republic”.⁷ Our basic selection criteria included long-term residency (at least 5 years) in Brno. Following Patton’s (2002) typology of purposeful sampling methods, we engaged in maximum variation (heterogeneity) sampling, combining criterion sampling and stratified purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002: 238–240), using three forms of recruitment: (1) personal referrals from our wider social circles; (2) the snowball method; and (3) public advertisements posted on local social media pages, such as residential or job advertising groups. The interviews (17 face to face and 8 online) were conducted in Czech, lasted between 50 and 120 min, were audio recorded and transcribed in full. Besides covering various issues related to general perception of migration in Czechia, part of the interview scenario was devoted specifically to the research participants’ perceptions of migration to Brno and their everyday encounters with foreign-born residents. The interviews were conducted and analysed by the authors of the paper.

We collected the secondary data in spring of 2023. Our aim was to analyse the municipal strategies and governance, with regard to immigration and migrant integration policies in the city of Brno. They included the “Strategy for integration of foreign nationals in the city of Brno 2020–2026” (Brno City Municipality, 2020) and the related “Action plan 2021–2023” (Magistrát města Brna, 2021), as well as documents published by the municipality aimed at the integration of foreigners, including analyses and evaluations related to the project “Enhancing the intercultural permeability of public institutions in Brno”,⁸ including “Data and facts about foreigners in Brno” (Sociofactor, 2022) and “Methodology of intercultural work” (Magistrát města Brna, 2019). In order to better understand the broader processes of how the documents were created and enhance our understanding of the field of integration policy-making in Brno, we also interviewed a municipal officer engaged in the process.

6.4.2 *Data Analysis*

We analysed the interviews as follows. We wrote fieldnotes after each interview, which we then combined with deep, interpretive readings of the transcripts, analytical memo-writing, and a coding procedure using the qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti. We engaged in several rounds of open, focused, and theoretical coding

⁶ All research participants are Czech citizens. Besides ethnic Czechs, the sample also includes three research participants with ethnic minority background (Slovak, Romani and Vietnamese).

⁷ More information about the project can be found at: <https://13imigrant.cz>.

⁸ These documents are available at <https://socialnipecce.brno.cz/sluzby-mesta/integrace-cizincu>.

(Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014), moving back and forth between our close readings of the data and engagement with theories of symbolic boundaries, boundary work, and cultural repertoires. These theories inspired two main groups of codes, “grounds for boundary work” and “cultural repertoires”, which informed our entire analysis. We also developed codes to capture the local historical, demographical, and geographical context of cities and the perceived impacts of migration on the city and on research participants’ lives. With the secondary data, we engaged in repeated, in-depth interpretive readings, also with the goal of capturing the grounds for boundary work and the presence of cultural repertoires. We focused on contextualising these data within the city’s demographics (using statistical information), social and cultural milieu, and urban self-presentation. Finally, we juxtaposed the two types of data, embracing a relational, multilevel governance perspective.

6.5 Results

In our analysis, we first identify the cultural repertoire of a “city in transition”, which echoes both in the municipal approaches to migration as well as in the local residents’ migration narratives. We then explore the patterns of boundary work driven by this cultural repertoire, which deem the contribution of some foreign-born residents to Brno’s transition more visible than of the others. Finally, we problematise the “blank spaces” of Brno’s purported cosmopolitanism and the structure of its labour market for newcomers.

6.5.1 *A City in Transition: From an Urban Periphery to a European Metropolis*

Brno is a city with a long historical experience of the coexistence of many cultures and nationalities. Since 1989 it has undergone fundamental changes in all spheres of human activity and life. Over the last thirty years, social and economic development has made the second largest city in the Czech Republic a centre of innovation, research and education. Brno has become an attractive place for many foreign investors and companies. Thanks to job opportunities, developing infrastructure, the transformation of the labour market, the offer of education, the resulting investments and cultural potential, the city has gradually become more and more open to the outside world. It has attracted foreign entrepreneurs, investors, variously qualified workers, as well as students and tourists. It has literally turned into an international and cosmopolitan city, a city that is constantly evolving, dynamic and innovative. (Brno City Municipality, 2020: 5)

This quote from the “Strategy for the integration of foreign nationals in the city of Brno 2020–2026” (henceforth, the Strategy) presents Brno as a city in transition towards a more international and cosmopolitan city. Such a discursive representation

positions Brno not only in relation to the capital city of Prague but also internationally in relation to other prominent cities in Central Europe. The phrase city in transition has been the dominant cultural repertoire employed by both the local policymakers and by native-born residents of the city in relation to migration. The year 1989, when the Velvet Revolution launched the official dismantling of communist rule in Czechia, as well as the lifting of the Iron Curtain, is marked as an important historical reference point for the beginning of the city's transition towards an "international and cosmopolitan city". At the same time, a sense of continuity in cultural diversity is established by a reference to the "long historical experience of the coexistence of many cultures and nationalities" (Brno City Municipality, 2020: 5). This history is selectively represented, however, in the Strategy. For example, the Strategy omits information on the expulsion of the city's population of ethnic Germans in the post-WWII period and the suppression of ethnic diversity by the communist regime. Instead, the Strategy centre on envisioning the future rather than on redefining the past or on reconciling the past and present, although these attempts have also been present in Brno.⁹ Migration is seen as an important factor contributing to Brno's transition from an industrial centre for textile and firearms production and engineering to a knowledge economy aiming at becoming the "Central European centre of the knowledge economy, first-class science and research" (Brno City Municipality, 2020: 12).

The cultural repertoire of a city in transition is also a frequent theme traceable in the narratives of the city's native-born residents we interviewed. In the past, they had viewed Brno as occupying somewhat peripheral positions, both nationally and internationally, and overall unattractive. However, with the city's growing internationalisation, Brno has gradually appealed to locals and foreigners alike.

It's probably not just the factor of migration, but...eh, Brno has of course gained a lot with internationalization in the last few [years]. Actually, even at the time when I was still considering living somewhere else... Brno was still a kind of gray, uninteresting city, where there was nothing. Nowadays, everything is here, like in any European metropolis. It's just a little bit smaller, so it's more pleasant. By the way, this is something that even our foreigners say... The most difficult [thing] is to get them to come here and see it - and when they come, it's almost an instant win, because then they like it so much. The quality of life, affordability, the quality of public infrastructure, and so on. (František, 41, male, researcher¹⁰)

According to František, an academic who works at one of the high-profile research institutes in Brno and has co-workers from different countries, Brno has, thanks to its internationalisation, finally gained the attributes of a "European metropolis". As the quotation reveals, this transition has not only aided František's decision to

⁹ The year 2015 was proclaimed the Year of Reconciliation, when the city officially acknowledged the tragic events related to the treatment of ethnic minorities during and after WWII. The website reads: "People of the Jewish faith, the Roma ethnicity or German-speaking citizens, however, were—and still are—residents of our city and part of its story. We must not, and after all, even cannot, throw them into oblivion. In fact, they also form the mosaic named Brno" (TIC Brno, 2023).

¹⁰ We have anonymised the interview data, using pseudonyms rather than actual names. We include the age, sex, and occupation of our research participants to personalise them for the reader, not because we have conducted the analysis based on such characteristics.

stay in Brno, but it has also facilitated the building of the international working environment he desires. Although František welcomes Brno's gradual transition, he also appreciates that the city has managed to retain its peripheral characteristics, ensuring a good ratio between quality of life and affordability. It highlights a potential tension that might occur once the city's transition reaches a tipping point and local residents start to perceive the negative aspects of its growing popularity, known to accompany urban growth of other European cities, such as housing crises (Colomb, 2013; Sequera & Nofre, 2020) or increased labour competition (Edo, 2019). However, such developments are not thematised much in the interviews.¹¹ Miroslava, another research participant, also perceives Brno's transition as a process that has positive impacts on the overall quality of life in the city.

It just seems like a positive thing to me, yeah? It's like people are spending here, they're living here. You can see that Brno has simply transformed over the last 10 years, also thanks to the foreigners. Because there are a lot of like pubs here, which can make their living. Those people [foreigners] can even afford to pay for better accommodation, so it's pulling up the quality of rental apartments here. So, for me, it's a positive thing. (Miroslava, 38, female, entrepreneur)

At least for now, the cultural repertoire of Brno's transition articulated in the Strategy resonates among its residents, largely perceived as positive and legitimate. Thus, from a relational perspective, both the discourse of the municipal documents and the city's native-born residents are interdependent, drawing on the same cultural repertoire. In the following two sections, we problematise some of its aspects, paying attention particularly to the main patterns of boundary work implied in the cultural repertoire of a city in transition, as well as to some of its "blank spaces".

6.5.2 *The Visible and the Invisible Actors in Brno's Transition*

Brno is striving to be an attractive city where people live well, a confident, developing city, attractive for the lives of existing and new inhabitants, accessible from anywhere in the world for new talent, experienced workers and scientists. It has to be an open, tolerant and socially cohesive city, where nobody is a second-class citizen; a city that promotes equality and mutual respect among all citizens, is forthcoming to newly-arrived people and has an understandable governance system that is friendly to people. (Brno City Municipality, 2020, p. 12; following Vision Brno, 2050)

As declared in the Strategy, foreign-born residents are important actors, contributing to the city's repositioning in neoliberal restructuring processes and joining the global competition for talent. Entrepreneurs, investors, variously qualified workers, students, and tourists are recognised as newcomers contributing to the

¹¹ Although our sample cuts across social classes, most research participants identify either with lower or higher middle class. It is, therefore possible that the inclusion of more representatives of the working class would bring more critical reflections upon this development.

city's growing international and cosmopolitan character (Brno City Municipality, 2020: 5). Skills and economic capital work as the main grounds for boundary work that serve to distinguish the privileged newcomers from other, more invisible actors, such as low-skilled workers and unemployed refugees.

Brno's Strategy highlights high-skilled foreign-born workers as the most valuable visible newcomers to the city. The commitment of city administrators to attract high-skilled workers from abroad is also reflected in the institutional set up of municipal bodies targeting foreigners. In 2010, the free public service organisation, Brno Expat Centre, was established with municipal support to attract and assist high-skilled foreign workers to settle in Brno. Only much later, in 2016, the city established an integration agenda at the municipal Department for Social Inclusion, perceived by local stakeholders as an institution for "other", less privileged foreign-born residents. Although the number of high-skilled workers is relatively high, there is still much demand for low-skilled positions that require only an elementary education. In 2022, such positions occupied 42% of the foreign-born workforce in Brno (Úřad práce, 2022b). Nevertheless, their role was considerably less recognised in the Strategy. Low-skilled workers were excluded from the cosmopolitan imaginaries that tend to be associated with the "mobility" of the privileged (Cranston & Duplan, 2023). That raises questions about eliminating "second-class citizenship", which has been emphasised by municipal strategic documents.

The native-born residents of Brno also view migration as having a positive impact on the development of the city. The recognition of the contributions made by foreign-born residents is largely linked to two distinct urban imaginaries raised in the interviews—a student city and a technological hub—both of which play a crucial role in the broader cultural repertoire of Brno as a city in transition. According to our research participants, students and high-skilled workers are two groups of Brno's foreign-born residents whose contribution to the development of the city is the most visible. They notice the presence of these foreign-born residents based on their language use or appearance, although they do not necessarily associate them with any specific nationality. They mostly encounter them in the public spaces of the city, on public transportation, or in restaurants, sport facilities, cultural venues, etc. The research participants also stress the overall contribution of foreign-born residents to the cultural and economic development of the city.

There are a lot of foreign students here, one can hear that when one walks in Jakub's Square in the evening, one certainly hears other languages than Czech. [...] I think there is a significantly higher proportion of foreign students here than in other cities or nationwide. [...] It's specific, I think, and it contributes a lot to the overall atmosphere in the city—that you're on a tram, on a trolleybus, and you hear English next to you, or that you see that someone looks a little bit different and they're talking to somebody already in Czech... I find it cool. (David, 71, male, architect)

In Brno, there are more foreigners than the average in Czechia, because we have a lot of companies that attract foreigners. There's Kiwi.com, I suppose that about half of their employees are foreigners, and there's IBM, and so on. And these positions are quite skilled, they bring a lot of money into the budget, and I think it's a terribly important benefit for Brno that these people are here. (Miroslava, 38, female, entrepreneur)

While David emphasises the positive impact of foreign students on the city's atmosphere, Miroslava praises high-skilled people for contributing to the city budget. In both cases, the symbolic boundaries in relation to foreign-born residents become blurred on the grounds of their perceived contribution to the development of the city.

The contributions of low-skilled workers, including foreign-born residents, is not thematised to the same extent in the interviews. This omission is likely caused by the overall invisibility of low-skilled workers in neoliberal cities, further exacerbated by their frequent spatial and social segregation and their consequent inability to fully participate in the public life of the city. In other words, the research participants have not encountered low-skilled workers as frequently as their high-skilled counterparts and they have much less awareness of their activities despite their large numbers. Two exceptions from this pattern include Brno's foreign-born residents from Vietnam and Ukraine.

The Vietnamese have introduced retail businesses here; they have taken retail under their wing. They're very hardworking and they service a certain part of the market that would otherwise be left out... twelve, fourteen hours a day, Saturday and Sunday inclusive. I think that's the dominant thing with the Vietnamese. (David, 71, male, architect)

I very often use the services of different construction workers who are Ukrainian. So, I can't imagine that I would...that we would, do without them. Particularly in this profession, right? Ukrainians in the building industry. (Gabriela, 59, female, lawyer)

As the two quotations reveal, research participants tend to associate the Vietnamese specifically with retail and the Ukrainians with the construction industry, and they derive their contribution from their role in these labour sectors. While David appreciates the fact that the Vietnamese keep their shops open also at times when most other shops are closed, Gabriela praises the indispensability of Ukrainian construction workers for her life as well as for the city at large. In both cases, however, the recognition of their contribution is not linked to the story of Brno's transition. Instead, it is connected to their willingness to take over economic activities from which most Czechs have turned away.

The boundary work in the municipal documents, as well as among residents, points to the limits of Brno's cosmopolitanism: despite the general recognition of the contributions made by foreign-born residents to the city, potential ruptures appear. At least some residents tend to ethnicise problematic aspects of behaviour among the foreign-born, articulating an expectation they will behave more like Czechs. What is more, the patterns of boundary work clearly differ in relation to different groups of foreign-born residents, with foreign students and high-skilled workers being more visible and recognised for their perceived contribution to the city, while their low-skilled counterparts remain largely invisible.

6.5.3 *Blank Spaces*

According to the Strategy, the city of Brno strives to be a cosmopolitan and international city with "openness to people from different countries, ethnic groups

and cultures” (Brno City Municipality, 2020: 12). However, the nature of Brno’s cosmopolitanism and the role of culture in it is not clearly articulated; there are “blank spaces”. A closer look at the Action plan and other integration policies shows an adherence to the principles of an intercultural approach and diversity management, which distances itself from a multiculturalism that conserves the “otherness” of foreigners (Magistrát města Brna, 2019: 6). The main aim of intercultural work as conceptualised by the municipality is to reduce the barriers foreigners face in accessing institutions of public administration; the goal is to enable everyone to use their skills and talents to improve quality of life for all (Magistrát města Brna, 2019: 8). The municipality thus conceives culture as an instrument for the integration of foreigners to the current institutional structures, rather than supporting a broader societal transformation of the city population to cosmopolitanism “in the light of the encounter with the Other” (Delanty & Harris, 2018: 95). A survey among municipal employees reveals their poor foreign language competencies and a strong national orientation, evident in their tendency to draw boundaries between “our” rules, laws and cultures on the one hand and foreigners who are seen as not willing to accommodate and respect them on the other hand (Sociofactor, 2018). There is thus a clear tension between the growing presence of international companies and foreign-born residents and the prevailing national character of municipal institutions.

Our interviews with Brno’s native-born residents also reveal a selective understanding of cosmopolitanism that mostly emphasised contributions made by the foreign-born to the development of popular culture and neglected deeper questions related to their beliefs, values, and perspectives. Aleš, one of study participants perceives such cultural contributions primarily via cuisine.

I have a friend, she’s a dancer, she comes from Vietnam, so when there was like a discussion or something, she has made it into a topic, like she was talking about it, about the culture, like the food and stuff like that. I think her parents make the rolls, the food from Vietnam. I’m noticing a lot that the culture manifests itself in the food, like there are Indian restaurants, Asian restaurants, and so on. (Aleš, 21, male, unemployed)

The perception of cultural contributions is thus largely limited to food, clothing, arts, or language. When it comes to aspects of culture that go beyond voluntary consumption of diversity and require Brno’s native-born residents to re-evaluate or even adapt their own cultural practices—such as using Czech as a primary language of communication in public and semi-public spaces, or the presence of religious symbols in the public sphere—the perception of the cultural contributions by foreign-born residents becomes more mixed. While some research participants view a mosque in Brno as a publicly controversial topic, others fear being forced to adapt to Islamic cultural practices.

A lot of people are afraid to speak their mind, to say they don’t want any migrants here, that they don’t want a mosque in Old Brno, that they don’t want anyone to force us women, to wear burqas just because, uh, that’s the way they do it back home... (Nina, 57, female, lawyer)

The controversies around Arabic speakers had emerged in Brno in response to the city administration financing an intercultural workers program¹² in 2017, triggering a series of anonymous hoax emails and online disinformation news warning against the institutionalisation of the Arabic language at Brno's municipal offices. In response, the administration published a list of "Myths about accepting migrants in the city of Brno" on their website, explaining the need for and the role of intercultural workers. The text highlighted the economic benefits of helping the foreigners understand "our rules", preventing irregular employment and potential problems known from abroad to appear when integration was not properly managed (Brno City Municipality, 2017). This case not only represents the broader context of a post-2015 rise in Islamophobia, (Čada & Frantová, 2019), but it also illustrates the limits of local cosmopolitanism.

Although the Action plan for 2021–2023 supports the "development and use of the skills, capabilities and qualification of foreigners in the city and the use of foreigners' potential" among eight key topics to be addressed in the process of integration of foreigners (Magistrát města Brna, 2021), deskilling has been a widespread phenomenon in Czechia (see, for example, Valenta & Drbohlav, 2018). In addition, Brno has struggled with a mismatch between qualifications in demand on the labour market and the actual qualifications of foreign-born workers. While almost 25,000 positions occupied by foreign-born workers have a primary education requirement, less than half of the foreign-born workers actually have this qualification. At the same time, although more than 18,000 foreign workers have achieved tertiary education, only 10,000 of them work in positions that have a tertiary education requirement (Úřad práce, 2022a). Some research participants narrated about the insufficient use of the potential of foreign-born residents from Eastern Europe. Workers originating in Ukraine or Romania were viewed as overrepresented in low-skilled jobs mismatched with their educational capital and skill levels. The research participants saw it as natural for the open labour market, and pointed out that foreign-born workers were probably unable to find a job in their home country. Others, however, were more critical and pointed to foreign-born residents being forced into precarious employment that curbs their potential contributions:

I've heard about a lady who studied law in Ukraine and came here [to Brno] to work as a cleaning lady. It just seems like a problem to me. [...] I also know a guy, a decent guy, who came here from Ukraine, I don't know how many years ago, and he has been working at Globus [local hypermarket], like for ten years, for a totally ridiculous wage. He had been earning like fifteen thousand [crowns] during those ten years, which is just totally ridiculous. [...] even if they [foreign-born residents] are educated they just don't get hired for higher positions. (Aleš, 21, male, unemployed)

The question concerning the role of the city administration in mitigating the exploitation of foreign-born workers remains salient. Shelley (2007) argues that abuse of foreign-born labour is an integral part of the structure of key industries of

¹² Four intercultural worker positions were institutionalised, with personnel communicating in Vietnamese, Russian/Ukrainian, Arabic, and Romanian. The intercultural workers offer various services both for foreign-born residents and workers of the public administration including translation, accompaniment to offices, advising, networking or conflict mediation. Their positions are part of the public administration financed from the city budget.

the global economy; therefore, this issue can be hardly mitigated without the MLG perspective.

6.6 Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter, we have elaborated how the perspective of native-born residents living in a secondary city that has recently seen an influx of foreign-born residents adds to our understanding of migration governance on the local level. We argue that the perspectives of native-born urban residents are essential to understand migration governance in cities; yet, their voices remain overlooked in the literature on multi-level governance (MLG). In Brno, attitudes towards migration and integration of foreign-born residents among the city's native-born residents constitute an important aspect of the everyday life reception context, opening the possibilities and setting the limits for the inclusion of new residents. We believe that a better understanding of the perspectives of native-born urban residents is particularly important in CEE cities with a recent history of immigration.

Contemporary literature has highlighted the different ways cities respond to global economic changes by employing strategies of repositioning and rebranding (Glick Schiller & Caglar, 2009). Brno, as a secondary city, has joined the global competition for talent in an attempt to become a centre of the knowledge economy, a trend recently observed by Ewers et al. (2022). The dominant cultural repertoire of a city in transition informs the discourse of not only the municipality but also the migration attitudes of its native-born residents. Such repertoire points to greater migration openness and Brno's aspirations in becoming a "(Central) European" cosmopolitan metropolis with foreign-born residents as important actors in this transition. Nevertheless, not all foreign-born residents are perceived as equal contributors to the city's development. Predominantly high-skilled, foreign-born residents are recognised by the municipality and by the city's native-born residents as valuable. Low-skilled foreign-born residents, despite constituting a large share of the city workforce, are missing from the repertoire of a city in transition. The city's cosmopolitanism is limited by native-born residents' willingness (or lack thereof) to reconsider their everyday practices beyond the diversification of food or cultural consumption (see also Crul et al., 2023).

Our findings contribute to the development of the horizontal axis of MLG theory (Bazurli & Kaufmann, 2022; see also Alexander, 2003; Dekker et al., 2015; Filomeno, 2016; Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017). We have examined how cultural repertoires sustain the responses of different actors (the municipality, the public, and others) to the growing presence of foreign-born residents in the city. There is an interdependence of the cultural repertoires employed horizontally by the municipality, and by local residents, which inform their meaning-making processes. The attitudes of native-born urban residents towards newcomers are nuanced and sometimes at odds

with the prevailing municipal discourse. This can be well exemplified by recognising the positive aspects of the presence of lower-skilled foreign-born residents from Ukraine and Vietnam, pointing to some of the ambivalences in attitudes.

Our findings also speak to the vertical axis of MGL theory (Bazurli & Kaufman, 2022; see also Zapata-Barreto et al., 2017), relations between central- and local-level actors, by highlighting the incongruencies between the cultural repertoire of a city in transition and the prevailing securitised discourse on migration at the national level (Jaworsky et al., 2023). Overall, both the municipality administration and Brno's native-born residents conceive of highly skilled, foreign-born residents as people who contribute positively to the city. At the same time, Brno's residents, like other Czechs, express their share of xenophobia and Islamophobia. These contradictory views of foreign-born city residents further emphasise the importance of studying the governance of migration at the local level, which may or may not mirror national views (Rapoš Božič, Klvaňová & Jaworsky, 2023a). As specified by a municipal representative involved in the preparation of the Strategy, emphasising the skills and economic contribution of foreigners, and avoiding terms such as "refugees" or "migrants", which have predominantly negative connotations in public discourse, were crucial for the Strategy to be approved by the municipal government.

Our Brno-focused study has certain limitations. First, the situation for foreign-born residents as well as the perception of migration by city's native-born residents can differ dramatically across city neighbourhoods. Hence, in future research of migration governance, there is a need to focus on the neighbourhood-level as an important context. Although the Strategy (Brno City Municipality, 2020) sets up a vision for the city of Brno as a whole and creation of a unifying identity of a "Brno-er", the city is hardly unified with respect to settlement of foreign-born residents and the nature of cohabitation between native-born and new urban residents. Future research should thus explore the differences in the perception of migration among residents of different neighbourhoods with various levels of exposure to different types of migration. Second, our policy analysis focused only on the municipal migrant integration strategic documents. More extensive ethnographic research on integration policies as they are translated into the everyday practices of various stakeholders and their interactions with foreign-born residents is needed to explore how policy measures shape patterns of boundary work. Finally, a closer look at class distinctions, among different socio-economic groups in the city, may reveal other cultural repertoires and patterns of boundary work.

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Part III

Border Cities

Chapter 7

Shaping Migration Governance in a Crisis Context: A Case Study of Lublin



Karolina Podgórska and Andrzej Jekaterynczuk

7.1 Introduction

A city in eastern Poland, Lublin has long been a natural destination for economic migrants, primarily from Ukraine. The city's academic institutions have also attracted foreign students from post-Soviet countries and other parts of the world. The topic of migration has therefore been a live one for local authorities and NGOs in the city over many years.

On the eve of Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine, the starting points for responses in Lublin, the most prominent Polish city on the border with Ukraine, were previous experiences of cross-border cooperation and the social capital generated by local integration activities. After Russia invaded Ukraine, the city of Lublin, the capital of the Lubelskie border region, became both a destination and transit point for those who had fled. This necessitated the provision of both emergency and long-term assistance. The city's effective and resilient response to these events, including the creation of the Lublin Social Committee for Aid to Ukraine (LSCAU), became a nationally known phenomenon. The high degree of flexibility shown by Lublin in addressing such challenges to unintended practical consequences at the level of local resources, including the professionalisation of humanitarian aid and the development of long-term integration plans.

K. Podgórska (✉) · A. Jekaterynczuk
Institute of Sociology, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin, Poland
e-mail: karolina.podgorska@umcs.pl

A. Jekaterynczuk
e-mail: andrzej.jekaterynczuk@umcs.pl

K. Podgórska
Centre of Migration Research, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland

The chapter aims to analyse the measures taken by various actors in Lublin in support of forced migrants and to identify factors conducive to the effective implementation of such activities, especially during the humanitarian crisis of 2022–2023. Theories of multilevel governance (MLG), social resilience and social capital provide the conceptual backbone of our analysis.

7.2 Theoretical Framework

MLG refers to the involvement of multiple actors in managing migration, as well as the integration of activities at subsequent stages of mobility. Multilevel governance assumes interaction and coordination between different levels of governance without the clear dominance of one level (Scholten, 2013). It is only one way of theorising the relationships between different levels of governance; other ‘ideal types’ are the centrist (top-down) approach characterised by clear and strong central coordination and hierarchy, the localist (bottom-up) approach, implying a proactive, networked role for local administrations and the disjointed or ‘decoupled’ approach, where there is no coordination between national and local levels, often leading to contradictory actions (Curry, 2018; Scholten, 2013).

MLG is based on vertical relationships between different levels of governance. Relations between the central authority and its subordinate institutions are key to MLG, as are networked horizontal relationships between different types of actor in a given field (Zincone & Caponio, 2006). The horizontal dimension of MLG has received attention from migration scholars in various disciplines (Iraklis et al., 2021). For instance, in a crisis situation and/or when governmental migration policy is absent, special attention needs to be paid to the role of non-governmental organisations, which often fill gaps in the migration management system; consideration must also be given to interventions made by grassroots and informal initiatives, both potentially rooted in each level of governance (Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016). Nonetheless, local actors—and, frequently, non-public ones, too—can influence legislative solutions at a central level through their commitment, cooperation (e.g. within a union of cities) and lobbying (as in so-called ‘vertical venue shopping’: Guiraudon, 2000). However, the presence of a multiplicity of actors from different levels can also be a weak point in an administrative system, especially in a crisis (Şahin-Mencütek et al., 2022). If good cooperation mechanisms are not developed, there is a risk that the desired multilevel governance may instead develop along separate tracks at the central and local levels (Gökalp-Aras, 2020; Scholten & Penninx, 2016). This is especially a risk as circumstances and demands change and the work of crisis-context migration management shifts from an initial reception phase to a more stable, so-called integration phase. As a result of the swift implementation of European and national temporary protection measures during the 2022 humanitarian crisis, this shift occurred faster than in the case of asylum seekers subject to standard waiting times; in some cases the two phases even merged (Pędziwiatr & Magdziarz, 2023: 355; Sobczak-Szelc et al., 2022).

Our second conceptual framework, social resilience theory, helps describe the resistance, elasticity, adaptability or flexibility of a given community in response to challenges caused by external factors. One way of defining social resilience in systemic approaches is as ‘the capacity of actors to access capitals in order to not only cope with and adjust to adverse conditions (i.e. reactive capacity), but also search for and create options (i.e. proactive capacity) and thus develop increased competence (i.e. positive outcomes) in dealing with a threat’ (Obrist et al., 2010: 289). Social resilience can be analysed at different levels, e.g. individual, community and institutional resilience (Preston et al., 2022: 1423).

The final theoretical framework employed in this chapter is Putnam’s concept of social capital. Previous collaboration between Lublin’s local government and local NGOs has facilitated two types of social capital identified by Putnam: bonding capital and bridging capital. The former is exclusive in nature and is focuses on the strengthening of intra-group ties. The latter concerns the establishment of more instrumental, less emotionally-driven connections with a broader range of social actors, thus enabling greater access to the resources of other groups and surpassing the opportunities afforded by participation in a single social group. These two types of capital can coexist simultaneously; they are both grounded in either intra-group trust or trust in other groups holding common values (Putnam, 2000).

MLG and social resilience theory and theories of social capital have helped us analyse crisis management mechanisms at work in Lublin, looking both at the context of migration management before 2022 and the consequences of the measures taken by the city.

7.3 Methodology

This chapter uses material from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included a variety of documents and online sources (mainly databases and information services provided by city institutions) describing both the profile and activities of local actors before 2022 and the status quo in the city two years after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Our main primary sources, however, are interviews conducted both prior to and as part of an international research project¹ undertaken between May 2022 and May 2023. Our empirical material thus relates to the first year of the aid effort.

Interviews were conducted by the chapter’s authors and other members of the research team. Interviews with representatives of institutions and informal, grassroots and private initiatives were carried out using the semi-structured individual in-depth interview technique (IDI). A total of 58 IDIs were conducted in the Lublin area with

¹ Project Multilevel governance of the humanitarian crisis caused by the Russian aggression on Ukraine on the examples of activities in the Lublin Voivodeship (PL) and the Volyn Oblast (UA), BPN/GIN/2022/1/00025/U/00001, Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange For more information about the project and materials including research reports see: <https://miglab.umcs.pl/index.php/projekty/nawa-zarzadzanie-kryzysem-humanitarnym/>.

actors operating within the city as well as at regional and national level. Our IDI dataset included: 7 interviews with representatives of Lublin branches of the central administration, 13 with representatives of local government, 18 with representatives of mainly local non-governmental organisations, 6 with business representatives (including one private higher education institution), 9 with religious entities, 3 with informal initiatives and 2 with other entities (a public university and an international organisation).² On occasion, two people from a given institution were interviewed together. Interviews lasted an average of one hour and the audio was recorded with interviewees' consent. The material was then transcribed and anonymised. We asked participants about: the circumstances surrounding the initiation of relief activities; the context in which they were undertaken; the sources of actors' knowledge about migrants' needs and available procedures; activities implemented after February 24th and in the following months; changes in the relief effort over time; the resources used and sources of external support. We also asked them to describe difficult and unusual situations and to assess the situation in terms of its impact on the ordinary functioning of institutions. The interviews were thematically coded and analysed using Dedoose software. In addition, this chapter also draws on material collected through two focus groups (January–February 2023) with representatives of the same kinds of Lublin-based actor as in the case of our IDIs.

7.4 City Characteristics

Lublin, the capital of the Lubelskie Voivodeship,³ one of two Polish regions bordering Ukraine and historically always situated on the borderline between East and West, is the largest city in eastern Poland. The city's population as of mid-2023 was 330,447 (Statistical Office, 2023a). The data also indicate that Lublin can be classified demographically as a shrinking city. Between 2000 and 2020, the city's population decreased by 20,300 inhabitants (−5.7%), from 358,900 to 338,600. In 2022 Lublin's annual migration balance per 1000 inhabitants was—1.8 (made up of a positive foreign migration balance and a negative internal migration balance) though this data does not reflect temporary or unrecorded mobility (Statistical Office, 2023b). However, this depopulation has been accompanied by an increase in the number of people living in suburban areas. This trends are visible over a twenty-year period that has seen: a decrease mentioned above and an increase by 20,800 in the population of Lublin County (Statistical Office, 2022b). Also worth mentioning is that due to the city's academic profile (nine higher education entities, of which five are public), the city's population is much higher during the academic year. A proportion

² When referring to interview material we apply the following abbreviations: LA—local administration, CA—central administration, NGO—community-based organisations, REL—religious organisations, IF—informal initiatives.

³ The administrative structure in Poland is as follows: the basic administrative division is 16 voivodeships. Each of these is subdivided into counties, which in turn are subdivided into communes: rural, urban and urban-rural. There is local government at each of these levels.

of students residing temporarily in the city are foreign students. According to data for the 2021/2022 academic year, the proportion of international students at Lublin's universities was 13.8%, or over 8000 students (Lublin City Office, 2022b). Students from Ukraine predominate among the city's foreign students.

The number of Ukrainian migrants permanently resident in the city on the eve of the Russian invasion has been estimated at 22,569, with an additional 12,155 in the Lublin metropolitan area (Wojdat & Cywiński, 2022: 30). These estimates outnumber official registration data indicating that 5000 non-Polish nationals were living in Lublin in 2019 (Lublin City Office, 2020). Pre-2022 migration was principally circular and temporary in character as a result of proximity to the border and the prevalence of migration for study purposes (Górny et al., 2019: 30–31).

The city is well connected to other regions of Poland, including by road and rail with Warsaw. As a border region it is also well connected to neighbouring countries. The region has five border crossing points with Ukraine [Dorohusk–Yahodyn (road and rail), Zosin–Ustyluh (road), Dołhobyczów–Uhryniv (road), Hrebenne–Rava Ruska (road and rail), Hrubieszów–Volodymyr Volynskiy (rail)] along with three road borders and one rail border with Belarus. There is also an international airport in the city. Lublin has established international cooperation with 26 'twin' cities, nine of which are in Ukraine: Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, Lutsk, Luhansk, Rivne, Starobilsk, Sumy, Kryvyi Rih and Kharkiv. Links with the former were established after February 24th 2022. Another form of international cooperation involves 'friendly' cities. Of 19 Lublin-linked 'friendly' cities, 3 are in Ukraine: Kamianets-Podilskiy, Dnipro and Vinnytsia (Lublin City Office, 2023b).

The political landscape of the city has changed over the years. During our period of study, 2022–2023, Lublin was governed by the opposition. This was in contrast to the situation before 2018, when the incumbent mayor worked with a city council in which the Law and Justice party, in power in Poland at that time, held a majority. Aside from the mayor, the city council plays a key role in managing the city. Lublin City Council is made up of 31 city councillors. In 2018–2024 the majority of the council were allies of the incumbent mayor, a member of the liberal Civic Platform party, who was serving his third term in office. A minority were members of the conservative Law and Justice party, which held power in Poland between 2015 and 2023. For more a decade, the local authorities have cooperated with civil society organisation around questions relating to cultural diversity and integration. In 2012 a Social Integration Support Group was established at the Mayor's Office (in 2023 it operated through the Social Participation Office of the City Hall).⁴ In 2021, the Civic Dialogue Commission (CDC) for the Municipal Support System for the Integration of Immigrants and Immigrant Women was established; its function was to advise the Mayor. Since 2012, the city of Lublin has also been a member of the Council of Europe's Intercultural Cities Network. The city's promotion of diversity and inclusion is evidenced by Lublin's local government being one of the first to

⁴ The Integration Support Group was established as part of a collaborative project between the Chancellery of the Mayor of Lublin and the Swiss canton of Neuchâtel. This project was called 'Lublin for All. A participatory model for managing cultural diversity in Lublin'.

employ migrants, especially those from Ukraine. The well-established presence of Ukrainians in the city's administration was an important factor fostering a rapid and appropriate response after February 24th 2022.

