



COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE MANAGEMENT



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Introduction to the Report

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This report gathers a selection of short articles analysing migration, its governance and its implications, at different levels – state, local, the EU, international.

The paper involves studies and perspectives on institutions, refugees' agencies, activities, ideas and rights, displaying opinions from experts, researchers, diplomats and institutional actors

Covering cross-country comparisons as well as different theoretical and methodological approaches the report enables comparative perspectives on migration governance.

The idea of this work originated from a private discussion over the current Ukrainian crisis. As a result of this discussion, the organisers Economic Forum of Karpacz and the Centro Studi Internazionali - CSI decided to partner and cooperate in collecting the different opinions of those participants at the Economic Forum who focus on the issues of migration and asylum.

We are honoured to have received such a strong participation by national institutions, universities and research centres, which we thank for their participation.

Our hope is that this brief document can stimulate constructive debates among the Forum community and within the relevant panels.

The Ukrainian Crisis and the EU's refugees management: yet another lesson to be learnt?

Emanuele Errichiello and Francesco Gaudiosi

Centro Studi Internazionali - CSI

With the conflict in Ukraine carrying on, civilians continue to be affected in their day-to-day lives, with many coming to the decision of leaving Ukraine. From March, over 7 million Ukrainian citizens have left their country [1], seeking refuge in neighbouring EU countries, particularly Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania. Some of these 7 million people have also reached Central and Western EU countries, seeking refuge in the homes of family members or friends living abroad. Notwithstanding the incredible degree of solidarity shown by all EU countries, and by the EU itself, in this context, new/old uncertainties and criticalities have (re)emerged regarding the EU's management of refugees and asylum seekers, particularly following the activation of the controversial Temporary Protection Directive. Considering the situation, the following article – building on the developments of the ongoing Ukrainian crisis – aims to assess the current European legislations and institutional structures on refugee crisis management, attempting to shed light on: (1) the existing gaps and the future developments on matters of refugee management and asylum; (2) the ways in which the EU is trying to realistically solve the overarching Russia-Ukraine crisis to stop migratory fluxes.

The activation of the Temporary Protection Directive: from hopes to reality

In response to the Ukrainian crisis, the Council of the European Union decided to adopt – for the first time since its creation in 2001 – the Temporary Protection Directive [2]. The Directive was written in 2001 to deal with the refugees coming from the former Yugoslavia but was never implemented – not even in 2015 – becoming an extremely controversial issue, to the extent some member States called for its abrogation. Thus, its recent – and very quick – adoption came with extreme surprise for everyone.

Normatively speaking, the Directive allows a simplification of procedures and authorizations for refugees escaping from dangerous contexts outside the EU to enter the EU territories. Specifically, the directive allows the refugees to quickly obtain a protection status as well as the status of legal immigrant; in other words, these people can access all basic services within the country they seek refuge, and avoid applying to refugee status through the ordinary procedure, which can take up to 12 months to complete.

The Temporary Protection Directive can only be activated when the flux of migrants is so large to become out of control for the ordinary system of asylum and protection. The duration of the protection status is initially 1 year but can be extended up to 3 years.

The activation of this Directive, nevertheless, has raised serious concerns over the international role of the EU vis-à-vis its internal cohesion, especially when it comes to controversial fields such as immigration, foreign and defense policy. If the Ukrainian crisis seemed the chance to reach that unity the EU needs in the aforementioned fields, future perspectives seem, quite on the contrary, contradictory. Whilst it is true that the Russian aggression in Ukraine has made Hungary and Poland more flexible on matters of immigration at the EU table, opposing views in the EU still exist. This is particularly the case of the ongoing discussion at the European Parliament (EP) on the new pact on asylum management and international protection proposed by the Commission. The initial rhetoric of core EU actors gave hopes to possibilities of radical reforms. Yet, the opposition of Northern and Eastern countries have modified drastically the overall approach designed by the Commission in its proposal [3], which led in turn to intense criticism by some political groups in the EP. Most crucially, the proposal keeps the existing first-country-of-arrival rule. This leaves enormous pressures to those countries more exposed to migratory fluxes, namely Italy, Spain and Greece, as it allows discretion for other countries to refuse or accept migrants.

