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UKRAINIAN MIGRATION DURING THE FIRST YEAR AFTER THE BEGINNING OF THE RUSSIAN ARMED CONFLICT IN 2022

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Abstract: *This study examines the evolution of Ukrainian refugees during the first year after the start of the full-scale armed conflict on 24 February 2022, which resulted in a severe humanitarian crisis and high levels of migration both within Ukraine and towards Europe. Using official statistics, the changes in border crossings from Ukraine to neighboring countries during the first year of the conflict are investigated. Additionally, surveys conducted with Ukrainian refugees in several European countries and author interviews conducted in Bulgaria, Spain, and Germany reveal the specific needs of refugees and the main challenges to successful integration into host labor markets and societies. The Temporary Protection Directives and other local protection programs are analyzed in this study, accompanied by a comprehensive discussion on similar initiatives. The primary conclusion drawn from this research affirms the presence of substantial challenges in the successful integration of Ukrainian refugees into host societies, despite the efforts made by the respective governments.*

Keywords: *Ukrainian Refugees; Europe; Border Crossings; Ukraine; Temporary Protection Directives*

INTRODUCTION

The Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict originated in 2014 with the Euromaidan protests and the referendum in Crimea, which the Russian Federation has annexed. Later, in April 2014, demonstrations by pro-Russian groups in Donbas escalated into several years-long armed conflicts between the Russian separatists and Ukraine´s Armed Forces.

In 2021 and early 2022, major Russian and Belarusian joint military exercises occurred near the Ukrainian border.

On 21 February 2022, Russia officially recognized the two self-proclaimed separatist states in Donetsk and Lugansk and sent troops into their territories. Thus, on 24 February 2022, Russia started an armed conflict with the whole of Ukraine. This immediately resulted in a major humanitarian crisis and large-scale migratory flows inside Ukraine and toward Europe.

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), in mid-March 2022, at least 6.5 million people were estimated to have been internally displaced in Ukraine, and over 3.9 million refugees fleeing Ukraine have been recorded across Europe (Filo 2022; UNHCR 2022). At that time, the number of border crossings from Ukraine to the neighboring countries showed high migration flows of Ukrainian refugees as follows: Poland - 1.830.711, Romania - 459.485, Moldova - 337.215, Hungary - 267.570 and Slovakia - 213.000 (UNHCR 2022).

One year later, recorded by mid-March 2023, it shows that more than 8.113.170 Ukrainian refugees settled in Europe. The countries mentioned above continue to host a significant number of Ukrainian refugees: Poland (1.573.200), Germany (861.300), Slovakia (112.360), Romania (110.000), Moldova (107.200), and Hungary (34.300). Figure 1 below illustrates the resettlement situation as of mid-March in various European countries (UNHCR 2023).

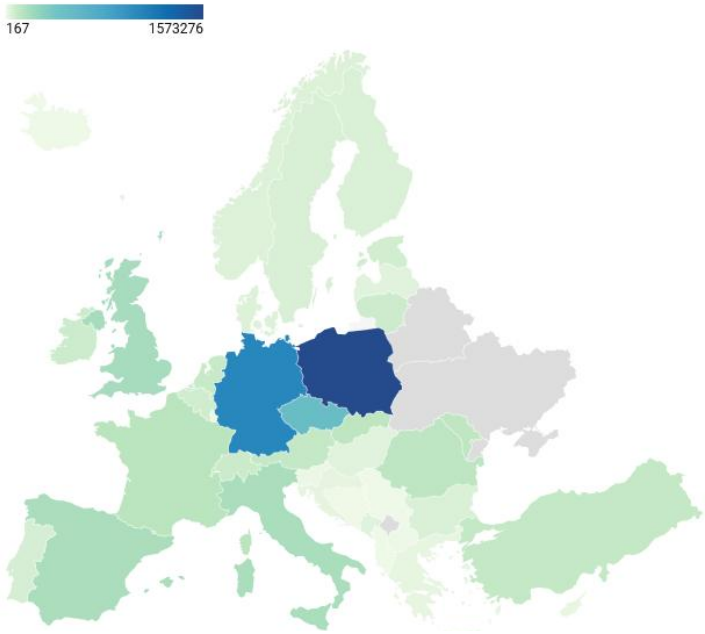


Figure 1: Ukrainian Refugees Settled in Europe by Mid-March 2023 (Source: Own elaboration using data from UNHCR 2023 - Interactive map in https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/5yWkK/2/)