Large local NGOs specialising in human rights, migration and minority issues have been present in the city for years. These have included⁵: the Homo Faber Association (created in 2004); the Rule of Law Institute Foundation (2002); the Volunteer Centre Association (2003); the Borderland Spiritual Culture Foundation (2004) and numerous smaller organisations. Compared to larger urban centres, the NGO landscape is modest in scale, which may help facilitate communication between social actors representing different points of views. Unlike Rzeszów, the capital city of another Polish city bordering Ukraine, Lublin's pre-war NGO landscape was diverse and dynamic (Jekaterynczuk & Podgórska, 2023: 136, 143–144; Klaus & Jarosz, 2023: 6). Lublin is also home to the Ukrainian Society,⁶ an organisation primarily led by the Ukrainian national minority (people with Polish citizenship), which is also engaged with migration issues locally. However, there were no migrant-led organisations in Lublin before February 24th 2022. At least three small migrant-led organisations were established in 2023, carrying out mainly educational and outreach activities: the Strength of Unity Foundation (run by a refugee woman from Ukraine),⁷ the Global Ganesha Foundation (run by a person of Syrian origin)⁸ and the Global Okunerere Foundation (run by a person of Nigerian origin).⁹

7.5 What Happened in Lublin After February 24th 2022?

After Russia's invasion in 2022 Lublin became a destination and transit point for people fleeing Ukraine. Between February 24th and early April 2022, the number of people resident in the city increased by 20%. Research carried out by the Union of Polish Metropolises several weeks after the start of the refugee aid effort showed that, as of 1 April 2022, as many as 17% of people living in Lublin were citizens of Ukraine (Wojdat & Cywiński, 2022: 30). However, the scale of the assistance provided is more clearly evidenced by other data: more than 1.2 million people entered Lublin during the first three months of the invasion, of whom at least 138,000 stayed in the city for at least one night and made use of public services (Lublin City Office, 2022a).

⁵ Dates of creation are given in brackets.

⁶ Ukrainian Society in Lublin webpage [nd]. http://www.ukr-tov.pl/pl/?page_id=29_ Accessed 25 November 2024.

⁷ The Strength of Unity Foundation webpage [nd]. <https://www.facebook.com/SilaJednosci/>. Accessed 25 November 2024.

⁸ Global Ganesha Foundation funpage [nd]. https://www.facebook.com/p/Globalna-Fundacja-Ganesha-61555490037310/?paipv=0&eav=Afbolf-S_oKard2EV9_0sD1sYFPuPfd7b6s7KzNMrekePlqESCEnJKAyztvF2tZP0&_rdr. Accessed 25 November 2024.

⁹ Global Okunerere Foundation webpage [nd]. <https://okunererefoundation.org/contact/>. Accessed 25 November 2024.

As of January 9th 2024, 9694 Ukrainian TP holders¹⁰ lived in Lublin (based on the so-called PESEL UKR data, Open Data Portal 2024). A few months into 2022, a significant number of those who had arrived in Lublin after the Russian aggression had decided to return to Ukraine or had relocated to other Polish regions, Western European countries, the USA or Canada. However, because PESEL UKR numbers could be registered in any municipality office in Poland, the number of people arriving after February 24th 2022 and residing (even temporarily) in Lublin may be higher. In early 2024, the number of refugees residing in Lublin was estimated by the local authorities at around 20,000–30,000 (Panel Discussion, 2024).

7.5.1 The Networking of Aid Actors as a Manifestation of Multilevel Governance

The way refugee assistance has been provided in Lublin since 2022 is influenced by past experience. Principal factors have included previous experience of cross-border cooperation and the social and human capital developed through integration activities undertaken by the city in consultation with social actors. In Lublin, pre-existing cooperation between the local government and NGOs had generated trust, which subsequently translated into grassroots aid initiatives with the active participation of individuals with migration experience, particularly Ukrainians. This can be understood as an example of bridging capital. At the same time, city's Ukrainian migrant community in the city organising itself to coordinate support for their compatriots, illustrating the principle of bonding capital (Putnam, 2000). Taking into account the lack of formal mechanisms to manage such a crisis, both kinds of capital proved particularly important at this stage of the refugee emergency. The city's rapid, comprehensive and effective response became a nationally known phenomenon as a result of cross-sector cooperation organised via the Lublin Social Committee to Aid Ukraine (LSCAU). This close and informal/semi-formal cooperation between city hall, several NGOs and business and grassroots initiatives played a key role in managing the crisis. From the very beginning, actors already involved in migrant and refugee support activities (e.g. Homo Faber Association, Institute for the Rule of Law Foundation, Foundation of Spiritual Culture of the Borderland, Foundation for the Development of Central and Eastern Europe, and two scouts organisations, the Polish Scouting Association and the Ukrainian organisation Plast) overcame previous ideological differences and various bureaucratic obstacles to form a broad local taskforce of cooperation (Homo Faber Association, 2022).

On the other hand, it was also thanks to the fact that the committee established itself very quickly in the cultural centre [...] To me it seems a matter of clarity and obviousness [when

¹⁰ This protection status was introduced by the Law of March 12th 2022 on assistance to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of Ukraine, based on the EU's Temporary Protection Directive.

there are] so many organisations and people...that the different parts should all accumulate and connect with each other there. (FGI 2)

At that point, the Homo Faber Association, one of LSCAU's founding organisation, had fresh operational experience of providing humanitarian aid through its activities within the so-called Border Group¹¹ in the Polish–Belarusian border area (Klaus, 2022).

The advantage Lublin held over other large Polish cities may have been that these entities were strongly networked even before the war and had a relatively well-established place in the urban ecosystem. This networking approach was already in evidence on February 18th 2022, a week before the Russian aggression against Ukraine, when, on the initiative of Lublin City Hall's Civic Dialogue Commission, a meeting took place between local NGOs, the mayor, the governor of Lublin¹² and representatives of organisations and services responsible for humanitarian aid and public security. The main aim of this meeting was to discuss, both in broad terms and at a level of detail, an emergency response to the migration flows that were likely in the case of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. After this meeting NGOs drew attention to a gap in the planned aid strategy, i.e. its failure to address the specific and long-term needs of people who might arrive in the city beyond the initial reception phase (Dziewanowska et al., 2023: 30).

From the very beginning of the war, actors at different levels, including local and central government, the emergency services and other institutions, were involved in the relief effort in Lublin. Their strategy was in line with plans adopted at a central level just before the invasion began: Poland was divided into transit and target areas. According to the government's plans, as a border area both the entirety of Lubelskie Voivodeship and Lublin itself were to be transit areas, alongside the Podkarpackie Voivodeship. Refugees were to be relocated from these areas to the interior of Poland to avoid overloading the border areas. Lublin, going beyond these arrangements, decided not only to assist refugees on their journeys to other regions of Poland and abroad, but also undertook to create the conditions to coordinate the reception of refugees in the city over a longer period. This distinguished Lublin from the capital of the Podkarpackie Voivodeship, Rzeszów, which followed government recommendations and focused on the transit of refugees inland and abroad (Jekaterynczuk & Podgórska, 2023).

In the initial crisis management phase, the main absentees were international aid organisations (especially UNHCR). From the perspective of local government and local NGOs, their approach to the provision of assistance did not take into account the realities of Central and Eastern Europe, the needs of the refugees themselves or the climatic and material conditions. Above all, their assistance could have been more timely. In early 2024, there was still an UNHCR regional office operating in Lublin, implementing aid initiatives in the city and region and working with local actors.

¹¹ Border Group funpage [nd]. https://www.facebook.com/grupagranica/?locale=pl_PL. Accessed 25 November 2024.

¹² The provincial governor is the representative of the central authority within the provincial structure.

From the beginning, then, the multilevel management system mainly utilised local resources, including material resources made possible by the lively responses of local businesses, religious communities and individuals, who also formed professionally run aid hubs. One example of such participation can be found in the work of a collective, which was a private initiative providing short-stay and transit assistance. It also catered for people with special health needs. This collective, however, eventually lost the support of both the provincial and municipal authorities, who did not want to cooperate closely with a completely informal initiative, despite it being extremely effective.

Unfortunately we didn't have access to the official centres such as MOSIR, Elsnera, where there were hundreds of people, and as we were not an official entity, we couldn't advertise our convoys. At the beginning we were invited but after some time we were asked to come out [then] the police were called on us. (IF)

There were also reception and information points in the city during the reception phase of the crisis. These were run by the office of the provincial governor and therefore managed by the central government. Local NGOs, including some that were not members of LSCAU, operated these points on the administration's behalf. Some of our interview participants commented on this variation as well on the different ways in which municipal and central government worked with local NGOs:

There is a big difference in approach. As far as the Lublin local government is concerned, NGOs are treated, I would say, as partners. Whereas the state or provincial authorities are not yet able to treat NGOs as partners. I mean, they actually wanted to position NGOs as [providers of] ad hoc aid for their ideas [and] activities. (REL)

7.5.2 Horizontal Cooperation Between Local Government and Community Organisations Within LSCAU

Lublin developed a fit-for-purpose aid infrastructure within a short period, mainly as a result of efficient communication. Information points were set up at railway and bus stations and the voivodeship office. In addition, four helplines were offered in several languages: (1) a helpline for refugees from Ukraine in need of advice on social and civic matters, psychological and medical support and legal assistance; (2) a helpline run by Lublin City Hall's Contact Centre and coordinating the recruitment of volunteers as well as enquiries from residents relating to the accommodation of people fleeing war temporarily in private homes; (3) a helpline where people hosting refugees from Ukraine could report items needed by Ukrainian families; (4) a helpline run by the Lublin Employment Office for employers wishing to offer employment to Ukrainian citizens (Statistical Office, 2022a).

The reaction of Lublin's local authorities was immediate. On the morning of the first day of the invasion, a meeting was held at the Lublin City Hall between representatives of the City Hall and Lublin NGOs.

So from the twenty-fourth, I don't know, from six or five o'clock... Anyway, when we found out we were on the train to Berlin [so] we got off the train and returned to Lublin. And at ten we were at the City Hall because as we were coming back (...) we were already mentally and organisationally preparing for the fact that if something like that happened... We didn't even think for a second, we already knew what had to be done. (NGO)

The fact that cooperation began at such an early stage shaped the aid landscape in the city later on. The formation of the LSCAU can be viewed as the result of the functioning of informal social networks in Lublin over many years. These networks were composed of people who had been involved in supporting migrants in the past. Along with NGO representatives and volunteers, city officials—some seconded, some not—were also involved in the work of the Committee, taking on the coordination of selected areas of support. It was not uncommon for officials to volunteer with LSCAU after their normal working hours. Cooperation between officials and NGOs proved to be very beneficial for both sides, ensuring complementarity in terms of the activities undertaken and thereby improving their effectiveness. The involvement of officials also legitimised operational decisions that were often taken *ad hoc* (albeit always by consensus).

I remember at some meetings, someone asked female officials from the committee to raise their hands. And it turned out that, the majority, probably eighty per cent, were officials who brought with them certain procedures from their daily work. It was obvious to me that when I'm creating housing databases, that there has to be some sort of RODO [GDPR] compliance. That when I host a person and collect their data, or type their data into a document, they have to give their consent and sign a RODO [GDPR] form. Right away, right? I think the fact that committee volunteers were mostly people from the right system, this also helped maintain the standards of our daily work. (LA/NGO)

In fact, in Lublin, during the first months of the aid effort, it was often difficult to distinguish between strictly municipal aid initiatives and those organised by NGOs and civil society. The Mayor of Lublin also appointed a Plenipotentiary for Assistance to Ukrainian Citizens Fleeing War, which can be seen as evidence of the city prioritising support for refugees (Lublin City Office, 2024a).

At its peak, LSCAU identified almost 30 thematic areas of assistance, although the number of themes decreased over time (Homo Faber Association, 2022). The actors involved in the Committee became increasingly specialised, placing emergency aid in the hands of other, public institutions as they themselves concentrated on activities aimed at integrating the city's newly arrived inhabitants with the settled community.

In addition to the offer of accommodation in private housing coordinated by the LSCAU, the city also set up several municipal accommodation sites. Four out of the sixteen accommodation sites in operation at the peak of demand remained active in January 2024, providing shelter for more than 500 Ukrainian refugees (Lublin City Office, 2024a). Refugees were also supported with food parcels. Moreover, by the end of 2022, around a hundred convoys had left Lublin heading directly to Ukraine; this was made possible thanks to Lublin's cooperation with partner cities, friendly local authorities abroad and international organisations. In practice, Lublin's networking with Ukrainian cities was the result of close cooperation over many years between specific officials, community leaders and cultural and academic specialists. This

made it possible to effectively establish people's needs and transfer aid to specific institutions, places and people in Ukraine.

7.5.3 *Harnessing Social and Human Capital*

Those involved in the relief effort included officials and volunteers as well as representatives of NGOs and people with migration experience. People from Ukraine, Belarus and Polish citizens of Ukrainian nationality took part in large numbers. One of Lublin's weaknesses remains the very limited presence in the urban landscape of organisations created by people with migration experience. A lack of partnerships with migrant and minority organisations had been lamented by staff at Lublin City Hall staff even before the outbreak of the war between Russia and Ukraine (Dolińska & Makaro, 2021: 202). Organisations of this kind, such as the Warsaw-based Our Choice Foundation and the Wrocław-based Ukraine Foundation, do not exist in Lublin. One of a very few such organisations in Lublin, and a source of empowerment for the migrant community, is the Strength in Unity Foundation, founded by refugee women from Ukraine.¹³ However, the scope of the foundation's activities is quite limited and mainly focuses on material aid. It is significant that a local cultural organisation run by the Ukrainian community (minority) is limited in the assistance it is able to provide by lack of funds and appropriate tools. This is not an isolated phenomenon; in other cities in Poland, organisations run by members of the Ukrainian community have also focused so far on cultural and educational activities aimed at preserving national identity (however, the exceptions have existed—like Narodnyj Dim in Przemyśl, in Podkarpackie Region). Ukrainians have often assisted refugees to navigate Polish organisations and institutions.

A fairly large proportion of local government officials in Lublin had come to their roles from the third sector in recent years. They were thus able to combine, as it were, the identities of civil servant and social activist. Such officials served as linkage points optimising cooperation between the local administration and social organisations. Such mechanisms seemed to be present to a lesser extent in other Polish cities.

What is interesting, and probably completely unique to Lublin is that a lot of people associated with non-governmental organisations also work in the local authority office. This is true of me, and also of a lot of other people. (LA)

The activities of the various levels of the administration and the third sector were more effective, and carried out with greater ease, due to the large-scale response of ordinary citizens of the city. This was realised in two ways: through the activity of volunteers working with existing entities (e.g. the Catholic organisation Caritas) or

¹³ However, it should be noted that the situation has changed — by the time the book was published, several new migrant organisations had been established.

newly established ones (such as LSCAU); and through informal initiatives organised on an ad hoc basis by the city's inhabitants and rooted in community initiatives. Students from Lublin's universities and various local professional groups were particularly involved in collections for Ukraine as well as for refugees in Lublin.

A crucial element in developing effective future migration-management strategies and tools would appear to lie in the area of volunteering, and especially its professionalisation (Podgórska et al., 2024). The scale of volunteering in Lublin during the crisis was vast and has served as a jumping off point for increasing levels of social engagement in the city: in November 2022, the 'Lublin Volunteering' programme city, a joint venture with the Sempre a Frente Foundation and the Homo Faber Association as part of the European Youth Capital 2023 programme, was implemented in the city. This programme aimed to consolidate the city's volunteer infrastructure and extend training and support to those participating in it (Lublin City Office, 2022c).

Volunteer work formed the core of LSCAU's activities. Many of its volunteers were (mainly Ukrainian and Belarusian) students from the University College of Enterprise and Administration in Lublin and other local universities. As mentioned before, some volunteers were City Hall employees, a number of whom later changed professional path by moving to departments more engaged with social issues or establishing lasting cooperation with local NGOs. The Homo Faber Association, for example, went from an organisation employing three people before the invasion to a staff of around 80 at the peak of its aid activities. Some volunteers have also found permanent employment in the collective accommodation facilities, which were still in operation under city management in 2024, as well as in other units of the municipal administration.

7.5.4 From Reception to Integration: Pioneering Solutions for Culture and Education

The first measures taken at the end of February 2024 in Lublin mainly revolved around the provision of shelter, food and medical and psychological care to refugees. Over time, the range of activities offered by the various actors broadened and became more organised.

Well, the process of those early days, I think, could be compared to a supermarket where everyone thinks they just have to buy what's on offer. After three months, it feels more like a thriving store with a wide range of products. (LA/NGO)

Culture and education were important areas in which the city went beyond the realm of emergency and social assistance to facilitate the integration of refugees. The City Hall set up a platform called Spilna Kultura to disseminate information on cultural activities aimed at, among others, refugees. In autumn 2022, the UNICEF-funded Spilno Lublin centre was set up as a joint initiative of the city and a consortium of NGOs to run activities for young residents of Lublin from both Poland and

Ukraine.¹⁴ The city's budget for 2024 includes additional funds for the continued operation of this centre (Lublin City Office, 2023a). The city has vaunted the principle that culture plays a vital role in the integration of migrants into the local community even as some of the measures taken contradict this principle. For example, the Mayor of Lublin appointed a Commissioner for Inclusion through Culture in 2022 but this position only existed for a short period of time. The Spilna Kultura platform is also no longer operational.

In contrast, a new project called Baobab has been operating in Lublin since the beginning of 2023. It has been described as 'a new space in the centre of Lublin for integration, a place for the exchange of experiences, the realisation of projects, talks and, above all, meetings of migrants and migrant women, refugees and residents of Lublin' (Baobab, 2023). The project is run by the city in partnership with the Homo Faber Association (as a leader) and other organisations including Plast, the Ukrainian scouting organisation, and Doświed, a Belarusian cultural centre. It is funded by the UNHCR. Baobab has become a meeting place for numerous migrant communities besides the Ukrainian community. The project provides free legal advice, intercultural assistance, childcare, psychological support and a multicultural library, among other things. A report on the project's activities in its first year of operation reveals the following achievements: more than 2000 legal advisory services were provided; 3400 children visited the information point and took part in 150 workshops; 2500 books in 24 languages were placed in the library; 29 Polish language courses were organised; 2494 psychological consultations were provided; 41 crisis interventions were undertaken and 900 other support activities were carried out at clinics, hospitals and offices. A total of 10,000 people passed through the information point (Homo Faber Association, 2024). However, according to accounts given by staff, although Baobab has indeed become a meeting place and migrant-support hub, it has proved quite difficult to attract ordinary Polish people to the centre so that 'old' and 'new' inhabitants of the city can from each other.

As far as education is concerned, Lublin's municipal government was the first to hire Ukrainians under the 'Cash for Work' programme when it employed a number of refugees as teachers in March 2022. This initiative, undertaken in partnership with the Polish Centre for International Aid Foundation, was a pioneering idea eventually implemented on a national scale. There were 49 teachers in the programme when it started and 98 at its peak, though as a result of the end of the project and the termination of external funding there are currently (as of the end of January 2024) 16 people working on the project (Lublin City Office, 2023c). The 'Cash for Work' programme also allowed Ukrainian educators to be employed in Lublin schools from March 30th 2023. Their role was to assist students, teachers and parents to integrate and work together. During the summer holidays, they also supported the city's cultural institutions and NGOs, implementing activities as part of the city's annual 'Summer in the City' programme. They assisted the guardians of Ukrainian

¹⁴ Spilno Lublin ceased its activities in 2025 and was transformed into Spilno Hub—a space for non-governmental organisations.

children in communicating with their charges and involving them in games, workshops or sports activities. The educators worked in 39 schools in Lublin. In addition, 16 educational and cultural workers, 25 translators, two psychologists and a legal aid worker were employed. The programme ran until October 2023 (Lublin City Office, 2024a).

Data from Lublin City Hall show that approximately 2000 refugee children are still (in 2024) enrolled in Lublin schools or kindergartens run by the local government or other educational institutions. This figure has remained relatively stable since the beginning of the war (Lublin City Office, 2024c). While these figures are in line with recent nationwide surveys, the low level of participation of refugee children in the Polish education system remains an issue: more than 54% of Ukrainian refugee children residing in Poland do not attend Polish educational institutions. (Some of these children study in Ukrainian schools online, and there is no information about others (The Centre for Citizenship Education, 2024).). At the same time, there has been a decrease in the number of Ukrainian teachers, educators, psychologists and intercultural assistants employed in Lublin, even as demand for their work remains unchanged.

7.5.5 Paths of Anticipated Stabilisation

One important factor in the city's effective multilevel response to the crisis situation proved to be diversity, not only in terms of participating sectors but also in terms of the ideology of the actors involved in the relief effort. The three social organisations that founded LSCAU (the Homo Faber Association, the Foundation for the Spiritual Culture of the Borderland and the Foundation Institute for the Rule of Law) represent completely different world views. Yet, somewhat surprisingly, this diversity served as a stable foundation for the effectiveness of LSCAU's cross border work in the months that followed. From mid-2023 onwards, the scope of cooperation between these entities seems to have reduced; as sector leaders had predicted, they have reverted to their principal 'specialisations'. According to local leaders, public institutions, NGOs and organisations interested in supporting and integration activities are increasingly being forced to compete with each other as they apply for ever more limited funding from external sources.

There is a certain amount of competition. As you know, non-governmental organisations are not self-sufficient and then there is competition for funds between the different social organisations... However, we are not aspiring to create some kind of closed organisation, we have some ideas and want others to cooperate. If other organisations are willing to cooperate, we do work together. If they don't see such an opportunity or need, then - no. (REL)

As LSCAU began to wind down its activities, the launch of the Baobab space helped restructure the activities the city was undertaking in support of refugees. The Civic Dialogue Commission also became active again at this time. At the end of 2023, several roundtables and workshops were organised by the CDC with the

participation of institutions, organisations and informal initiatives operating in the area of migration and integration in the broadest sense. The aim of these sessions was to workshop ideas for and consider challenges relating to the creation of a new long-term integration policy for the city of Lublin. Leadership roles in this process were taken by the CDC's co-chairs—the Participation Office of the Lublin City Hall and the Homo Faber Association (Lublin City Office, 2024b). These activities are reflected in the city's 2024 budget, which includes funding for both emergency measures and projects aimed at integrating Ukrainian refugees into the local community (Lublin City Office, 2023a).

One of the key challenges faced by Lublin will be to maintain and develop the pioneering educational initiatives that had such a positive impact in 2022, the first year of the crisis. It remains to be seen whether such important and innovative measures as the employment of Ukrainian teachers, intercultural assistants, educators, psychologists and translators in Lublin's educational institutions will be affected by the city's loss of external funding. The work of projects such as Baobab is also currently dependent on external support although, as we have seen, the local government is also contributing to meeting these costs. Financial questions have been and continue to be crucial as far as the successful delivery of aid activities is concerned, especially given the inadequacy of funding received by local government in the form of government subsidies. According to our interviewees, at the stage at which the most intensive aid activities were taking place in Lublin, it was the local governments of foreign partner cities and international organisations that offered the most financial support. Interestingly, the intensive relief measures implemented by the local government in Lublin did not significantly change the functioning of that institution, despite the active involvement of many staff in addition to material and financial resources. In this sense, local government structures showed a high degree of organisational resilience.

The largest [donor] is UNICEF, which by March this year had donated 18 million zloty, of which 16 million was in cash. There is also aid from our partner cities, above all, Münster, which provides financial aid through the Lublin-Münster association. We're talking about several million zloty. There are also smaller [donors], along with the Taiwanese community in Poland and small donations from various other sources [...] We recently had a quality-management audit and I was asked whether regulations had been changed in the area that I am responsible for. The answer was no. It turns out that the regulations that we had were flexible enough. We didn't need significant changes to the City Council's regulations, not that we weren't prepared to make them, there just wasn't the need. (LA)

Finally, an important current challenge from the point of view of local migration management concerns how data is gathered on the presence of migrants in the city. Attempts are being made to create a dedicated municipal-level research unit in line with principles of evidence-based policy formulation and in cooperation with other local institutions, e.g. academic institutions.

7.6 Conclusion

The majority of the actors involved made a positive assessment of the crisis management processes put in place at the local level in response to a sudden influx of refugees in Lublin. The solutions put in place in the city proved effective, especially in the reception phase of the crisis, allowing support to be provided to a very large number of people over a short time. This support provided was also multifaceted and specialised. Several key factors focused on different analytical dimensions enabling local resilience during the crisis can be identified.

The first is the existence of partnership networks that can be exploited when unforeseen circumstances arise. These networks principally involved the key social actors in the city and the local administration, who had historically worked together through the CDC. The fact that many city officials had a background in social work or community organising was another helpful factor and helped provide the social basis for an effective administrative response.

Cooperation also took place internationally and was developed through links forged via previous cross-border collaboration with Ukrainian partners, whether in partner cities, through business links or as the organic result of economic and educational migration to Lublin over many years.

The models of cooperation thus developed and the very existence of relationships on the other side of the border made it possible to take quicker and more effective decisions around the organisation of support, including aid sent from the city to Ukraine itself. This could be referred to as a spatial dimension of the emergency response grounded in obvious and less obvious social-network structures.

Another factor relates to time and the variability and flexibility of aid provision. As the informal leader of the relief effort in the city, LSCAU operated in many different areas, dynamically changing its operations according to need. Decisions to launch further services or terminate provision were made collectively and seamlessly. Other examples of flexibility included the changing competences of the various actors involved, the changing number and role of volunteers and the circumvention or 'bending' of procedures. In a nutshell, the city's decision to cooperate with community organisations sped up response times considerably and helped transcend the 'institutional inertia' (Podgórska, 2025) characteristic of public institutions.

A last factor positively influencing the city's performance in the crisis was flexibility around the management of information and a willingness to make constructive use of resources and dynamically emerging opportunities. Knowledge here represents the learning dimension. One example was the city's provision for LSCAU of a space in a building housing a civic cultural centre. This arrangement was made without a specific, formalised cooperation agreement or the delegation of city officials to assist volunteers. The city's use of previously unexploited kinds of capital to support the development of new solutions (e.g. employing experienced volunteers at the city's collective accommodation points in the later stages of the crisis) was also of significant importance in terms of the effectiveness of the crisis management response. Such an approach on the part of city administrators allowed the moment of openness

in the system occasioned by the crisis to be exploited to undertake innovative (e.g. hiring Ukrainian teachers in schools) or long-term measures (e.g. the launch of a multi-dimensional integration centre like Baobab) and pursue 'proactive', resilient solutions.

The MLG approach taken by Lublin was grounded in the leadership role assumed by the local administration, which went beyond the framework established by central government to position Lublin as more than simply a transit point for refugees. In such cases the vertical dimension of relationships in multilevel governance loses significance in favour of horizontal, multi-sectoral cooperation among actors closely rooted in the local context. The tasks carried out by representatives of the central administration in Lublin were, in sense, performed along a secondary, separate circuit and there was only infrequent communication between these systems around e.g. the operation of city-run information and reception points, leading to minor frictions.

In this sense, our research findings contribute to ongoing scholarly discussions of the leading role played by horizontal relationships in MLG approaches to crisis situations (Iraklis et al., 2021). The subsystem created in Lublin to manage the presence of a high number of refugees from Ukraine after February 24th 2022, and grounded in previously developed social capital, would seem to represent a *decoupled model* of migration governance (Scholten, 2013) characterised by a degree of self-autonomy for local authorities (who undertook pioneering initiatives around e.g. education) and the subsidiary yet crucial role played by a wide range of social organisations. In evaluating the effectiveness of such an approach, it is important to consider how the horizontal relationships established or strengthened during the crisis will contribute, over the long term, to the development of a distinctive local approach to migration governance. This topic could serve as the basis for further research.

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Chapter 8

Analysis of the Labour-Market Situation of Ukrainian Forced Migrants in Romania: Case Study—The City of Oradea



Edina Lilla Mészáros

8.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the initial response of Romanian decision-makers to forced migration caused by the conflict in Ukraine, examining what migration governance model was implemented. However, the main objective of the paper is to analyse refugee reception and the labour-market situation in Romania, specifically in the border city of Oradea and Bihor County. Despite growing interest among scholars in analysing Romania's migration profile and integration capacities, the literature on refugee/migration governance and the labour-market integration of third-country nationals remains scarce, especially in the case of border cities like Oradea (Coşciug, 2022). Existing research analyses migration and refugee governance at the national level, while studies looking at local governance models primarily evaluate integration in the capital city, Bucharest, and urban centres such as Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara, Iași, Constanța and Galați (Centrul pentru Studiul Comparat al Migrației, 2023). I argue that the border city status of Oradea encouraged Ukrainian displaced persons to use the city and surrounding Bihor County mainly as transit areas. Despite the city's welcoming profile and the availability of jobs, the vast majority of Ukrainian forced migrants opted to relocate to neighbouring countries such as Poland, owing to established ties and amicable relations prior to the conflict, or to countries further west such as Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (EWL Migration Platform, 2023; IAB Report, 2024). Based on information received from the Bihor County Employment Agency, the vast majority of jobs available to Ukrainian TP holders in Oradea and in Bihor County were in the manual-labour or blue-collar

E. L. Mészáros (✉)
University of Oradea, Oradea, Romania
e-mail: meszaros.edina@uoradea.ro

sectors, resulting in limited opportunities for those with a higher level of education. Furthermore, despite Bihor having one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country at 1.3% at the end of 2023, the average monthly net wage of 3856 lei is still below the national net monthly salary level (Chişbora, 2024). I thus contend that the employment opportunities and wages on offer were insufficient to persuade a greater number of Ukrainian displaced persons to pursue employment in Oradea and Bihor County (The Social and Economic Status of Bihor County, 2023c; Monthly Statistical Bulletin of Bihor County, 2023b). Given that the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and forced migration of Ukrainian citizens hinders the saturation of specialist literature, I am confident that the present chapter, which examines the integration of Ukrainian forced migrants into the Romanian labour market through a case study of a medium-sized border town, will advance this volume's primary aim of addressing gaps in the existing literature by offering an innovative analysis of migration governance in Central and Eastern European cities post-2015.

8.2 Literature Review

Modern migratory trends pose new challenges for decision-makers, revealing the insufficiency of national policy frameworks and integration models and demanding more involvement from local actors, including tailor-made solutions. Many scholars have argued in favour of more decentralised migration governance, with more power handed over to cities and municipalities. They contend that local authorities can leverage their expertise in the local context in response to migratory phenomenon and often demonstrate a more practical and results-driven approach by comparison to central decision-makers (Bosswick et al., 2007; Penninx, 2009). Yet despite frequent lobbying for decentralisation to promote efficient integration policies, prominent scholars in the field such as Penninx admit that this is no panacea. Penninx asserts that the transfer of power and competences from a central to a local level must be carried out within the framework of multilevel governance to prevent a downturn in the quality of public services. He argues that the delivery of successful integration policies needs to be based on coordination between actors at various levels. Local authorities also need to be granted additional resources, tools and autonomy to make decisions according to their specific local conditions while following the general guidelines for integration laid down at supranational (EU) and national levels (Penninx, 2009).

Nevertheless, in the absence of a national framework, cities frequently assume a leading role in the integration of migrants and refugees (Kraal et al., 2017; Penninx & Martiniello, 2004). Moreover, as Scholten argues, a policy-making hierarchy in which local decision-makers simply execute national directives reduces policy effectiveness (Scholten, 2013, 2016). Scholten's theory of multilevel governance proposes four distinct governance models to describe the relationship between national-level and urban migrant integration policies. The first model, the *centralist type*, promotes a top-down hierarchical model of policy-making in which local authorities are expected

to strictly follow national directives. In this model, various control mechanisms, such as the creation of specialised departments and the designation of responsible officials, ensure the execution of the central policy framework at local level. The second model, the *localist (devolved) type*, is the opposite of the centralist one, and advances a bottom-up position based on principles of subsidiarity. Within such a system, local authorities are given more autonomy and exchange know-how horizontally with central decision-makers as well as being actively involved in local processes of policy formulation. The third type of model describes perfect multi-level governance, in which vertical rather than horizontal interactions characterise the relations between decision-makers at various levels. Instead of a policy-making hierarchy, the multilevel governance model favours mutual dialogue and coordination between actors who meet through ‘vertical venues’ such as forums or networks. The last model proposed by Scholten describes a type of governance in which vertical relations are missing and a decoupling takes place between actors at various levels, leading to policy contradictions and reducing policy effectiveness (Scholten, 2013, 2016).

8.3 Background: The Profile of the City of Oradea (Bihor County)

8.3.1 *The General Profile of Oradea and Bihor County*

Oradea is located in north western Romania on both banks of the Crişul Repede River, 8 km from the Hungarian border and 294 km from its Ukrainian twin city, Ivano-Frankivsk. It has traditionally been perceived as the western gateway to Romania and Transylvania and remains an important transport hub (Dukrét & Péter, 2006). From an administrative-territorial point of view, the centralised model best describes the governance model implemented at national level in Romania (G4Media.ro, 2024). However, after several failed decentralisation projects, a Law on Decentralisation was finally enacted in June 2024, giving more power to local actors. Town halls, for example, were empowered to take over projects of national interest (Law no. 222/2024). Romania has 8 Development Regions, 41 counties (not counting the Municipality of Bucharest) and 103 municipalities. Oradea has the status of a municipality. The seat of Bihor County, it is among the main urban centres of Romania, and is among the top 10 most populous Romanian cities (INS, 2023). According to the 2021 census, the population of Bihor County is 551 297, while the Municipality of Oradea numbered 183 105 residents. Romanians are the biggest ethnic group in Bihor County at 69%, followed by Hungarians at 22.3% and Roma people at 7.2%. The ethnic composition of the Municipality of Oradea is similar (INS, 2023). According to the last census, both Bihor and Oradea have registered a decline in the number of inhabitants. This is mainly the result of emigration and demographic ageing. The 2021 census testifies to Oradea’s multicultural and multiethnic heritage, registering

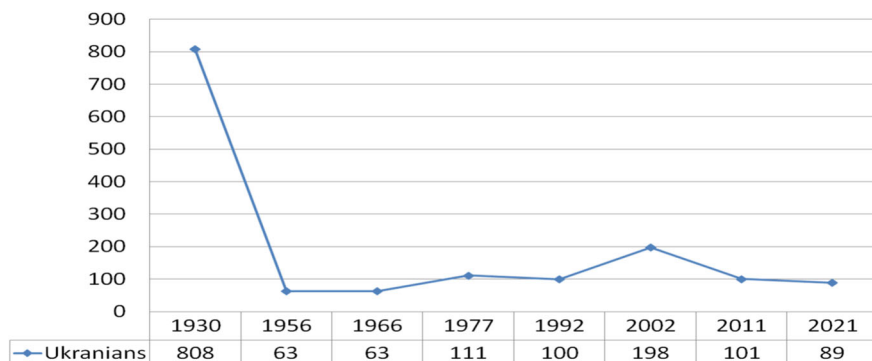


Fig. 8.1 The evolution of the number of Ukrainian ethnic minorities in Bihor County according to census data from 1930–2021 (*Source* Compiled by the author based on INS census data from 1930–2021)

at least 14 different ethnic groups besides the three largest ethnicities. The same diversity can be observed in respect of religion, with more than twenty different religions being practised in the city. As Figs. 8.1 and 8.2 demonstrate, the number of Ukrainians residing in Bihor/Oradea is relatively low compared to e.g. Suceava and Maramureş Counties, where there is a significant Ukrainian presence.

In terms of investment, Oradea has successfully competed with bigger urban centres such as Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca and Iaşi to attract EU funds and implement projects of significant volume and value. In 2022 Oradea's City Hall was charged with implementing 44 projects in receipt of European funding, with a total worth of 224 million Euros (Ivanov, 2022). Evaluations by international credit rating agencies are of utmost importance to foreign companies considering investments in a specific country or city. According to Fitch Ratings, the Municipality of Oradea has maintained a stable outlook and good rating for long-term loans in foreign and national currency over more than a decade (Fitch Ratings, 2023 and 2024; Primăria Oradea, 2023). In 2022 and 2023 Oradea was also among the top 10 small European cities in terms of cost effectiveness (fDI Intelligence, 2022 and 2023).

In respect of employment and net wages, the average monthly net salary in Bihor at the end of 2022 was 3401 lei. The unemployment rate at county level was 1.2% (The Social and Economic Status of Bihor County, 2023c; Bihor County Statistical Yearbook, 2022). This upward trajectory was maintained in 2023 as well, with November figures listing 184,039 residents of Bihor County as employed and 3129 as unemployed, with an average monthly net wage of 3856 lei. The unemployment rate has remained low at 1.3% (Monthly Statistical Bulletin of Bihor County, 2023b). Accordingly, Bihor County has one of the lowest unemployment levels in the country, though net salaries remain below national level.