Hence, despite the recent crisis and the hopes for a new momentum for the reform of the EU asylum and immigration policy, a lack of political seems to persist.

Solving the Russia-Ukraine crisis to end the humanitarian crisis: is there an EU approach?

The stagnation of the negotiations and the internal lack of cohesion within the EU called for a different approach to solve the Russia-Ukraine conflict and thus end the humanitarian crisis resulted from it. This approach by the EU took the OSCE as a precious – albeit complex – resource, as this organization monitors Ukraine since 2014. Specifically, EU-OSCE interaction in the Ukrainian conflict constituted an indirect form of governance as the EU targeted Russia through the OSCE [4]. Contrary to other forms of indirect governance, the governance arrangement that emerged in the Ukrainian case functioned only through soft inducements. Although EU member states represent almost half of the OSCE members, indeed, the EU has no formal legal control over this organization.

The presence of many member states, nevertheless, has allowed the EU to play an influential role, without constraints that it would have, on the other hand, within the Council. This governance arrangement can promote solutions to deal with contingent capability deficiencies the EU has on matters of crisis management. In the case of Ukraine, outsourcing part of EU crisis management activities to the OSCE was not only necessary, but also appropriate since the EU was perceived as being directly part of the conflict.

Nonetheless – here too – we must note the EU’s adoption of orchestration to externalize its foreign policy activities raises serious questions about the EU’s overall capacity to act as a security provider through its crisis management activities. For sure, as the article’s empirical analysis shows, the EU has enough ideal and material resources to guide and support third actors in addressing major security threats in its neighborhood. In the long term, the adoption of this mode of governance cannot replace centralized operational capabilities at the EU level to respond to external conflicts and crises. Given the EU’s lack of control over its intermediaries, in fact, orchestration cannot be considered as a panacea for EU structural deficiencies. This is especially so in policy sectors where the EU has so far mostly relied on regulatory means of integration rather than on capacity-building, namely the CSDP’s military and civilian management; and the common foreign and security policy’s sanctioning power.

The lesson to be learnt

Whilst alternative approaches on foreign and security policy and middle ground solutions on the pact on asylum seem the only reality at the current stage, the authors of this short article believe that these cannot be long-term viable solutions. Rebuilding the EU common policies on asylum and refugee protection in an effective and sustainable manner and seeking a real common foreign policy are defining questions for the European Union. This is a fundamental test of the EU’s ability to respond to rapid socio-economic changes and to facilitate common policy responses that add value to national policies. We argue that the most productive way forward is not to discuss over small policy changes but to seek the momentum of the Ukrainian crisis and convince typically opposing countries – now facing the challenge – on more radical reforms, including a re-thinking of the first-country-of-arrival rule.

[1] Data extracted from the UNHCR Operational Data Portal:

<https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

[2] Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001:

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32001L0055>

[3] EU Commission, *Migration and Asylum Package: New Pact on Migration and Asylum documents* adopted on 23 September 2020. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/migration-and-asylum-package-new-pact-migration-and-asylum-documents-adopted-23-september-2020_en

[4] Viceré, M. G. A. (2022), Externalizing EU crisis management: EU orchestration of the OSCE during the Ukrainian conflict in *Contemporary Security Policy* 42(4), pp. 498-529.

Polish Perspective on the Migration Crisis related to the War in Ukraine

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The scale of unconditional assistance provided by Polish citizens, local and central authorities to Ukrainian refugees was an expression of exceptional solidarity with war-affected Ukraine. The involvement and support of the society, as well as the administration as a whole, resulted in unprecedented actions involving extensive support for the designated group of people. According to the data of the Department of Operational Duty Service of the Polish Board Guard, in the period 24.02.2022-28.08.2022, 5,445,811 citizens of Ukraine entered the territory of Poland, of which it is currently estimated that there are still about 1.3 million people in Poland (of which 38% are children under 18 years of age). Thus, the number of Ukrainian citizens in Poland, taking into account the 1.3 million labor migrants already temporarily living and working in Poland, has doubled. It is estimated that the rental housing market can serve less than 9.4% of those in need of accommodation out of the variant calculated maximum migration absorption estimated at 3.1 million people.