It should also be noted that by 31 December 2022, there have been 602.337 border crossings of third-country nationals (TCNs) from Ukraine into one of its neighboring countries since the beginning of the war. About 53% of all crossings of TCNs were reported by Poland, followed by Romania at 22%, the Republic of Moldova at 12%, Slovakia at 9%, and Hungary at 4%. The main nationalities vary due to the residence of these people before leaving Ukraine and to the proximity to different countries of origin in Europe, North America, Central Asia, and the Middle East (IOM TCN 2022).

Contemporary Ukrainian migration has been a subject of intensive study by several scholars. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine has been struggling with economic and social problems, which resulted in massive emigration towards Western Europe and especially the Visegrád countries (Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, and Hungary) due to their proximity and ethnic and historical ties with Ukraine (Iglicka and Weinar 2008, Benč 2016, Eröss et al. 2016, Jaroszewicz 2018). Migration from Ukraine to Hungary had special characteristics due to geopolitical and economic factors and the presence of a large Hungarian minority in Transcarpathia (Eröss et al. 2016). The immigrant flows to Poland, the Czech Republic, and recently Slovakia was positive due to the characteristics of the labor market (Kaczmarczyk 2015; Strielkowski and Gryshova 2016; Benč 2016; Koroutchev 2020; Koroutchev and Novotný 2020).

The analysis after the beginning of the armed conflict on 24 February 2022 has also been the focus of numerous studies concerning historical perspectives (Bauer 2022), the beginning of the conflict (Welfens 2022), the protection mechanisms (Benton 2022), the economic theory of alliances (George and Sandler 2022), the consequences for the African countries (Duho 2022), the Arab World (Tárik 2022), as well as the Indonesian economy (Junaedi 2022) among others. A recent study regarding the migration of Ukrainian refugees towards Moldova, Romania, and Bulgaria has revealed their impact on the host countries' economies and societies (Koroutchev 2023a, 2023b).

The present research aims to see the evolution of the Ukrainian migration flows during the first year after the beginning of the full-scale armed conflict. An important aim of this study is to analyze the impact of the Temporary Protection Directive on the evolution of the Ukrainians who have benefitted from it in different host countries and to understand the legal basis of this mechanism. The real effects of this Directive have been analyzed by citing some results of recent surveys with Ukrainian refugees across different European host countries and the results of own interviews in several countries. Finally, an additional discussion of the effectiveness of the Temporary Protection Directive and its application in similar cases of massive migration is also presented.

BORDER CROSSINGS FROM UKRAINE DURING THE FIRST YEAR AFTER THE BEGINNING OF THE CONFLICT

The evolution of the border crossings from Ukraine from the beginning of the conflict on 24 February 2022 until mid-March 2023 in several neighbouring countries is shown in the figures below (UNHCR 2023).

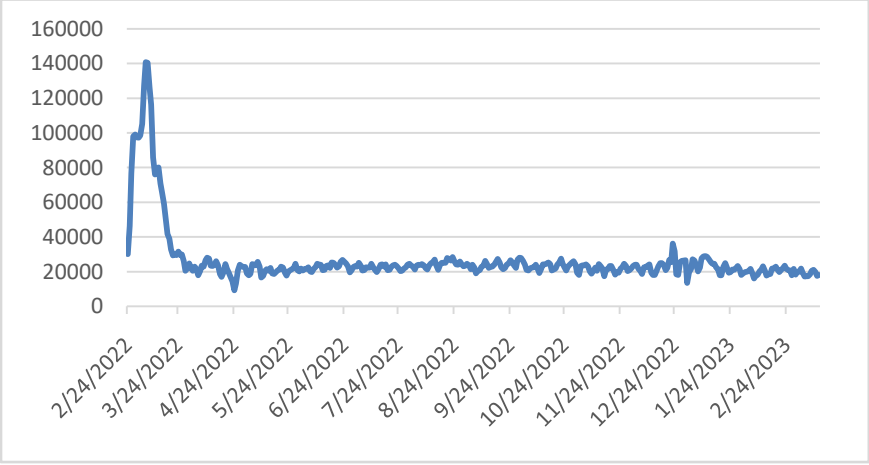


Figure 2: Border Crossings from Ukraine to Poland from the Beginning of the Conflict on 24 February 2022 to Mid-March 2023 (Source: Own elaboration using data from UNHCR-P 2023)