As regards employment opportunities, the Oradea Local Development Agency manages the city's four Industrial Parks under the direct supervision of the Municipality and is responsible for attracting investors. To incentivise investment, tax

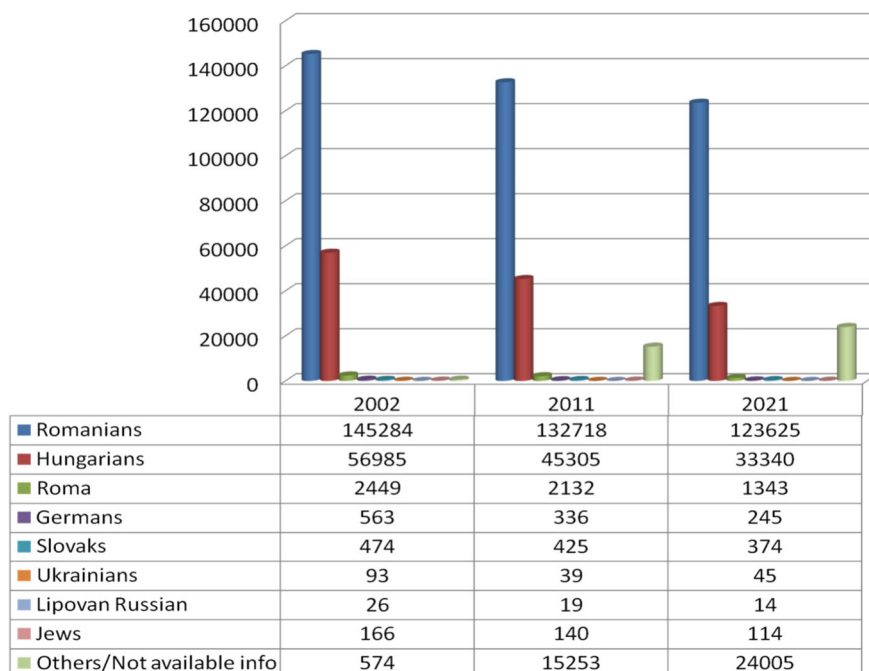


Fig. 8.2 The evolution of the number of the resident population of Oradea Municipality by ethnicity according to the census data from 2002–2021 (*Source* Compiled by the author based on the INS census data from 2002–2021)

breaks are available to all leaseholders in the Industrial Park (Oradea Local Development Agency, 2024). Among the plants operating within the four Industrial Parks can be found leading foreign companies such as Nidec, Stihl, AstorMueller group, Ford, FAIST Mekatronic, Hanning, Zucchetti, Ravenol and IWIS (Oradea Local Development Agency, 2024). Moreover, Nokian Tyres, a Finnish tyre manufacturing company, is soon to open a plant in Oradea after relocating from Russia. Nokian brings with it substantial investment of more than 650 million Euros. Production is due to start in 2025, creating more than 500 new jobs and making Oradea the first city in the world to produce tyres with zero CO₂ emissions (Ministrul Muncii și Solidarității Sociale, 2024). This brief assessment is intended to familiarise the reader with the city's profile, revealing its attractiveness for foreign investors and giving the lay of the land in terms of investments, wages and job creation.

8.3.2 The Immigration Profile of Oradea and Bihor County

Analysis of the region's immigration profile indicates that both Oradea and Bihor County receive mainly transit migration, principally third-country nationals arriving

since the start of the war in Ukraine. Due to their proximity to the Hungarian border, Oradea and Bihor are not commonly chosen by migrants as entry points or key destinations (Immigration Bureau of Bihor County; Territorial Inspectorate of the Oradea Border Police). However, the 2015 crisis led to an escalation in illegal border crossings at the border between Hungary and Romania, with Oradea and Bihor also witnessing a surge in irregular migratory activity. Based on data provided by Oradea Border Police, there was a significant rise-650%-in the number of illegal border crossings (2400) in 2017.¹ Since then, the situation at the border has normalised (Digi24, 2017). Otherwise, since the end of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a rise in the number of foreign workers; this increase can be attributed to a labour shortage caused by the out-migration of qualified local workers, both abroad and to bigger Romanian urban centres (Consiliul Judeţean Bihor, 2021). Since 2021/2022² there has been an exponential increase in the number of work and residence permits issued by the Immigration Bureau of Bihor County. The vast majority of foreign workers are from financially disadvantaged Asian countries such as Nepal, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh (Ghilea, 2024; Paşcu, 2023). Oradea is also a university city, home to the University of Oradea, which attracts more and more foreign students each year, most of whom are pursuing medical studies in the city (Totorean, 2023). Nevertheless, the vast majority choose not to stay in the city or county once they have graduated. Due to the historically low number of asylum seekers and other migrants who have chosen to settle in Oradea and Bihor, the creation of a self-sufficient local strategy for the integration of third-country nationals has never been prioritised. However, the Integrated Sustainable Development Strategy of Bihor County for 2021–2027 makes reference to alignment with the main strategic directions laid down at supranational EU level, such as those enshrined in the EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum (Consiliul Judeţean Bihor, 2021). Moreover, at a local level, emphasis has been put on the greater representation of vulnerable groups and ethnic minorities, including Roma people, in the local labour market. Their integration is also prioritised in the Bihor County Strategy for the Development of Social Services over the Medium and Long Term (2022–2031). Within this strategy, refugees, asylum seekers and refugee children appear as vulnerable groups eligible for assistance and financial support via the Bihor County Agency for Payments and Social Inspection (Consiliul Judeţean Bihor, 2022).

Despite lacking a distinct migrant integration strategy, Oradea and Bihor have policies, institutions and agencies dealing with all aspects of the integration of TCNs. The main institution overseeing the integration of third-country nationals in Romania, the General Inspectorate for Immigration, is organised into county departments, regional centres for processing and housing asylum seekers and accommodation centres for foreign nationals in state custody. At a territorial level, the Inspectorate is divided into directorates, services and other functional divisions. One of 14 regional integration centres is located in Oradea, which is within the jurisdiction of the Regional

¹ In 2018, 190 applications for employment permits were received and 183 were granted. As far as unlawful residence in Bihor is concerned, 16 undocumented migrants were reported.

² In 2021, 101 undocumented migrants were reported at county level.

Centre of the General Inspectorate for Immigration at Timișoara. The General Inspectorate for Immigration also has a local bureau in Oradea. Moreover, several local NGOs support public authorities around the reception and integration of migrants (Official Site of Inspectorate General for Immigration). One of the most relevant institutions of this kind is the Oradea Philanthropy Association, which opened an Information and Counselling Centre for Third Country Nationals in Romania in 2012 (Asociația Filantropia Oradea). Effective collaboration between local authorities and civil society representatives on national projects aimed at the integration of TCNs and beneficiaries of protection (BPs) evidences not only cross-departmental engagement in migrant affairs, but also represents a collaborative form of migration governance. In 2022–2023, for instance, Bihor County Prefect's Institution was a direct partner on a project promoting the integration of TCNs and BPs in the county. This project was financed by the EU and the General Inspectorate for Immigration through FAMI, the National Programme-Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AidRom, 2024). A similar programme under the title Integration Services for Beneficiaries of Protection and Foreigners Legally Residing in the Western Region of Romania, is currently being implemented in Bihor County. The primary goal of the project is to enhance the level of integration of both TCNs residing legally in Romania and BPs by engaging local communities and institutions and providing comprehensive integration services (România e acasă, 2024). World Refugee Day is also celebrated locally on a yearly basis, on June 20th (Sim, 2024).

8.4 Methodology

This chapter ventures a multilevel analysis, assessing the reception, accommodation and labour-market situation of displaced persons from Ukraine in Romania at the macro (national), meso (county, NGO, civil society) and local (city) levels. My primary objective is to identify which governance model(s) are used at each level of analysis (particularly at the local level) and to consider why, in spite of their cordial reception and the availability of jobs, the city and county have not been favoured by Ukrainian forced migrants for long-term stays and labour-market integration. Based on available data, I contend that transit migration is characteristic of the county and city under investigation, even in the cases of third-country nationals who came before and after the 2015 migration crisis and Ukrainian displaced persons arriving in 2022. The novelty of the topic and visible lacunae in the specialist literature on migration, refugee governance and labour-market integration in Romanian border cities like Oradea motivate my decision to rely predominantly on primary sources. My research is mainly based on qualitative analysis of official documents, reports, legislation, communications, press releases and newspaper articles published at national, county and local levels. A quantitative analysis of Romanian census data over the period 1930–2021 will familiarise the reader with the ethnic profile of both Romania and Oradea (Bihor County). On the basis of Law 544/2001 governing free access to information of public interest, I sent formal requests to the Immigration Bureau of

Bihor County and the Bihor County Employment Agency for accurate data on the number of Ukrainian beneficiaries of international protection and their labour-market situation in Oradea and Bihor. However, it must be noted that the two institutions do not provide separate data on Oradea, only on Bihor as a whole. Similarly, the Bihor County Directorate of Statistics similarly issues data on salaries, employment and unemployment exclusively at a county level, without city-specific information.

8.5 Results: A Brief Examination of Romania's Ethnic Pluralism and Its Initial Response to Forced Migration from Ukraine in 2022

Historical and demographic factors mean Romania has never been either an important colonial country or a significant destination for non-European migrants. However, close examination of the country's ethnic map reveals that, in addition to the Romanian majority, there are a number of ethnic communities with distinct religious, cultural and linguistic traditions. Hungarians, Roma, Ukrainians, Germans, Russians-Lipovans, Turks, Tatars, Serbians, Slovaks, Bulgarians, Croatians, Greeks, Jews, Czechs, Poles, Italians, Chinese, Armenians, Csangos, Macedonians and others are examples of ethnic minorities in the country. Romania can therefore be seen as an ethnically pluralist state. There are, however, hardly any non-European minorities (Dumitrescu et al., 2008). According to the latest census data, from 2021, Romanians represent 78% of the total population, Hungarians 5.35%, Roma people 3% and Ukrainians less than 1%. Other ethnicities represent less than 1% of the population (INS, 2022).

As census data from 1930–2021 reveals, Ukrainians are the third largest minority in Romania after Hungarians and Roma people. Counties close to the border with Ukraine, such as Suceava and Maramureş, register the highest number of Ukrainian ethnic minority residents along with the capital, Bucharest (INS, 2022) (Fig. 8.3).

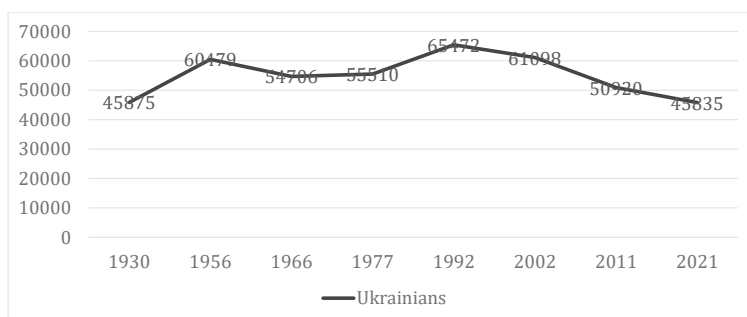


Fig. 8.3 Evolution of the number of Ukrainian ethnic Ukrainians in Romania according to census data from 1930–2021 (*Source* Compiled by the author based on INS census data from 1930–2021)

8.5.1 Romania's Early Crisis Response Mechanism

Assessing the management of the humanitarian crisis prompted by the 2022 war in Ukraine, we can observe a sharp difference in how Ukrainian displaced persons were received at national and local level compared to the reception of TCNs arriving during and after the 2015 refugee reception crisis. Owing to geographical proximity, shared history and similarities in culture and religion, people escaping the conflict in Ukraine were received more favourably in Romania than asylum seekers and migrants from Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Like the general public, employers responded positively to displaced Ukrainians at a national and local level, showing willingness to employ them and even advertising 'Ukrainian-friendly' jobs (BestJobs, 2022a, 2022b). This was the case even though before the outbreak of the war, relations between Romania and Ukraine had been rather chilly, mainly due to Romania's territorial losses to Ukraine during the 1940s, issues around the maritime border in the vicinity of Snake Island, differing views on the rights of the Romanian minority in Ukraine and the construction of the Bâstroe Channel in the Danube Delta (Ruse, 2023).

Many Ukrainian citizens fleeing the war opted to transit through Romania. By April 14th 2022, the Romanian Border Police had registered 704 074 border crossings by Ukrainian citizens. The proper management of the crisis thus required the coordinated efforts of various stakeholders at a national and sub-national level (Prime Minister's Chancellery, 2022, 2023; Government of Romania, 2024). According to government data, between February 24th 2022 and July 31st 2024, a total of 4494 Ukrainian citizens applied for asylum, 166 720 benefitted from temporary protection and 188 obtained some form of international protection (Report on the Integration, 2024b).

Romania launched a two-phase early response scheme, with an emergency response in the first phase and the protection and integration of refugees receiving priority in the second. In terms of time frame, Putin signed the invasion decree on February 22nd 2022 and a national coordination strategy meeting was convened by the Romanian Prime Minister on February 23rd. This meeting was attended by relevant national, international and civil society stakeholders. It can therefore be stated that a whole-society approach was favoured by national decision-makers from the outset. The first phase of the response lasted until March 19th 2022, when preparations began for the second phase (Prime Minister's Chancellery, 2023). The initial phase, under the direction of the Department for Emergency Situations (DES), involved immediate action being taken at the national level to assist Ukrainian refugees. Further, the dire circumstances that arose at the border necessitated a re-evaluation of the legislative framework resulting in the implementation of novel approaches and the adoption of extraordinary measures. The new legislation was the result of coordinated efforts and consultation between various stakeholders. The first phase in the governance of the emergency situation was characterised by a top-down approach, particularly around the establishment of multiple task forces and strategic

groups as well as the development of a new legal framework. However, local authorities were also involved in decision-making, creating their own customised operational plans based on their assessment of local need. Central governmental agencies were instrumental, however, in terms of crisis coordination and drafting legislation. Several consultations were held between representatives of relevant national and sub-national agencies, intergovernmental organisations, NGOs and private actors (Prime Minister's Chancellery, 2023).

The second phase of the national response consisted of several measures taken to promote the protection and inclusion of Ukrainian refugees and TP holders who decided to stay and work in Romania in the medium to long term. Six working groups were established covering the most important areas from health to education, labour, accommodation, vulnerable people and youth. Each group worked under the direct supervision of a relevant national ministry; their functioning was overseen by the Humanitarian Assistance Strategic Coordination Group, which was charged with elaborating sector-based action plans in close collaboration with experts from civil society and UN agencies. The principal aim of the second phase of the response was to formulate a National Action Plan in accordance with provisions outlined in the sector-based plans. On the other hand, although the main guidelines continued to be handed down from the level of central government, local authorities played a bigger role in this phase, initiating a collaborative (bottom-up) form of refugee governance. The policy measures that eventually emerged were the results of inter-institutional consultations, feedback from local authorities and the participation of local government representatives in policy-formulation discussions. Besides local authorities, regular consultations also took place with representatives of national NGOs, civil society organisations and relevant international agencies (Prime Minister's Chancellery, 2022, 2023; Government of Romania, 2024a).

As regards the role of civil society organisations, their contribution to assisting forced migrants from Ukraine was substantial, both during the initial intervention phase and subsequently. NGOs responded promptly to the initial influx of Ukrainian refugees into Romania by establishing mobile emergency services at border crossing points and emergency response services in various cities across the country. As the conflict in Ukraine persisted and the needs of displaced individuals evolved, the services provided to them by non-governmental organisations also diversified. Services introduced for Ukrainian displaced persons covered areas including education, healthcare, emergency aid, rehabilitation, specific therapies and the prevention of abuse, violence and trafficking (Petrescu, 2023).

8.5.2 What Measures Were Taken at Meso and Micro Levels Around the Reception of Ukrainian Displaced Persons?

Examining the measures taken in respect of the reception and integration of Ukrainian forced migrants at the level of the city of Oradea, we can conclude that such measures

were the results of coordinated efforts between various county and local stakeholders following guidelines laid down by government institutions. Accordingly, we have decided to assess jointly the meso and micro levels of refugee governance, due to their intertwined nature.

With respect to the management of the humanitarian crisis, the main institution coordinating the humanitarian efforts at the level of Bihor County was the Bihor County Prefect's Institution. According to national legislation, the Prefect is the representative of the government at the local level and is responsible for administering decentralised public services and organs of the central public administration operating at county level. The prefect is also responsible for leading county committees on emergency situations (OUG nr. 57/2029 art. 2). On February 26th 2022, two days after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Prefect of Bihor County called a meeting with representatives of organisations charged with upholding public order in Bihor County to discuss how humanitarian actions could be organised at county level. A prefect's order was issued directing all of the county's town halls to establish temporary collection points for non-perishable goods donated by citizens and NGOs. Four phone numbers were put at the disposal of those who wanted to provide assistance to Ukrainian refugees; these hotlines were coordinated by the County Intervention Coordination and Management Centre Bihor. An inter-institutional structure known as the County Centre for the Coordination and Management of Interventions is designed to support the County Committee for Emergency Situations to make decisions and coordinate interventions relating to emergency situations that impact the county. In cases of extreme emergency and complexity, the County Centre for Management and Coordination of Interventions is activated (ISUJIS, 2024). The County Centre for Management and Coordination of Intervention was the main institutionalised command centre charged with handling the flow of Ukrainian forced migrants at the level of Bihor County (ISUJIS, 2024). On February 28th 2022, a meeting gathered all of the relevant stakeholders at the level of Bihor County and Oradea. Principal topics of discussion included how to manage the flow of services, goods and financial contributions that individuals or private organisations wished to provide to Ukrainian refugees. As one of the first emergency measures, the Municipality of Oradea put the Hotel Citadel at the disposal of Ukrainian displaced persons transiting the city and requiring temporary accommodation. It also set up two telephone lines run by the Oradea Social Assistance Directorate and two more run by the General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection for Bihor for citizens wishing to offer accommodation to displaced people (Prefectura Bihor, 2022a; Prefectura Oradea, 2022b). The Municipality also allowed the county branch of the Union of Ukrainians to use part of the premises of the Oradea Local Transport (OTL) bus depot as a storage space. OTL also laid on transportation to facilitate the reception of forced migrants and their transfer to lodgings, the railway station or the airport. By the end of February 2022, 9000 accommodation spaces had been made available to displaced people in Bihor County, to which were added private homes and spaces that could be temporarily set up in gyms (Primăria Oradea, 2022a; Primăria Oradea, 2022b). On the basis of an initial impact assessment made by the local authorities and taking into account the number and profile of displaced persons, during the first

wave³ Bihor County and Oradea served mainly as transit zones for Ukrainian citizens heading for other countries. During this phase, Bihor and Oradea served mainly as a support county and city for Satu-Mare County and its border crossing point at Halmeu. Later waves brought refugees with less or no financial means and no clear destination, prompting the local authorities to source long-term accommodation and facilitate access to employment. Accordingly, on March 15th 2022 the Bihor County Committee for Emergency Situations (CJSU), chaired by the prefect, approved a list of accommodation options for Ukrainian refugees. Statistical data indicates that from the beginning of the war until the end of May 2022, 3430 Ukrainian citizens were accommodated in Bihor. In May 2022, 400 were still residing in the county (Totorean, 2022). In the first year after the outbreak of the conflict, 1580 Ukrainian citizens were granted residence permits in Bihor. Between February 2022 and November 1st 2024, 2054 Ukrainian displaced persons requested and received temporary protection in Bihor, with the Immigration Bureau of Bihor County issuing 2054 residence permits (Immigration Bureau of Bihor County, 2024).

With the launch of the national-level 50/20 programme, people from Oradea and Bihor offering accommodation to Ukrainian beneficiaries of international protection could be reimbursed to the tune of 50 lei per person per day for housing and 20 lei per person per day for meals. This financial assistance was provided by the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations through the county's town halls (Guvernul României, 2024).

Under the direct supervision of the 'Crişana' Inspectorate for Emergency Situations and in close collaboration with the County Intervention Coordination and Management Centre for Bihor, the Bihor Humanitarian Assistance Centre for Refugees began to operate in Oradea on March 29th 2022 with the principal goal of providing immediate and long-term assistance for Ukrainian displaced persons. Several information points were organised within the centre, helping refugees with direct information about their rights, psychological counselling, labour-market integration and other specialised services. Due to a decrease in the number of Ukrainian forced migrants transiting the county and the city, the centre's activities were scaled down at the beginning of June 2022 and it was moved to another location under the management of a local NGO, the Oradea Community Foundation. Today, the centre is temporarily closed, as the number of Ukrainians transiting the county and the city has dropped drastically (Inspectoratul Pentru Situaţii de Urgenţă "Crişana" Bihor (2022); Europe Direct, 2022).

With respect to refugee governance, besides local and regional decision-makers NGOs and civil society played a crucial role in the management of the refugee flows. Moreover, a group of 46 NGOs united under the umbrella of a group called Bihor for Ukraine with the aim of providing a coherent response at the level of the local civil society (Asociaţia Anima Verde, 2023). On February 23rd 2023 local associations and non-governmental organisations supporting refugees from Ukraine presented their work for 2022 at a meeting convened by the County Commission

³ During this wave, most of the Ukrainian citizens who arrived were people with financial means for whom Bihor and Oradea were transit destinations.

of Equal Opportunities Between Women and Men in Bihor. Having described the reception of Ukrainian displaced persons at the level of Bihor County and the city of Oradea, my last subchapter will provide the reader with relevant information on their labour-market situation. Conversely, in 2024, although the number of foreign workers from economically disadvantaged Asian nations is increasing in Oradea and Bihor, there has been a consistent reduction in the number of Ukrainian displaced persons (Immigration Bureau of Bihor County; Sim, 2024).

8.6 An Evaluation of the Labour-Market Situation of Ukrainian Forced Migrants in the City of Oradea and Bihor County

Government Emergency Ordinance no. 20/2022 granted Ukrainian displaced persons access to the labour market for a period of one year with the possibility of extension, and without the need for a work permit. As a briefing by the National Agency for Employment revealed on March 11th 2024, since the beginning of the war a total of 21 654 Ukrainian TP beneficiaries have registered to receive information, careers advice and employment services through the National Employment Agency (ANOFM) and its territorial agencies at country level. The county under investigation, Bihor, was not among the top preferences of Ukrainian TP holders seeking employment. 2946 Ukrainian citizens have managed to find employment in the country using the services provided by the National Employment Agency.⁴ During this period, a total number of 633 Romanian employers expressed interest in hiring Ukrainian nationals, putting at their disposal 5701 jobs (ANOFM, 2024). The manufacturing industry, construction, trade, hotels and restaurants and the information and communications sectors recorded the highest number of closed employment contracts at national level (Report on the Integration, 2024a).

On the basis of a written request sent by the author of this paper to the Bihor County Employment Agency, data have been provided related to the number of Ukrainian forced migrants registered in their database. According to this data, from the beginning of the war (at the end of February 2022) until the January 30th 2024 a total of 281 Ukrainian TP holders (198 women, 83 men) benefited from employment support, information and advices services. The vast majority, 151, were between 25 and 45 years old, while 85 were over 45 and only 45 were under the age of 25 (Agenția Județeană pentru Ocuparea Forței de Muncă Bihor, 2024) (Fig. 8.4).

A total number of 94 Ukrainian citizens were recorded as employed for a fixed or indefinite period, the vast majority in the blue-collar sector (records go up to December 31st 2023). In the same time frame, companies and employers from Bihor/Oradea declared 140 job vacancies aimed at Ukrainian TP holders. The data shows that the lion's share of these jobs was in hotels, restaurants and the manufacturing

⁴ By the end of December 2023, a total number of 6.705 contracts were registered in the Revisal database at country level.

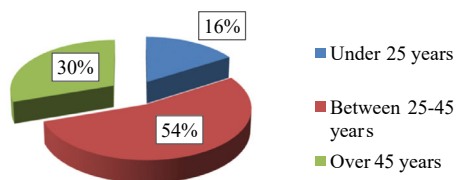


Fig. 8.4 Number of Ukrainian displaced persons who benefitted from employment support, information and advice through the Bihor County Employment Agency by age group (*Source* Data provided by the Bihor County Employment Agency)

sector. As underscored earlier, these are the sectors that have experienced the most severe shortages of labour at both a city and county level. As previously mentioned, local NGOs played a major role in the early reception of Ukrainian citizens fleeing the war and later provided free Romanian language courses to those who wanted to stay in the city in the long term. Through a project jointly developed by the Șinca and the Bihor Red Cross Bihor in June 2022 under the title Roua Educational Centre, both adults and children benefitted from free Romanian language courses, thus facilitating their labour-market integration (Sim, 2023). According to information provided by the National Employment Agency, between February 24th 2022 and July 31st 2024, 141 active employment contracts were registered for Ukrainian citizens were registered at the level of Bihor County (Government of Romania, 2024b).

8.7 Conclusions

Based on our analysis and taking into account Scholten's multilevel governance framework, we can conclude that Romania's strategy for managing forced migration from Ukraine had involved a combination of centralist (top-down) and localist (bottom-up) approaches, resulting in a hybrid mode of refugee governance. Analysing the management of forced migration from Ukraine by the Romanian authorities, we discover congruities between these national and local-level mod operandi and the governance model favoured by Penninx, through which local authorities are consulted and directly involved in decision-making processes while following guidelines established at the supranational and national levels. At the municipal level, there is no indication of policy decoupling or substantial inconsistencies. It appears that the local authorities followed guidelines laid down by the government while also being permitted to propose their own initiatives. Despite occasional invitations extended by the central apparatus to local authorities to participate in consultations and the development of local-level planning, the hierarchical nature of policy-making remains evident. The policy measures and legal framework that emerged were the result of collaborative work undertaken by diverse stakeholders at various levels of decision-making. As regards our main case study, Oradea, it is important to note that by comparison with larger urban centres in Central and

Eastern Europe, Oradea is a small city. Yet it is a city full of potential, open to entrepreneurs with an exceptional geographical location, ongoing investment in infrastructure modernisation. Due to its historical heritage, the city is home to many ethnicities and faiths and is also welcoming to foreigners. The lack of an autonomous local strategy for the integration of third-country nationals is attributable to Oradea's border city status; both before and after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine it has generally been seen by both TCNs and forced migrants as a transit destination. Information provided by representatives of the Bihor County Employment Agency validates our main assumption, according to which neither the county nor the city have become preferential destinations for Ukrainian nationals in search of employment. One of the main reasons for this may be the profile of available jobs. At the same time, we would contend that it is not only a lack of employment prospects but also the remuneration on offer that may have discouraged displaced Ukrainians from seeking employment in Oradea and Bihor County. Additionally, the fact of Oradea and Bihor being close to the Hungarian border has contributed to their use as transit zones. Ukrainian forced migrants have largely chosen to relocate to neighbouring countries such as Poland, due to established ties and amicable relations existing prior to the conflict, or to countries further west, such as Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, due to the superior services, better economic conditions and greater employment opportunities on offer there.

Ultimately, the statistics indicate that while the number of Ukrainian displaced persons residing in the city and county has been consistently decreasing, that number of foreign workers from Asia has gradually increased.

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Part IV

Shrinking Cities

Chapter 9

A Resilience Perspective on Migration Governance in a Shrinking City. The Case of Łomża's Response to Forced Migration from Ukraine in 2022



Joanna Zuzanna Popławska, Justyna Gać, Paulina Legutko-Kobus,
Marta Pachocka and Dominik Wach

9.1 Introduction

The diffusion of decision-making and administration among various actors at different levels typical of multilevel governance (MLG) is often viewed as an important element of a resilient system (Broadhurst & Gray, 2022). This is due to the possibility it creates for a rapid response, with the quick flow of information vertically and horizontally between various actors allowing crises or disasters to be managed more efficiently. The significant migration flows observed in Europe post-2015 and 2022 can undoubtedly be considered crisis situations. These flows exerted enormous pressure upon receiving countries, and particularly upon the local authorities and communities that directly encountered the new arrivals. It should therefore come as no surprise that migration scholars in Europe have paid increasing attention to local-level migration governance. As such scholars have noted, some cities, particularly larger metropolises, respond directly to the needs of their new migrant residents rather than merely implementing central government policies (Alexander, 2007; Caponio & Borkert, 2010; Schiller, 2017). Similarly, in Poland, and despite the country's relatively short post-1989 immigration history, the cities with the highest proportion of migrant residents, e.g. Kraków, Gdańsk, Warszawa or Wrocław, have undertaken initiatives in migration governance. This phenomenon has attracted the increasing attention of mainly Polish migration scholars (Mołęda-Zdziech et al.,

J. Z. Popławska (✉) · J. Gać · P. Legutko-Kobus · M. Pachocka · D. Wach
SGH Warsaw School of Economics, Warsaw, Poland
e-mail: jpopla@sgh.waw.pl

D. Wach
Centre of Migration Research, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland

2021; Okólski & Wach, 2020; Wach & Pachocka, 2022). Nonetheless, there remains a significant gap in the scholarship on medium-sized and small cities. Although such cities also play host to new migrants, their local authorities have tended not to see migration as an important issue. This situation began to change after 2014 when increasing numbers of migrant workers came to Poland, with some deciding to settle in smaller urban areas. Yet it was not until Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the resultant mass forced migration that immigration moved to the top of the political agenda. Although two-thirds of those fleeing Ukraine to Poland settled in the largest metropolises, medium and small-sized cities, too, faced the challenge of settling and supporting forced migrants (UMP, 2022).

In this chapter, using the case study of the city of Łomża and the forced-migration reception crisis of 2022, we seek to bridge gaps in the literature on how medium-sized cities respond to the challenges posed by migration. The chapter aims to analyse Łomża's response to the 2022 influx of Ukrainian forced migrants and to assess how various characteristics of the city fostered a resilient response. Our analysis of how the city of Łomża faced up to the challenges posed by migration represents both an empirical and theoretical contribution to the scholarship on medium-sized Central and Eastern European (CEE) cities. Unlike many other medium-sized Polish cities, Łomża has been home to forced migrants for almost two decades. As a consequence, it developed immigrant infrastructure long before 2022, including NGOs and a local administration specialised in migrant reception (Popławska & Gać, 2021).

We start the chapter by presenting our methodology and introducing two theoretical concepts: social resilience and social capital. The sudden influx of forced migrants and need to quickly mobilise various actors and kinds of capital (e.g. economic and social) justify our use of social resilience theory. Our chapter will analyse what actors supported Ukrainians and, to some extent, the relationships between those actors. We also refer in this context to the concept of multilevel governance in migration, though we do not explore this concept in detail in the theoretical part of the chapter). The next part of the chapter focuses on selected migration governance-related aspects of Łomża's development, allowing us to capture the context necessary to consider social resilience in an emerging situation. We argue that an important factor influencing the resilience of Łomża's response to the forced-migration crisis was the city's levels of social capital. The third part of the chapter discusses the events that unfolded between February 24th 2022 and the end of December 2022, at which point targeted and adapted reception mechanisms had been worked out and support systems stabilised. At that juncture, moreover, the presence of forced migrants from Ukraine became part of the city's everyday life.

9.2 Methodology

Our analysis is based on primary and secondary data. The former includes thirteen in-depth, semi-structured, individual interviews collected between 2021 and 2022. They were our key source of information on Łomża's migrant-integration policy pre-2022 and the reception-oriented processes that took place in the city after the 2022 influx of forced migrants. Our interviews were conducted among representatives of two main groups: (1) local government and public institutions (PA) ($N = 5$); and (2) civil society organisations (CSOs) ($N = 8$). In 2021, we carried out five interviews, two with public authorities and three with civil society organisations. In 2022, we conducted eight interviews, three with public authorities and five with civil society organisations. The data we collected was coded and analysed qualitatively to distinguish the factors facilitating and limiting the resilience of the city's response to an influx of migrants. We also collected data through desk research, including policy documents, statistical data and analysis of local media. Our research was conducted under the auspices of a Horizon 2020 research project entitled "Investing in 'Welcoming Spaces' in Europe: revitalising shrinking areas by hosting non-EU migrants" (2020–2024).

9.3 Theoretical Background

Urban migration governance in the context of a rapid influx of migrants can be analysed using theories of social resilience (Boersma et al., 2018; Hall & Lamont, 2013; Rast et al., 2020; Shimizu & Clark, 2019) and social capital (Czapiński & Panek, 2015; Putnam, 2008; Skrobacz, 2023). Social resilience refers to groups of different kinds and sizes and their capacity 'to sustain and advance their well-being in the face of challenges to it' (Hall & Lamont, 2013: 2). The concept explains actors' ability to mobilise economic, social and cultural capital to cope with and adapt to unfavourable conditions; this is described as reactive capacity. The capacity of actors can be considered *proactive* where their responses lead to increased preparedness and provide pathways that can mitigate or even overcome negative shocks (Obrist et al., 2010: 291; Podgórska et al., 2024). A resilient response to a crisis requires the activation different types of capital e.g. social and economic. The local context must therefore be considered during an analysis of crisis resilience (Rast et al., 2020).

Existing studies indicate several factors influencing social resilience at a community level. Social resilience is more likely in communities that are equal, inclusive, flexible and diverse, and in those that encourage cooperation and balanced power relations between different groups of actors. It is also more likely in communities whose members are indirectly dependent on one another and where community members enjoy opportunities to learn and experiment (Drabek & McEntire, 2003; Podgórska et al., 2024; Rast et al., 2020). Shimizu and Clark (2019) divide their analysis of social resilience into three dimensions. The first includes the actors involved and

the relationships between them, looking at the ways in which they cooperate, who coordinates their activities and how, and the mutual sympathy (or lack thereof) that exists between actors. Such an analysis draws on theories of multilevel governance (Garcés-Mascareñas & Penninx, 2016). The second dimension of social resilience relates to time: the development of social resilience depends on how activities change over time and whether and how past experience can be put to use in solving new problems. The third dimension concerns process: how the system learns and knowledge is produced.

Legal and regulatory contexts and the possibilities they create for the mobilisation of various resources are also important factors influencing the capacity for resilience of actors responding to a crisis (Boerchma et al., 2018; Rast et al., 2020). Actors can be divided into informal and formal. The former include communities, individual volunteers and civil society organisations. They act outside of institutionalised systems and as a result are more able to innovate and be flexible (Boersma et al., 2018; Drabek & McEntire, 2003; 2018; Smets & Azarhoosh, 2013; Rast et al., 2020). Such actors are rooted in local communities and can mobilise and integrate human and material resources using their social capital. As a result, they are able to venture effective, rapid and often innovative responses to problems. This capacity to respond renders such actors highly resilient (Boersma et al., 2018; Drabek & McEntire, 2003; Smets & Kate, 2008; Snyder, 2011). However, informal groups of actors struggle over the long term to sustain their activities and the quality of the services they provide (Snyder, 2011). Formal actors include public authorities and related institutions. Unlike informal actors, they have a limited capacity for spontaneous activity. Instead, they have to act according to rigid procedures. Decision-making process for formal actors are hierarchical and top-down, making it difficult for them to mobilise and integrate local resources. These limits on their agency restrict the possibility of a resilient response (Boersma et al., 2018; Rast et al., 2020). In a crisis context, it is extremely important to analyse the vertical and horizontal patterns of cooperation and coordination; this again, marks an affinity between theories of resilience and the multilevel governance approach. Theories of social capital can also shed light on urban migration governance. According to Enright (2016) and Duchek (2020), social capital, alongside human capital, helps foster organisational resilience. Community resilience is built through self-organisation and, among other things, social networks and governance (Berkes & Ross, 2013; Cinner & Barnes, 2019). Social capital can be a resource that helps organisations to become resilient and build their problem-solving capacities (McGuinness & Johnson, 2014). There has so far been relatively little research into the role of social capital in fostering resilience (Lee, 2020; Sienkiewicz-Małyjurek, 2022). Yet existing studies indicate that a high level of social capital fosters civic participation as well as actors' capacity to overcome crises (Hołuj & Legutko-Kobus, 2018) and build up their resilience (Czachor, 2019).