The assistance measures taken for refugees at the beginning provided for basic needs including shelter, food, access to education and health care, or psychological and legal assistance. However, the prolonged period of stay in Poland of mainly women and children fleeing war, especially in places of collective accommodation, contributed to the need to design system solutions to counter the problems associated with the resulting migration crisis.

Activities in the initial phase were spontaneous and ad hoc, but now Poland faced the need to meet comprehensive needs in the long term. Considering that probably a large part of those arriving after 24.02.2022 will not be able to return to their homes in Ukraine, the main task is to create an efficient system of social integration. So far, the most preferred places for refugees to stay are larger cities, probably due to the existence of large concentrations of Ukrainian citizens already working there before the war. Therefore, the over-density of the immigrant population in urban agglomerations has now become a challenge, with the consequent growing problems in finding housing, jobs, schools or kindergartens.

This situation is also affecting the Polish housing market in large cities. A small proportion of refugees use places of collective accommodation, which, despite the limited time, usually a few weeks, raises social and psychological problems, with social tensions and conflicts in prospect.

Therefore, the next stage is the implementation of long-term activities, the main task of which will be to develop a strategy of medium- and long-term activities that will ensure stabilization and coordinated support for the process of inclusion in local communities of Ukrainian citizens who decide to stay in Poland for a longer period of time. In this area, it is necessary to use the lessons of assistance activities at all levels: citizens, local governments and organizations, as well as assistance from the Polish State.

The Social Inclusion Strategy being prepared by Minister Agnieszka Ścigaj in the Department of Social Inclusion in the Chancellery of the Prime Minister is primarily related to strengthening the potential of small local communities. It is addressed not only to foreigners, including Ukrainians, but also to Polish citizens and repatriates. An element of this strategy is the "Mutually Needed" pilot program, which is scheduled to begin later in 2022. The concept will also include employers and entrepreneurs, the area of social economy, NGO activities and, very importantly, the creation of housing infrastructure suitable for these needs, which will serve as a space for these activities.

The effective integration of refugees into the labor market, the provision of adequate support for children's education or the acquisition of skills to facilitate employment, as well as the offering of decent housing will allow some tools and solutions to be tested. This will allow to demonstrate in practice the potential of including these people in local communities, where everyone contributing their labor and social capital also benefits from integrated support. Integrated assistance should be secured in the form of affordable housing, places in school and preschool institutions for children, and support for smooth integration into the labor market. The aforementioned pilot will focus on creating conditions for the dispersal of the aforementioned groups and families to smaller Polish cities and rural areas.

The use of the potential of smaller centers will result in the reduction of deficits in depopulation, lack of workers in the sphere of social services (performed mainly by women) and agriculture and, in parallel, the adaptation of existing vacant buildings that can be easily adapted for residential purposes. In addition, there is potential in schools located in these areas to accommodate additional students. Importantly, the solutions developed are intended to be inter-ministerial, also drawing on the experience of other countries affected by refugee crises.

The pilot program will be open to smaller urban municipalities and rural municipalities that establish cooperation with local social organizations and propose a coherent project allowing the relocation of Ukrainian families from large urban centers to smaller towns. Families there will receive comprehensive support, i.e. they will be provided with housing on a social rental basis (below market prices), jobs - especially in social services (e.g. child and elderly care) or those industries that suffered most during the pandemic (catering, hospitality, or agriculture), and children will be provided with places in schools, for example, along with the necessary support for learning. 3 - 4 rural municipalities and/or smaller towns or consortia of municipalities will be selected for the pilot, which:: demonstrate a shortage of workers in services and/or agriculture, identify properties (vacant lots) that can be converted to housing, and include in their bid an inventory of schools by number of students and housing conditions. Importantly, large metropolitan areas will also indirectly benefit from the measures by relieving the burden on urban facilities and housing stock.

The truly innovative character of the measures taken will not only have a humanitarian dimension, but will also integrate the aforementioned groups as comprehensively as possible into local communities, also contributing to their development. Therefore, in view of the information presented, until the situation in Ukraine stabilizes, it is necessary to adopt an inclusion strategy and introduce the indicated mechanisms, which will prevent isolation, passivity and exclusion.