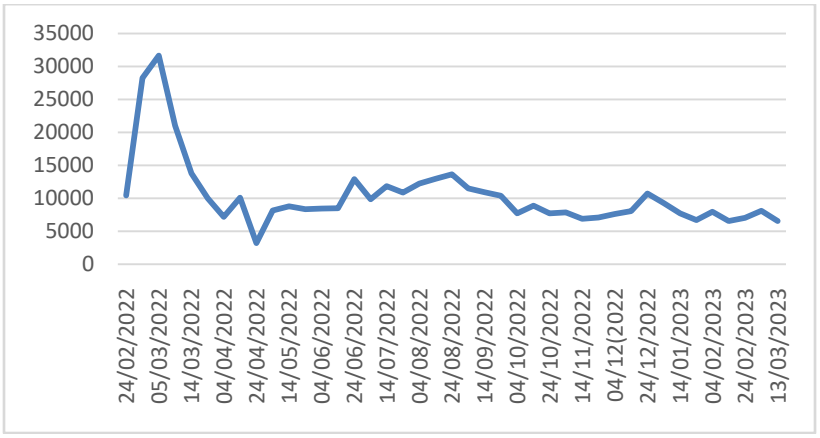


Figure 3: Border Crossings from Ukraine to Romania from the Beginning of the Conflict on 24 February 2022 to Mid-March 2023 (Source: Own elaboration using data from UNHCR-R 2023)

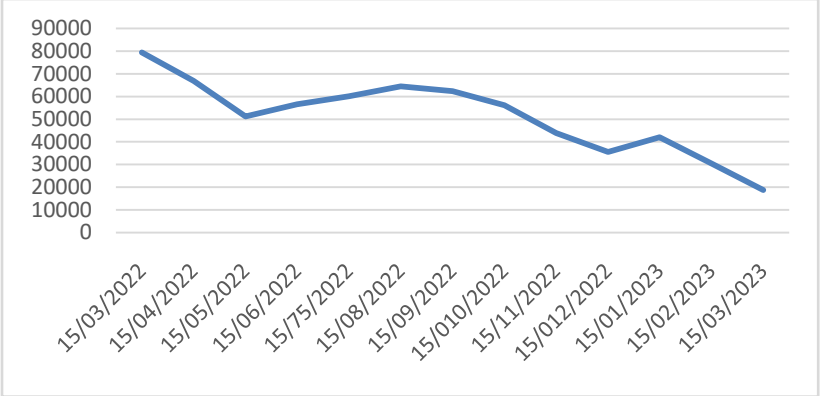


Figure 4: Border Crossings from Ukraine to Moldova from the Beginning of the Conflict on 24 February 2022 to Mid-March 2023 (Source: Own elaboration using data from UNHCR-M 2023)

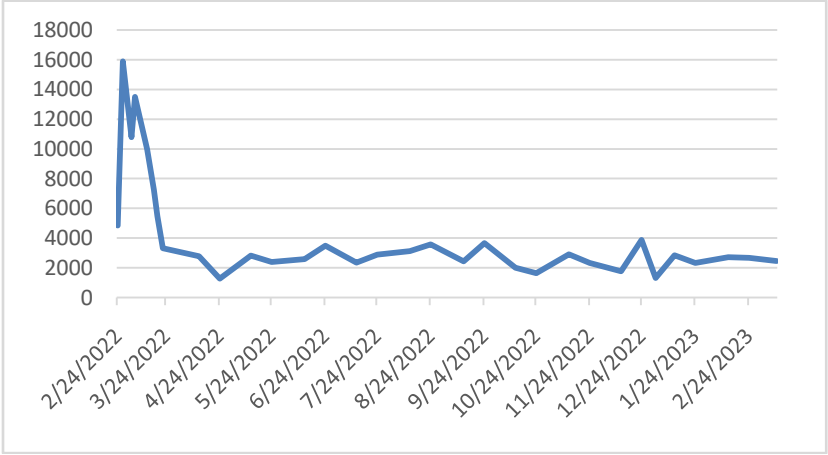


Figure 5: Border Crossings from Ukraine to Slovakia from the Beginning of the Conflict on 24 February 2022 to Mid-March 2023 (Source: Own elaboration using data from UNHCR-S 2023)