There are many ways of conceptualising social capital (Putnam, 2008; Czapieński & Panek, 2015; Skrobacz, 2023). The varying definitions of the term applied in the literature reflect the different emphases of researchers, with some focusing on relations between actors, others on the structure of relations between

actors within a social network and yet others engaged in studying both types of relation. Social capital can therefore be analysed in different ways. Both Adler and Kwon (2002) and Jia (2018) distinguish between bridging, bonding and linking social capital. As far as resilience is concerned, social capital is most commonly split into three distinct but interrelated dimensions: structural, relational and cognitive (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Sienkiewicz-Małyjurek, 2022). Structural social capital refers to the number and arrangement of ties that exist in a given network. In measuring structural capital scholars use indicators such as membership in associations and institutional links, as well as looking at trust levels. Relational social capital describes social connections and ties with close acquaintances (e.g. family members and work colleagues) and various external stakeholders (e.g. government officials and community leaders); such connections depend on interpersonal trust.¹ Cognitive social capital refers to the shared language, codes and narratives used in communication; it describes shared norms, values, obligations, goals and visions. In summary, levels of social capital can be assessed by reference to interconnectedness, and particularly to the quality and nature of actors' connections.

In the case study analysed here, levels of social capital have been measured by looking at the number of social organisations and their activities, including the activities of organisations involved in providing assistance and integration support to migrants, the ability of informal communities to self-organise, the number of volunteers they are able to mobilise and levels of trust towards migrants (Śliz & Szczepański, 2014).

9.4 Background: Łomża as a Shrinking City in Socio-Economic Decline

In order to understand the factors that enabled and inhibited Łomża from responding resiliently to the 2022 crisis, we need first to attend to the city's social, economic and historical contexts (Rast et al., 2020). Łomża is a medium-sized city located in north eastern Poland, approximately 150 km from the border with Belarus; this border is also the eastern border of the European Union. Łomża has been described variously as a city in socio-economic decline (Śleszyński, 2016: 11), a shrinking city (Strykiewicz & Jaroszevska 2016: 75) and a city with declining potential (Śleszyński, 2017: 584, Śleszyński, 2019: 8).

In 1999, after 24 years as the administrative capital of the Łomża Voivodeship, the city lost this status and became the third largest city in the newly created Podlaskie Voivodeship.² Łomża's loss of its administrative functions has meant the liquidation

¹ An analysis of social capital indicators in Poland indicates the predominance of relational over cognitive and structural capital (Baszczak et al., 2024; CBOS 2022; GUS 2022).

² Poland is a unitary state divided into 16 voivodeships, which are subdivided into poviats and communes. The central administration exercises its functions throughout the country, while the field government administration performs tasks related to government administration only in a specific

of government institutions and a reduction in the scope of competency of the city's local authorities; this has led to a loss of attractive and stable jobs in public administration and the exodus of some officials. A similar fate has befallen many medium-sized cities in Poland as a result of the abovementioned administrative reforms, which introduced a three-level territorial division of the country into communes, poviats and voivodeships while also reducing the number of voivodeships from 49 to 16. Over the long term, these changes have contributed to the city's current social problems, which include fairly high levels of unemployment and an exodus of young residents (NIK, 2015; Statistics Poland, 2023a).

Over the past 25 years Łomża has experienced both a decline in population and population ageing (Łomża City Council, 2021, 2022: 14). In 2022 the city had 60,000 inhabitants (Statistics Poland, 2023a), a decrease of almost 7% since 1998. Population projections remain unfavourable. By 2030 Łomża is expected to have 57,197 inhabitants and by 2050—46,082 (Statistics Poland, 2014).

Another vital indicator of the city's socio-economic situation is the unemployment rate. In 2022 registered unemployment in Łomża reached 6.5% compared to a national average of 5.2% (Statistics Poland, 2023b). Unemployment in Łomża is structural, with high rates of long-term unemployment (43.6%) youth unemployment (under 30—26.3%) unemployment among the over 50 s (27.1%), with a slight predominance of women among the city's unemployed (51.6%) (Poviat Labour Office, 2022). In addition, the period 2015–2021 saw an increase in the proportion of foreigners among the city's registered unemployed (Fig. 9.1). Yet the proportion of foreigners among the registered unemployed is still relatively low, probably because most pre-2022 migrants in Poland were short-term workers without the right to register as unemployed.

The fact that five higher education institutions (one public and four non-public) are located in Łomża may be a factor that has helped the city retain some of its younger residents as well as attracting residents from nearby towns and villages. However, universities located in larger cities are generally more prestigious (University Ranking by Perspektywy, 2023), and the most ambitious among the locality's young people have tended to choose such institutions, leaving Łomża as a result.

area and consists of several elements: (1) the voivode, an official who is the main representative of the Council of Ministers in the voivodeship and manages the overall work of the government administration in the voivodeship, including voivodeship services and inspections, as well as coordinating the work of the above and supervising the activities of local government departments; (2) Offices such as: the Central Statistical Office, the Central Examination Commission, the Office of Competition and Consumer Protection etc. (3) Inspectorates, regulatory and law-enforcement agencies, e.g. police, border guard, Supreme Audit Office. Local government administration in Poland has three levels: community, poviat and voivodeship. The headquarters of the Marshal's Office, a voivodeship-level unit of local government, is located in voivodeship cities. The voivodeship government performs those tasks and competences that are not reserved to local government.

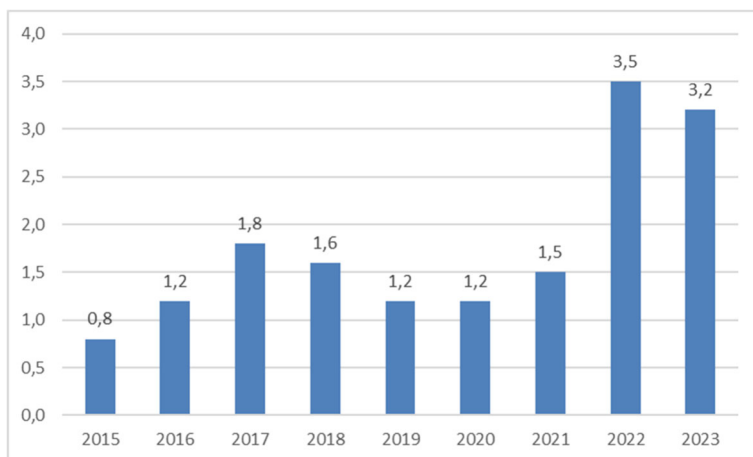


Fig. 9.1 Percentage of foreigners among the registered unemployed in Łomża in 2015–2023 (Source data from Powiat Labour Office in Łomża; 2015–2023 data—as of December 31st of each year)

9.4.1 Social Capital in Pre-2022 Łomża

Łomża is a city under threat of permanent marginalisation and depopulation (Szałańska et al., 2023). Such socio-economic challenges are not conducive to a resilient response to crisis phenomena. Against this backdrop it is worth analysing inhabitants' levels of social capital, which are interrelated with the city's levels of social resilience. The main indicator of social capital, e.g. the number of civil society organisations, suggests that the level of social capital in Łomża is somewhat low and decreasing. While in 2021, there were 211 CSOs registered (Socio-Economic Diagnosis of the City of Łomża, 2021), by October 2023, there were only 173 (website of the City Council 2023)—a significant decrease. Only two CSOs were involved in supporting the integration of refugees and migrants: the Ocalenie Foundation, which provides support to foreigners in Łomża; and the WYNAJMER Foundation, which supports Poles and people of Polish origin in Belarus and Ukraine. Other CSOs focus on sport, on educational and scientific fields of activity or concern themselves with the social integration of disadvantaged people or seniors (Interactive map of NGOs 2023). Another indicator of social capital is the number of community councils (an example of participatory governance, these are made up of a variety of stakeholders acting in an advisory and consultative capacity to the local government) and their size (measured in terms of the number of members). In 2023 three community councils were in operation at Łomża's City Hall: Łomża Community Council for Persons with Disabilities (35 members), Łomża Community Council for Seniors (20 members) and the Youth City Council (23 members). These organisations focused on addressing the problems faced by the social groups they represented (Łomża city website). The diversity and activity of these community councils evidences Łomża's potential to

contribute to social capital. Another significant indicator of social capital is the implementation of a civic budget, which ringfences funds for good causes, including civic participation (e.g. new civic initiatives and voting) and public trust (including trust in institutions). A civic budget has been in place in Łomża since 2014; since 2018 there has been dedicated project funding under the auspices of the Youth Civic Budget. However, there have been a decreasing number of votes for projects associated with the civic budget: while in 2016 10,800 local residents voted for such projects, only 5,500 votes were registered in 2022. An analysis of projects implemented as part of the civic budget shows that, since 2020, a number of inclusion projects have been initiated, with such projects either targeting all city residents or specific age groups; however, none of these projects focused on intercultural integration.

Summarising our analysis of several indicators of social capital in Łomża, we can conclude that levels of social capital are not high and have decreased over past few years. Łomża's level of social capital is therefore not a factor favouring resilient responses to crisis situations.

The local authorities in Łomża recognise the problem of low social capital, with official reports compiled at a local level pointing to the absence of an organ such as a volunteer centre dedicated to coordinating cooperation between NGOs. Yet official documents also highlight potential opportunities for civic education, including civic participation programmes; the same documents indicate that the city is planning a number of new initiatives to promote this important aspect of community development (Strategy for the Development of the City of Łomża until 2030, 2022).

9.4.2 Migration Governance in Pre-2022 Łomża

Unlike most medium-sized Polish cities, Łomża had some experience of hosting migrants before 2022. This experience stemmed from two open reception centres for asylum seekers, one located in the city (between 2005 and 2010) and another in nearby Czerwony Bór. After Russia's 2014 invasion of Crimea and the beginning of the war between Russia and Ukraine, Ukrainians started arriving and settling in the city as labour migrants. It is estimated that in 2021 some 200–300 Chechens lived in Łomża.³ According to figures from the Poviát Labour Office (Haberla, 2019), there

³ A number of Chechens migrated to Poland as early as the 1990s, although by the time of the Second Chechen War, they were few in number (181 people) (Office for Foreigners, 2015). In 1999, the Second Chechen War broke out. This conflict lasted until 2009, during which time the number of refugees arriving in Poland from the region increased year on year. From a few hundred people in 2000, the Chechen refugee population increased to around 6,000 new arrivals per year between 2004 and 2006, and over 8,000 in 2007. The decline in acceptance of this group in Polish society has been linked to Russian propaganda portraying the war against Chechnya as part of the global war on terror, and later to the attacks on Moscow's Dubrovka theatre (2002) and a school in Beslan (2004), which "confirmed and reinforced the negative perception of Chechens as ruthless Islamic terrorists" (Public Opinion Research Centre, 2002). It should also be remembered that Poland remains a country characterised by a low level of ethnic, national and religious diversity (Statistics Poland, 2022).

were some 2,500 Ukrainians in Łomża in 2018, accounting for about 4.2% of city residents. No public records giving their exact number are available.

The Chechens of Łomża were mainly families who settled in the city after leaving asylum reception centres. According to a CSO representative we interviewed, tension and even instances of hostility have been observed between this minority and Łomża locals; however, the situation has stabilised over time (CSO_Łomża).⁴ This stabilisation has owed much to the creation, in 2006, of the Ocalenie Foundation (FO), a local NGO specialising in welfare services for migrants.⁵ The foundation has worked directly with migrants and members of the local community as well as with local government institutions and the business community. One person we interviewed saw the foundation as the principal actor dealing with migrant-related issues in the city. The presence of an NGO specialising in support for migrants distinguishes Łomża from other medium-sized Polish cities and proved very important after the influx of Ukrainians in February 2022.

Most of the Ukrainians who settled in Łomża were men who worked in order to send money to their families back in Ukraine. As one NGO representative we interviewed noted, these migrants' physical appearance and behaviour was similar to city residents, with the result that they tended to blend into the local community (CSO_Łomża). As far as municipal policy is concerned, strategic documents published by the city of Łomża rarely refer to migration. There was therefore little local service provision targeted directly at migrants before the crisis.

The small size of the pre-2022 Ukrainian population and the access they enjoyed to local welfare institutions (e.g. the Municipal and Communal Social Assistance Centre and the Centre for Social Integration) were cited by one local official we interviewed in justification of the paucity of migrant-integration initiatives in the city. The same official held that the presence of a specialised NGO providing support for migrants meant the city administration did not need to undertake other activities. It is important to underline that, although the services of this NGO were theoretically available to all migrants in the city, they were mainly accessed by Chechens (PA_Łomża).

9.5 Łomża's Resilience in the Face of the 2022 Influx of Forced Migrants from Ukraine

By April 2022, less than three months after Russia's attack on Ukraine, around 800 Ukrainians had settled in Łomża. By December, some 505 remained in the city (based on the number of registered Ukrainian TP beneficiaries, Republic of Poland's Open Data platform, 2022). Forced migrants chose Łomża for three reasons: some knew

⁴ We use the following codes: PA for public administration, CSO for civil society organisation—followed by the name of the city.

⁵ The Foundation was established in Warsaw, where its headquarters are located, but a branch of the NGO also operates in Łomża.

the city from before the war, some had friends or family in the city and some arrived on a bus sent by the local authorities to the Polish-Ukrainian border.

9.5.1 Actors and Their Responses

The support provided to Ukrainian forced migrants in Łomża involved public and non-public actors with diverse levels of economic, material and social capital and varying capacities for resilience. They included the city council and related public institutions (Poviat Labour Office, Social Integration Centre, Municipal Social Welfare Centre, Łomża Housing Cooperative) as well as civil society organisations (Caritas, a charity operating under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church), one migrant-oriented NGO (the Ocalenie Foundation) and some smaller NGOs. Private and public kindergartens, schools and universities, private businesses and ordinary people also played an active role in providing support for forced migrants.

The first humanitarian activities were undertaken soon after 24th February 2022. A Crisis Team was set up by the city authorities and information about support services was distributed via the city's website and a telephone hotline. Emergency aid points were set up for the collection of clothing, food, medicines and medical equipment and a number of ad hoc accommodation and catering facilities were established (using e.g. the city's Municipal Sports and Recreation Centre, school dormitories, Caritas holiday centres and private hotels). City residents provided accommodation for forced migrants in their homes and donated basic-needs items. This scale and scope of support would also not have been possible without CSOs:

[W]ar broke out on Thursday [and] by Friday I already knew that people were going to me [...] By Sunday morning we were accommodating the first people in private flats [...] I managed to find these eleven flats [...] women were living there, paying only bills. (CSO_Łomża)

The number of donations collected was so large that several convoys of locally sourced donations could be sent to the border with the help of a local bus company, PKS Nova; these convoys were organised collaboratively with other municipalities. Until the end of June 2022, Ukrainian citizens were allowed to use public transport free of charge. Intercity travel was also free for forced migrants thanks to an initiative undertaken by the same bus company. The city hall collaborated with cultural and recreational organisations to lay on free entertainment for children: a playroom was made available in the Water Park, while performances of fairy tales and screenings of movies translated into Ukrainian were organised in the Cultural Hall; two performances were also held in the Puppet and Actors' Theatre.

In the longer term, attempts were made to help Ukrainians find jobs. A very prominent actor in this regard was the Poviat Labour Office in Łomża. This agency sought to address the needs of Ukrainians by organising information and civic-engagement sessions (both individual and group programmes) in libraries, cultural

centres and places where migrants were staying, e.g. Caritas facilities (Poviat Labour Office, 2023).

The Labour Office worked with Caritas – once in a while ladies from the office would come to Caritas to help the Ukrainian women living there prepare their CVs and make them aware of jobs that were going. (CSO_Łomża)

The Labour Office also organised training on how to conduct an effective job search (in Poland and abroad) and job interview etiquette; Polish classes were offered, too. In the course of such provision Ukrainian migrants completed personal-profile questionnaires with their assistance of Labour Office employees and interpreters, and were given the opportunity to outline their expectations and plans for their time in the city (Poviat Labour Office 2023).

Foreigners usually declare their willingness to take up any kind of physical work, the following professions were the main ones mentioned: kitchen assistant, cleaner, factory work, household work. Female migrants in Poland also expressed their willingness to work in the hotel industry, as caregivers for the elderly/disabled, cashiers, hairdressers, and beauticians. The interviews show that most of these women worked professionally [in Ukraine], often in specialist occupations, as technicians and other qualified white-collar workers. (PA_Łomża)

In 2022, the Poviat Labour Office in Łomża was granted 400,000 złoty (circa €87,000) to undertake programmes to help Ukrainian citizens into work; money also came in from central government to fund programme for Ukrainian forced migrants. Polish language courses and internships were organised (Poviat Labour Office 2023). Civil society organisations also got involved in helping Ukrainians look for work, albeit in a more informal manner e.g. by mobilising social capital resources.

Although many actors were eager to help in February and March 2022, the Ocalenie Foundation had the most experience in supporting refugees. As a result, the foundation was able to offer specialised assistance e.g. legal and psychological support, daycare for children. This support was offered on an ongoing and professionalised basis.

We are doing the same as we used to do for Chechens. The only difference is that the scale is much bigger (CSO_Łomża)

Through the Act of March 12th 2022 on Assistance to Ukrainian Citizens, forced migrants from Ukraine were granted access to mainstream welfare support including cash benefits and other forms of social and specialist assistance. Ukrainian children were very quickly granted access to free public primary and secondary education as well as care in private kindergartens and from the Catholic School Complex.

State and private universities were important actors that cooperated with the city around the relief effort. Collaboration took place in respect of volunteer recruitment, the provision of spaces for donation drives and offering premises and equipment to allow Ukrainian teachers to teach online.

The city's modest size and the relatively small number of actors involved in supporting forced migrant allowed support activities to be coordinated both efficiently and "intuitively". The city hall very quickly signed a cooperation agreement

with Caritas, making coordination between the two agencies easier. A further significant actor, the Ocalenie Foundation—a branch of a larger Warsaw-based NGO—enjoyed support from donors throughout Poland and abroad. Individual activists' social capital and extensive experience of supporting refugees was also of cardinal importance. Cooperation between the local government, Caritas and Ocalenie Foundation was not optimal, but these organisations assisted one another to a certain extent, mainly by sharing information. Some of our interviewees pointed to a delicate rivalry between the larger CSOs. Others noted that political and ideological differences between different actors hindered collaboration and reduced the effectiveness of the aid operation. However, these were isolated views, and the scale of such differences and possible antipathies appears not to have been so substantial as to significantly affect the overall response; in the final analysis, it did not have a major impact on the scope and quality of the support provided.

9.5.2 From a Resilient Response Back to Square One

Our analysis of the response to the 2022 crisis shows that local actors were able to quickly adjust to new challenges and that their response can be considered resilient. In February–March 2022, the level of civil engagement in refugee support was extensive and drew on various kinds of capital—economic, material and social; a significant portion of civil society was engaged in the aid effort in one way or another. Later the level of engagement began to decline. This declining trend is confirmed by an analysis of the City Hall website: since April 2022, the amount of content relating to support for Ukrainians has decreased sharply (Łomża city website). This decrease in activity was occasioned in part by civil society becoming more used to both the war and the presence of migrants in Łomża; further factors included other pressing issues that arose in the day-to-day life of the local community and the worsening economic situation in Poland, including high inflation (CSO_Łomża).

To begin with, there was just a lot of willingness on the part of civil society, [...] you know how it goes, at the beginning there was all that excitement... [because] war had just broken out. And little by little, people have got used to it all, it's become part of life...[and] unfortunately now there's inflation, that's all, people also have their own problems. And little by little, little by little, it's already... as if there is no war, it isn't happening, or at least it's not our problem. (CSO_Łomża)

The gradual exodus of Ukrainians was also significant (Republic of Poland's Open Data platform, 2022), with many deciding to return to Ukraine or migrate further, and those who stayed becoming increasingly independent and therefore no longer requiring ad hoc assistance (CSO_Łomża).

As our analysis has shown, in the case of Łomża the response to the humanitarian crisis caused by Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine resulted neither in changes to local governance (e.g. migration and integration policy) nor the empowerment of local civil society organisations. The initial participation of local residents and private actors proved short-lived and there was a failure to institutionalise support provision through

e.g. the creation of new NGOs. Only well-established CSOs, local government and related public institutions were in a position to provide sustained and professionalised support for forced migrants. The most significant systemic change during the period under study involved Ukrainian citizens being granted TPS beneficiary status; this measure, undertaken by central government as part of the 2022 law, allowed forced migrants to be integrated in the mainstream welfare system at a national level. The manner in which Caritas adapted over time to the challenges thrown up by the refugee crisis represents a further significant change.

9.6 Conclusions

Łomża represents an important case study of a medium-sized Polish city with some pre-2022 experience of migration governance and relatively low and decreasing levels of social capital. Despite forced migrants from Chechnya having lived in the city for two decades and at least a decade of labour migration from Ukraine, close and effective ties had not been established between the city's migrant-oriented NGO and local government. Local policies did not address the issue of migrants' integration.

The city's diminishing socio-economic indicators (e.g. unemployment, depopulation and population ageing as a consequence of the out-migration of young, educated people), low and decreasing levels of social capital and small number of local civil society organisations militated against a resilient response to the forced-migration crisis. Perhaps surprisingly in such a context, both the municipality and public institutions, operating in a multilevel governance system and taking advantage of the opportunities for horizontal cooperation this allowed, were able to effectively activate the resources at their disposal and create a support network that integrated other social actors (including the local community and private enterprises).

In the face of the sudden influx of forced migrants in February 2022, a crucial role was played by the local authorities and related public institutions, as well as two local CSOs, both of which enjoyed high levels of social capital. These actors were able quickly adapt their resources, experience and know-how to the needs of the emerging situation. The response of these actors was ultimately not only resilient but also (to an extent) sustainable thanks to the creative way in which they used the resources at their disposal. The response of abovementioned actors shows that each of them had a greater capacity to provide support than would have been apparent before 22nd February 2022. Other actors not specialising in supporting migrants or other marginalised social groups reoriented themselves towards work in this new sphere. In this sense, the response of the city and its various actors—public, social and private—can be seen as resilient. Contrary to the experiences observed before the 2022 crisis and the city's relatively low levels of social capital, the way in which Łomża mobilised to provide support to forced migrants demonstrated the community's capacity to respond to challenges and emergencies. However, it should

be made clear that this spontaneous, resilient response was ultimately rather short-lived. After three months of bottom-up actions, grassroots aid initiatives and the involvement of private actors (e.g. businesses) started to decline.

Our analysis of Łomża's response to the crisis points to a dichotomy. On the one hand, the city's relatively low levels of social capital presented obstacles and prevented the locality from realising the full potential of its crisis response. On the other hand, and despite the aforementioned challenges, Łomża's response demonstrates that medium-sized Polish cities operating in a multilevel system can indeed show resilience in a crisis. It should be noted, however, that the armed conflict in Ukraine has been going on for over two years (as of March 2024, when this paper was written) and the needs of forced migrants have changed over this period, with some deciding to stay in Poland. The support provided by the different actors assisting forced migrants needs therefore to observe a gradual shift away from a primarily humanitarian and reception-oriented response towards a focus on social integration. Such efforts need to be appropriately coordinated; this can be challenging due to the lack of coherent national policy in this area and low general levels of cooperation between sectors—the result, among other factors, of the relatively low levels of social capital observed in Poland as a whole.

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Chapter 10

A Strategy of Non-governance in Migrant Integration? Local Government and Civil Society Responses to the 2022 Ukrainian Forced-Migration Crisis in Płock, a Medium-Sized City



Arkadiusz Lewandowski  and Michał Nowosielski 

10.1 Introduction

In the spring of 2022, Płock, a medium-sized city in central Poland, faced turmoil. Russia's aggression against Ukraine in that year triggered a dynamic population movement involving large-scale forced migration, with Poland as the main initial destination. An estimated 1.5 million Ukrainians had entered the territory of the Republic of Poland (RP) by April 2022 (Duszczyk & Kaczmarczyk, 2022). Some were accommodated in medium-sized cities and towns (Klaus & Jarosz, 2023). At the height of the forced-migration crisis, the number accommodated in Płock reached around 4000. Key to our analysis here is the response of medium-sized cities to the challenges caused by an influx of migrants, including how such cities managed this hitherto unknown experience. Generally speaking, larger cities have the most experience in managing migration and integration, while smaller cities have seldom had to face such issues (Okólski & Wach, 2020). In the context of the Ukrainian forced-migration crisis, a particular challenge was therefore posed by such cities' lack of experience and infrastructure, particularly the absence of a pre-existing system

A. Lewandowski (✉)

Kazimierz Wielki University, Bydgoszcz, Poland
e-mail: a.lewandowski2@gmail.com

M. Nowosielski

WSB Merito University, Gdańsk, Poland

Centre of Migration Research, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland

M. Nowosielski

e-mail: michal.nowosielski@gdansk.merito.pl

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for managing cooperation between the diverse actors engaged in providing services for migrants. This seems to be confirmed by the case of Płock, a city with a population of slightly over 100,000, which received about 3000 forced migrants from Ukraine¹ during the period under analysis.

The first goal of this chapter is to present the activities that were undertaken in response to the challenges posed by the dynamic influx of forced migrants in Płock in 2022. We are particularly interested in the responses of different actors, both public (the city administration and its subordinate entities) and non-public (civil society including the third sector, as well as private companies). The second goal is to identify how these activities were managed and coordinated. Our analysis builds on the theoretical framework provided by multilevel governance (MLG) theory (Hooghe & Marks, 2001; Marks, 1993, 1996; Marks et al., 1996). Scholars using this approach have focused on the coordination of various migration-related activities between different public and non-public actors (Geddes, 2022) and the activities undertaken by the various actors.

The chapter consists of six parts. The first presents our theoretical framework and the second describes the research methodology used to collect data for analysis. The third profiles in detail the city of Płock, which we have chosen as our case study. The fourth part of the chapter describes the activities undertaken in support of Ukrainian forced migrants by public and non-public actors. A fifth part analyses cooperation between these actors and looks at how their activities were coordinated. The final part of the chapter is our conclusion, in which we summarise the results of our analysis.

10.2 Managing Diverse Actors: The Multilevel Governance Framework

A multilevel governance framework allows for the analysis of the key elements in the forced-migration management in Płock post-2022. This approach is all the more appropriate given that this chapter analyses the issue at hand at the level of a local administrative unit (a medium-sized city), which in the Polish political system nominally has no competence in terms of migration policy; moreover, the rights and duties of such administrative units regarding integration policy are limited and not fully clarified, being rather grounded in the recent practice of Polish local governments (particularly the local authorities in large cities) (Dolnicki, 2021).

MLG scholars have highlighted how migration decision-making processes unfold beyond the vertical structures of state institutions, examining the dispersal of power both upwards to supranational structures and downwards to regional or local levels (Marks, 1993; p. 407; Marks et al., 1996; Hooghe & Marks, 2001). Increasingly, MLG

¹ According to information provided by City Hall during the study.

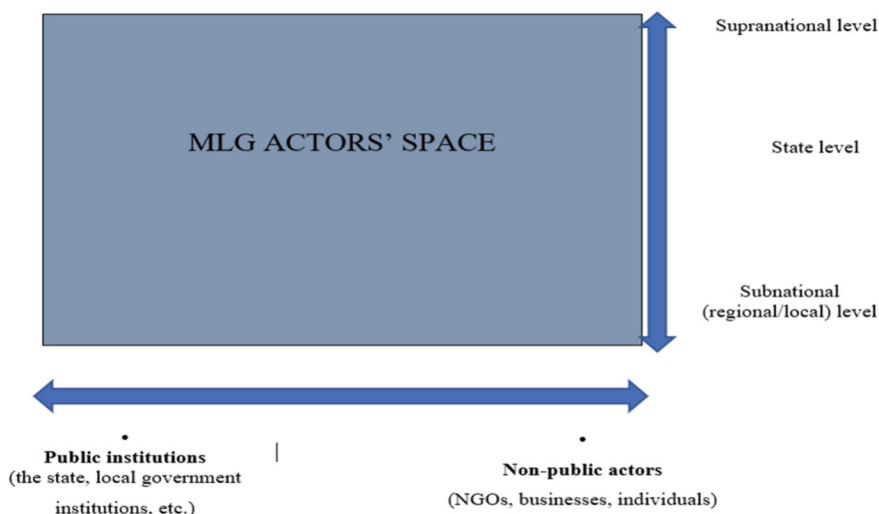


Fig. 10.1 Levels of analysis of actors engaged in migration governance (horizontal and vertical approaches) (Source authors' own research)

scholarship has focused on civic (e.g. civil society) and non-public (both institutionalised and scattered) actors engaged to varying degrees in migration management (Benz, 2004; Schmitter, 2004; Mayntz, 2007; Bache, 2008, p. 24; Kooiman, 2010, p. 72; Karolak-Michalska, 2021, p. 21). As various authors have noted, civil society actors enjoy more independence from state institutions than public actors. At the same time they are often connected with each other (sometimes by strong dependencies) (Brenner, 2004; Campomori & Caponio, 2017; Campomori & Amborini 2020). The complexity of these relationships requires the development of a system of interdependency between the various actors concerned (Tommel, 2008, p. 19) (Fig. 10.1).

In recent years MLG theory has gained popularity among scholars researching sub-state-level governance (Lackowska, 2009, pp. 52–53). This includes the implementation of migration policy at a local level as well as studies of the organisation and management of migrant diversity and integration (Dimitriadis et al., 2021; Matusz & Pawlak, 2020; Matusz-Protasiewicz, 2013; Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017). MLG scholarship highlights power dynamics of a cooperative rather than a centralised nature—the kind of power that, as well as drawing on ‘hard law’, also utilises ‘soft law’ in some areas; most importantly, it highlights the dispersed nature of power. These dimensions of power can be analysed through attention to multilevel and networked structures, but also by looking at participatory structures, which are of particular interest to us in this study (Kooiman, 2010, p. 72).

MLG scholars have developed an ideal type of relations between the actors participating in local-level governance; such relations are conducive to cooperation and the reaching of consensus. A system’s capacity for co-governance depends on actors’

openness to negotiation and willingness to compromise (Kooiman, 2008; Lackowska, 2009, p. 56). However, given the way in which public and non-public actors function in practice it is also necessary to consider other, more conflict-oriented/confrontational/competitive attitudes (Marks & Steenbergen, 2004).

MLG scholars have outlined four model types of vertical and horizontal relationship:

- a. multilevel management, characterised by more or less equal relationships;
- b. top-down governance;
- c. bottom-up governance, in which local authorities play a leading role in setting the policy agenda and formulating policy solutions;
- d. diffuse governance, with 'horizontal' governance processes operating at different levels and no significant vertical relationship between the different levels (van Oostaijen and Scholten, 2018, pp. 6–7).

Expanding upon this concept for the purpose of the current study, we suggest that the relations between actors in MLG can be situated on a continuum between rivalry and cooperation. Between these two poles we situate relations such as coordination, planning, competition, the duplication of provision or complementary provision, the exploitation of one actor by another and competition between actors (Fig. 10.2).

The approach we have identified naturally involves consideration of the distributed governance setting proposed by van Oostaijen and Scholten (2018, p. 7). This allows us to draw attention to the problem of distributed governance in the context of dominant horizontal relationships at a local level.

Our study focuses on governance below state level, i.e. at a regional/local dimension. Within this context we consider the vertical differentiation of public and non-public actors, the interdependencies between them and the necessity of building interactions, including those of an institutionalised and systemic character. The latter

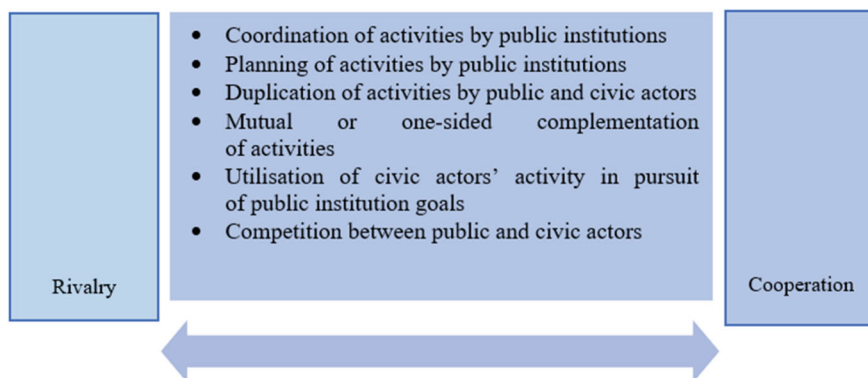


Fig. 10.2 Model of relations between MLG actors at a local/regional level (*Source* authors' own research)

would appear to be particularly relevant to our research question in the context of the reality of Polish local government institutions, which had to expand their activities to the area of migration and integration policy due to the events that followed February 24th 2022.

10.3 Methodology

The chapter is based on our analysis of data collected between June and November 2022.² Our main data source was qualitative interviews conducted with a diverse range of individuals. Our choice of personal interviews best fitted the study's main objective of reconstructing events and learning how our interviewees interpreted those events (Zittoun, 2021). Firstly, the data we have collected through our interviews has given us insight into stakeholders' experiences and interpretations to focus on the types of narratives they employ (Feldman et al., 2004). Secondly, we have drawn on the expert knowledge of stakeholders we interviewed in building a picture of events in different parts of the city, the processes involved, how they were coordinated etc. (van Audenhove and Donders, 2019).

The majority of interviewees (N = 8) were representatives of Płock City Hall or institutions subordinate to local government. We also interviewed activists from local NGOs. Our sampling was purposive and aimed at maximum differentiation in order to include in the study as many institutions and individuals as large a variety of experience as possible. Through our choice of sampling method, we were able to reach decision-makers, service providers and representatives of institutions operating in different areas (e.g. education, social assistance, culture etc.). No particular difficulties were encountered in contacting interviewees. Our interviews lasted 40 min on average. Data was collected and analysed by the authors of this chapter. Each interview was recorded before being transcribed and coded. The material was then subjected to thematic analysis (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016).³

Additional data sources used in our analysis include official policy documents, press releases and short media articles describing the situation in Płock during the 2022 crisis. Completing the information obtained during the interviews helped create the fullest possible reconstruction of events. As complementary material, this data was subjected to systematic analysis.

² Conducted within frames of a broader project "The Polish School of Assistance" executed by Migration Consortium, and the Centre for Migration Research at the University of Warsaw and the Centre for Migration Research at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Some of the research results were published in: (Jarosz & Klaus 2023).

³ The interviews referred to in the text are coded as follows: PA for public actor and NPA for a non-public one. The number given is the interview number.

10.4 Płock: City Background

Płock is a medium-sized city in central Poland. The city is situated on the Vistula River in the northwestern part of the Masovian Voivodeship. As a result of the three-level local government reform that took place in Poland in 1999, Płock became a city with *powiat* (county) rights. From a legal and institutional point of view, this gave the city the right to host various sub-regional level offices and public utility institutions. It also meant that Płock assumed a dual role as both a regional and sub-regional centre (Zaborowski, 2019, p. 33). While Płock has not been able to compete with the capital city of Warsaw, which continues to hold the position of a regional centre of Masovia, the city has remained a sort of administrative, economic, educational and cultural centre for nearby smaller towns.

Płock's dual role is reflected in the city's shrinking population. According to the 2021 national census, Płock has ca. 115,000 inhabitants and has experienced depopulation in recent decades. The number of residents has decreased by more than 10% over the last twenty years (in the last decade alone, the number of residents has fallen by 10,000) (National Statistics, 2023; Wiśniewski, 2022d). Another key factor in terms of Płock's profile and classification as a medium-sized centre is its geographical location in relation to large cities (Runge, 2012). Płock is located approximately 100 kms from three much larger cities that are significantly more attractive: Warsaw (over 2,000,000 inhabitants, the national capital with a well-developed job market), Łódź (over 700,000 inhabitants and an academic, cultural and industrial centre) and Toruń (around 200,000 inhabitants, an academic centre). Such a location naturally contributes to a specific form of 'brain drain': young people leave Płock first to study and subsequently settle down in the aforementioned locations. Combined with an ageing local population, this phenomenon is the root of the depopulation that has taken place in the city.