Immigration to the United States: Magnitudes and Public Opinion

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The United States is a large country of roughly 330 million people and a sizeable foreign-born (immigrant) population. Often thought of as a “country of immigrants,” the U.S. has seen dramatic change in immigration policies and outcomes over its history. Restrictions on immigration from Europe were minimal prior to World War 1, and a major immigration surge took place during 1880-1914 that caused the foreign-born share of the US population to rise to 15% by 1910. Restrictive immigration quotas were then imposed in the early 1920s that led to a long period of low immigration inflow, and the foreign-born share fell to 5% in 1970.

Since the 1960s, the U.S. government has pursued more liberal policies that have resulted in large inflows of both legal and unauthorized migrants, and the immigrant population is estimated to have risen to 45 million people by 2020, or 14% of the total population. This is by far the largest immigrant population in the world, and the foreign-born share is the sixth highest in the world among countries with a population of 10 million or more. [1]

This note reviews estimates of key migratory inflows and U.S. public opinion on immigration.

Legal Immigration

Over the last two decades, legal immigration to the U.S. has averaged roughly 1 million people per year. Table 1 below shows the number of people obtaining legal permanent residence in the U.S. during 2015-2020 broken down by broad category of preference. Two-thirds of legal immigrants obtain legal permanent residence on the basis of family unification, with only small minorities being granted this status for employment reasons (14%) or for asylum (13%).[2]

Table 1**Immigrants Obtaining Legal Permanent Residence in the U.S.: 2015-2020**

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2015-2020
Total	1,051,031	1,183,505	1,127,167	1,096,611	1,031,765	707,362	100%
Family-based	678,978	804,793	748,746	695,524	709,904	442,708	66%
<i>Immediate relatives of U.S. citizens</i>	<i>465,068</i>	<i>566,706</i>	<i>516,508</i>	<i>478,961</i>	<i>505,765</i>	<i>321,148</i>	46%
<i>Family-sponsored preferences^A</i>	<i>213,910</i>	<i>238,087</i>	<i>232,238</i>	<i>216,563</i>	<i>204,139</i>	<i>121,560</i>	20%
Employment-based preferences ^B	144,047	137,893	137,855	138,171	139,458	148,959	14%
Refugees	118,431	120,216	120,356	155,734	80,908	44,404	10%
Asylees	33,564	37,209	25,647	30,175	26,003	19,471	3%
Diversity	47,934	49,865	51,592	45,350	43,463	25,028	4%
Other ^C	28,077	33,529	42,971	31,657	32,029	26,792	3%
Memo: asylum claims filed in immigration court^D	63,922	83,003	145,810	165,374	215,566	195,683	

Sources: Immigrants obtaining legal permanent residence: Table 6, 2020 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Asylum claims filed in immigration court: Executive Office for Immigration Review: <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1106366/download>

A: Adult children, siblings of U.S. citizens; relatives of legal immigrants.

B: Priority workers, professionals and high-ability individuals, investors.

C: Parolees, victims of human trafficking/other crimes, other.

D: Fiscal year values.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Under U.S. law, refugees and asylum seekers are people who have been persecuted or have a well-founded fear of persecution because of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Refugees are those who apply and undergo application processing while outside of the U.S., whereas asylum seekers are those who apply for asylum after arriving at a U.S. border or while residing in the U.S. Refugees can become a legal permanent resident after one year of residence in the U.S. Data on “refugees” in Table 1 captures all entries of refugees. [3]

Asylum seekers enter the U.S. and are processed by the government very differently than refugees, and determining how many asylum seekers enter and reside in the U.S. is challenging. Table 1 only gives the number of asylum seekers who successfully complete a lengthy immigration court process and win legal permanent residence. A majority of asylum seekers ultimately lose their court case and are denied legal residence, but these migrants are not detained and deported, and a large majority of them continue to live in the U.S. in an unauthorized status. The memo item in Table 1 gives the number of new asylum claims made in U.S. immigration court. This is a reasonable (although imperfect) approximation to the true number of new asylum seekers who enter and reside in the U.S. The large majority of asylum claims are by people from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