As can be seen by comparing Figures 2 to 5 above, the biggest migration wave to these countries occurred during the first month after the beginning of the armed conflict. Then this phenomenon slowed down, although some increase during summer is also visible in all the cases under study. As a general observation, it can be said that from the beginning of the armed conflict to nowadays, there are still very intensive migration flows of several thousand border crossings daily from Ukraine towards the neighboring countries.

TEMPORARY PROTECTION MEASURES

Legal Basis

At the beginning of this unprecedented situation, registered by March 2022, the EU adopted temporary protection schemes for persons fleeing the war in Ukraine, giving them legal status in the EU to live, the right to work, access to social security, medical care, and education (EU Protection 2022).

This temporary protection benefits Ukrainian citizens who lived in Ukraine and were forced to leave their homes due to the Russian invasion on 24 February 2022, foreigners and stateless persons who were present in Ukraine legally and were forced to leave their homes due to the Russian invasion being unable to return to their countries, foreigners and stateless persons who lived in Ukraine on a "long-term basis", regardless of whether they can return to their native country, as well as family members of all the categories mentioned above. Who is a family member is determined in each country separately. At the same time, the European Union significantly simplified the rules of border checks, relaxing the requirements for border, customs, and veterinary control. The introduction of the mechanism of temporary protection means that citizens of Ukraine do not need to apply for asylum immediately after crossing the border.

The legal basis for this mechanism is given by the following Temporary Protections Directives (EC 2022):

- Arriving at the EU:

Article 6(5) - Entry conditions for third-country nationals; "(c) third-country nationals who do not fulfill one or more of the conditions laid down in paragraph 1 may be authorized by a Member State to enter its territory on humanitarian grounds, on the grounds of national interest or because of international obligations. Where the third-country national concerned is the subject of an alert as referred to in paragraph 1(d), the Member State authorising him or her to enter its territory shall inform the other Member States accordingly".

Article 7 - Conduct of border checks: "1. Border guards shall, in the performance of their duties, fully respect human dignity, in particular in cases involving vulnerable persons. While carrying out border checks, border guards shall not discriminate against persons on grounds of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation".

- Residence and legal status:

Article 17: "1. Persons enjoying temporary protection must be able to lodge an application for asylum at any time".

Article 19: "1. The Member States may provide that temporary protection may not be enjoyed concurrently with the status of an asylum seeker while applications are under consideration".

- Housing:

Article 13: "1. The Member States shall ensure that persons enjoying temporary protection have access to suitable accommodation or, if necessary, receive the means to obtain housing".

- Education:

Article 14: "1. The Member States shall grant to persons under 18 years of age enjoying temporary protection access to the education system under the same conditions as nationals of the host Member State. The Member States may stipulate that such access must be confined to the state education system. 2. The Member States may allow adults enjoying temporary protection access to the general education system".

- Employment:

Article 12: "The Member States shall authorise, for a period not exceeding that of temporary protection, persons enjoying temporary protection to engage in employed or self-employed activities, subject to rules applicable to the profession".

"The Member States shall authorise, for a period not exceeding that of temporary protection, persons enjoying it to engage in activities such as educational opportunities for adults, vocational training, and practical workplace experience".

- Social benefits:

Article 13: "2. The Member States shall make provision for persons enjoying temporary protection to receive necessary assistance in terms of social welfare and means of subsistence if they do not have sufficient resources, as well as for medical care".

- Health:

Article 13: "2. The Member States shall make provisions for persons enjoying temporary protection to receive necessary assistance for medical care. Without prejudice to paragraph 4, the assistance necessary for medical care shall include at least emergency care and essential treatment of illness. 4. The Member States shall provide necessary medical or other assistance to persons enjoying temporary protection who have special needs, such as unaccompanied minors or persons who have undergone torture, rape, or other serious forms of psychological, physical, or sexual violence".