Another factor adversely affecting Płock is the city's poor access to long-distance coach and train routes. As a recent specialist report notes, it is difficult for residents of Płock, the largest city in western Masovia, to travel to other towns in the voivodeship apart from Warsaw. In recent years the city has lost direct bus routes to the *powiat* town of Przasnysz, which lies 100 km to the north, and to Grodzisk Mazowiecki, 100 km to the south. Since 2017, routes to more distant, larger cities such as Szczecin and Wrocław have been cancelled; travelling to the latter, the capital of Lower Silesia, now requires at least three different buses or trains (Wykluczenie transportowe, 2021, p. 23). Płock also lacks direct access to the country's main road routes. For example, to reach the nearest entry to the A1 motorway, city residents must first travel to Strzelce located about 40 km to the south.

The job market in Płock is poorly diversified. At the end of 2021 12,561 businesses were registered in the city. According to the Central Statistical Office (*Główny Urząd Statystyczny*, GUS), the majority (8834 businesses) were small businesses. The most common kinds of small business were: those involved in the sale and repair of cars and motorcycles (1905); professional, research and technical enterprises (1186); construction (1079); transport and warehouse management (813); healthcare

and social care (807) and industrial processing (735) (Miejski Zeszyt Statystyczny, 2022). 94.5% of registered businesses (11,805) were micro-businesses, that is, self-employed sole traders or businesses with less than 10 employees. In Płock there are 521 businesses that employ between 10 and 49 employees, 137 medium-sized businesses (50–249 employee), 18 large businesses (250–999 employees) and five very large enterprises providing work for at least 1000 people. The largest business based in Płock is the partly state-owned energy company ORLEN S.A., which in 2021 employed ca. 35,000 people nationwide (Bezrobocie rejestrowane w Płocku, 2022; ORLEN, 2021; Płock - rynek pracy, 2021).

Due to the scope of its business, sponsorship and corporate social responsibility activities, ORLEN S.A. is more than a local- or even national-level entity. Indeed, it can be described as a company with continental impact (Żuławiński, 2022). However, ORLEN's main petrochemical complex, which includes an oil refinery, is located in Płock. This is one reason why ORLEN undertakes a number of local activities directed at employees of the Płock plant and the local community. ORLEN finances and sponsors cultural events, local professional and amateur sports teams and health promotion and ecology-oriented programmes designed for city residents (ORLEN dla Płocka, 2023).

The year-end unemployment rate in Płock over the last five years was as follows: 5.8% in 2022; 6.1% in 2021; 7.0% in 2020; 6.1% in 2019 and 6.8% in 2018 (National Statistics, 2023). These rates are slightly higher than the national average (5.2% in 2022, 5.8% in 2021, 6.1% in 2020, 5.1% in 2019 and 5.8% in 2018).

One significant characteristic of Płock as a medium-sized city is its cultural potential; however, this has at best a regional impact. Cultural and artistic events held in the city are in most cases aimed at residents of the city and the sub-region of north-western Masovia. The city is trying to broaden its offer in this area, as confirmed by the local government's announcement that an attempt has been made to propose Płock as a candidate for European Capital of Culture (Budkiewicz, 2023).

Płock also has sub-regional importance as a centre of higher education. There are four educational institutions in the city: the Masovian Academy; a branch of Warsaw University of Technology; the Higher Theological Seminary and Paweł Włodkowic University College, the only private institution among the four. For every 1000 residents of Płock, 40 are students; the total number of students in the city is close to 5000 (Wiśniewski, 2022b). However, it should be noted that the development of higher education has not translated into increased student activism that could serve a potential resource for non-governmental organisations, 355 of which were registered in Płock in 2022 (UMP, 2022b, p. 3).

In the context of our research, it is important to underline that before February 2022 the local authorities in Płock had little experience of migration-related issues. Anne White (2021) has noted that local government had not previously pursued policies aimed at encouraging economic migrants to move to the city. The presence of individual migrants was thus coincidental to the result of activities of recruitment agencies. White also notes the problem of migrant visibility in Płock: before 2022 migrants did not form a distinct group but were rather dispersed among the city's wider population (White, 2021, p. 368).

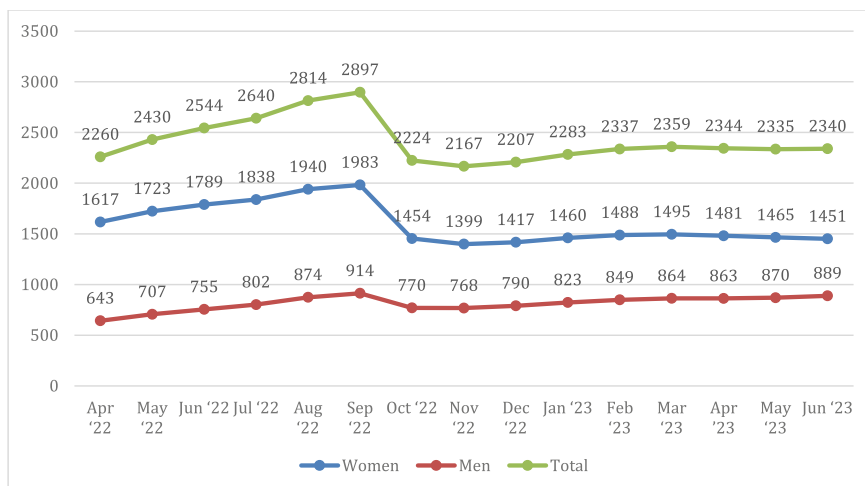


Fig. 10.3 The number of Ukrainian citizens in receipt of temporary protection on the basis of the Law of March 12th 2022 (end-month data for the period April 2022–June 2023) (Source Authors' own work based on data from Otwarte dane, 2023)

These findings are surprising if we consider the number of migrants living within the including Ukrainians, living within the city limits In December 2018 4658 Ukrainians were registered in Plock (this figure includes those working in agriculture outside the city (White, 2021, p. 366). In 2021, 13,431 work permits for Ukrainian citizens were registered (K.B, 2019; mars, 2022).

By comparison, during the first year after February 24th 2022, the number of Ukrainian citizens and their families residing in Plock who had been granted temporary protection status on the basis of the Law of March 12th 2022 on Assistance to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the Armed Conflict on the Territory of that Country did not exceed 3000 (Fig. 10.3).⁴

At the same time, this relatively high percentage of migrants in the job market did not translate into interest from the city authorities. This may be because the city not only lacked a migrant inclusion strategy but also lacked basic knowledge about its migrant population (Nowosielski et al., 2021). However, this issue may very soon gain importance in the eyes of the city authorities given that ORLEN S.A. has recently begun the construction of the OLEFINY III oil processing system. This in turn has led to an influx of workers from countries including Pakistan and the Philippines. It has been projected that between six and ten thousand migrants are likely to be employed in Plock in the coming years (Omachel, 2023; Szkwarek, 2023).

⁴ These statistics do not include those who lost their protection status due to death or by obtaining a Polish national identity card or residence card, or by leaving the territory of the Republic of Poland, etc. Since May 5th 2022 the statistics include data on children born on Polish territory. Since October 6th 2022 temporary protection status is automatically revoked 30 days after a person's registered exit from the territory of the Republic of Poland.

In a migration context, a discussion of the city's profile would not be complete without mention of international cooperation with the Ukrainian city of Zhytomyr, one of the 14 towns with which Płock has concluded cooperation agreements on the twin-town principle (Miasta Partnerskie, 2023).

It is also important here to describe the political landscape of the city. Like other cities of similar size, Płock is a political arena where elections have followed party divisions. The city's political scene has been dominated by the rivalry between, on one side, the centre-liberal Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*, PO), later the Civic Coalition (*Koalicja Obywatelska*)—and, on the other, the conservative-national Law and Justice Party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS) (Lewandowski, 2019; Lewandowski et al., 2022). Since 2010 the city has been continuously governed by politicians of PO, who, along with the Polish People's Party (*Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe*, PSL), form a governing coalition on the city council (a collegiate self-government legislative body). Since 2010 the city's mayor (*prezydent*) has been a PO politician, Andrzej Nowakowski (Lewandowski, 2019).

The political affiliation of City Hall is significant as it determines the relations, difficult in this case, between the local authorities and central government, which between 2015 and 2023 was under the control of the rival Law and Justice Party. One consequences of these difficult relations has been the relatively low level of support for Płock's city hall from the Government's Local Investment Fund (Burzyńska & Karwacka, 2021; Wiśniewski, 2021).

10.5 Results

10.5.1 *The Assistance Provided by Public and Non-Public Actors in Płock to Forced Migrants from Ukraine*

In line with MLG theory and the horizontal approach, our analysis of the support provision undertaken in Płock after February 24th 2022 differentiates non-public actors (e.g. individuals, grassroots civil society initiatives, NGOs, churches and religious associations and local businesses) from public entities linked to the local government. Among public bodies a further division is made between the subsystem centred around the City Hall (CH) (comprising CH branches such as the departments of education, culture, support for social initiatives and security and crisis management), the subsystem formed by institutions (e.g. cultural and welfare organisation) operating on the city's territory (e.g. the City and Education Libraries) and municipal units subordinate to the CH, such as the Płock Centre for Culture and Art, the Social Welfare Centre and municipal companies. A third group can also be differentiated, consisting of other public institutions operating in the city, some of which are partnered with the CH on other areas of activity (e.g. higher education institutions and the Masovian Teacher Training Centre).

The above division is reflected in the way this section is structured. We begin by analysing the activities of non-public actors. We have chosen this order because it reflects the chronological precedence of grassroots activity; it also allows us to efficiently present the main types of assistance rendered and define the relations between the actors with the help of MLG theory.

Within both public and non-public subsystems, assistance began to be provided almost from the very beginning of the crisis. The first refugees from Ukraine reached Płock on February 5th 2022 with the help of a private entrepreneur. The first busload of refugees organised by the CH arrived from Zhytomyr on the night of 27th/28th February. In the following days, two arrival pathways emerged: a group pathway, through which Ukrainians arrived via organised transport (e.g. from the twin town of Zhytomyr), and a private pathway, whereby refugees came on their own (mostly in their own cars and sometimes by transportation means organised by residents of Płock) (Magierska, 2023).

10.5.1.1 Non-Public Actors

In respect of the service provision by non-public actors analysed in this study, it can be stated that a wide range of grassroots initiatives were put in place from the very beginning of the war on February 24th 2022. Płock residents spontaneously organised informal or institutional donation drives on a significant scale, with essential items being collected at points designated by the City Hall (Kozłowski, 2022b). From the beginning of the war, individual citizens also contributed by undertaking private trips to the border to bring refugees to Płock (Magierska, 2023). Local residents also hosted refugees in their homes (Magierska, 2023; Wiśniewski, 2022a).

The involvement of local residents in the provision made by public institutions was idiosyncratic in character. Two types of such involvement can be differentiated: the first relates to local residents volunteering to work for city institutions, NGOs and churches and religious associations, undertaking activities such as distributing food and necessities from city storage points, organising lodgings, facilitating access to healthcare, helping refugees find employment, etc. The other type involved employees of public institutions taking part in support initiatives through their workplaces but after hours (Karwacka, 2022a). As an employee of one city institution noted:

Several people, including me, volunteered for extra shifts round the clock. Myself, the director and some other people started asking what help we could offer here, we began to organise this provision. We thought about where we could offer accommodation for the night, where we can lay down some mattresses... From day to day it turned out that something needed modifying on the go (PA1, Płock)

It can therefore be said that individual residents of Płock were involved in refugee support provision at a variety of different levels.

The aforementioned support provision was very important in the first phase of the crisis, which lasted until the beginning of May and might be described as the ad hoc

phase. This period was characterised by a high level of often spontaneous engagement (not least emotional engagement) on the part of non-public actors. At the same time, it was clear that residents were adapting progressively to the new situation. There was also a significant amount of online activity, including the establishment of internet support groups such as the Facebook group *Pomoc dla Ukrainy ♥ Płock i okolicy* (Help for Ukraine ♥ Płock and district). This provision was particularly important and lively during the first few months of the crisis, during which the moderators of online groups worked to coordinate a variety of support activities; however, over time, such activities tended to lose their impetus, with online support groups evolving into advertising boards. Leadership personalities tended to emerge in this area; such figures, including Monika Brzostowska (nicknamed *Moniczka Wojowniczka* and *Moniczka Podróżniczka* ('Little Monika the Warrior/the Traveller'), were of significance in terms of galvanising others or at least attracting media attention (Karwacka, 2022c). However, over time the role of these figures, too, decreased; this decline coincided with an overall loss of momentum in support provision and the progressive institutionalisation of grassroots activity, which was increasingly used and visibly coordinated by public actors. An example of such activity in the sphere of social media was the work of the Centre for Non-Governmental Organisations and Volunteering which attempted to coordinate assistance through its Facebook page. As an employee of a public institution related to us,

We certainly had good cooperation with the Volunteering Centre. They created a Facebook page and published information there promptly, and this was a good medium for transmitting information (PA2, Płock)

Over time, the level of support provided by non-public actors decreased. One sign of this was a decrease in the quantity of food and other necessities donated to the relief effort. As one City Hall employee noted:

At the moment [in May 2022] such provision is mainly focussed on collections from shops, but there are fewer such products [being donated] than there were in February, March and April. The same goes for private companies calling or asking about making donations, telling us they available funds, asking whether we need anything and donating specific products to us (PA3, Płock)

The reasons for the above may be relate to a 'burnout' of societal enthusiasm and, concomitantly, people's willingness to help.

The support provided by individual actors was often channelled through NGOs (including the Płock branches of the Polish Red Cross and Polish Scout Movement, churches and religious associations, the Volunteer Water Rescue Service and the *Przystanek Rodzina* Foundation). However, in Płock the scope of civil society involvement in refugee support refugees was clearly limited. Over time, such provision, which had originally been delivered autonomously, was increasingly taken over by public actors or relegated to the role subordinate to that of provision organised by local government or its subordinate institutions. This relationship is best viewed as non-public provision being exploited (or coordinated) by public actors than in terms of competition or the duplication of support provision.

The main key humanitarian organisation involved in providing aid in Płock was the Polish Red Cross (Polish: *Polski Czerwony Krzyż*—PCK), which carried out four principal kinds of activity: (a) direct assistance to people in need through collection and delivery of clothing, medicine, etc.; (b) voluntary and independent support for aid activities carried out by the city; (c) support in conveying aid to residents of Płock's partner city, Zhytomyr, which had been identified as a key target of aid provision; (d) the provision of space for integration activities aimed at Ukrainian refugees (e.g. a Ukrainian Seniors Club). As far as non-public actors in Płock were concerned, churches and religious associations played a significant part in supporting refugees, with both Caritas in the Płock Diocese and individual parishes of the Catholic Church making financial collections. Caritas also established a Centre for Assistance for Migrants and Refugees (Burzyńska, 2022; KAI, 2022).

Admittedly, the Catholic Church in Płock did not provide centralised and top-down assistance. Its aid activities mainly consisted of initiatives undertaken by individual parishes, which organised, for instance, accommodation and donation drives for refugees (Burzyńska, 2022). A particularly significant example of refugee provision made by the Catholic Church's assistance was the work of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy in Stara Biała, a village near Płock, which organised accommodation for Ukrainian families and offered Polish language lessons (Orzechowski, 2022, p. 126; Magierska, 2023). The Old-Catholic Mariavite Church undertook similar activities in the Płock area, providing accommodation and support for a large group of refugees and organising collections of food, medicine etc. In the case of both the Mariavites and the Sisters of Our Lady, support provision also had an institutional, public dimension as well: in both cases agreements had been drawn up with the city around accommodation for refugees (Kozłowski, 2022b). In these cases, it is therefore possible to speak not only of aid activities being exploited and coordinated by public actors but also, in the context of a city-wide aid system, of a mutual complementarity between public and non-public actors.

When analysing the role of non-public actors in support provision, the contribution of local businesses should also be emphasised. This could be seen on several levels, including in the form of donations made to donation drives organised by the local government during the first phase of the response. Such support was provided, for example, by Basell Orlen Polyolefins, a joint venture company operating in Płock, which supported the monthly purchase of food and basic necessities (food and hygiene products) for refugees and residents of Zhytomyr. The mechanism through which this provision worked was described by one of our interviewees:

We have an agreement with Basell, who once a month give us about 10,000 [PLN] for shopping. We buy things out of that, we choose the shops, do the shopping and the invoice goes to them (PA3, Płock)

Over time, the level of such support provided by local businesses decreased, although some Płock entrepreneurs maintained their activities in this sphere even after April 2022, i.e. during a period in which support provision was becoming increasingly institutionalised and was largely coordinated by public actors, principally the City Hall.

Local businesses also provide stand-alone support that was not linked in any way to the public-sector response. One example of this type of provision was the contribution of the Dziergowski bakery in Bodzanów, near Płock, which organised a collection of flour that made it possible to bake 3000 loaves of bread for refugees (Karwacka, 2022b). Local clothing businesses also organised donation drives (for e.g. medicines, clothing, food products) among their own employees. Support was also provided by local branches of retail chains. For example, the DIY store Leroy Merlin donated tools, shelves and paints for the renovation and adaptation of rooms intended to accommodate migrants and warehouses where donations were to be stored.

An original example of support from local business was an initiative carried out in the *Galeria Wisła* shopping centre in Płock. The centre managers created an area in the shopping centre which they called the River of Help (a reference to the gallery's name), and where collections of items for Ukrainians (food products, clothes, toys) were collected. In this space Ukrainians could get free clothes donated by local residents (Karwacka, 2022d; Kozłowski, 2022a). Restaurants in Płock also showed their support by providing meals for migrants and volunteers.

Some business owners sought to help Ukrainian employees and their family members by bringing the latter to Poland and arranging accommodation for them. Budmat, a Płock company, is one example of a business that provided such support. The case of this company also exemplifies collaboration between business and public actors. The establishment of a relationship between Budmat and the City Library resulted in the organisation of activities for Ukrainian families, as an employee of a public institution noted:

As early as March... after mid-March, we were contacted by women workers from Budmat who were supporting Ukrainian families, because Budmat has branches in Ukraine and a lot of women and children, the wives of Budmat employees, had come from there. They asked us [...] to hold a meeting, because [even though] these [new arrivals] lived in good conditions, they were largely confined to their accommodation, and were not always finding it easy to integrate [...] Several dozen people came, mothers with children [...]. Mums drank coffee, tea, the kids played, we organised activities for the little ones [...]. (PA2, Płock)

As far as the involvement of local businesses is concerned, ORLEN played a special role. This company was actively involved in providing assistance to refugees on a nationwide scale but also undertook local activities. One example of this involved the donation of fuel vouchers to the City Hall in Płock to support the transport of goods to Zhytomyr. Another significant outreach activity undertaken by ORLEN involved the loan of company-owned Dębowa Góra Hotel in Nowe Rumunki, near Płock (SM, 2022); ORLEN also continued to fund the hotel's running costs while it was being used for refugee support activities. ORLEN's relatively minor involvement in direct support for refugees in Płock may have been the result by the company's strategic focus on nationwide, non-local-level support provision strategy as well as by politically motivated tensions between ORLEN, with its strong ties to the government, and the city authorities.

10.5.1.2 Public Actors

The central and most significant public actor engaged in refugee assistance after February 24th 2022 was local government in the shape of Płock City Hall. As previously indicated, for the purpose of this analysis, we make a fundamental distinction between the City Hall, with its internal organisational structure, and municipal institutions affiliated with the City Hall but possessing a degree of autonomy. Examples of the latter include *POKiS* (Płock Art and Culture Centre), *MOSiR* (Municipal Sports and Recreation Centre), *MOPS* (Municipal Social Welfare Centre), municipal companies and public actors that work in partnership with the City Hall.

The local government in Płock reacted promptly to the events of February 24th 2022. The City Hall and its subordinate institutions began organising aid on the very day of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Despite the emergency nature of the situation that prevailed in the first week of the war, attempts were made even at this early stage to institutionalise support provision. This was reflected in the opening of the Refugee Reception and Relocation Point, managed by the city's Municipal Social Welfare Centre, on March 1st 2022. By December 2022, 3497 people had been registered through this reception point; at the peak of the crisis, there were approximately 2000 people arriving in the Płock area from Ukraine (detailed statistics based on the information regarding the PESEL numbers issued are shown in Fig. 10.3). Additional instances of the institutionalisation of aid initiatives included the establishment of collective accommodation facilities by the municipal authorities. These facilities were created in collaboration with various entities, including the Płock Art and Culture Centre, other city institutions and non-public actors; the result was a total of ten accommodation facilities providing round-the-clock meals. Furthermore, the City Hall's Department for Cooperation with Non-Governmental Organisations and Volunteers assumed responsibility for organising and coordinating the procurement and distribution of essential supplies such as food and hygiene materials. Notably, on March 1st 2022, the Mayor of Płock convened a taskforce charged for implementing support provision for Ukrainian refugees arriving in the municipality.

Public-sector support for Ukrainian refugees was extended through collaboration with the municipally owned public transport provider *Komunikacja Miejska*. This entity contributed its fleet of vehicles to facilitate the transportation of refugees from the Polish-Ukrainian border to Płock. Its vehicles were also instrumental in conveying essential medical supplies, food provisions and clothing to Zhytomyr.

Despite efforts to institutionalise and formalise such aid initiatives, ad hoc support provision predominated during the early weeks of the crisis. During this period, which lasted until approximately mid-April, municipal institutions sought to supervise and harmonise the delivery of aid that was in many cases being provided non-public entities. During this pivotal early phase of assistance, the City Hall also concentrated its efforts on establishing an efficient system for information flows.

Of great significance in terms of the transition from ad hoc to more structured and institutionalised provision was the enactment, on March 12th 2022, of a special Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Citizens in connection with the Armed Conflict

on the Territory of that Country. An agreement between the voivode⁵ and the local authorities in Płock was subsequently formulated under the auspices of this law. Among the various provisions enacted through this legal framework was the financing of refugee accommodation under the local government's jurisdiction but utilising central budgetary resources. As a result of this pivotal legislative development refugee support provision increasingly assumed an institutionalised character, as corroborated by statements from local authority representatives:

An [important] moment was the formal signing of the first funding agreement with the Voivode [...]. The money is extremely important. There was an order, a declaration that the Voivode would use government funds to finance commissioned projects such as accommodation, meals, psychological and social assistance and transport. But it was only a declaration, there was no agreement yet and we had to source these accommodation spaces purely on the basis of verbal agreements with facilities providers.... [The plan had] to be in place, we had to provide accommodation, food [...]. But it was only when we signed the first agreement that we reached a level of financial security that meant we could plan certain things (PA4, Płock)

As far as the establishment of systemic solutions in Płock is concerned, initiatives that had previously relied on the engagement of volunteers and the employees of individual institutions began to undergo a process of systematisation. For instance, in areas such as psychological assistance and Polish language tuition, provision continued, but within a more structured and organised framework involving bodies such as the City Library, the Education Library and various cultural institutions. At the same time, efforts were being made to integrate more than five hundred Ukrainian children into the public education system. This number remained relatively stable even after the summer holiday period. By early December 2022 Płock had accommodated 136 Ukrainian children in its kindergartens, 340 in elementary schools and 63 in upper secondary schools. Our interviews with managers of such institutions did not reveal significant problems relating to the inclusion of Ukrainian students in the educational system.

The stabilisation and institutionalisation of aid was further evidenced by changes in the way essential goods collected for the refugees were distributed. Distribution points began to be open at specified days and times only. This change coincided with a decline in the number of aid beneficiaries⁶ and a reduction, at least to some extent, in spontaneous contributions from individual actors in terms of items donated.

⁵ Voivode: in the Polish political system, this is an organ of state administration representing the central government at voivodeship level. A voivode's competences include the implementation of government policy adapted to local and regional conditions, the execution and coordination of tasks in the area of defence and state security and crisis management and the supervision of the activities of local government units.

⁶ The expectations of refugees themselves and the scale of the migration also changed. Problems with accommodation became less and less important as a significant number of migrants became professionally independent and a large number left Płock. In December 2022, interviewees representing the City Hall estimated that the number of refugees in need of support and accommodation was slightly over 300 (90% of whom were women and children). At that time, these people resided in four accommodation centres.

Higher education institutions in Płock represented an additional, unrelated element of the system created by public actors. In the first phase of the crisis, they helped organise collections, recruited volunteers and provided storage space (Lewandowska, 2022; Mazowiecka.edu, 2022). They also made their own dormitories available to accommodate migrants (Orzechowski, 2022, p. 125).

The research conducted for this study focused mainly on the activities of local actors and non-local actors working at a local scale. Nevertheless, in the context of our analysis it should also be pointed out that there exist MLG relationships of a vertical nature that go beyond the sub-state level.

In the case of Płock, there were initiatives that extended to both national and international levels. At the national level, such interactions were primarily formal and took the form of engagement between local authorities and the government representative in the region, namely the voivode, with local actors responsible for implementing directives. An example of such engagement concerned directives from the voivode relating to the provision of accommodation spaces for refugees, as well as to the execution of provisions outlined in the special law.

As regards relations at the international level, local actors from Płock played a very different role. An illustrative instance of such engagement on the part of local public bodies was the support provided to Płock's partner city of Zhytomyr in the form of transportation for essential materials and supplies, which was spearheaded by the Płock City Hall. This collaborative effort, initiated by local authorities and executed with the involvement of civil society, began at the very start of the conflict; the first shipment of donations was dispatched in February. Besides Zhytomyr, aid convoys dispatched by the City Hall reached destinations including Lviv, Kharkiv, Kyiv and the reception point at Dorohusk (Kelman, 2022; Orzechowski, 2022, p. 124). In this context, Płock also contributed to the coordination of international aid efforts, securing support from its twin cities, namely Fort Wayne (USA), Darmstadt (Germany) and Auxerre (France), as well as their respective residents. The funds for this initiative, valued at approximately half a million złoty, were allocated for the procurement of items destined for Zhytomyr (Wisniewski, 2022c).

An additional international dimension of the refugee support effort took the form of an initiative of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (CIFAL), which operates a training centre situated in Płock. As a result of this support, two buses laden with humanitarian aid donations were transported to Płock from Spain (UMP, 2022a).

10.5.2 Cooperation or Competition? Relations Between Actors

Our analysis of the aid activities of both non-public and public actors makes it possible to identify the basic types of relationships between these actors, most of which align with the model of horizontal relationships between actors at a local level

described in MLG theory (Fig. 10.2). We have been able to identify the following types of relationship:

- coordination and attempts at steering the activities of non-state actors on the part the city authorities—examples of such coordination include the cooperative organisation of accommodation by both public and non-state actors (mainly NGOs), the coordination of the collection and distribution of essential items by the city's subordinate units and the communication through the Facebook profile managed by the Volunteer Centre for the purposes of sharing information between the city authorities and the various non-state actors involved;
- duplication of activities—a model example of such a situation, is provided by the case of collections run separately by the City Hall and an NGO based in the same building. This not only caused confusion among donors but may also have been a source of tension between actors. As an NGO representative recalled:

When the armed conflict started a city office warehouse was set up at the same address [as ours], in the same building, only in the other wing, and, theoretically, now, in retrospect, I know that we would have coped with it; however, mistakes started to happen (NPA1, Plock)

- the use/takeover of aid activities of non-public actors by municipal authorities. During our research we observed situations in which volunteers from third-sector organisations were engaged to work for municipal institutions (e.g. scouts almost automatically became volunteers supporting the operation of the municipal warehouse housing essential items). Another important and telling example of this type of relationship involved cases in which collections run by NGOs and local businesses were eventually taken over by an organisational unit of the City Hall.

No instance of direct competition between public and non-public actors was noted. Cases that might suggest rivalry (e.g. in the case of duplication of donation drives) tended to result from a lack of coordination rather than competition.

Arguably more common were examples of cooperation or mutual support. Such cooperation occurred in the case of the accommodation organised for refugees from Ukraine by public and non-public bodies, and in the case of the cooperation, financial and organisational support provided by businesses for donation drives and aid initiatives carried out by local government institutions.

However, it should be noted that this support or cooperation was largely spontaneous in nature. It was not driven by assumptions about the benefits of cooperation or by a plan to stimulate and strengthen such collaboration in order to better coordinate provision. It was rather forced by the situation—particularly by shortages. For example, a shortage of manpower in municipal institutions necessitated the coordination by NGOs of volunteer schemes.

We must be similarly cautious in our enthusiasm when reviewing the relationships involved in coordination or planning support provision. Such activities tended to be fragmentary/random in nature and to relate only to certain aspects of overall aid effort. It is therefore not possible to speak of the development of a system of cooperation and coordination between different actors.

As our research shows, the system of support provision developed through the relations involved in planning and coordination was dominated by public actors who exploited the activities of non-public actors. A glaring example of an approach rooted in classical models of public governance rather than in MLG was the complete lack of developed mechanisms for cooperation and consultation with non-public actors and their exclusion from decision-making processes (e.g. from the taskforce convened to coordinate the aid effort). This problem was highlighted by one NGO representative:

Maybe it is a bit sad, but I have to say this ... even though a [taskforce] was set up in Płock that was devoted to the armed conflict, [name of interviewee's organisation] was nonetheless not invited to be part of it (NPA1, Płock)

10.6 Conclusions

The dramatic events precipitated by Russia's aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 exerted a profound impact not only upon Ukraine and its population. They also wrought significant changes in the migration landscape in Poland. The abrupt arrival of over one million refugees necessitated extraordinary measures on the part of both public and non-public actors—primarily civil society and its constituent NGOs but also less formalised groups and initiatives. The crisis demanded mobilisation at both a state and local level, with cities assuming a pivotal role. This chapter has focused on system of aid provision for forced migrants from Ukraine that developed in the medium-sized city of Płock with the aim of describing the actions taken by public and non-public actors in response to the influx of refugees and how these efforts were managed and coordinated.

Above all, it must be stated that thanks to a significant mobilisation of human and material resources, the response of both public and non-public actors to the challenges posed by the dynamic influx of refugees to Płock was decisive and relatively effective. Particularly notable in the first days of the crisis was the degree of social mobilisation and activity of non-public actors, who succeeded in providing aid in large part due to the efforts of NGOs and the wider society. Public actors, particularly the City Hall and its subordinate units, also made efforts to organise assistance. In the first months of the emergency such initiatives were ad hoc in nature, characterised by often uncoordinated and at times chaotic provision, which clearly reflected the city's lack of prior experience. Another hallmark of this initial period was the pronounced interconnection and complementarity between public and non-public actors. However, these interactions were not organised in a structured manner. They rather stemmed from the enthusiasm and multiplicity of spontaneous responses of the many actors involved. They also relied on informal social initiatives and already-established relationships between individuals involved in provision made by public institutions and non-public actors. During this time, the most common types of activity involved the establishment of information hubs, the soliciting of financial and material contributions and the organisation of accommodation. These efforts were driven by the imperative to address the most fundamental needs of the refugees.

Over time, the city's system of aid provision underwent notable transformations, becoming both more expansive and better organised. On the one hand, the support provided the forced migrants from Ukraine expanded beyond basic needs provision to encompass aspects such as cultural engagement, entertainment and recreational activities. This development encompassed the offer of Polish language courses and activities for children and young people. A significant factor in the development of the relief effort was the provision made for financial the special law of March 12th. This provision increased the role of public actors, who they subsequently became the dominant actors in the aid effort. This shift reflected the intensified provision of services tailored to the needs of refugees (partly influenced by the fatigue experienced by civic actors due to prolonged involvement). Furthermore, it reflected the concerted efforts of public actors, primarily the City Hall, to establish dominance over smaller non-public actors.

Drawing on Multilevel Governance (MLG) theory, our study reveals that the ideal model of MLG relations based on cooperation and consensus (Kooiman, 2008) was not entirely achievable in Płock. We instead observe a more nuanced version of MLG relations characterised by a continuum stretching between rivalry and cooperation and depending on various categories of actors. In Płock such intermediary stages such as coordination, planning by city authorities, the duplication of activities and the appropriation of non-public actors' assistance activities by the city authorities were also in evidence.

Ultimately, the system of support provision that emerged in Płock tended towards the dominance of public actors, resulting in a shift from distributed governance to a more top-down approach. This shift highlights the challenge of achieving a purely cooperative and consensual MLG model in emergency situations. The case of Płock rather aligns more closely with the disjointed governance model proposed by van Ostaïjen and Scholten (2018), where the activities of involved actors are scattered and poorly coordinated.

The original contribution of this chapter has been to highlight the fluid nature of governance dynamics in response to crises. We have observed how management of the refugee crisis moved between a distributed and a top-down model, with MLG being only temporarily and fragmentarily in evidence. Moreover, these transitions were smooth and often went unnoticed, reflecting local actors' adaptive and pragmatic responses to the evolving situation. This finding in particular underscores the importance of understanding MLG as a dynamic and context-dependent process, particularly in the face of sudden and large-scale crises.

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Part V
Comparative Perspectives on Migration
Governance in CEE Cities

Chapter 11

Modalities of Municipalism in Refugee Solidarity in Hungary: Assisting the Displaced from Ukraine, Post-February 2022



Violetta Zentai, Margit Feischmidt, Eszter Neumann, Ildikó Zakariás and Csilla Zsigmond

11.1 Setting the Agenda¹

11.1.1 Introduction

“Obviously, as a neighbouring country, there is no chance of escaping [the task of assistance provision]. But the refugee assistance system is fundamentally patchy; there is no clear path for you if you arrive to Hungary, to get basic safety. In the end, you arrive somewhere, but many become trapped on the road and incidentally channelled somewhere. The whole system is based on getting away”. (M1) This condensed statement by a well-informed and experienced civic solidarity activist cogently

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V. Zentai (✉)
Central European University, Budapest, Hungary
e-mail: zentaiv@ceu.edu

Central European University, Vienna, Austria

M. Feischmidt · E. Neumann · I. Zakariás · C. Zsigmond
ELTE Centre for Social Sciences, Budapest, Hungary

M. Feischmidt
Department for Media and Communication Studies, Pécs, Hungary

C. Zsigmond
Department of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary

reveals the wider situation in which various dedicated actors in different municipalities in Hungary had to organise themselves in support of displaced Ukrainian citizens after the start of the full-scale war in February 2022.

In the first few months following the start of the 2022 invasion, displaced people from Ukraine arrived in Hungary on a massive scale. As various reports revealed, most of them transited through the country in search of protection elsewhere (UNHCR, 2023a). Even these few days of transit and the need to assist those who decided to stay longer created an extraordinary situation for the dilapidated immigration assistance infrastructure in Hungary. The government combined a pro-Russian and victim-blaming geopolitical narrative with reasonably friendly messages towards hosting displaced Ukrainians. Official high-level statements stressed that Hungary would fulfil its moral duty and help people who had to flee their country due to the war (Zakariás et al., 2023: 3). In reaction to the EU's Temporary Protection (TP) directive, the Hungarian government granted TP status to displaced Ukrainian citizens, mobilised financial resources to entrusted large faith-based charities and devised entitlements to assistance claims by the Ukrainian refugees. Beyond these individually targeted refugee support measures, most municipalities and civic actors, whether allies of the authoritarian regime or not, had to find financial resources, expertise and a labour force to quickly set up their first-level assistance services and then temporary integration measures.

In the last decade, our research team has been exploring civic solidarity practices associated with various 'crisis events' since the 2015 refugee arrivals to Europe, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2022 full-scale war against Ukraine (Feischmidt & Zakariás, 2019; Zakariás et al., 2023). In reflection of the solidarity mobilisations emerging from spring 2022 onward, our complex inquiry has explored how civic and municipal actors reassembled material, human and institutional resources to respond to a situation of urgency and how these actors also reacted to the authoritarian regime and governance in Hungary. More closely, in this chapter, we investigate how local governments and civic actors contributed to generating distinctive forms of municipalism in response to forced migration and what mechanisms enabled the variations in these forms. We initiate the discussion with a selective literature review that dwells on the problem of municipalism and local migration governance and depicts our empirical research and the applied methodological device. Then, we outline the analytical framework we used to unpack the forces that shape modalities of municipalism in local migration governance and flesh out four modalities that we have identified. Our concluding thoughts address the particularities of the refugee solidarity and governance landscape in domestic and Central and East European contexts.