“Traditional” Unauthorized Immigration

The U.S. has also experienced a much larger inflow of “traditional” unauthorized immigrants who do not pursue an asylum claim. Until recently, almost all unauthorized immigration did not involve asylum seeking. Unauthorized immigration from Mexico began to rise after the U.S. government cancelled a large-scale Mexican guest-worker program in 1965. This flow surged to very high levels in the 1980s and 1990s and then began to fall, gradually in the 2000s and quite sharply after 2010. [4]

As Mexican immigration started to fall in the 2000s, unauthorized “traditional” immigration from the Central American countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras rose. An important new stage began after 2011, when the number of Central American migrants entering the U.S. through the asylum channel began to rise. Asylum seekers probably now account for more than half of all immigrants from these three countries.

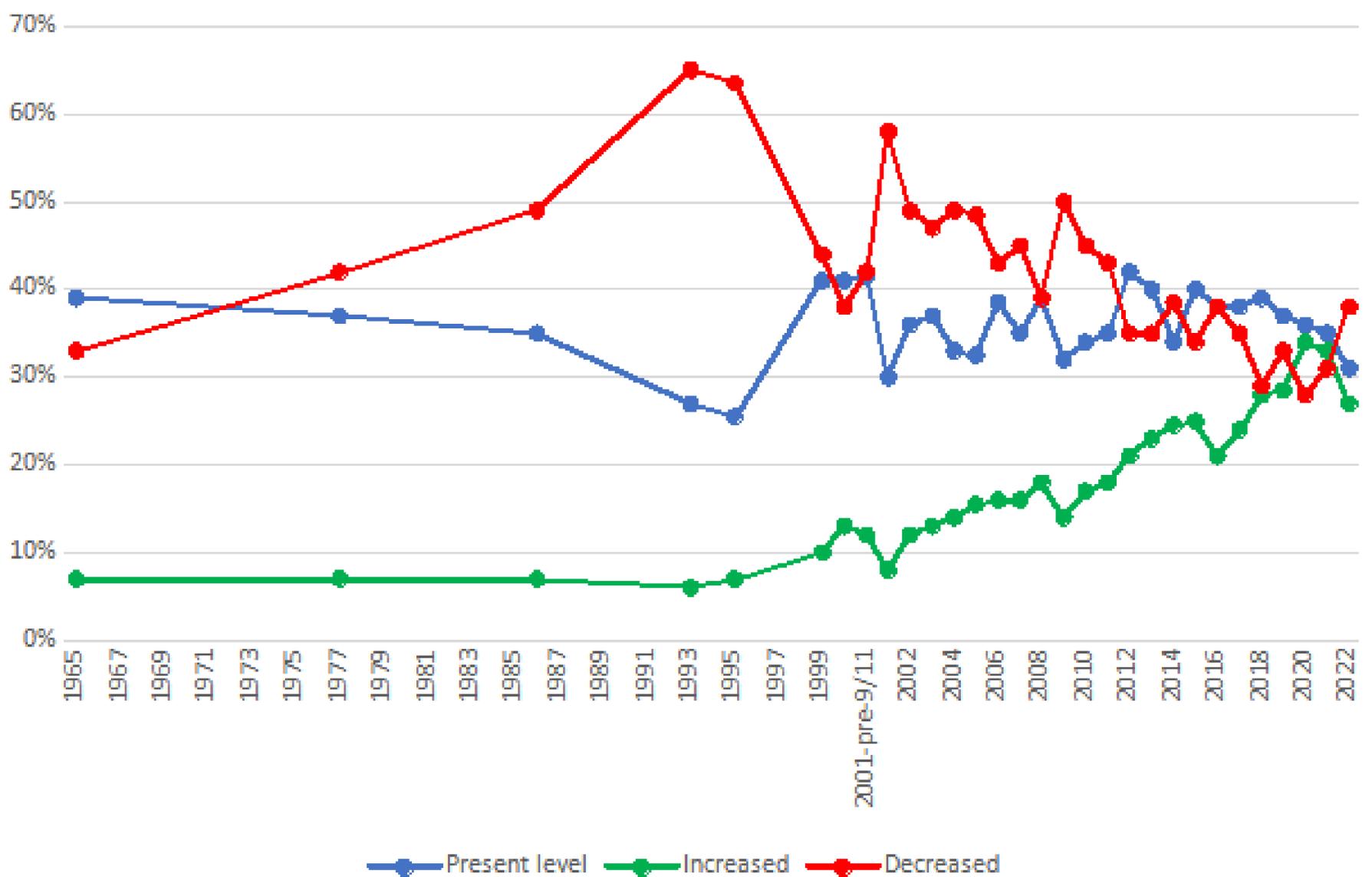
The U.S. likely has the largest unauthorized immigrant population in the world. It is estimated to have comprised roughly 10 million people in 2017, or roughly 20% of the total foreign-born population. [5]