Additionally, to the above Temporally Protection Directive, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has launched a cash-based program in Ukraine to support the most vulnerable families forced to flee their homes (IOM Cash Assistance 2022). With initial funding from the UN Central Emergency Fund (CERF), the European Union, Canada, Germany, and the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), IOM's cash-based program covered multiple regions in Ukraine. Zakarpattia Region was the first area where this financial help reached almost 40.000 vulnerable people among those internally displaced and host communities, such as pregnant and single women, families with two or more children, persons with disabilities, and elderly people. This program was also applied to other regions such as Chernivtsi, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, and Vinnytsia in order to support the internally displaced persons, host communities, and other conflict-affected groups,

including migrants who were stranded in Ukraine and needed support during and after crossing the borders with the EU.

Finally, one has to note that the access of Ukrainian citizens and other migrants to the European job market needs reconsideration regarding the recognition of skills and qualifications. The IOM has taken a step in this direction, which launched a freelancing platform helping displaced Ukrainians find remote, online work, facilitating their entry into the job market (EC Integration 2022; IOM Freelance 2022).

Statistics and Surveys

By mid-March 20th, 2023, the number of refugees from Ukraine recorded across Europe was 8.157.230 persons, while the number of them registered for temporary protection or similar national protection schemes in Europe at that time was 4.946.920. In Table 1, the number of Ukrainian refugees registered for temporary protection is given for several European countries.

Table 1: Number of Ukrainian Refugees Registered for Temporary Protection in Different European Countries by Mid-March 2023 (Source: Own elaboration using data from UNHCR 2023)

Country	Registered for Temporary Protection Ukrainian Refugees (Date)
Poland	1.573.276 (19.03.2023)
Germany	881.399 (31.01.2023)
Czech Republic	499.887 (19.03.2023)
Bulgaria	154.590 (14.03.2023)
Italy	171.739 (24.02.2023)
Spain	170.973 (16.03.2023)
France	118.994 (31.10.2022)
Romania	122.362 (19.03.2023)
Slovakia	112.154 (19.03.2023)
Austria	94.984 (20.03.2023)
Netherlands	89.730 (10.02.2023)
Lithuania	75.954 (17.03.2023)
Latvia	46.600 (20.03.2023)
Estonia	44.232 (19.03.2023)
Hungary	34.248 (21.03.2023)

Despite the programs mentioned above and the number of Ukrainian refugees across Europe for temporary protection, recent surveys with some 14.500 chosen from different European countries have been performed during August and September 2022 (Fleeing Ukraine 2023). The countries have been chosen according to the following criteria: being neighboring ones to Ukraine (Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia), had the largest numbers of people displaced from Ukraine (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, and Spain) and had a large population of people displaced from Ukraine relative to their total population (Estonia). The EU Temporary Protection Directive allowed individuals fleeing the conflict to establish residency, work, travel, and access services in various European countries. Nearly all respondents sought temporary protection, with approximately one-third applying for asylum. The surveys reveal that these refugees face challenges in education, work, housing, and making ends meet. The results

showed that one of every three would like to return to Ukraine, although as well one in three of the participants expressed their opinion that they formed part of the host community.

However, many challenges remain, such as language, housing, education, work, health, and cost of living. Especially the lack of knowledge of the local language has been reported as the main reason for dropping out of the education sphere. The housing also shows severe problems related to sharing facilities and lack of privacy. The situation in the labor market is complicated, as only 33% reported having a paid job. The same percentage of the women reported that they do not work as they have to take care of their children, and 48% reported that their new job was below their level of education. As stated, the main barriers to accessing employment for adults for paid work are the lack of knowledge of the host country's language. The problems related to the health situation of the responders show that almost 50% of them were depressed since arriving in the host country, and almost 50% of the children have difficulties sleeping and concentrating. Finally, it has been reported that almost 80% face difficulties in making ends meet.

Several interviews have been performed as well by the author in Bulgaria (10 in the Black Sea region), Spain (10 in the Madrid region), and virtually in Germany (5 in Cologne and Mainz). The participants had similar characteristics to the surveys reported above. Those with a job expressed optimism for better integration in the host countries. However, in Spain and Germany, one of the biggest challenges has been reported to be the language, which creates difficulties for adults to start a job. Moreover, about half of the women who participated in the surveys reported that they did not work as they had to care for their children. As in the previous survey, more than 70% reported difficulties making ends meet.