11.1.2 Displaced People from Ukraine in Hungary Post-2022

Between February and December 2022, 3.9 million Ukrainian nationals crossed the border to Hungary of whom two million directly from Ukraine and the rest through

Romania (UNHCR, 2023a). As of October 2023, Hungary had granted temporary protection status to approximately 35,000 Ukrainians (UNHCR, 2023b), equal to less than 0.5% of the total population of the country (9.6 million). According to the IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix, the demographic composition of the hosted Ukrainians was similar to that of those who arrived in other European countries, with an overrepresentation of women, children and elderly dependents and a large proportion of educated people. Regarding their language background, they mainly used Ukrainian (65%) and Russian (33%) (IOM, 2023). As the Hungarian language significantly differs from Slavic ones, organising assistance became a major challenge in the context of Hungarian public administration, which has a weak capacity to provide basic information in any foreign language.

Hungary, like several other European countries, has established a highly restrictive asylum and migration policy regime. Nonetheless, since 2015, it has stood out due to its securitising and illegalising of asylum-seeking as well as its harassment of civic and other autonomous actors who work for refugee rights protection. Xenophobic central governmental communication has conflated all forms of mobility from third countries with the stigmatising label of illegal migration (the individuals being '*migráns*') and painted the most vocal solidarity actors as enemies of the nation (Kovács & Nagy, 2022). Surprisingly, despite the government's openly pro-Russian foreign policy path and domestic discourse, soon after the 2022 full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, Hungarian society expressed a high level of support for Ukrainian forced migrants, as identified in scholarly publications and population surveys (Zakariás et al., 2023). This support remained relatively robust, even until early 2023 (GLOBSEC 05/2023).

With some delay, the Hungarian government reacted with a welcoming narrative to the massive arrival of Ukrainian forced migrants in February 2022. Following the chaotic first weeks, the government assigned the essential humanitarian interventions for Ukrainian refugees to faith-based charities coordinated by the Charity Council. The Council was given the task of managing a central state fund, out of which the six largest charities received support for their operations. In addition to the central state funds, considerable financial resources arrived from international, corporate and private donors. Some of these directly assisted the refugees, and others sponsored the development of civil society capacities to gradually replace citizens' voluntary efforts. Our interviews revealed that the state and its privileged faith-based charities reluctantly cooperated with the main international donors and rejected systematic dialogue with other civil society organisations. The National Directorate General for Disaster Management,² the central state authority for crisis responses, which reports to the Ministry for Internal Affairs, was assigned the power to designate local municipalities for hosting groups of displaced Ukrainians.

As media reports and our own field observations showed, in the spring of 2022, the capital city, its district governance and some towns and villages in the northeastern border region of Hungary, as well as NGOs, grassroots and ad hoc citizen networks

² See the webpage of the authority: <https://www.katasztrofavedelem.hu/33763/introduction>
Accessed on November 20, 2024.

quickly responded to the arrival of people displaced from Ukraine. Concentrated in the main train stations of Budapest, the first destination for those crossing the Ukrainian border, rapid reaction services were set up by civic and smaller religious assistance groups offering temporary accommodation and immediate transfers for those seeking to move on further to destinations in Europe and beyond. In rural areas, municipalities and local organisations registered with the National Directorate General for Disaster Management started to host refugees, typically groups of 20–30 people, by involving many volunteers. In several localities, civic and municipal actors embarked on proactive refugee-welcoming operations with no connection to central coordination mechanisms at the outset. As revealed by a mayor we interviewed in the fall of 2022 (M7), of Hungary's 3155 municipalities, 296 had Ukrainian refugee care activities that received some state support for a shorter or longer period. While enduring practices of solidarity for Ukrainian refugees have largely remained an urban phenomenon in Hungary, small-town and village initiatives played a more salient role in addressing refugee support needs in 2022 than in 2015.

By the end of the summer of 2022, most of those displaced Ukrainians who had plans and opportunities other than staying in Hungary had left the country (UNHCR, 2023b). The seemingly unending need to provide immediate shelter and basic humanitarian aid of an unknown time horizon was replaced by meeting the needs of those who had obtained temporary protection status (for two years at the start). Although this TP status (originally valid until March 2025) entitles displaced Ukrainians to access primary and emergency health care, public educational services and monthly financial assistance, finding one's path to these institutions and overcoming the language barrier has remained a challenge. Further, TP status does not entitle one to secure housing and labour-market assistance. Local governments and civil society organisations had to step in to connect the information sources and administrative avenues for navigating spaces largely dominated by market principles—that is, housing and labour participation.

11.1.3 Methodology and Data

As a background investigation, we mapped solidarity attitudes and early solidarity activism associated with people displaced from Ukraine; we completed a survey with 1,000 respondents, representative of the population of Hungary according to gender, age, settlement type, region and educational background (Zakarias et al., 2023). Data collection was completed in June 2022. Second, we conducted 40 semi-structured interviews, most of these between May and December 2022 and the rest in 2023. The composition of the interview sample was diverse regarding the organisational backgrounds of the actors, including nine NGOs, twelve civic groups, seven local government-related actors (mayors or other municipal officials), four faith-based groups or organisations and four international organisations.³ Third, we carried out

³ The list of interviews by categories of actors is included in the Annex to the chapter.

ethnographic observations in two districts of Budapest and four other localities of different sizes to explore the variegated contexts and modes of local solidarity practices. We coded the interviews using mixed inductive and deductive methods. These observations were conducted in March–December 2022 and January–June 2023. Finally, we took part in solidarity work as volunteers in the capital city and attended a variety of knowledge-sharing events organised by international donors and led by refugee support organisations, corporate donors and municipalities.

Regarding the localities in our inquiry, the capital city was an obvious choice for its proactive local government, longer history of migration policies, multifaceted civil society and concentrated immigrant population, including a modest number of Ukrainian and Russian-speaking diaspora prior to 2022 (Kováts, 2010; Kováts & Soltész, 2022). In addition, the capital-centric transport infrastructure of the country made Budapest a focal point in the dramatic ‘asylum events’ both in 2015 and 2022. In the respective municipal election cycle (2019–2024), most of the districts of Budapest were led by oppositional political forces. Two of these districts were targets of our recurring observations on inclusion-driven local policy-making.

Further, we observed actors who supported refugees with accommodation and other care services in three settlements⁴ near the Ukrainian-Hungarian border, often including impoverished and Roma populations among their own inhabitants. One is a small town and a neighbouring village, where the owners of a boarding house that mainly serves pilgrims hosted families from Transcarpathia and Eastern Ukraine. Another is a small hamlet in the northeastern part of the country with multiple disadvantages where the municipality and its civic actors volunteered to receive refugees. The third is a smaller village that has hosted disadvantaged Transcarpathian families and non-European international students from Ukraine with the devoted support of a Protestant pastor and the presbytery. We also examined a fourth rural locality in a western region of the country close to some economically thriving industrial cities, inhabited mainly by members of the lower-middle class, an ethnically almost homogenous population.

11.2 An Analytical Framework for Understanding Municipalism in Refugee Solidarity and Governance

11.2.1 Consonant Streams in the Literature: Civic Solidarity, New Municipalism and City Making

For this study, we worked with three interrelated streams of thought within the broader scholarly literature. One addresses the changing forms of civil solidarity in response to neoliberal social policy measures and migrant and refugee regimes in Europe in the last two decades. The second stream scrutinises novel forms of

⁴ To maintain the anonymity of our informants, we avoid using the names of the localities.

municipalism in different domestic political and policy contexts with an eye on contentious refugee and migration governance issues. The third one addresses the mechanisms of multi-scalar city-making in Europe and beyond.

Renowned scholars of austerity and neoliberal crisis reactions across societies in Europe and beyond propose that contemporary non-governmental solidarity actions react to but only partially mitigate the precarities associated with neoliberal social and political structures (Muehlebach, 2012). Despite this caveat, other voices argue that civic solidarians constitute their practices as an antidote to such crises (Lahusen et al., 2021; Rakopoulos, 2016). Most recent social movement studies have called for recognising indirect, implicit forms of politicisation that motivate ordinary and everyday acts of collective problem-solving (e.g. Zamponi, 2018; Della Porta & Steinhilper, 2022; Feischmidt & Neumann, 2023). Solidarity acts often strive to substitute for the infrastructural commitment they expect from the state. While their strategic peripheral entrenchment creates *zones of temporal autonomy* from state governance, they also negotiate the terms in which essential state services are to be provided (Trémon, 2022). Working with the notion of contested solidarity, Fleischmann argues (2020) that civic actors may express vocal disagreements with governmental actors; at other times, they operate as grassroots practices without directly making claims towards the state (ibid.). Civic actors may also pursue conservative and hierarchical social visions that deserve attention in the study of solidarity mechanisms, while they also address conditions of exclusion, domination and discrimination in societies when serving people in need (Ambrosini, 2021).

Intrinsically connected to diverse forms of civic solidarity, locally conditioned actors and practices have also received increasing scholarly attention in the second stream of the literature we work with. The concept of *new municipalism* embraces local political and policy actions that reconsider public service provisions in neoliberal domestic economic and governance regimes, posits cities as spaces of democratic changes of national and international relevance and investigates transformative power-sharing between central and local decision-makers (Agustín, 2020). As eloquently revealed by Thompson (2021), the new forms of municipalism reassemble and rework various earlier theorems, visions and practices to take the urban and the local as the site of progressive, democratic and equality-promoting mechanisms and as a counter to spatial, technological, market and administrative forces. New municipalists strive to reform the state at the municipal scale or build a different kind of polis rooted in the urban (Thompson, 2021). Their governance vision often includes a community-based orientation in everyday practices and seeks to reverse the separation between regular citizens and outsiders. The democratic social imagination of politically active citizens and their collectives is nurtured to enact a transformative praxis which expands democracy and social empowerment and reconnects institutions with the common good (Agustín, 2020). All this strategically enables local actors to respond to neoliberal austerity and seek experimental programmes for the transformation of state-market-society relations. These elevated norms are pursued through distinctive entanglements with pragmatic inspirations, degrees of resilience to economic constraints and differential radicalism in departing from traditional party and electoral politics, and each form embodies major tensions between

these inspirations. For our inquiry, it is pertinent that new municipalism ‘twists’ social movements’ practices and contentious politics and makes forms of solidarity politically salient and inherent in local social policy governance (Ataç et al., 2024; Beveridge & Koch, 2021).

Migration policy scholars articulate ideas akin to the progressive hopes and practices of new municipalism. Zapata-Barrero (2024) coined the term ‘re-bordering’ to flesh out the trend by which cities react to states’ (re)bordering processes that activate rigid forms of social governance, limit migrant rights and pursue security-based inclusion. Re-bordering enacts resilient strategies with the purpose of ensuring urban justice in their own operations and for the migrants located outside the social and political system. Further inquiries in migration studies reveal that citizens, civil society and subnational governments, often backed by transnational networks, fill the gaps in refugee protection left by national authorities (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019; Łukasiewicz et al., 2023; Nowicka et al., 2019; Vandevoordt, 2019). Local policy innovations may turn into sustainable refugee protection solutions by ensuring fundamental rights to all and reinvigorating social cohesion and local community relations (Campomori & Ambrosini, 2020; Garcés-Masareñas & Gebhardt, 2020; Permoser & Bauböck, 2023; Sabchev, 2021). The concept of transversal solidarity is used to highlight the bridges across autonomous, civic and institutional domains of solidarity (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019). These solidarity operations are typically initiated by civic actors with various interfaces with other municipal actors. Scholars pay pronounced attention to citizen and civic capacities to produce inclusive social and spatial practices and expand the space for participation in the operation of public institutions as well. Intensive interfaces between policy actors, however, do not guarantee protection from controversy: actors pursue local solidarities which embody political processes of conflict and often result in collisions besides collaboration (Ataç et al., 2024; Santamarina, 2024). By interlacing actors and process perspectives, the concept of ‘zones of negotiations’ (Pott & Tsianos, 2018) grasps solidarity operations through the interactions of different actors—most importantly, local governments, civil society and citizens—in both deliberations and collisions of interests and visions (Kreichauff & Meyer, 2023).

A third path in the scholarly literature relevant to our analysis is the theoretically and empirically robust scholarship on city-making practices spearheaded by Çağlar and Glick-Schiller (2018, 2021). This conceptual scheme understands cities as spaces where institutional, political, economic and cultural actors are positioned on interconnected scales and in domains of power. These actors participate in city-making processes by engaging in forms of displacement and emplacement. Regarding the first concept, widely discussed in the literature, Çağlar and Glick-Schiller offer the theory of emplacement, which connects and creates commonalities between migrant and non-migrant people, embraces local constellations of multi-scalar networks and forces of power and constitutes spaces in which political economies, governance practices and citizenship claims are made. These processes not only move people within and across spaces and borders but facilitate or limit access to means of production and reproduction. The notion of emplacement prompts one to link the categorical division between migrants and non-migrants with the actual practices by which

people operate in their multiple identities and positionalities and in different layers of contemporary political economies. Second, the place-making lens sharpens one's eye concerning both the limiting and enabling outcomes of governance pursued with the normative goal of democratising politics and economy that new municipalism embraces. Finally, the proposal of place-making inspires scholars to deploy a multi-scalar conceptual lens to study localities positioned at lower levels of administrative power.

All three streams of literature encourage and inform research into various scales of geographies and municipalities. They reveal that cities embody complex histories, social compositions, resource settings and governance responsibilities that make them capable of possessing a certain degree of autonomy and manoeuvring public affairs within and across national polities. They often embrace vivid and variegated civic spaces and activities that play critical roles in social policy, inclusion and human rights protection. Although the largest body of research and conceptual thinking in migration governance dwells on larger cities, in this inquiry, we rework some of the analytical tools used in the relevant scholarship to interpret our observations, which also embraced smaller urban and rural municipal entities. Like other voices (e.g. Flamant et al., 2020; Hadj & Katsiaficas, 2023), we argue that these localities also demonstrate differentiated domains of power, accumulated histories of societal relations and civic participation and multi-layered links between decision-makers and the subjects of those decisions. Refugee support practices do become the source of debate, mobilisation and policy formations with multidirectional outcomes in these settings.

11.2.2 Forces Shaping Modalities of Municipalism in Assisting Displaced People from Ukraine

In recent scholarly inquiries, various typologies have been proposed to examine forms of municipalism in migration governance. In a historically and geographically informed theoretical account, Thompson (2021) identifies three models of new municipalism, namely platform, autonomist and managed ones shaped by local actors' interlaced agendas regarding state-space restructuring, the urban-capitalist crisis and political mobilisation on different scales. These agendas are captured by the strategic aims, normative inspirations, catalyst forces, institutional pillars, spatial imaginaries and economic interventions that municipal actors forge. Investigations that rely on inductive theory building by dwelling on recent and contemporary urban practices in the Global North and often beyond scrutinise governmental and civic institutional settings, political contexts and societal configurations on multiple scales and the intersections of these factors (Bazurli & Kaufmann, 2023; de Graauw & Vermeulen, 2016; Scholten & Penninx, 2016). Others add a historical perspective to local societal formations and a long-durée understanding of participation traditions

in local affairs (e.g. Caponio, Scholten & Zapata-Barrero, 2018). Paradigms of multi-level governance also enrich the conceptual discussions in the field due to the equally robust scrutiny of both vertical and horizontal relations between policy-shaping actors. Among the leading voices that work with these paradigms, specifically in migration governance arenas, Scholten and Penninx (2016) identify four ideal-type configurations of governmental ties: centralist (top-down), localist (bottom-up), multilevel and decoupled. Caponio and Jones-Correa (2018) argue that multi-level governance arenas composed of a vertical and horizontal nexus of actors also encompass heterogeneous and non-hierarchical networks of actors cutting across the first two domains. Garcés-Mascreñas and Gebhardt (2020) propose enhancing this model with components of policy entrepreneurship in a multilevel governance space, stressing the capacities to innovate and perseverance and alliances with like-minded actors in advocating for change. Bazurli and Kaufmann (2023) dwell on the potential of insurgency in urban asylum policies shaped by horizontal and vertical dimensions of multilevel governance. Their investigation of three large cities in Europe portrays sustained insurgency, temporary insurgency and progressive conformism. To explain variations in refugee supporting local policies across four large cities in the Global North, Bazurli and de Graauw (2023) examine city-specific and supra-local contextual factors that enable four different policy outcomes along two dimensions: policy content (providing substantive support to asylum seekers) and policy harmony (conforming or contesting the national policy paradigms) of the local interventions. Pisarevskaya and Scholten (2025) propose a typology of five types of urban diversity in European urban spaces based on four systemic conditions which shape dynamic opportunities for local migration governance.

In conversation with these model-building efforts to explain variations in local migration governance formations, we have conceived our own analytical scheme to make sense of the geographically dispersed but non-representative set of research data. In so doing, we have honed the insights that we have assembled through studying social actors and spaces inhabiting Central and East European political and governance domains over several years. Adding insights from the literature on refugee solidarity, new municipalism and multi-scalar place-making, as highlighted in a previous section, we propose a *five-pronged analytical framework* to explain the modalities of municipalism in refugee solidarity and governance.

We have identified the following forces that together shape local (forced) migrant solidarity mechanisms and governance.

1. **Vertical institutional relations** that localities are embedded in, which shape the autonomy and dependency of municipal actors in the field of forced migrant assistance and in broader policy formations; the local institutional and governance landscape tailoring initial opportunity conditions for migrant solidarity at the local level;
2. **Horizontal collaboration** and alliances among civic and municipal actors that are routinised prior to the observed forced-migration events and enhanced during ongoing solidarity operations;

3. The **social inclusion experiences** of the agenda-setting solidarity actors by which they react to the emerging needs and opportunity structures in the current solidarity operations;
4. **Access to and mobilisation of resources** in pursuing broader social inclusion policy-making and operating active refugee support;
5. **The composition of local society**, which shapes its receptivity to tolerating or supporting solidarity actions initiated by local coalitions in social policy and migration matters.

1. *Vertical Institutional Relations*

Hungary embraces a largely decentralised system of municipal governance, formally composed of three tiers (central, county and local). The latter includes 3300 + elected local governments. Since the current regime has been ruling the country (since 2010), decision-making power regarding local developmental resources (including EU funds) has been dramatically centralised and skewed to the localities loyal to the ruling regime's clientele web (Pálné Kovács, 2020). The middle tier has primarily become a top-down resource allocation tool with some responsibilities for maintaining the infrastructure of regional scope. Municipal actors vary not only by administrative status, size and location in spatial hierarchies but also in terms of being the regime's allies or opponents. While city governments' elected leaderships tend to be explicitly compliant or non-compliant with the central government, larger and smaller villages can navigate through ambiguity. Overall, all municipal actors relate to the hegemonic authoritarian structures in public administration, social services and other municipal affairs (Tamás, 2016).

There has been a massive decline in the quality and generosity of social services in Hungary since 2010. Family support has become increasingly based on the 'deservingness' of social groups assessed through their productive capacities as labour force, investors, parents and complying citizens (Czibere et al., 2024; Herke, 2020; Inglot, Rat & Szikra, 2022). Municipal governments have been stripped of most of their earlier educational and healthcare responsibilities and funding sources. The state has lavishly supported faith-based social policy services, which has resulted in a bifurcated schooling system and the 'churchification' of various care services (Fodor, 2022). This has reduced funding for social policy and standardised revenue streams for public services maintained by municipalities. In these circumstances, entrepreneurship, bargaining capacities and compromise-making choices shape municipal capacities and the opportunity structure in any policy field, including migrant assistance (Kováts & Soltész, 2022). The latter, however, was nudged, twisted or transformed by the solidarity champions to various degrees in 2022–23.

The first overwhelming experience for the interviewed solidarians was the lack of a transparent and centrally coordinated refugee-welcoming infrastructure, except for the active presence of border guards and national railway personnel in the first weeks following February 2022. What only recently became known is that the National Directorate General for Disaster Management started to act behind the scenes and engage the larger humanitarian organisations and some local governments in a selective way. Other municipal actors implemented their own initiatives

and sought routes to obtaining low-level financial compensation from central state budgets later standardised. Overall, the vertical relations of municipal governance only ensured a minimum level of resource allocation and coordination in basic humanitarian assistance for the proactive municipal actors. Further, the regular social services open to refugees (primarily in education and health care) continued to function with a strong vertical logic, even if accessibility primarily had to be locally managed, with some additional opportunities obtained through bargains with the privileged faith-based charities. In these vertical relations, the lead local solidarity actors' compliance or non-compliance with the central regime's institutional and discursive forces were, in some cases, unequivocal choices; in others, they were outcomes of layered manoeuvring.

2. *Horizontal Collaborations and Alliance Building Among Civic and Municipal Actors*

Civic-municipal cooperation in local policy-making is diverse and manifold in Hungarian municipalities. In urban settings, civil society organisations show diversity in their missions, political or apolitical standing and the density of their civic networks. In smaller localities, they can survive by pursuing ties with local opinion makers or engaging with national networks of issue-specific groups (e.g. education, environment or community building). As our local field explorations revealed, those who had a history of working in highly demanding conditions or on contentious issues had a greater chance of being emotionally, morally and conceptually prepared to initiate and justify actions in the 2022 refugee reception situation.

Local governments show variegated receptivity to civic-municipal government cooperation and possess differentiated capacities to manage this sort of cooperation. Social assistance is a field in which a lot of urban governments do cooperate with civic actors in designing services for marginalised groups or contracting out services to specific social groups (e.g. the elderly). This nexus becomes complicated by the local chapters of the large faith-based organisations and their charity operations. Most of these charities are centrally governed, with little transparency, even if their local staff occasionally seek horizontal cooperations. Sometimes, they remain parallel structures in the local municipal spaces; in other cases, they attract competent staff from the impoverished state sector (Keller & Virág, 2023; Keller, Szőke, & Virág, 2022).

When the needs of displaced Ukrainians warranted fast action in the spring of 2022, the municipal leaders of civil society backgrounds ushered in the establishment of municipal government and civic interfaces in both the capital's mayor's office and the district governments of Budapest. In one of the two city districts we observed, the Civic Participation Office of the local government was the driving force behind the municipal involvement by mobilising many volunteers. In the other district, the liaisons between the mayor's office, the social service departments, NGOs and volunteers had already been established during the COVID-19 crisis (Baranyai, C & Ferencz, 2022). In other urban and rural settlements, municipal governments manoeuvred their horizontal nexuses in differentiated manners. Some remained passive or even secretive towards civic actors about their capacities and intentions regarding

refugee welcoming. Others acted as solidarity pioneers and/or sought civic partners for their knowledge and human resources. The compliance or non-compliance of the respective municipal government with the central authoritarian regime showed some correspondence with its mode of relating to the local civic actors.

3. *Inclusion Experiences and Visions*

We argue that social inclusion visions and experiences are essential to unpacking local migration governance practices. We use the umbrella term ‘inclusion’ in cognisance that, both in the social actors’ and scholarly vocabularies, various alternative concepts are used, such as in/equality, human rights and social justice. The forced migrants’ solidarity needs emerged on a massive scale and embodied complex human needs and vulnerabilities. Thus, it required persistence, knowledge and courage to conceive the adequate direction of solidarity actions and prepare for contestations by the wider public, the national and local authorities or even beneficiaries. Solidarity and social inclusion experience helped actors build self-confidence in designing solidarity interventions despite their radically different resources and positions in an authoritarian environment (Zentai & Feischmidt, 2025).

To understand the knowledge of key actors concerning how to build solidarity actions, we examined their inequality and human rights activism or humanitarian assistance prior to the 2022 forced migration from Ukraine. We judge social inclusion experience as formative if the local actors had engaged in pro-equality or targeted inclusion actions for vulnerable or protected social groups in the recent past. Deploying the simplified twin concepts of selective and non-selective, we denote the dominant local social policy visions along an axis of hierarchical versus egalitarian social outcomes. Local authorities had accumulated formative experiences in social policies, such as managing social cleavages between the Roma and non-Roma or mitigating the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in a general authoritarian context. For civic actors, supporting local emergency or crisis conditions and advocating for local governmental actions created formative capacities. As our field research revealed, solidarity actors shared two fundamental experiences, especially in the early weeks of the war. First, they sensed that all those arriving from the war-torn Ukraine were civilian victims and thus faced a universal human predicament. Second, solidarians felt that they had been abandoned by the government in their dedication to providing unconditional support to refugees. Their conviction of the equality of basic human needs among the displaced people we label a non-selective social governance path. On top of this, we read the acknowledgement of specific properties of people that goes beyond identifying the equality of basic needs as advanced equality thinking. In this vein, several civic and local governmental solidarity actors in our research sample viewed the classical care demands in society, including gender, ability, age, health and parenting responsibility, as conditions complicating the needs of the displaced people (Feischmidt & Zentai, 2023) and requiring specific attention.

Regardless of their pre-2022 experiences in refugee reception, solidarity actors acknowledged that people displaced from Ukraine are layered according to their social backgrounds and mobility trajectories, stemming most importantly from their citizenship and ethnic background imbued with forms of precarity. These people not

only transported such vulnerability across the country's borders but were often met with suspicion by the wider public in the host society (Eredics et al., 2022; Tóth & Bernát, 2023). Transcarpathian Roma and third-country nationals among the forced migrants became the prime targets of a deservingness test (Tosic & Streinzer, 2022) in the eyes of the public and frequently proved inadmissible. In reaction to this, several solidarians, civic and municipal alike, specifically dedicated themselves to saving those who were believed to generate public resilience or rejection or who had been rejected by other helpers. The devotion to work with the least deserving meant opposing the narratives of the ruling regime and actively working with wider non-supportive societal sentiments (Feischmidt & Zentai, 2023).

4. *Access to and Mobilisation of Resources*

For refugee solidarity work, access to financial resources, material infrastructure, know-how, network capital and media attention comprises the major difference among the involved actors in any contemporary context. In Hungary, humanitarian and social assistance aid resources were divided in an unequal way among civic actors, large faith-based charities and state-funded municipal actors even prior to 2022. We assumed that following February 2022, due to the suddenly and dramatically intensified solidarity scene, this division would be reshuffled. However, we found that the distribution of central government funds, including EU sources, remained centralised, non-transparent and primarily inaccessible to non-state actors except for the larger privileged faith-based charities. In 2022, local governments remained entitled to receive modest per capita support for their refugee host services through reimbursement. Therefore, those who engaged in hosting people displaced from Ukraine had to mobilise external, their own or other local resources. Local business and civic actors lined up in several localities: while business owners were essential in providing material support (food, transport, cash, shelter, etc.), civic actors unleashed their human resources.

As in any large-scale humanitarian juncture, international aid organisations quickly ushered in backing the major European countries that hosted the largest numbers of displaced people from Ukraine. UNHRC became the largest donor and technical assistance organisation in Hungary. It worked with large charities favoured by the central government, but it also sponsored several established and autonomous human rights and social inclusion-driven civil society organisations. These included smaller faith-based organisations, which were seen by the central government as insurgents. UNICEF also mobilised noteworthy resources and supported both local authorities and civic groups. IOM Hungary engaged with some of the local governments that we studied, but it also became the beneficiary of central government funding. The distribution of international funding reached civic actors who possessed experience in grant application and management, typically the most established ones located in the capital city. Support for rural initiatives was ensured by smaller donor organisations with modest financial resources, knowledge sharing, and network capital. United Way and the Carpathian Foundation's programmes focused on minor seed grant distribution, mentoring and knowledge exchange by targeting smaller organisations outside of the metropolitan region.

When people displaced from Ukraine started to arrive in Hungary, spontaneous forms of information exchange emerged among civic actors. This cooperation was built on previous horizontal liaisons between key NGOs specialised in refugee care who provided technical support to smaller organisations, voluntary groups and municipalities. In addition, a new formation emerged on the solidarity scene, a rapidly created, efficient and enduring mega-size Facebook platform sharing solidarity supply-and-demand information in three languages (Ukrainian, English and Hungarian). The facilitating group, composed of young professional working moms and other members of the host society, took off as a citizen action coalition and turned into an association over time. Their role evolved from a neutral and multifaceted information-sharing platform to a brokering and experience reflection forum connecting various institutionalised civic operations. This activity purposefully remained under the guidance of autonomous civic actors fenced off from state, business and municipal spaces (Lengyel-Wang, 2023).

5. *Composition of Local Society*

Like everywhere in Europe, in Hungary, larger urban settlements are more pluralistic in their social histories and compositions than smaller urban and rural settlements. However, this is only one of the key properties of local social landscapes. It is not unparalleled in Europe that populist governmental ideology apparatuses promulgate polarised visions of societies composed of productive and non-productive citizens, families and groups (Gerő & Sik, 2020; Kovács & Nagy, 2022). In Hungary, this has developed into an overarching authoritarian governance regime that operates social policy systems through ‘deservingness’ principles. Those who are perceived to deserve recognition and resources have certain demographic, economic and moral capacities and ethnic and cultural properties sharply contrasted with those who do not. Further, workfare and pronatalist distribution mechanisms intensify the outcomes of a political economy weakly protected from global economic currents (Scheiring & Szombati, 2020). The intermingling effects result in local societies that are often polarised by political belonging, social networks and dependency relations yet also interlaced in a variety of neighbourhood, workplace, civic and community relations.

We have identified four major configurations of local society that created differential opportunities and challenges in pursuing solidarity actions: plural, integrated, divided and managed. The larger cities that we studied are composed of ‘plural’ social tissues, and their social diversity is cherished or even capitalised by municipal governance. Their social inequalities are managed in some fashion and only rarely turn antagonistic. Local societies in smaller urban or rural settings that we observed are less plural yet ‘integrated’. Integration does not eliminate but contains or mitigates social inequalities through non-polarising local governance (Czibere & Kovách, 2022). The ‘divided’ local social composition typically prevails in localities where the local opinion makers promulgate hierarchy-based social relations and institutions, and the municipal government either resonates with these or remains passive in resisting them. ‘Managed’ local societies do have their internal hierarchies, yet they also have a sense of convenience or limited integration, which in the Hungarian context is the avoidance of living together with Roma citizens.

11.3 Modalities of Municipalism in Refugee Solidarity

Based on our empirical research findings, we have identified four modalities of local solidarity operations in response to forced migration from Ukraine in 2022–23: (1) transformative, (2) fragile, (3) contentious and (4) conformist. The four modalities demonstrate distinctive and complex social, political and institutional spaces as well as courses of events enabled by the solidarity actors and their capacities to shape these spaces. As all have been shaped by specific constellations of municipal actors in variegated positions vis-a-vis the national political and policy paradigms, they qualify as forms of municipalism in refugee solidarity and, in a broader sense, migration governance. Therefore, we canvass a landscape of current migration governance in Hungary without claiming representativity or a comprehensive socio-spatial overview. We present concise portrayals of these modalities by tying them to the concrete localities we explored. Our interpretation cannot pay detailed attention to how temporalities played out in these local cases, but the four portrayals below embody junctures, punctuated or gradual changes, stalemates or even more complex dynamics (Table 11.1).

1. *Transformative Municipalism*

The most transformative refugee support actions were carried out by local coalitions of equality-conscious civic actors and local government entities resisting mainstream concepts and practices of imposing naturalised social divides. These actors relied on material, expert, network and recognition resources and took advantage of socially plural urban spaces through exemplary leadership and previous or

Table 11.1 Modalities of municipalism in refugee solidarity and their underlying mechanisms

Modalities of municipalism	Vertical institutional relations	Horizontal relations: civic and local government links	History of inclusive governance and prime solidarity gov. principle	Mobilisation of resources	Composition of local society
Transformative	non-compliant	strong	formative and non-selective	significant	plural
Fragile	non-compliant	strong	formative and non-selective	modest	integrated
Contentious	non-compliant or formally neutral	thin to none	partially formative and selective with non-selective islands	modest to thin	divided
Conformist	compliant	controlled	none and selective	significant	managed

Source: Authors' construction

existing engagements in inclusive social policy. These municipal action coalitions had internal political and social support, although rarely uncontested, and involved well-developed networks of civic actors. They often managed to enact islands of solidarity against a wider authoritarian regime and its social vision. This municipalism modality had to face the challenge of how to share physical infrastructure and other limited resources among local marginalised communities, including the Hungarian Roma and the newly arriving forced migrants.

In the respective local governmental election cycle (2019–2024), the municipal governments of Budapest and most of its 23 local administrative districts were dominated by oppositional political forces. Despite limited financial resources, the districts possessed some policy and fiscal autonomy in social policy issues. Two of the capital districts had outstanding initial conditions for transformative municipalism in the first months following February 2022. They were led by mayors with strong civic and human rights backgrounds and had elected councils offering either strong or satisfactory support. Local policy-making remained non-compliant with central governmental agendas by establishing transparent decision-making, the prudent management of public funds and inclusion-driven social policies. The links between the capital city and the districts moved in genuine and coordinated collaboration regarding the Ukrainian war-related refugee support work. The city government of Budapest, in essence, acted as the extension of the horizontal ties that the district actors generated with its tangible logistical, infrastructure and financial support. The Metropolitan Coordination Forum in Budapest was established as early as February 2022 to facilitate consultations between local professional NGOs, international refugee organisations (UNHCR, IOM) and civic initiatives.

In the two districts of Budapest, daily solidarity operations relied on strong civil and local government cooperation in pluralistic urban social spaces. Experienced and equality-conscious civic actors functioned as facilitators and brokers among different stakeholders. International donors quickly found these civic actors and offered resources to provide direct assistance, capacity development and infrastructure enhancement to primary reception services. The respective municipal authorities reallocated their own resources in parallel with opening and capacitating the municipal-run institutions regarding refugee care. *“Here, the two worlds naturally overlap, and it makes no difference whether you help as a municipality or as a civil society organisation – you help, and that’s it”*—stated one municipal government official we interviewed (M2). The civic and municipal actors voiced unconditional solidarity for refugees, irrespective of their ethnic and citizenship backgrounds, by referring to principles of social justice and human rights. They considered solidarity mechanisms as connecting public duties and refugees’ human rights with compassion and stamina. The transformative effects of their municipalism included not only finding adequate ways to provide care and share local resources but also reinforcing those local alliances that enabled inclusive municipalism as a way forward. In doing so, they made municipal governance a resilient force in a wider authoritarian environment.

2. *Fragile Municipalism*

Several other municipal governments also initiated solidarity actions for people displaced from Ukraine by insisting on non-compliant social policy principles in their vertical governance links. These actors had some but more modest resources than the ones in the capital city and its district governments but worked in a close alliance with civic groups concerned with human rights and inclusion. A few international organisations helped these local actors, but these resources dried out over time. These local coalitions pursued duty-to-care missions by resisting the ‘deservingness’ distinctions embodied in policy framings and distributive provisions of the central government regime. Despite initial solidarity enthusiasm and supportive attitudes, citizens of some of these localities developed welfare-sharing concerns if their own resources were drained and living conditions deteriorated. Nonetheless, the proactive refugee-welcoming operations remained successful in those municipalities where inclusion-driven policy-making had started earlier than 2022, and accumulated knowledge helped navigate the local refugee support scene.

In a small rural settlement in Eastern Hungary, the mayor’s office embarked on solidarity championing based on proactive mission expansion immediately from the second week of the full-scale war against Ukraine. The mayor shared with us that *“(T)he regional office of the respective state authorities did not designate us as a refugee hosting settlement. But we have local citizens dedicated to acting as solidarians. I suggested that we go directly to the state border and offer our hosting services to those who are unassisted. And it happened”* (M6). Their links to central authorities demonstrated unambiguous non-compliance in relation to framing their social policies, yet they made some practical compromises by claiming the minimum per capita state support for refugee accommodation. In parallel, they reshuffled their local small-scale but genuine social service infrastructure and personnel to deliver asylum assistance. They were also able to rely on volunteering citizens. The mayor’s office carefully balanced between the needs of local citizens and those of the Ukrainian forced migrants. Their local assistance to Roma and other marginalised citizens remained proactive parallel to interventions addressed to forced migrants. Solid self-confidence and public trust in their generally inclusive local social policies backed the explicit non-compliance with norms of ‘deservingness’ promulgated by the central government.

Although the forced migrant support in this mode of municipalism became genuine and robust in local terms, it also remained fragile. In this modality, pro-inclusion entrepreneurial leadership was essential, which is not unknown among the municipal leaders, but not common sense in the wider politico-administrative environment. Further, non-hostile or even collaborative relations between Roma and non-Roma groups in the local community is rarely the case in smaller rural places in Hungary. Localities that exemplified this modality of municipalism maintained inclusive provisions of public services which they extended to people of migrant and asylum backgrounds. Equality championing leadership is based on some favourable local conditions, and more importantly, it builds these local conditions through courageous navigation and perseverance. The sustainability of this leadership under an authoritarian political environment is often fragile.