Public Opinion

The immigration surge that began in the 1970s has led to considerable debate and political controversy about immigration policies and outcomes. Nationally-representative opinion surveys have asked many immigration-related questions in recent decades. [6] The first such question was asked in 1965 by the Gallup organization on whether immigration should be kept at its current level, increased, or decreased. [7]

Figure 1 shows results over the period 1965-2022 and indicates that the share of Americans wanting increased immigration was very low until 2000 and then increased to roughly one-third in 2021, whereas a preference for decreasing immigration peaked at two-thirds in the early 1990s and then fell to roughly one-third in 2021. These results suggest that American sentiment about immigration has become more positive over the past two decades. The poll does show a drop in support in 2022, perhaps because of the large surge of unauthorized immigration that has occurred since early 2021.

Figure 1
 "Should immigration be kept at its present level, increased or decreased?"



It is unlikely that many people responding to the Gallup question knew what the “current level” of immigration into the U.S. was at the time they were questioned. Table 2 summarizes responses to three recent polls that asked people about their preferred quantitative level of legal immigration. Two-thirds or more would prefer a lower level of legal immigration than the current level (1 million), and the median preferred level is much less than the current level. These polls also reveal very little support for the extreme positions of either a level of immigration equal to zero, or no restrictions on the level of immigration. Taken together, opinion survey evidence suggests that a majority of Americans support a non-zero level of immigration that is significantly less than the current level.

Table 2**“In your opinion, how many (legal) immigrants should be admitted to the U.S. each year?”**

	Date of poll	Less than 1 million	1 million	More than 1 million	<i>Median preferred level</i>
Harvard-Harris	1/2018	81%	7%	12%	250,000
Cato	3/2021	61%	19%	20%	100,000
Rasmussen	3/2021	66%	19%	15%	<500,000

Polls provided somewhat different numeric choices, and responses were aggregated into these groups.

Harvard-Harris: <https://harvardharrispoll.com/>; Cato: <https://www.cato.org/survey-reports/e-pluribus-unum-findings-cato-institute-2021-immigration-identity-national-survey>;

Rasmussen: https://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/politics/immigration_index/immigration_index_trends

With respect to the public’s evaluation of the impacts of immigration, opinion surveys generally suggest that a majority of Americans view immigration as being of overall benefit to the society and economy. A majority also supports re-orienting legal immigration policies to admitting immigrants on the basis of employment needs as opposed to family unification. Polls also show that Americans are generally quite concerned about unauthorized immigration, and that majorities have consistently been in favor of reducing illegal immigration, strengthening border control, and making it more difficult for unauthorized immigrants to gain employment. [8]

Public opinion on refugees has generally only been collected when a large refugee inflow has or could emerge. Some refugee flows are more welcome than others. There was considerable opposition to Vietnamese refugee inflow in the late 1970s (perhaps due to the large number of arrivals), and public opinion was slightly against admitting Syrian refugees in 2015. In contrast, two-thirds of Americans supported admitting Kosovar refugees in 1999, and there is overwhelming support for admitting up to 100,000 Ukrainian refugees this year. [9] Questions have also been asked in recent years about whether the U.S. has a responsibility to admit refugees: slightly over 50% supports that there is a responsibility, and slightly over 40% oppose this, with roughly one-third of Americans opposing admitting any refugees. [10]

Finally, responses to immigration questions also indicate a major polarization along political identification lines. Democrats/liberals are much more likely than Republicans/conservatives to regard immigration positively and favor maintaining or increasing immigration levels, and less likely to be concerned about illegal immigration. Those who do not identify with either party (independents) are in between and closer to Democrats or Republicans depending on the specific issue.