Changes to European Aid for Ukrainian Refugees One Year Later

One year after the beginning of the armed conflict, several European governments are changing the schemes and formats of assistance for Ukrainians. Some examples are given below.

In Poland, President Duda signed amendments on 23 January 2023 to the law "On Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine in Connection with the Armed Conflict on Their Territory". According to the amendments, if a citizen of Ukraine leaves the territory of Poland for more than 30 days, they will lose their status and benefits. In addition, citizens of Ukraine who are in places of collective residence of refugees must cover half of the costs of assistance provided by local authorities (about PLN 40 per person and day) from 1 March 2023 and PLN 60 from 1 May 2023. The registration system is also changing, and citizens of Ukraine need to choose between refugee status and obtaining a residence permit under an employment contract.

In Germany, the Hospitable German Family project was closed in June 2022. There is no single benefit in Germany, as in some other countries, as it depends on many factors. Individuals look for apartments on their own, and the job center only approves the area and the amount of rent because they are the ones who pay for it. This amount also includes water. In general, the state will not stop helping refugees or reducing aid.

Romania maintained its 50/20 social support program for a long time, providing 50 lei for accommodation and 20 for food per day. However, one year later, the support program is

changing, and instead of compensating homeowners, the state will pay Ukrainians 400 Euros a month for four months. During this time, they must find a job and continue to pay for housing on their own. The 50/20 program, however, will continue for students studying in Romania and Ukrainians over 65 years old.

In the Czech Republic, once the amendments come into effect on 1 April 2023, the financial assistance amount will be reduced to 4.860 crowns per adult, and after receiving such assistance for 150 days, it will be further reduced to a minimum of 3.130 crowns (133 Euros). However, this reduction will not apply to children, disabled individuals, pensioners, and students. Additionally, free housing can be provided for a maximum of 150 days, but if a refugee leaves the housing for more than 10 days, they will forfeit the benefit.

In general, finding a suitable job that corresponds to their educational background and experience remains a major challenge for Ukrainian refugees in Europe (Halip 2023).

Beyond the Ukrainian Temporary Protection

Finally, it must be mentioned that the displacement of more than 8 million people fleeing Ukraine since the Russian invasion has exceeded any recent humanitarian crisis and led to unprecedented inflation and food prices. In this situation, it is worth thinking that the Temporary Protection Directive of the Ukrainian refugees could be a Tipping Point for Refugee Protection (Benton 2022).

The Temporary Protection Directive grants fast-track residence and work rights to Ukrainians and allows for circumvention of the asylum systems, thus speeding the processing of the cases. It seems to be the way of integrating people in need of protection into host countries most effectively without depriving them of their right to international protection. In addition to the Temporary Protection Directive, some countries have applied additional protections related to refugee skills or family reunification, thus offering labor and education opportunities. Providing legal status quickly may carry economic benefits not realized in previous crises. This may require more flexibility from the integration services, including remote work, jobs that do not need knowledge of the host country, and options to get childcare for the Ukrainian refugees, largely represented by women, children, and elderly people.

The Temporary Protection Directive will not be applicable in every case, nor should it replace existing asylum and refugee protection mechanisms. Instead, it will serve as a complementary measure to enhance the adaptability and flexibility of solutions for asylum and protection seekers (Benton 2022).

CONCLUSION

This article explores the explosive character of the Ukrainian refugee migration across Europe after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The evolution of these flows toward Europe and especially toward neighboring Ukraine countries during the first year after the beginning of the conflict has been carefully analyzed. The recent changes in humanitarian aid for Ukrainian refugees in several European countries have also been discussed. The effect of the Temporary Protections Directives and other similar local protection programs

have been analyzed concerning their legal basis. Data from numerous surveys with Ukrainian refugees in several European countries have been compared to the interviews performed by the author in three selected countries (Bulgaria, Spain, and Germany). Both show the existence of challenges for the refugees mainly related to their knowledge of the local language, labor market access, and financial stability. Finally, the application of temporary protection programs in a broader sense has been briefly discussed.

COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

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This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any authors.

Statement on the Welfare of Animals:
This article does not contain any studies with animals performed by any authors.

Informed Consent:
Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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