3. Contentious Municipalism

In a reluctant or passive municipal governmental environment, civil actors and active citizens served as the engine of solidarity. They searched for opportunities to develop the basic infrastructure of refugee hospitality. They frequently found allies in local entrepreneurs engaged in local public affairs. Non-governmental solidarians often had social inclusion support experience of some sort, whereas their material and human resources for providing refugee support were modest, uneven or dispersed. In addition to the challenges, reactions from local communities were often fused with explicit ‘deservingness’ thinking. In some localities, the decline in general welfare and drastic energy price increases, the corollary of the war, generated resistance to solidarity with the victims of the war. In other settings, the Transcarpathian Roma refugees became quintessential undeserving subjects. They were rejected for being responsible for their own plight and seen as bogus refugees whose vulnerability was faked or overstated.

In February 2022, in rural areas and small urban settlements near the Ukrainian-Hungarian border that we studied, many residents, families and civic groups rushed to help people fleeing Ukraine to Hungary. Although the local governments in these localities often remained passive, they were not hostile when local civic groups, religious and grassroots alike, started to organise themselves. In the urban settlement we examined near the Ukrainian border, the local affiliate of a lead Budapest-based refugee advocacy organisation started to horizontally coordinate local grassroots and nearby faith-based charity groups, as well as business owners. In rural localities, this role was taken on by a local hospitality entrepreneur in close cooperation with a local priest and his spouse, both members of a small congregation, not from among the central government-favoured charities. In both localities, the agenda-setting impact of the international organisations and the Budapest-based civic allies on this locality was insignificant. Local actors’ financial resources remained modest and gradually declined by the end of the summer of 2022. Residents first were motivated to volunteer by seeing the poor asylum infrastructure and the low-level governmental responsiveness to refugee needs. When the number of forced migrants started to decrease, and the remaining ones sought more enduring inclusion services, residents’ dedication to caring for the displaced declined. The displaced were no longer seen as ‘vulnerable enough’, in contrast to other local marginalised or precariat.

In both localities, the solidarity drive of the local public was gradually replaced by claims for selective social policy in resonance with the existing social divides: the needs of the local host society, especially its productive and well-integrated members, were perceived as deserving priority. The initial enthusiasm, devotion and horizontal mobilisation capacities of the key civic actors waned after a few months of dedicated operation. Due to receiving little professional, material and recognition support, civic solidarians were gradually forced to give up on their efforts, while the respective municipal governments remained passive. This mode of municipalism in refugee care, spearheaded by a few civic, faith-based and private business actors, appeared contentious: the local actors’ coalition remained patchy, social support was weak and declined over time and solidarity actions relied on selectively inclusive

social policy traditions, if any. In one of the two respective localities, the active solidarians became perceived by other residents as endangering the social cohesion of the village by actively serving the Roma refugees viewed as even more despised than the local Roma population. Based on anecdotal evidence, we assume that this contentious mode of municipalism was relatively widespread among those localities that hosted displaced people from Ukraine.

4. *Conformist Municipalism*

Due to a lack of comprehensive inquiry, based on our selective qualitative research, we can only assume that most municipalities and mayors hosting Ukrainian refugees are in political positions vertically compliant or neutral but only rarely non-compliant with the central government. None of these positions, however, predetermined the local reactions to the arrival of displaced Ukrainians. Our population survey conducted in June of 2022 revealed that both respondents who supported and opposed offering support to Ukrainian refugees did vary by political meta-ideologies or voting preferences (Zakariás et al., 2023). Therefore, it was not surprising that several municipalities with no history of asylum services opened their doors to exiled Ukrainians. They obtained modest and earmarked state support, redeployed their own resources and mobilised volunteers. Some municipal governments acted out of humanitarian convictions, whereas others pursued pragmatic objectives by hosting refugees. Some received recurrent publicity in state media, thereby demonstrating that the Hungarian government and society are fundamentally welcoming to Ukrainian refugees.

A handful of local governments proactively engaged in solidarity operations due to a self-centred governance agenda, local social integration strategy, cunning self-promotion or a combination of these drivers. An in-depth case study conducted as part of our team research helped us explore one locality in Western Hungary where a municipal government led active local asylum support in 2022 (Safonova, 2023). A formally non-aligned yet vertically compliant mayor took the initiative in the first days of the war. He approached the National Directorate General for Disaster Management and proactively offered the welcoming facilities of the village to the displaced. The mayor possessed sound local knowledge of how to mobilise citizens' resources, including knowledge of Russian or Ukrainian languages and social assistance and organising skills in the face of a lack of active civil society and grassroots entities. Through this strategic move, the mayor managed to host a group of Ukrainian forced migrants in congruence with local capacities. He energised the local community by using the narrative of pride in disinterested solidarity. Further, he quietly spread the knowledge that, by doing this, the settlement could avoid hosting Transcarpathian Roma. This intention concurred with the prevailing local social governance, which 'efficiently' protected any Roma from moving into the settlement except for a few selected families.

This path of municipalism mobilised local resources, actively built on local policies within well-established vertical liaisons, and boosted and endorsed a community spirit that was imbued with normalised social policy selectivity. Conversations that backed up the case study unveiled that the village welcomed newcomers warmly, creating positive sentiment in the local community about the inhabitants' moral

worth. A local activist summed up the dominant local public sentiments this way: *“I often got into discussions about the roots of this conflict and the problematic figure of the Ukrainian president, and many other opinions promulgated by the state-controlled media, yet nobody doubted whether we needed to help these concrete people. They became ‘our Ukrainians’”* (Cited by Safonova, 2023).

11.4 Conclusions and Limitations

We identified various modalities of municipalism in refugee solidarity that emerged in Hungary in response to the arrival of forced migrants from Ukraine upon the start of the full-scale invasion against the country. The modalities of municipalism we captured do not compose a fully-fledged typology of local migration governance in Hungary in 2022–23. Our inquiry has been limited in its geographical and temporal scope and grasped mainly early refugee reception and inclusion services for the hosted Ukrainians. More comprehensive research will be needed to find further modalities of municipalism by exploring other urban settings outside of the capital city. To that end, we envision to refine our analytical framework as well. For example, the combined perspective of past and current inclusion policy experiences and paradigm choices is likely to be a subject of analytical separation.

Originally, we examined localities where solidarity actors launched local initiatives for welcoming and later integration services. We assumed that municipal policy-making would engender spaces of alterity and resilience in the dominantly authoritarian governance of public affairs. We did find cases of active municipalism enacting such resilience, but local action remained fragile or contentious in other cases, and elsewhere, it encompassed vertically compliant governance. Municipal actors and coalitions in smaller cities and villages often operate amidst intersecting ethnic and class divides and conditions of precarity that appear more rigid than in larger cities. For these municipal actors, creating spaces of solidarity is a realistic opportunity only if the vocal part of the local community can be brought together in a moral or normative welfare-agenda-framing network. Elsewhere, the inequality mechanisms, deservingness debates and local dependency relations seriously limit the municipal actors’ scope of action or force them to engage in unpleasant compromises. These conditions shape most powerfully the contentious (third) modality of our explanatory scheme. In the two respective local cases of this modality, the municipal governments were not hostile to refugee solidarity yet remained passive observers of the enthusiastic local civic initiatives. The pioneer civic actors initially ventured to go against the deservingness-based policy climate despite receiving modest moral, professional and material support and gradually were forced to give up or displace their resilient activism.

The scholarship we selectively reflected upon at the outset of this study reveals that in migration governance, conflicts and decoupling between local and national policies are frequent and represent common sense rather than the exception in larger and socially diverse cities with migratory traditions (Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017;

Garcés-Mascareñas & Gebhardt, 2020; Zapata-Barrero, 2024). These converging observations have largely zoomed in on cities in the most developed part of the Global North, where global neoliberalism and securitisation policies have prompted the utmost municipal resilience and renewal. Unlike in these contexts, in Hungary, which has the most centralised and clientelist authoritarian regime in Central and Eastern Europe, municipalism thrives within both compliant and non-compliant positions. Regarding Ukrainian forced-migration-related solidarity, both transformative and conformist municipalisms generated policy entrepreneurship and local coalitions to create active place-making for the displaced Ukrainians. This finding encourages us to contemplate the interfaces among new municipalism and multi-scalar place-making theories to unveil the nature of localisms when the latter are embraced by authoritarian social governance visions, resource allocation and dependency ties. The leading thinkers of place-making inquiries consider locally relevant governance processes as complex fields of power in which the municipal space and state space are intricately entangled and mutually co-constituting (Çağlar & Glick-Schiller, 2021). Municipal actors may or may not be interested in the democratic renewal of the economy, politics and social services yet produce locally dense and active new realignments in political, economic and cultural configurations, as well as new forms of legitimation and contestation. The solidarity responses to the arrival of displaced Ukrainians in 2022–23 have multiplied these municipally anchored experiences and revealed the increasing diversity of social, political and policy processes that embrace, accommodate or resist different versions of authoritarian political and governance regimes in Central and Eastern Europe.

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Annex

Interview list and identification

Number	Type of actors	Interview ID
1	NGO	N1
2	NGO	N2
3	NGO	N3
4	NGO	N4
5	NGO	N5
6	NGO	N6
7	NGO	N7
8	NGO	N8

(continued)

(continued)

Number	Type of actors	Interview ID
9	NGO	N9
10	Civic group	C1
11	Civic group	C2
12	Civic group	C3
13	Civic group	C4
14	Civic group	C5
15	Civic group	C6
16	Civic group	C7
17	Civic group	C8
18	Civic group	C9
19	Civic group	C10
20	Civic group	C11
21	Civic group	C12
22	Municipal government - capital city	M1
23	Municipal government - capital city	M2
24	Municipal government - capital city	M3
25	municipal government - rural	M4
26	municipal government - town	M5
27	municipal government - rural	M6
28	municipal government - rural	M7
29	Faith based charity	F1
30	Faith based org	F2
31	Faith based charity	F3
32	Faith based group	F4
33	Faith based educational entity	E1
34	Private educational entity	E2
35	Public educational entity	E3
36	Public educational entity	E4
37	International organisation	IN1
38	International organisation	IN2
39	International organisation	IN3
40	International organisation	IN4

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Chapter 12

Governing Migration in CEE Cities: Comparative Insights from the CEELMiG Index



Karolina Łukasiewicz , Marta Pachocka , and Michał Nowosielski

12.1 Introduction

Chapters of this book **map migration governance structures** in nine CEE cities, which are often overlooked in the broader migration literature. The book provides an in-depth insight into migration governance in the **capital cities**—Warsaw (Chapter 2, Winiarska et al., 2026), Budapest (Chapter 3; Matuszczyk & Bernát, 2026; Chapter 11; Zentai et al., 2026) and Prague (Chapter 4, Jelínková & Zogata-Kusz, 2026); **secondary cities** of Kraków (Chapter 5, Czerska-Shaw & Pędziwiatr, 2026) and Brno (Chapter 6, Jaworsky et al., 2026); **border cities** of Lublin (Chapter 7, Podgórska & Jekaterynczuk, 2026) and Oradea (Chapter 8, Mészáros, 2026) and **shrinking cities** of Płock (Chapter 10, Lewandowski & Nowosielski, 2026) and Łomża (Chapter 9, Popławska et al., 2026). Across the cities, authors identified key state and non-state actors, their respective roles and the implementation of immigrant integration policies and programmes, as well as the changes that took place between 2015 and 2024, including those prompted by the 2022 forced migration from Ukraine. The authors analysed **horizontal governance dynamics** by examining relationships among local state, non-state and grassroots actors, and how their interactions shape governance on the ground. They also analysed **vertical**

K. Łukasiewicz

Centre of Migration Research, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland
e-mail: k.lukasiewicz@uw.edu.pl

M. Pachocka (✉)

SGH Warsaw School of Economics, Warsaw, Poland
e-mail: mpachoc@sgh.waw.pl

M. Nowosielski

WSB Merito University, Gdańsk, Poland

Centre of Migration Research, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland
e-mail: michal.nowosielski@gdansk.merito.pl

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governance dynamics between local, national and supranational levels, including forms of coordination, alignment and disjuncture. Each chapter identified some **macro-, meso-, and micro-level factors** shaping migration governance in the analysed cities, *both vertically*, in terms of alignment or divergence from national-level policies, and *horizontally*, through inter-actor relations and comparisons across different city contexts.

This final chapter aims to summarise key findings, introduce a novel CEE Local Migrant Governance Index (CEELMiG) which will be used to present a cross-city analysis comparing migration governance in cities, and develop a model of migration governance characteristics for CEE, incorporating the key factors that shape them. We conclude by highlighting our contribution to the literature on multilevel migration governance in cities.

12.2 Cities Contextualised

Cases of cities included in this book highlight how the 2015 European refugee reception crisis either amplified existing migration governance trends or triggered new dynamics across the analysed cities in Central and Eastern Europe. Despite significant differences in how the crisis impacted CEE countries, national governments in Poland, Hungary and Czechia generally adopted restrictive immigration and integration policies. Yet, the 2015 crisis and later the 2022 forced displacement from Ukraine, prompted diverse local responses ranging from developing proactive integration strategies (Prague, Brno, Kraków) to reliance on civil society and remaining primarily a transit point (Budapest, Oradea, Łomża), reflecting varied local political will, existing infrastructure and capacities. The 2022 forced displacement from Ukraine strengthened cooperation among local actors and, in many cases, spurred the development of more effective and adaptive local policies.

Large capital cities (Warsaw, Prague, Budapest), compared to smaller secondary or shrinking cities, experienced the largest immigrant influxes and became at the forefront of crisis response in the 2015 and 2022 crises. Local governments and civil society organisations proved crucial in responding to large-scale forced migration, often filling the gaps where national policies were absent, ineffective or slow to adapt. While some cities, such as Warsaw or Prague, were primarily built upon existing integration frameworks, others, like Budapest, largely maintained a “no policy” approach despite the evident needs. The crises generally spurred significant, though often informal, horizontal cooperation at the local level and, in some cases, led to an accelerated organic mainstreaming of migration across municipal departments. However, overcoming pre-existing structural and political challenges, particularly antagonistic national-local relations, remained a significant hurdle.

In **Chapter 2**, Winiarska et al. (2026) analysed migration and integration governance in Warsaw from 2015 onwards, emphasising the shift in local policy measures, the actors involved and horizontal cooperation after the mass influx of forced

migrants from Ukraine in 2022. Warsaw, like other Polish municipalities, faced challenges in migration governance due to a generally unwelcoming central government policy post-2015, which politicised migration and defunded the asylum and reception system. The mass influx of over 300,000 Ukrainian forced migrants between February and May 2022 was a critical turning point, intensifying existing challenges but paradoxically strengthening cooperation between local government institutions and NGOs. This crisis also brought mass international funding for non-profit organisations. Since the late 2000s, Warsaw has adopted a “mainstreaming approach” to migration governance, addressing all residents in strategic documents rather than specifically targeting migrants. That resulted in “mainstreaming by accident”, where NGOs played a significant role in service provision. Horizontal cooperation between the city administration and the third sector (NGOs and migrant organisations) was crucial. The Sectoral Social Dialogue Commission for Foreigners, operating at Warsaw City Hall, served as a platform, although its effectiveness and responsiveness were debated among stakeholders. Challenges to cooperation included internal competition among NGOs for grants, bureaucratic relations with the city, insufficient funding and poor communication and information flow to migrant communities. Despite signs of positive change in horizontal cooperation and some harmonisation between national and subnational levels, disjointed governance remained predominant due to the conflictual relationship with the central government until late 2023. The case of Warsaw highlights both the shortcomings of the mainstreaming approach (leading to chaotic, crisis-driven governance) and its potential as a basis for the gradual development of effective, institutionalised policies for foreign residents.

In Chapter 3, Matuszczyk and Bernát (2026) compared Budapest’s responses to the 2015 and 2022 forced-migrant reception crises, examining factors like the politicisation of migration, administrative centralism and the limited agency of local administrators in Hungary. Their findings indicated that Hungary maintained a highly centralised and restrictive asylum and migration policy since 2015, marked by securitisation and harassment of civic actors. Budapest’s responses to both the 2015 and 2022 crises did not result in the development of coherent, pro-immigrant or pro-refugee policies. During the 2015 Schengen crisis, Budapest became a transit hub, with thousands of asylum seekers arriving daily at the railway stations. The municipality remained passive, aligning with the central government’s anti-migration stance, and formal state support was absent. Humanitarian aid was primarily provided by spontaneous grassroots movements and citizens who organised online, though their efforts were poorly coordinated. Between 2015 and 2022, the central government introduced punitive laws restricting civil society organisations supporting migrants, significantly hindering their capacity to operate. In the 2022 forced-migrant reception crisis, Ukrainian refugees were discursively portrayed as “good” and “deserving” (people fleeing war, not “refugees”), leading to a more positive public and governmental attitude compared to 2015. NGOs responded rapidly, and local residents organised through social media. Despite a change in city leadership to the opposition in 2019, a fundamental shift in Budapest’s migration policy did not occur. The city’s proximity to Ukraine and the presence of many Ukrainian refugees holding Hungarian citizenship contributed to the relative openness in 2022. Poor

central-level management of the 2022 crisis affected large cities, with humanitarian aid coordination often being given to specific faith-based organisations that had been inactive since 2015. Budapest's neighbourhoods and districts, especially those led by the opposition, played a critical role in attempting to implement integration measures. Ultimately, Budapest continues to adopt a "no policy" approach to migration, characterised by remedial actions without a long-term vision or clear distribution of roles, partly due to drastic budget cuts from the national government.

In Chapter 4, Jelínková and Zogata-Kusz (2026) examined the 20-year evolution of migrant integration policy in Prague, its multilevel governance framework and the significant changes brought by the arrival of Ukrainian forced migrants in 2022. Prague is recognised as a pioneer in local migrant integration policy in the CEE region, having established its first integration concept in 2014 with significant input from local NGOs. By early 2021, migrants constituted 16% of Prague's population. Until 2015, migration was not highly politicised in Czechia; the 2015 European refugee crisis led to its intense mediatisation, politicisation and securitisation, despite a low number of asylum seekers nationally. This created an unwelcoming national environment for migrant rights advocacy. Prague's approach to migration governance is characterised as a multilevel model, involving close cooperation with professional and experienced NGOs, which often complement or substitute state activities and influence policy. The Integration Centre Prague (ICP), which has been managed by the city since 2012, plays a crucial coordinating role in migrant integration, providing platforms for stakeholders and offering a range of services. Before 2022, challenges included the marginal perception of migrant integration, limited staff capacity and slow implementation of necessary measures due to the "invisibility" of migrants. However, Prague had strong strategic documents, ongoing evaluation, established grant programmes for NGOs and political consensus not to hinder integration policy. The arrival of thousands of Ukrainian refugees in 2022 acted as a "successful stress test" for Prague's existing integration concept, proving its inclusivity. The initial response to Ukrainian refugees was largely bottom-up, driven by volunteers and NGOs, despite a "lack of clear leadership" at higher levels. The business community also provided substantial support. The crisis brought migrant issues into the public and political spotlight, leading to an organic mainstreaming of these issues across most municipal departments, which previously viewed them as marginal. However, the response was not uniform: Ukrainian Roma faced structural racism and discrimination in accessing services. City officials initially relied on NGO expertise but later sought to take full control, sometimes disregarding their guidance. Overall, the crisis forced Prague, which was previously only partially open, to adapt more extensively, moving further towards becoming a "metropolis for all".

In Chapter 5, Czerska-Shaw and Pędziwiatr (2026) examined the rapid transformation of Kraków's migrant population, focusing on the (in)formality of relations and networks that emerged in response to the 2022 forced migration from Ukraine, and how these shaped local migration governance. Kraków experienced a doubling of its migrant population between 2019 and 2023, reaching over 10% of the total population, primarily due to the influx of an estimated 32,000 forced migrants from Ukraine after February 2022. This shifted the city towards "super-diversity". Before 2022,

Kraków primarily attracted highly skilled migrants and international students, with few asylum seekers. The 2022 influx brought more diverse and pronounced needs, including housing, education and psychological assistance. The city's pre-existing diversity-awareness programme, "Open Kraków" (introduced in 2016), aimed to prepare the city for foreigners and ensure equal access to public services for all. While a 2023 evaluation found it lacked systemic effectiveness, many of its activities received positive reviews. The full-scale Russian invasion had a galvanising effect on diversity management in the city, leading to significant mobilisation. New actors emerged, including clusters of civil society organisations (such as migrant-led ones), private businesses, diasporic entrepreneurs and international donors. International funding was crucial initially, but its "boom-bust" nature left many NGOs in a precarious state as funds were redirected. Large businesses played an "unlikely yet important" role, engaging in corporate social responsibility and providing logistical, technological and human capital support, often through informal, personalised networks. State authorities (municipal and regional) activated their response, with the regional government developing Poland's first regional strategy for migrant integration ("Open Małopolska"), signalling a move away from ad hoc planning. Relations within the migration-support ecosystem were often informal and personalised, leading to flexible and efficient coordination; however, civil society actors felt that a significant burden was placed on them by public authorities. This dynamic reflected "institutional ambiguity". In this context, "ad hoc mainstreaming" refers to the uncoordinated proliferation of migrant-related issues across various municipal departments, without significant institutional reform. The crisis stimulated the development of stronger neighbourhood hubs and community initiatives, building on shared mobilisation experiences. The city also allocated a physical space for the Multicultural Centre and Information Point for Foreigners, formalising links with migrant organisations and research centres. Kraków's case suggests that while informal "crisis mode" responses can be beneficial for agile action, they must be complemented by longer-term planning and solid foundations to avoid a "stalemate" of "permanent temporariness".

In Chapter 6, Jaworsky et al. (2026) explored the link between municipal reception contexts and attitudes towards migration among native-born urban residents in Brno, Czechia's second largest city, and the tensions between national and municipal migration policies. Brno has seen rapid growth in its foreign-born population, doubling between 2004 and 2014 and again from 2018 to 2022, reaching 16.5% with the arrival of Ukrainian refugees. Brno stands out among Czech cities for its proactive migration governance framework, adopting its first municipal integration strategy in 2020 ("Strategy for integration of foreign nationals in the city of Brno 2020–2026"). This strategy was developed through an unusual participatory process involving diverse public, private and NGO sectors. The dominant cultural repertoire in Brno is "a city in transition", from an urban periphery to a more international and cosmopolitan European metropolis. This narrative is shared by both local policymakers and native-born residents, who largely perceive migration's impact on the city as positive, contributing to its development and quality of life. However, the concept of "symbolic boundary work" reveals selective inclusion. The first group

of migrant population can be characterised as visible or included—these are high-skilled foreign workers, students, entrepreneurs, investors and tourists who are highly recognised for their contributions to the city’s development and cosmopolitan image. The other group includes those invisible or excluded who are low-skilled foreign-born workers, despite constituting a large share of the workforce (42% in 2022). They are largely overlooked and not explicitly linked to Brno’s “transition” narrative, and their contributions are acknowledged only for their willingness to perform jobs that Czechs avoid (e.g. Ukrainians in construction, Vietnamese in retail). There are “blank spaces” in Brno’s purported cosmopolitanism: while the city strives for openness, its definition of culture is often instrumental (e.g. cuisine) rather than promoting deeper societal transformation or engagement with diverse beliefs and values. Tensions exist between Brno’s locally adopted “city in transition” cultural repertoire and the prevailing securitised discourse on migration at the national level in Czechia. To gain approval, Brno’s strategy emphasised the economic contributions of foreigners and avoided negative terms like “refugees”. The chapter highlights that the attitudes of native-born residents are crucial for understanding urban migration governance, particularly in CEE cities with recent immigration histories, and that these attitudes can be nuanced and sometimes diverge from prevailing municipal discourses.

In Chapter 7, Podgórska and Jekaterynczuk (2026) analysed the measures taken by various actors in Lublin, a Polish border city, in support of forced migrants after Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine, identifying factors conducive to effective crisis management and resilience, drawing on multilevel governance, social resilience and social capital theories. Lublin became a significant destination and transit point for Ukrainian forced migrants after February 2022, with over 1.2 million people entering in the first three months, and its population increased by 20%. Lublin’s response was notably effective and resilient, becoming a nationally recognised phenomenon, largely due to pre-existing social capital and partnership networks between the local government and local NGOs (e.g. through the Civic Dialogue Commission). Many city officials had backgrounds in social work or community organising, which aided the administrative response. The initial aid efforts in early 2022 were rapid, spontaneous and bottom-up, primarily driven by NGOs and civil society, with the Lublin Social Committee for Aid to Ukraine (LSCAU) serving as a key coordination hub. Unlike some other cities, Lublin took a proactive stance in coordinating long-term refugee reception, rather than merely functioning as a transit point. The Mayor appointed a Plenipotentiary for Assistance to Ukrainian Citizens. The multilevel governance system in Lublin largely utilised local resources, with the vertical dimension (relations with central administration) becoming secondary. The central government’s reception points were often operated by local NGOs on its behalf, highlighting different approaches. The city’s existing regulations were flexible enough to accommodate the crisis without significant changes, demonstrating high organisational resilience. Over time, aid shifted from emergency reception to integration efforts, with pioneering initiatives in culture and education, such as the UNICEF-funded Spilno Lublin Centre and the UNHCR-funded Baobab multicultural centre, providing various services and employing Ukrainian educators. The

study concludes that Lublin's crisis management represents a decoupled model of migration governance, characterised by local autonomy and a crucial subsidiary role for a wide range of social organisations, leveraging strong horizontal, multi-sectoral cooperation.

In Chapter 8, Mészáros (2026) analysed the reception and labour-market situation of Ukrainian forced migrants in Oradea, a border city in Romania, and Bihor County, and examined the implemented migration governance model, noting why the city has primarily served as a transit point. Oradea and Bihor County are predominantly transit areas for all categories of migrants, including the 2022 Ukrainian displaced persons, despite the city's welcoming profile, labour shortages and employment opportunities. Most Ukrainian forced migrants opted to relocate to countries neighbouring Romania, such as Poland or further west to Germany, the Netherlands or the UK, due to established ties, better services, more favourable economic conditions and improved employment opportunities. Jobs available to Ukrainian Temporary Protection (TP) holders in Oradea and Bihor County were mainly in the manual-labour or blue-collar sectors, with limited opportunities for highly educated individuals. Average net wages were below the national level, discouraging long-term settlement. Romania's national migration governance strategy for Ukrainian forced migration employed a hybrid approach, combining centralist (top-down) and localist (bottom-up) elements. The initial emergency response (February–March 2022) was top-down, whereas the subsequent protection and integration phase involved greater, more collaborative participation from local authorities. At the municipal level in Oradea, there was no policy decoupling or substantial inconsistencies, as local authorities followed government guidelines while also proposing their own initiatives. The Bihor County Prefect's Institution coordinated humanitarian efforts, while the Municipality of Oradea provided temporary accommodation and established hotlines. Initial assessments showed Oradea primarily as a transit zone for Ukrainians with financial means, with later waves bringing refugees with fewer means. NGOs and civil society played a crucial role, with 46 NGOs uniting under "Bihor for Ukraine" to provide a coherent local civil society response. NGOs also provided free Romanian language courses to facilitate labour-market integration. Despite immediate labour-market access for Ukrainian TP holders, Bihor was not a preferred employment destination. By the end of 2023, only 94 Ukrainian citizens were recorded as employed for a fixed or indefinite period in the country, mostly in blue-collar sectors. The number of Ukrainian displaced persons residing in Oradea and Bihor County has consistently decreased. In contrast, the number of foreign workers from Asian nations (e.g. Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh) has gradually increased.

In Chapter 9, Popławska et al. (2026) analysed Łomża's response to the 2022 influx of Ukrainian forced migrants, assessing how the city's characteristics (as a shrinking, medium-sized city with prior migrant experience) fostered a resilient response, using theories of social resilience and social capital. Łomża is a medium-sized city in northeastern Poland facing socio-economic decline, including population decrease, ageing and structural unemployment. Its social capital levels are low and decreasing, as indicated by the decline in civil society organisations and

a decrease in participation in civic initiatives. Despite these challenges, Łomża had pre-2022 experience with forced migration, hosting Chechen forced migrants for two decades and Ukrainian labour migrants for over a decade. This led to the development of some immigrant infrastructure, including specialised NGOs like the Ocalenie Foundation. The response to the 2022 crisis was highly resilient in its initial phase, with a rapid and extensive mobilisation of diverse public and non-public actors, including the city council, public institutions, civil society organisations, private businesses and individual citizens. This swift response demonstrated strong reactive capacity. The initial support was largely spontaneous and bottom-up, with citizens accommodating refugees, organising convoys and providing free transport. Universities also cooperated in volunteer recruitment and providing resources. Coordination of activities was described as “efficient and intuitive” due to the city’s modest size and the limited number of actors involved. Formal cooperation agreements were quickly established. Despite some rivalry or ideological differences among larger CSOs, these did not significantly impede the overall response quality. However, this resilient response was short-lived: civil engagement began to decline after April 2022 due to “war fatigue”, other local issues, worsening economic conditions and the gradual departure or increased independence of Ukrainian refugees. The crisis response did not result in lasting changes to local governance or the empowerment of local civil society organisations. The initial participation of residents and private actors proved temporary. The chapter concludes that while Łomża’s low social capital presented obstacles, its response demonstrated that medium-sized Polish cities can show resilience in a multilevel system. However, the long-term challenge remains shifting from humanitarian aid to social integration in the absence of a coherent national policy and low overall social capital in Poland.

In **Chapter 10**, **Lewandowski and Nowosielski (2026)** analysed how public and non-public actors in Płock, a medium-sized Polish city, responded to the large influx of forced migrants from Ukraine after the Russian attack in February 2022, focusing on how assistance was managed and coordinated using a multilevel governance (MLG) framework. Płock, being a medium-sized city with limited prior experience in managing migration, accommodated about 3,000 post-2022 forced migrants from Ukraine at the most intense moment. The initial response was largely ad hoc and driven by spontaneous, grassroots activities of Płock residents, including private trips to the border, hosting refugees in their homes and volunteering for city institutions, NGOs and churches. While non-public actors (grassroots initiatives, NGOs, churches and local businesses) showed intense activity initially, their level of help, including donations, decreased over time. PKN Orlen, one of Poland’s largest companies, with its main production facility located in Płock, had relatively minor direct involvement in Płock’s aid efforts, possibly due to its nationwide strategy or political tensions with city authorities. The Płock City Office, as the central public actor, also initiated assistance from the start, organising transport for refugees and establishing a Relocation Point. The enactment of special legislation on March 12, 2022, enabling central budgetary resources to finance refugee accommodation, was a critical moment that led to increased institutionalisation of assistance activities. The analysis found that the ideal MLG model of cooperation and consensus was not fully achieved in

Plock. Instead, relations between actors often lie on a continuum between rivalry and cooperation, with intermediary stages like coordination, planning by city authorities, duplication of activities and appropriation of non-public actors' assistance by city authorities being evident. Ultimately, the assistance system in Plock tended towards the dominance of public actors, shifting from a distributed governance model to a more top-down approach as the crisis progressed.

In Chapter 11, Zentai et al. (2026) explored how civic and municipal actors in Hungary responded to the arrival of displaced Ukrainians after February 2022, proposing a scheme of modalities of municipalism based on their resilience to, or capitalisation on, the authoritarian state's social policy regime. The chapter identified four modalities of local solidarity operations. The first is transformative municipalism, characterised by equality-conscious civic actors and local government entities (e.g. Budapest and its districts) that resisted mainstream social divides, established transparent decision-making processes and implemented inclusion-driven policies, thereby acting as a resilient force against the wider authoritarian environment. The second one refers to fragile municipalism, which involves municipal governments initiating solidarity actions with modest resources, often in alliance with human rights groups, and resisting central government distinctions of "deservingness". The sustainability of this leadership is frequently fragile under authoritarian political environments. The third one focuses on contentious municipalism, where civil actors and active citizens drive solidarity in reluctant or passive municipal environments, often in alliance with local entrepreneurs. Initial enthusiasm waned, and support relied on selectively inclusive social policy traditions, which sometimes led to local social tensions. The final one is about conformist municipalism, which means that municipal governments led active asylum support while remaining vertically compliant with the central authoritarian regime, often prioritising "deserving" refugees (e.g. culturally proximate Ukrainians) and aligning with state-controlled media narratives. The study concludes that the ideal multilevel governance model of cooperation and consensus was not entirely achievable in Hungary, with a more nuanced continuum of rivalry and cooperation observed. Municipalism in Hungary thrives in both compliant and non-compliant positions within the highly centralised and clientelist authoritarian regime.

12.3 CEE Local Migrant Governance Index (CEELMiG)

To compare migration governance across CEE cities systematically, we developed and utilised a novel tool, the CEE Local Migrant Governance Index (CEELMiG). So far, various indices have been developed to measure immigrant integration policies at a central level in Europe and in the U.S. (e.g. Blatter et al., 2017; Koopmans & Michalowski, 2017; Solano & Huddleston, 2020; Wallace et al., 2021; Immigration Policy Lab, n.d.; Harder et al., 2018), yet, a handful focus on cities. A few existing examples that guided our analysis include the Local Migrant Integration Policy Index

(MIPEx-L) (Irastorza et al., 2024), developed within the Horizon Europe Whole-COMM project, the Local Migrant Integration Index in Ireland (Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2022), the Municipal Responses to Immigrants Survey (Fisher Williamson, 2017, 2018) and the New American Economy's (NAE) Cities Index (American Immigration Council, n.d.).

To date, two main concerns have been identified related to the construction of immigrant policy indices: (1) validity and (2) measurement, including small-N issues (Goodman, 2015, 2019; Boucher & Gest, 2015). The index proposed in this study addresses these concerns by (1) precisely defining policy dimension coverage, operationalisation and measurement; and (2) combining index interpretation with an in-depth analysis of local urban contexts, provided in each chapter/case.

Unlike other policy measures, the novel CEELMiG does not capture broad categories of policy inputs (e.g. access to employment), but instead it covers more complex and intersecting policy areas typically identified during the analysis of how policies operate on the ground, such as the multilingual provision of programmes or family-related programmes. The index was designed after an in-depth analysis of existing indicators, taking into account key elements in our comparative study of cities and specific national and local contexts. The index covers data up to and including 2023. In some sub-indicators, we have distinguished between the situation before and after 2022. We considered 2022 to be a breakthrough year, as it began with Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine, which triggered large forced displacement to the CEE region. This was such a turning point that it influenced integration measures at both the national and municipal levels, where forced migrants were being accepted. These measures may have resulted from legal solutions, especially at the government level, as well as practical changes at the local level. All the countries studied—Poland, Czechia, Hungary and Romania—are EU Member States where the EU Temporary Protection Directive was in force. Additionally, Poland has adopted extended temporary protection for Ukrainian citizens based on the Act on Assistance (2022).

12.3.1 Steps in Developing the Index

The CEELMiG index was developed in a rigorous, multi-step process to ensure validity, comparability and transparency (Ogunyemi et al., 2024). The CEELMiG development process included conceptualisation of the index framework and design, indicator selection, developing coding guidelines, expert data collection, quality control and peer review, weighting and aggregation, and index validation.

During the development of the index, we consulted with both internal and external experts. Internal experts were the authors of individual chapters of the book, both theorists and practitioners of the cities they studied. Their knowledge stemmed not only from years of quantitative and qualitative research at both local and central levels in specific CEE countries, but also from regular cooperation with the representatives of local authorities, civil society organisations and local communities. The experts

either lived in the cities under study, worked at local academic institutions or regularly conducted research there, giving them direct insight into the cities' everyday functioning. In addition to drawing on their own expertise, the internal experts cross-checked statistical sources, local legislation and official documents, and consulted with local actors to help fill any gaps in the data. Moreover, they were involved in the development of the consulting framework and index design, as well as the selection of indicators. They evaluated each indicator using national laws, regulations and practices, and consulted guidance on weighting.

In addition to internal experts, we engaged external experts in the process of consulting on the index framework, evaluating the selection of indicators, developing coding guidelines, creating index weights, conducting quality control and peer review, weighting and aggregation, and index validation. The external experts were economists, statisticians, sociologists, political scientists and social policy experts specialised in mixed-methods research and the use of indices.