[1] Based on data for the year 2015 from the World Development Indicators databank. The immigrant population of the U.S. is almost four times larger than the next largest one in Germany, and for countries with 10 million or more total population, the foreign-born share in the U.S. is exceeded only by that for Saudi Arabia, Australia, Canada, Kazakhstan, and Germany.

[2] Roughly half of those granted legal permanent residence are new arrivals to the U.S., and half obtain this status after already having lived in the U.S. for some time.

[3] The number of refugees in Table 1 include refugees and family members who arrive in the U.S. as well as family members who successfully follow these initial arrivals within 2 years. These “follow-to-join” refugees are typically 80% of initially-arriving refugees.

[4] This dramatic fall in Mexican immigration to the U.S. appears to have resulted from a fall in Mexican fertility and intensification of US enforcement against illegal immigration.

[5] There is significant uncertainty about the true size of the unauthorized immigrant population. An alternative estimate based on a credible methodology suggests that it is twice as large at roughly 20 million. Although the true size is more likely to be closer to 10 million, this controversy has not yet been resolved. For the 10 million estimate, see <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/13/key-facts-about-the-changing-u-s-unauthorized-immigrant-population/>.

[6] For an apparently exhaustive inventory, see <https://www.pollingreport.com/immigration.htm>.

[7] The question does not state what the “current level” actually is.

[8] See survey question results inventoried in <https://www.pollingreport.com/immigration.htm>.

[9] See summary of refugee questions in Gallup polls (<https://news.gallup.com/poll/392069/americans-widely-favor-welcoming-ukrainian-refugees.aspx>) and results of other polls (<https://www.pollingreport.com/immigration.htm>).

[10] See results of relevant poll questions at <https://www.pollingreport.com/immigration.htm>.

False Myths, Real Challenges

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The Polish perspective on the influx of refugees into Europe differs fundamentally from that of countries in the southern part of the continent. Poland, while accepting, in principle, the international agreements and conventions that bind it, has for years opposed recognizing all migrants as persons who have the right to automatically apply for refugee status. During the 2015 refugee crisis, Poland refused to participate in building a European solidarity system on this issue, limiting itself to symbolic and independently implemented support. The aim was to signal the need to change the strategy of migration policy in the European Union, rather than to provide real assistance to migrants and those countries most affected by their influx.

This completely symbolic participation of Poland in solving the refugee crisis did not, in fact, have any real impact on the development of the situation. Support for migrants was shown outside the European Union, primarily in some African and the Middle East countries as well as in countries through which migratory routes to Europe led, such as Turkey.

What were the reasons for this attitude of the Polish authorities in 2015 and 2016?

It is necessary here to distinguish between real actions and the tone and arguments from both proponents and opponents of such a policy that were made in discussions in parliament, the media and other forums during the discussion at the time.

First - strongly opposed to a wide opening to migrants from outside the European continent was Polish society. There were various reasons for this - a sense of cultural alienation toward the main refugee groups, the recognition of economic motives as insufficient for obtaining the right to stay in the EU and refugee status, and the fear that terrorists and representatives of fundamentalist and extremist movements might hide among the migrants. Here I am merely constating the dominant phenomena in the social consciousness of Poles at the time, without judging whether they were justified or not. Another thing is that the authorities in Warsaw did practically nothing to rationalize these social fears and foster reflexes of solidarity both with the migrants themselves and with the countries most affected by the refugee crisis.

Secondly - there is a strongly established view in Poland that refugees from other continents are not interested at all not only in settling, but in staying longer in our country. This is due to the experience of national migration policy. After 2001, after the second Chechen war, newcomers from Chechnya and Dagestan began arriving in Poland on a fairly massive scale claiming to be victims of repression by the Russian authorities. It wasn't even that it was difficult to verify their alleged anti-Russian activities and attitudes. The most important thing was that practically all of them wanted to leave Poland almost immediately - mainly to Germany and Great Britain - and they did so at the first opportunity. As a result, after a short time, the authorities began to limit the migrants' ability to invoke their desire for refugee status at the Polish border and first made it difficult and then almost impossible for them to enter the country. Among other reasons, the Polish authorities believe that since our country is not a destination for migrants, the responsibility for solving the problem lies primarily with the richest EU countries.