The first version of the tool was prepared as a questionnaire in Excel format, and calibrated on two contrasting types of cities in Poland—Warsaw and Łomża. Based on this, additional quality control and peer review were conducted with experts. Accordingly, corrections were made to the tool, and further instructions were added for internal experts. Next, data collection started. In this step, internal experts were asked to complete the questionnaire for the city in which they specialise. Based on the results obtained and additional questions, we initiated quality control, peer review and index validation. To do that, remote workshops were held with the book's editors and authors, allowing for a discussion of doubts and consideration of specific conditions. In the final steps, weights were assigned, and results were aggregated. The process ended with a final index validation.

12.3.2 Structure of the Index: Dimensions, Indicators and Sub-Indicators

The index is organised around **five core response dimensions** (strands) policies/programmes; institutional coordination; participation; research and funding. Each dimension encompasses a set of indicators and is further broken down into specific sub-indicators.

“Policies and programmes” refer to activities dedicated to immigrants that are put in place in a given city by a local administration, including immigration strategy, other inclusion-related strategic documents, providing translation of administrative websites to top immigrant languages, the quality of such translations, introducing diversity-inclusive activities addressed to the majority groups in the host society; variety groups to which integration activities are addressed.

“Institutional coordination” refers to the organisational framework cities establish to facilitate integration for immigrants. This dimension encompasses creating dedicated administrative units for migrant integration, mainstreaming immigrants’

services across municipal departments and prioritising diversity-focused hiring and staff training. It also measures cities' engagement through official pro-immigrant declarations, membership in city networks such as the International Intercultural Cities Network or the Eurocities, cooperation with immigrant-related NGOs and the provision of specialised immigrant service providers within the city.

"Participation" refers to the extent and nature of stakeholder involvement in developing local immigrant integration policies for asylum seekers, highly skilled migrants and undocumented migrants. This dimension measures both the level of public participation in policy development processes, ranging from basic information provision to full empowerment, and the diversity of actors invited to participate, including representatives from local NGOs, immigrant organisations, businesses and educational institutions.

"Research" refers to the systematic data collection and evaluation activities that cities undertake to inform immigrant integration. This dimension encompasses whether and how frequently city administrations conduct or fund migrant needs assessments, their support for collecting comprehensive data on urban population including immigrant residents, migrant children's educational progress and social service utilisation. Moreover, it also focuses on the evaluation of existing immigrant integration strategies and policies.

"Funding" refers to the financial resources that cities allocate to support immigrant integration activities. This dimension measures the existence of dedicated funds for immigrant services from both internal national budgets and external sources such as the EU, as well as the presence of other earmarked budget lines within main budget chapters specifically allocated to integration-related issues.

The structure of our index is included in the Appendix.

12.3.3 Score Calculation and Weights

The approach we used to assign scores for values of specific indicators follows the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), the MIPEX-L and the NAE Cities Index logic, where scores range from 0–100. A score of zero is considered "critically unfavourable" to developing urban immigrant policies, and a score of 100 indicates immigrant "favourable" conditions.

Internal local experts researching each city assigned a relevant score **between 0 and 100** to each sub-indicator, referring to the period up to 2023. The scoring methodology varied depending on the type of sub-indicator. For some of them, categorical options were developed, with pre-defined answer options (A, B, C, D, E, F) linked to specific scores. For instance, 'A' typically scores **0 points** (e.g. "not introduced at all" or "no"), 'B' scores **25 or 50 points** (e.g. "introduced post-February 2022" or "yes, but only after February 2022") and 'C' often scores **50 or 100 points** (e.g. "introduced before 2022" or "yes, already before February 2022"). More granular options, such as D, E and F, were also assigned incremental scores, ranging from 75 to 100 points. For other questions, multiple-choice options were utilised. In that case

(e.g. targeted populations, city networks or actors involved in participation), points are awarded for each relevant choice. Typically, 10 points are given for every group or network selected, with a maximum score of 100 points if all options are marked. For example, if a city participates in only one immigrant network, it receives 10 points, two networks give 20 points, up to 100 points for ten or more networks.

Importantly, this scoring system was contextualised to the CEE conditions. In this case, policies put in place were evaluated based on two crucial data points: 2015 and 2022. 2015 was a year when migration entered the top of the public agenda in the CEE region. Suppose a policy had been put in place before that (e.g. as in many cases in Prague), that would indicate a remarkably progressive and proactive approach to migration governance. If a policy was implemented after 2022, it means a more reactive approach and scores slightly lower.

Each of the sub-indicators within five dimensions was then aggregated to an “average of the strand”, through an average, to derive a score for the entire dimension. In addition, we calculated comprehensive city score using assigned **weights**, to different categories of indicators (Booyesen, 2002; OECD et al., 2008; Frątczak et al., 2017). This ensured that specific dimensions contribute more significantly to the final score, reflecting their relative importance.

The weights attributed to each response dimension (strand) for the year 2023 are as follows (totalling to 100%): 1: policies/programmes targeting and/or mainstreamed to the needs of migrant residents: 30%, 2. institutional coordination: 20%, 3. participation: 20%, 4. research: 15% and 5. funding: 15%.

12.3.4 Scope of Assessment and Contextual Information

The assessment refers to **existing public policies**, rather than their implementation (i.e. how policies operate in practice). It considers all **public programmes** available in cities, including those implemented by various public institutions and publicly funded programmes carried out by civil society organisations.

To account for national and local circumstances and contexts, experts were encouraged to **add comments** in a dedicated box next to a score. This feature was crucial for including important contextual information that might influence the score, especially for qualitative aspects or those difficult to assess unambiguously, thus allowing for a refinement of the achieved results.

The index has high application value and multiplier potential. It can be used by cities of various sizes in CEE and other countries, especially those that experienced a significant impact in 2022 due to forced migration from Ukraine. It can support cities in monitoring their progress in developing existing local integration strategies, as well as in planning to adopt such strategies in the future.

12.3.5 Index Limitations and Interpretation

The methodology adopted for the index has the following limitations. First, while some data and the results derived from them are objectively easy to determine and measure, others are more difficult to decide on and measure. The former includes the presence or absence of official local strategic documents, the existence of specific institutional solutions, e.g. the possibility of officially employing foreign-born persons in municipal units, or the number of partnerships within various international and European urban/integration cooperation networks. The data that is more difficult to determine and measure refers to institutional coordination or participation.

The second limitation of the index is the nature of some data that inherently relies on expert assessments. To mitigate this, in all cities except Oradea, more than one expert was involved in the assessment process. This approach enabled us to tap into a broader pool of knowledge and local networks.

The interpretation of the index is therefore only possible in a combination of factors shaping local context, such as city population, migrant population, immigration history or national context (see: Chapter 5.2). For example, within the Hungarian context (see Chapter 3; Matuszczyk & Bernát, 2026; Chapter 11; Zentai et al., 2026), Budapest stands out as a proactively inclusive city, despite its weaknesses and often fragile policy mechanisms. It ultimately results in the most progressive municipal modality outlined in the scheme developed in Chapter 11 (Zentai et al., 2026). Yet, in comparison to other capital CEE cities, it presents itself as a mediocre municipal government, at best. Hence, all these knowledge pieces can stand next to each other, but most likely not without reflections.

The CEELMiG is meticulously constructed, utilising a multi-dimensional framework to capture various aspects of policies and practices. It is designed for experts to attribute scores based on detailed indicators and sub-indicators.

12.4 Migration Governance in a Comparative Perspective - CEELMiG Results

The comparative analysis based on five key dimensions of **migrant governance**, policies and programmes, institutional coordination, participation, research and funding, reveals significant variation in how cities across Central and Eastern Europe address the reception and integration of migrant residents (see: Fig. 12.1). A clear pattern emerges: the type of city aligns with the scope, quality and coherence of local integration efforts.

Capital cities (especially Warsaw, Prague) and secondary cities (Brno, Kraków) that consistently perform best across the analysed dimensions tend to combine well-established, targeted immigrant policies with mainstreaming approaches for immigrants, supported by stable funding, cross-departmental coordination and a willingness to engage in participatory and evidence-based governance. Their immigrant

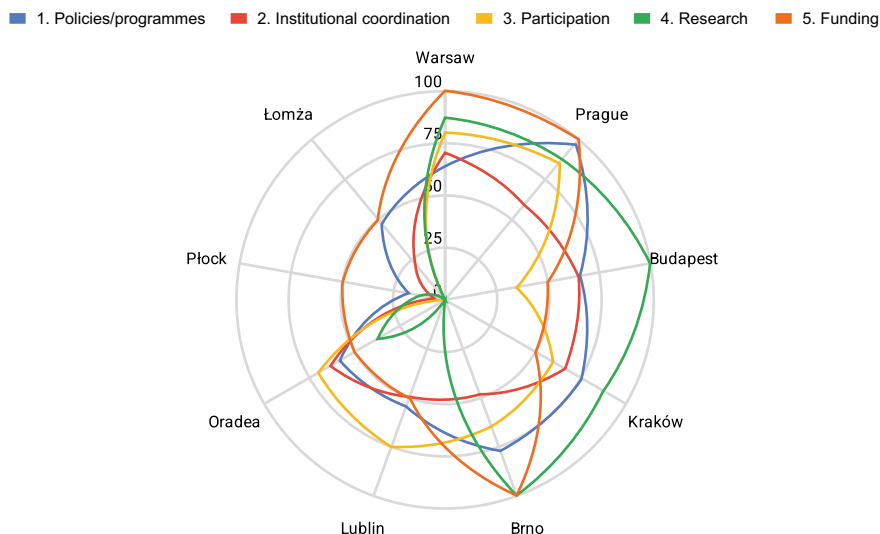


Fig. 12.1 CEELMiG scores across CEE cities (*Source* Own calculations based on CEELMiG index results, unweighted)

integration strategies are embedded within municipal structures and political leadership and are often present in public discourse and local policy frameworks. Budapest, unlike other capital cities in the sample, performs lower, particularly in terms of developing municipal policies in a participatory way or designating funding for immigrant services. That reflects, among others, lower administrative and budgetary autonomy of Hungarian cities.

Border cities, such as Lublin and Oradea, show emerging or intermediate levels of engagement. While they implement many relevant actions, often through partnerships with civil society and using external funding, these efforts are frequently fragmented and lack the strategic continuity seen in capital and secondary cities. Usually, their institutional capacity was limited, and their integration policies were less likely to be supported by systematic research or long-term financial planning.

Shrinking cities like Płock and Łomża present the lowest levels of institutional readiness and policy development in migration governance. With low migrant populations, migrant integration is not prioritised in these contexts, and there is a noticeable absence of dedicated programmes, budget allocations or coordination mechanisms. These cities also rarely collect or use data to inform their decisions, which may lead to missed opportunities to strengthen local resilience and social cohesion.

What emerges from this assessment is that cities that demonstrate alignment across these five dimensions are better positioned to respond to demographic and social changes in equitable and sustainable ways. At the same time, the experience of cities involved in international networks or partnerships suggests that collaboration and peer learning are powerful drivers of capacity building, particularly for municipalities with fewer resources or limited experience in managing diversity.

12.4.1 Policies/Programmes Targeting and/or Mainstreamed to the Needs of Migrant Residents

Two Czech cities (Prague, Brno), and one Polish secondary city (Kraków), stand out for combined dedicated migrant integration strategies with broader urban policies that address the needs of migrants. That reflects a mature and institutionally embedded model of integration governance. Capital cities of Warsaw and Budapest, while formally equipped with certain integration measures, present a more fragmented approach, with actions often driven by external projects rather than embedded in long-term municipal strategy.

Border cities (Lublin, Oradea) present a more nuanced picture. In Oradea, integration efforts often take the form of targeted actions—such as support for cultural inclusion or project-based partnerships with NGOs—but these are not always embedded within a coherent policy framework, reflecting a reliance on external funding rather than a long-term municipal strategy. Lublin, by contrast, has been engaged in discussions on migrant integration for over a decade. In recent years, there has been intensified institutional work on a dedicated integration policy, and the city's strategic thinking in this area has matured to the point of being translated into concrete municipal action.

Shrinking cities (Płock, Łomża) show the lowest levels of policy engagement. The absence of both targeted and mainstreamed integration measures indicates that migration is not perceived as a strategic area of local governance. In these contexts, limited administrative capacity and resource constraints likely compound a general lack of political prioritisation of integration-related issues.

This initial assessment highlights how city type, particularly in terms of scale, resources and institutional development, but also national policy framework (with Czechia first introducing a national integration strategy in the CEE region), shapes the scope and depth of local migrant integration policies. It also provides a foundation for comparing how these structural differences influence other areas of integration, including participation, research and funding.

12.4.2 Institutional Coordination

The indicator assessing institutional coordination in migrant integration reveals that capital cities (Warsaw, Budapest, Prague—in the order of index values) are equipped with more formalised and multi-dimensional institutional coordination structures. These include having a dedicated municipal position for integration coordination, immigrant engagement of multiple municipal departments, hiring cultural assistants or multicultural workers and participation in international networks focused on migration and inclusion. In many cases, mayors have issued public statements or resolutions in support of migrant communities, thereby reinforcing the political visibility of integration goals.

Secondary cities (Kraków, Brno) also demonstrate robust institutional arrangements, though these are occasionally less formalised. Coordination roles exist, but they were developed later (e.g. after 2014) than in the capital cities of Prague and Warsaw. Also, they cooperate in fewer networks than Prague or Warsaw. While Czech cities usually score high in the CEELMiG index values, they score lower in institutional coordination due to creating fewer opportunities to engage local immigrant communities in municipal administrative structures (not hiring cultural assistants/or not providing diversity training to municipal staff or consciously hiring workers with immigrant background).

Border cities (Oradea, Lublin) show variable engagement. In Oradea, coordination structures and participation in integration networks tend to be project-based and depend on individual leadership, which may result in fragmented or short-term efforts. Lublin, on the other hand, demonstrates a more institutionalised approach. The city is a long-standing member of the Intercultural Cities network and has been increasingly embedding migrant integration into its municipal structures. Its efforts are supported not only by participation in external partnerships but also by growing internal coordination and policy planning at the local level.

Shrinking cities (Płock, Łomża) report the lowest levels of institutional coordination. They often lack dedicated coordination roles, interdepartmental collaboration is minimal and formal cooperation with migrant-related NGOs is absent or limited. The lack of institutional infrastructure reflects broader limitations in administrative capacity and political prioritisation, undermining the ability of these cities to respond effectively to integration challenges.

This analysis highlights the significance of institutional architecture in fostering coherent and sustainable migrant integration policies. Cities with more established coordination structures exhibit greater consistency and capacity across other dimensions of integration governance.

12.4.3 *Participation*

An analysis of participation sub-indicators in migration governance revealed that the capital cities of Warsaw and Prague represent similar, and the highest, levels of participation compared to other cities. The initial proposal for local migration policies was developed through the engagement of various stakeholders. These policies were then framed and refined through consultations with multiple parties. Although Budapest scored significantly lower, the city regularly holds consultations with NGOs and civil society actors through forums such as the Budapest City Human Rights Roundtable, which provides a platform for dialogue on issues including migration and inclusion. However, in some cases, the limited range of actors involved suggests that participation may be highly institutionalised rather than genuinely bottom-up. This may point to the performative nature of participation in certain contexts.

Border cities of Lublin and Oradea got higher results for participation than the secondary cities (Kraków, Brno). Border cities stand out for their above-average

engagement of diverse social groups, interest groups and institutions (e.g. NGOs, schools, healthcare actors) in participatory processes. This may be linked to their experience in international cooperation and the presence of grassroots initiatives. Kraków and Brno demonstrate advanced participatory mechanisms, particularly in terms of process quality, such as citizen involvement in decision-making.

At the other end of the spectrum, shrinking cities (Płock, Łomża) exhibit the weakest performance, both in terms of the quality of participatory processes and the diversity of stakeholders involved. Systematic participatory practices are largely absent, which may potentially undermine the legitimacy and effectiveness of integration policies. This absence may reflect not only a lack of institutional capacity but also specific local governance styles, such as mistrust towards social partners (as observed in Płock).

These findings underscore the importance of supporting smaller and more peripheral cities in developing inclusive mechanisms for civic dialogue and local coalitions for integration. Strengthened participation can enhance both the legitimacy and effectiveness of integration strategies.

12.4.4 Research

Capital cities and secondary cities included in our sample perform best in terms of conducting research on migrant needs and evaluating integration policies. Brno and Budapest stand out in particular, with high scores across all sub-indicators: conducting needs assessments among their immigrant population and their frequency, supporting data collection on urban population, and policy evaluation. This indicates a systematic, data-informed approach to planning and improving integration strategies.

Other cities perform less well, often lacking more regular research practices, not conducting regular needs assessments and missing targeted policies to evaluate. This reflects both the absence of structured integration strategies and a broader lack of evidence-based governance tools, limiting the cities' capacity to respond effectively to integration challenges.

12.4.5 Funding

Warsaw, Prague and Brno report the highest levels of financial commitment to migrant integration. These cities allocate both dedicated funding and include integration-related expenditures within their core municipal budgets. While their strategies differ—Prague, for example, has an explicitly defined integration policy, whereas Warsaw tends to mainstream integration across general municipal programmes—they achieve similarly high levels of financial engagement. Such practices reflect a high degree of institutionalisation and budgetary stability, suggesting a mature and

consistent approach to integration policy, regardless of the specific governance model adopted.

Other cities in the sample, including Budapest, border cities (Oradea, Lublin), along with secondary cities and shrinking cities, mainly use external sources (e.g. EU funding) to fund institutional expenses related to addressing the needs to immigrant residents. While this indicates recognition of the importance of immigrant integration, a stable funding system is still lacking. Additionally, Budapest falls within the middle range in terms of funding, indicating a certain degree of budgetary commitment to migrant integration. However, this support appears to be more partial or project-based, without the same level of structural financial integration observed in the highest-performing capital cities.

Ultimately, the level of funding reflects the overall city's approach to integration. Warsaw, Prague and Brno benefit from more stable and diversified funding sources. Other cities demonstrate partial but fragmented commitment.

12.5 Migration Governance in CEE Cities and Factors Shaping It

12.5.1 *Model of Migration Governance in CEE*

Analysis of over nine cases of cities included in this book, combined with cross-city comparisons using the CEELMiG index, revealed differences across cities that were primarily related to the type of city. Yet, all cities shared some characteristics in migration governance typical for the CEE region that go beyond the city type explored in the second phase of local turn literature (Pisarevskaya & Scholten, 2025; Pettrachin & Caponio, 2026).

First, migration governance in CEE is characterised by “decoupled” or “disjointed governance” (Scholten & Penninx, 2016) **across local and central levels**, where policies at different levels lack structural connections or even contradict each other (see: Chapter 2, Winiarska, et al., 2026; Chapter 3, Matuszczyk & Bernát, 2026; Chapter 7, Podgórska & Jekaterynczuk, 2026; Chapter 9, Popławska et al., 2026; Chapter 10, Lewandowski & Nowosielski, 2026). Local authorities may operate with a degree of self-autonomy, sometimes engaging in “insurgent urban asylum policies” (e.g. Budapest's stance against the central government); however, they risk being hindered by the central administration. Hybrid models also exist, such as in Romania, where local authorities follow national guidelines but are also permitted to propose their initiatives, or in Prague, where authorities maintain good relations with national ministries despite partial divergence in approaches.

Second, migration governance is often characterised by **service privatisation**, in the absence of comprehensive national-level state immigrant integration policies (except Czechia) or due to state underfunding, local administrations, together with civil society, step in to address service gaps, usually utilising international

and local funding. Local administrators typically subcontract immigrant services to civil society organisations, which play a leading role not only in implementing integration services to migrants but also in designing them. Service privatisation has been exacerbated through the 2022 forced-migrant reception crisis and boosted by international funding. Local organisations relied heavily on mass international funding, although this funding could be temporary (“boom-bust” economy) and create competition among local actors (Chapter 5, Czerska-Shaw & Pędziwiatr, 2026; Chapter 11, Zentai et al., 2026; Chapter 7, Podgórska & Jekaterynczuk, 2026). Service privatisation generates risks such as unstable and underfunding, fragmentation of services, unequal quality of social services and challenges related to coordinating multiple actors providing services (Łukasiewicz et al., 2023, 2026b). Grass-roots initiatives and spontaneous citizen mobilisation turned out to be critical during the initial phases of the 2022 reception crisis. However, civil society organisations may face state restrictions or harassment (Hungary), or tension as the state prefers them as service providers over policy influencers (Czechia).

Third, CEE cities rely heavily on **informal, ad hoc and spontaneous responses**, such as during the initial phases of the 2022 crisis (Fomina & Pachocka 2024; Pachocka et al., 2025; Podgórska et al., 2024). While this could lead to “institutional ambiguity” or “permanent temporariness” (see Chapter 5, Czerska-Shaw & Pędziwiatr, 2026), it can also enable agile, resilient and effective responses, especially when combined with existing bonding and bridging social capital (see Chapter 7, Podgórska & Jekaterynczuk, 2026; Chapter 9, Popławska et al., 2026).

Fourth, selective treatment of migrants based on racialised, gendered, ethnic or class hierarchies (Samson, 2025; Ganty et al., 2026; see Chapter 3, Matuszczyk & Bernát, 2026; Chapter 4, Jelínková & Zogata-Kusz, 2026; Chapter 6, Jaworsky et al., 2026; Chapter 11, Zentai et al., 2026). The 2022 influx of Ukrainian forced migrations led to more favourable treatment compared to other migrant groups (e.g. from the Middle East, Africa or Roma populations). This is attributed to cultural proximity, perceived demographics (including women, children and educated individuals) and geopolitical considerations that threaten cities in the region more so than in Western Europe. The 2022 mass civil society mobilisation was mainly possible due to the racialised, gendered and ethnic characteristics of forced migrants.

12.5.2 Factors Shaping Migration Governance in CEE

The case studies presented in this book, along with cross-city analysis conducted using the CEELMiG index, enabled us to identify a set of unique macro-, meso- and micro-level factors that shape migration governance in CEE cities. **On a macro level**, what uniquely shape CEE cities are their post-communist history evolving from largely closed border policies implemented until 1989, and then slow shift from net emigration to net immigration since the mid-2010s (Łukasiewicz & Yeliseyeu, 2026); becoming a new immigrant destinations with underdeveloped immigrant infrastructure (Grzymała-Kazłowska & Lesińska, 2017); developing the infrastructure through

Europeisation and internationalisation (Pędziwiatr & Magdziarz, 2023; Sobczak-Szelc et al., 2022); rapid politicisation of migration in the post-2015 context (Eglitis & Kelso, 2022; Jaskułowski, 2019); neoliberalisation of welfare policies in the post-1989 context (Lendvai-Bainton & Szelewa, 2021; Chapter 11, Zentai et al., 2026); post-1989 administrative systems transforming from political and fiscal centralisation to decentralisation and again to increased centralisation (Lux & Horváth, 2017).

Unlike many Western European countries with long histories of immigration, CEE countries, including Poland (Chapter 2, Winiarska et al., 2026) and Czechia (Chapter 4, Jelínková & Zogata-Kusz, 2026), relatively **recently opened their borders for emigration** (post-1989), and have only recently **transformed from net emigration to net immigration**, particularly after they acceded to the EU in the early 2000s. This means that both at the national and local levels, pre-existing, well-developed migration infrastructure is significantly missing, unlike in large Western European cities. Due to migration being a relatively novel phenomenon, even large capital cities lacked coherent migration and integration strategies (Chapter 2, Winiarska et al., 2026). Hungary has been described as enacting a “no policy” approach to integration despite crises (Chapter 3, Matuszczyk & Bernát, 2026), while Czechia has historically viewed migrants as an “unwelcome necessity” primarily driven by labour-market demands. The existing immigrant infrastructure has often been developed through internationally funded (EU, large international organisations) short or long-term projects (the cases of Prague, Budapest, Warsaw, to a lesser extent, smaller cities). The downside of such an unstable funding structure is unstable services that come and go with the funding (see Chapter 5, Czerska-Shaw & Pędziwiatr, 2026; Chapter 11, Zentai et al., 2026). Immigrant infrastructure under development means that data collection on the immigrant population is largely missing, or being fragmented, particularly at the local level (see Chapter 1, Łukasiewicz et al., 2026a; Chapter 2, Winiarska et al., 2026; Chapter 4, Jelínková & Zogata-Kusz, 2026).

Unlike in Western European countries, migration had been largely **absent from political debates** in the CEE region **until 2015**, when it entered the top national-level political agendas in a politicised and securitised manner. Hungary, in particular, has pursued one of Europe’s most extreme anti-migration and anti-refugee policies, which has translated to restrictions against pro-immigration local administrators and civil society organisations (Chapter 3, Matuszczyk & Bernát, 2026; Chapter 11, Zentai et al., 2026). Migration politicisation and growing anti-immigrant sentiments in some cases (Poland, Hungary) have been aligned with central governments limiting **formal competencies, rights or financial resources that cities need to manage migration efficiently**. Central authorities may dramatically centralise decision-making power and allocate resources preferentially to localities aligned with the ruling regime, as exemplified by a case of Hungary (Chapter 3, Matuszczyk & Bernát, 2026; Chapter 11, Zentai et al., 2026).

Migration governance in CEE cities has been significantly influenced by the 2022 forced migration from Ukraine. Paradoxically, the humanitarian crisis fostered stronger cooperation between local government institutions and NGOs

(Warsaw, Lublin, Prague), and it facilitated unintentional immigrant mainstreaming across public services (Łukasiewicz & Yelisseyeu, 2026; Chapter 2, Winiarska et al., 2026).

On a meso, i.e. urban level, ‘local turn’ in migration governance in CEE mainly took place in capital and secondary cities (e.g. Warsaw, Kraków, Prague, Brno, Lublin). It was driven by a missing central-level integration policy framework combined with the actual needs of growing migrant populations, progressive local leadership (as seen in Budapest and Brno in specific periods) or pre-existing local social capital and cross-border ties (Lublin). What revolutionised migration governance in cities across the region was, however, the 2022 forced migration from Ukraine. Not all cities experienced the increase of migrants in similar way, but in those cities where migrant population increase was the largest, and pre-2022 networks of cooperation between local actors existed (see: Chapter 2, Winiarska et al., 2026; Chapter 3, Matuszczyk & Bernát, 2026; Chapter 4, Jelínková & Zogata-Kusz, 2026; Chapter 7, Podgórska & Jekaterynczuk, 2026) a window of opportunity for more permanent policy change emerged (Kingdon, 2010). As a result, these cities managed to accelerate the mainstreaming of immigrants (Westerveen & Adam, 2019) in their public service delivery, for example, through the establishment of multilingual administrative websites (see Chapter 2, Winiarska et al., 2026). However, where the migrant increase was smaller, and cooperation networks of local actors were weaker, services put in place in response to the forced migrant arrival remained ad hoc and temporary (see Chapter 9, Popławska et al., 2026; Chapter 10, Lewandowski & Nowosielski, 2026; Chapter 11, Zentai et al., 2026).

Finally, a set of micro-level factors shaped the responsiveness, effectiveness and direction of migration governance in CEE cities. That included the social and cultural capital, expertise and interpersonal relationships of individuals working within local administrations, NGOs and community organisations in the analysed cities. In addition, racialised, gendered and ethnic characteristics of migrants shaped migrant deservingness hierarchies and the willingness of the local actors to engage in migration governance. A case of Lublin (see Chapter 7, Podgórska & Jekaterynczuk, 2026) reveals how pre-existing cooperation between the local government and NGOs, stemming from social capital, enabled rapid and effective aid initiatives for forced migrants fleeing Ukraine. The trust and networks built by individuals within these organisations were crucial in the migration governance process. A case of Łomża (see: Chapter 9, Popławska et al., 2026), emphasises how informal actors, such as individual volunteers and civil society organisations, mobilised resources through their “social capital” to provide “effective, rapid and often innovative responses”. Individual activists’ social capital and extensive experience were also essential in the city’s response to the 2022 forced migration. In Kraków (see Chapter 5, Czerska-Shaw & Pędziwiatr, 2026), the influence of individual social capital and informal relationships was also crucial in the 2022 response and the development of migration governance in the city. Behind the formal structures, it was often the work of a “few motivated leaders with good social networks and informal relations with key stakeholders that moved things along” in the refugee support ecosystem. In Hungarian cities (see Chapter 11, Zentai et al., 2026), it was the “pro-inclusion

entrepreneurial leadership” (an individual characteristic) that played a crucial role in enabling effective responses and shaping the modalities of municipalism in refugee solidarity.

12.6 Discussion and Conclusion

The book aims to contribute significantly to existing scholarship by addressing geographical, empirical and theoretical gaps in the field, which has historically been dominated by examples from Western Europe and the U.S. (Caponio & Borkert, 2010; de Graauw & Vermeulen, 2016; Dekker et al., 2015; Pisarevskaya & Scholten, 2025), with limited literature devoted to cities in other regions of the world (e.g. Triandafyllidou et al., 2024). The period from 2015 to 2024 is identified as crucial due to a series of critical events that brought migration to the forefront of political, socio-economic and urban agendas in the region. These events include the 2015 European refugee reception crisis, the 2021–2022 crisis at the EU–Belarus border and the mass forced displacement caused by the 2022 full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine (Eglitis & Kelso, 2022; Jaskułowski, 2019). Despite the growing importance of CEE cities as destinations for migrants and sites of emerging integration policies, they remain largely underexplored in migration scholarship.

Our book, first, fills a geographic and empirical gap in local turn scholarship (Scholten & Breugel, 2017). It directly addresses a critical oversight in migration scholarship by providing a comprehensive and comparative analysis of migration governance in selected CEE cities of various types. Although immigrant integration is widely viewed as a local process, and there have been calls for comparative local studies, migration governance in CEE cities post-2015 has largely been unexamined (Çağlar & Glick Schiller, 2018; Gebhardt, 2016; Scholten & Breugel, 2017). Unlike the Western European and Northern American cities, often described in the literature, migration governance in CEE cities is shaped by its negotiation of historically low immigration experience with new, large-scale inflows, often under the shadow of highly centralised and restrictive national policies, which forces local actors to innovate through flexible, often informal and civil society-driven approaches, particularly evident in their diverse responses to the Ukrainian refugee crisis.

Second, the book challenges the traditional Western bias prevalent in migration studies. By focusing on CEE contexts, the book actively supports the “regionalisation of migration research”, aiming to develop theories and methodologies better suited to the region’s distinct political, social and economic dynamics (Triandafyllidou et al., 2024). This expands dominant perspectives with new theoretical and empirical insights (Pisarevskaya & Scholten, 2025). The book’s in-depth comparative analysis across various city types within the CEE region provides a nuanced understanding of their diversity, often overlooked when the region is treated as a monolith. Individual cases of cities described in the book highlight region-specific factors like post-socialist transformations, varying levels of central control, unique crisis responses and the critical role of local socio-economic and cultural dynamics.

Third, the book innovates the MLG scholarship by incorporating socio-cultural factors into MLG (Chapter 6, Jaworsky et al., 2026; Chapter 11, Zentai et al., 2026). The Brno case introduces “cultural repertoires” (Lamont & Thévenot, 2000) and “symbolic boundary work” (Lamont & Molnár, 2002) to explain how native-born urban residents’ attitudes and city characteristics shape approaches to migration, often revealing selective inclusion and tensions with national narratives (Jaworsky et al., 2026). The analysis of Hungarian cities, through the lens of “modalities of municipalism”, demonstrates how local governance thrives within both compliant and non-compliant positions in an authoritarian state, contributing to policy entrepreneurship and place-making, thereby enriching the understanding of complex power dynamics between municipal and state spaces (Chapter 11, Zentai et al., 2026). In addition, various cases of cities collected in the book showcase Scholten’s MLG typology—centralist, localist, multilevel and decoupled modes—and reveal more nuanced complex interplays between central and local levels and across the cities (Scholten, 2013; Scholten & Penninx, 2016). Warsaw’s case exemplifies a “mainstreaming approach” in an unwelcoming national context, resulting in “decoupled” governance but enhanced horizontal cooperation following the 2022 crisis (Chapter 2, Winiarska et al., 2026). Budapest’s analysis reveals a “policy of no policy” driven by administrative centralism and politicisation, with grassroots and NGO responses filling gaps, showcasing the limitations of local agency in turbulent times (Chapter 3, Matuszczyk & Bernát, 2026). Prague’s study demonstrates an evolution towards a multilevel model, with NGOs acting as “policy entrepreneurs” and the city taking “ownership” of the integration agenda, which was strengthened by the 2022 influx acting as a “stress test” (Chapter 4, Jelínková & Zogata-Kusz, 2026). Oradea’s case applies the MLG framework to a border city, identifying a hybrid centralist-localist strategy with no policy decoupling, and shows how local economic conditions influence transit migration patterns (Chapter 8, Mészáros, 2026).

In sum, this book offers a regionally grounded and theoretically generative contribution to the study of urban migration governance. By combining empirical depth with conceptual innovation, it advances the understanding of how cities beyond the traditional centres of migration scholarship respond to evolving migration dynamics. Our findings call for a more pluralistic and geographically inclusive migration research agenda, one that meaningfully addresses the experiences, constraints and agency of cities in Central and Eastern Europe. We hope this work inspires further comparative and interdisciplinary inquiry, helping to reframe global debates about migration and urban governance from a truly multi-centric perspective.

Appendix

CEELMiG Index Questionnaire with Indicators

1. Policies/programmes targeting and/or mainstreamed to the needs of migrant residents

- This dimension includes **seven indicators** (a1-a7).
- **Sub-indicators cover areas such as:**
 - **a1:** When the immigrant integration strategy/policy was introduced.
 - **a2:** The existence of other immigration/inclusion-related strategic documents or plans.
 - **a3:** Whether the immigrant integration strategy/policy has been updated or has a regular update mechanism.
 - **a4:** Translation of local administration materials (e.g. municipal websites) into non-host country languages.
 - **a5:** The quality and comprehensiveness of translation.
 - **a6:** The organisation of events to celebrate immigrant communities or facilitate positive interactions.
 - **a7:** The specific groups addressed by local policies, such as e.g. EU internal migrants, asylum seekers, highly skilled migrants or undocumented migrants.

2. Institutional coordination.

- This dimension comprises **nine indicators** (a1-a9).
- **Sub-indicators include:**
 - **a1:** The establishment and mission of a dedicated local administration position/unit for migrant integration activities.
 - **a2:** The engagement of different departments of local administration in immigrant mainstreaming.
 - **a3:** Prioritisation of hiring cultural assistants/multicultural workers by public local administration.
 - **a4:** Prioritisation of training staff on diversity/immigration issues.
 - **a5:** Prioritisation of hiring foreign-born employees.
 - **a6:** Issuance of official stances, declarations or resolutions by city representatives supporting immigrants.
 - **a7:** Established cooperation forums between the local administration and immigrant-related NGOs.
 - **a8:** City membership in various city networks, such as e.g. the International Intercultural Cities Network or the Eurocities.
 - **a9:** The existence of specialised immigrant service providers (public and social) in the city.

3. Participation

- This dimension features **two indicators** (a1-a2).
 - **Sub-indicators focus on:**
 - **a1:** The level of participation in the process of developing local immigrant integration policies, ranging from merely informing to empowering the public.
 - **a2:** The specific actors invited to participate in the process, such as representatives of local NGOs, immigrant organisations, businesses or educational institutions.
4. Research
- This dimension includes **four indicators** (a1-a4).
 - **Sub-indicators pertain to:**
 - **a1:** Whether the city administration conducts and/or funds migrant needs assessments.
 - **a2:** The frequency of conducting/funding migrant needs assessments.
 - **a3:** City administration's support for collecting various data on the city's urban population, including immigrant residents, migrant children's progress in schools or use of social services.
 - **a4:** The evaluation of the immigrant integration strategy/policy.
5. Funding
- This dimension contains **two indicators** (a1-a2).
 - **Sub-indicators cover:**
 - **a1:** The existence of dedicated funds for immigrant services, whether from internal national budgets or external sources like the EU.
 - **a2:** The presence of other earmarked lines in the main budget chapters dedicated explicitly to integration-related issues.

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