Third and finally, during the peak of the migration crisis in Europe, Poland itself experienced a massive influx of labor and economic migration from Ukraine. Although one of its causes was Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine, it was an abuse to apply the term "refugees" to this group of migrants. This does not change the fact that the influx of Ukrainians to Poland at the time reached an unprecedented scale. And although the ability to manage the process of the influx of migrants was basically maintained, and the labor market was not destabilized - the challenges faced by authorities, businesses and local communities proved to be a very difficult experience for them.

Contrary to many fears, there have fortunately been no significant tensions between migrants and the local population, or between Polish and Ukrainian workers on wage and social grounds. There has been no increase in criminal phenomena. Instead, there has been a better mutual understanding and acceptance of the two communities. This was fostered especially by the cultural and linguistic proximity of the two nations.

On February 24, 2022, the barbaric Russian aggression against Ukraine began. In the following days and weeks, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians crossed the Polish-Ukrainian border. It is estimated that more than four and a half million Ukrainian citizens left their homeland. Most of them - more than 2.5 million - came to Poland. In addition, at least 6.5 million refugees from the frontier zones tried to take refuge in more secure regions in Ukraine. The scale of this migration is already larger than anything Europe has experienced since the deportations and resettlements following World War II.

Fortunately, the fears that the distrust expressed a few years ago by a significant portion of Poles towards the influx of refugees into the European Union will also now result in a negative attitude towards the refugees fleeing war in large numbers from Ukraine have not come true at all.

Today's Polish perspective towards the influx of refugees is shaped primarily by the experience of coexisting with migrants from Ukraine who came to us after 2014. No one in Poland today questions the status of those fleeing war in Ukraine and arriving in our country. The official rhetoric of the authorities describes them as guests rather than refugees. Poles recognize the humanitarian dimension of the catastrophe, above all the fact that among the refugees are almost exclusively women, children and the elderly. They are not placed in separate refugee camps. Temporary specific legal regulations have been prepared to guarantee their status in our country and support from the authorities for a limited period.

Key, however, are not legal regulations, but the attitude of Polish society toward this new refugee crisis. Poles learned for themselves after February 24 what kind of society they are. Certainly, in the vast majority, very far from xenophobic behavior. This time, solidarity with the newcomers from Ukraine is shown by almost all social groups, residents of large cities and less urbanized areas. Also - the electorates of the main Polish parties on the very polarized political scene, after all. The differences resulting from the geographical division of Poland into a more liberal west of the country and a more conservative east have also lost their significance in this case.

The number of Ukrainian refugees in Poland remains at a very high level. Their relocation to other countries and the possibility of ensuring their safe return to Ukraine is limited. Most refugees are not interested in going further west, as they would like to stay as close to their country as possible, to be able to have at least occasional contact with their relatives who have remained in Ukraine. The possibility of housing them in Poland, providing them here with financial assistance, food, medical care and medicine, and education for children and young people is also increasingly facing organizational barriers.

The war in Ukraine continues. More terrorist attacks by Russian troops targeting civilians are to be expected. Autumn is approaching along with a cooler temperature. If there is no end to the war, the humanitarian situation of Ukrainian internal refugees may soon worsen. They are concentrated today mainly in areas of western Ukraine and in some regions of the central part of the country on both sides of the Dnieper. If this happens, a renewed influx of refugees from Ukraine to Poland could be expected in the coming months. This would require renewed public mobilization and state services. This would be a very difficult challenge for our country.

Nevertheless, it is also necessary to reckon with the fact that an increasing number of Ukrainians will decide to stay in our country for a longer period of time in anticipation of the end of the war and later the reconstruction of the country, the restoration of infrastructure and jobs. In such a situation, significant corrections will be needed in the existing policy of the authorities - changes in legislation that will facilitate faster adaptation of refugees in Poland - in the labor market, education and health care systems. Like never before, Poland needs a new migration policy. Moreover, it needs better cooperation with major EU countries and European institutions, as well as with the US.

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