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— SPECIAL SECTION —

Editorial Introduction: Migration Dynamics, Trajectories and Policies in the Context of Russian Full-Scale Aggression against Ukraine

abstract
This editorial introduction sets the scene for the second part of the Special Section devoted to studying the multi-faceted migration-related consequences of the Russian full-scale invasion against Ukraine of 24 February 2022. Different kinds of migration, migration policies, practices of assistance and solidarity and also experiences of discrimination and exclusion happening in the aftermath or in the context of the Russian aggression against Ukraine after 24 February 2022 – whether inside Ukraine, in neighbouring states or globally – remain within the scope of both parts of this Special Section, with the first part having been published in June 2023.

Keywords: Ukraine, Russian aggression, forced migration, migration policies

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Forced migration from Ukraine in the third year of war

On 24 February 2022, Russia launched an all-out invasion of Ukraine by land, air and sea, the biggest attack by one state against another in Europe since World War II. The assault included heavy air strikes against Ukraine's capital city – Kyiv – and simultaneous land attacks at all Russian–Ukrainian borders. Particularly dangerous from the point of view of civilian casualties was an unexpected attack from the territory of Belarus, directly threatening the capital city and heavily populated neighbouring regions. The Russian army soon changed its military tactics and started using regular night-time air strikes on major cities, with the use of drones and land- and aviation-launched cruise missiles. In what is now the third year of the full-scale war, apart from heavy military battles in the Ukrainian eastern regions, air strikes on Ukrainian cities have started to focus on the energy infrastructure, which resulted in severe power outages to both public institutions and individual households across the country. Within the first 7 weeks of the war, the Russian invasion forced 4.6 million refugees to flee the country and displaced more than 7.1 million people within Ukraine (UNHCR 2022). Over time, these trends have stabilised and many people returned home, particularly in spring 2022. As of 13 June 2024, there were almost 6 million Ukrainian forced migrants recorded in Europe and more than 500,000 recorded outside (UNHCR 2024).

The more time passes since the eruption of armed conflict, the more profound are the processes of adaptation of migrants to their new realities and the efficiency and fairness of the policies undertaken. Russia's full-scale war unleashed room for different practices of solidarity, networks of heterarchical societal self-help, volunteering for the war effort and assistance for civilians struggling with the war both within Ukraine and in neighbouring countries. However, over time, there was a growing fatigue with the social burden of resettlement in the host communities (Grabowska 2023; Moise, Dennison and Kriesi 2023). This weariness may be actively used in populist anti-migrant rhetoric and may influence the dynamics of domestic policies in European Union countries (Hooghe, Marks, Bakker, Jolly, Polk, Rovny, Steenbergen and Vachudova 2024; May and Czymara 2024). At the same time, we see the anxiety and psychological and physical exhaustion of the women, who comprise the vast majority of forced migrants, because of the lack of a clear perspective for the future, either in the destination country – which usually offers only temporary protection – or in Ukraine, where basic security is still a challenge.

Yet there is a growing plethora of coping strategies used by migrants, which usually involve transnational activities, including circular migration. In June 2024, the Council of the European Union extended the duration of the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) granted to forced migrants from Ukraine for a further year, up to and including 4 March 2026 (Council of the EU 2024). Finally, further migration trajectories of Ukrainian migrants within the EU may, over time, fit better into the scheme of internal mobility as, also in June 2024, the EU opened accession talks with Ukraine.

Setting the scene for this Special Section

This editorial introduction sets the scene for the second part of the Special Section devoted to studying the multi-faceted migration-related consequences of the Russian full-scale invasion against Ukraine of 24 February 2022. Different kinds of migration, migration policies, practices of assistance and solidarity and also experiences of discrimination and exclusion happening in the aftermath or in the context of the Russian aggression against Ukraine after 24 February 2022 – whether inside Ukraine, in neighbouring states or globally – remain within the scope of both parts of this Special Section, with the first part having been published in June 2023 (Mikheieva and Jaroszewicz 2023).

Several months after the eruption of full-scale aggression – and in a bid to address the unprecedented migration consequences of military aggression – the Central and Eastern European Migration Review announced a call for articles for a Special Section on the consequences, trajectories, policies, discourses on war and displacement, emergency practices and other aspects pertaining to the migration and resulting from the Russian illegal war against Ukraine. Neither the CEEMR editors nor the Special Section editors deliberately stipulated any particular topics for possible contributions, leaving to the authors the choice of subjects, approaches and methods. On an epistemological level, however, the Special Sections' purpose was to offer a voice to research that is context-specific and based on a thorough knowledge of Ukraine and the wider region of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the political, social and economic context of the countries that have accommodated Ukrainian forced migrants. The overall aim of the Special Sections was to cure existing blind spots in global migration knowledge production, which still lacks diversified research on Ukrainian migration (Düvell and Lapshyna 2022; Jaroszewicz, Grzymski and Krępa 2022). The interrelated, more emancipatory, goal was also to give a voice to those experiencing the war and its consequences, either directly or via specifically targeted research. It also aimed to bring into public discourse the voices of the host communities, which are often omitted, marginalised and sidelined in the study of migration. However, their reaction to the situation of forced migration is important, both from the point of view of the moral and psychological atmosphere of migrants' stay in host communities and from the point of view of the impact of the situation itself on the transformation of host communities and state institutions in the long term.

Introducing the papers

This Special Section presents 3 articles examining both the individual experiences of forced migrants on the one hand – by portraying the testimonies of children who were forced to flee Ukraine due to the armed conflict – and the collective ones on the other, i.e. the informal practices of hosting refugees and the local official responses to the arrival of forced migrants.

The first article, by Lucie Macková – from Palacký University Olomouc – and Andrea Preissová Krejčí – from the Silesian University in Opava, examines the very delicate topic of researchers' positionality in exploring such sensitive issues as the impact of forced migration on the identity of children forced to leave Ukraine and settle in the Czech Republic. The article is based on the stories of 22 children from Ukraine who, while spending time attending daily children's' clubs in 2 Czech localities (where one of the authors volunteered) were invited to write about their lives. The authors conducted a narrative analysis of the life stories of those children willing to participate in this research. The research was granted ethical clearance and followed the UNICEF procedure on ethical standards in research, evaluation, data collection and analysis. The empirical study was supplemented by the historical analysis of stories written by child refugees who experienced war in the former Yugoslavia. Through the detailed analysis of the children's stories, the authors reveal that many children spoke of feeling fear and of witnessing war first-hand. Being in exile, children still feared for their families and friends who stayed in Ukraine. They also expressed their feelings about their home country very strongly, both at the personal and at the more general level – as well as from a sense of patriotic obligation. Social networks that span multiple countries, together with education and leisure time in their new places of residence helped them to overcome the war-related stress and the anxiety stemming from forced migration. The authors conclude that children's agency and their embeddedness in wider transnational networks should be considered by both parents and guardians as well as by the institutional educational offer prepared by the countries of residence. The study of children's perspectives on war and forced migration offers opportunities for the development of well-adjusted policies and competences in working with children and families, both in informal meetings in clubs and in educational institutions.

The next article offers us a different starting point in the perception of forced migration and its consequences. The main focus when reconstructing the complex social texture of interactions between migrants and host communities is on the experience of Polish hosts who voluntarily accepted forced migrants from Ukraine. The article by Kamil Łuczaj from the University of Łódź, based on individual in-depth interviews with Polish hosts in the Podkarpackie voivodeship who invited Ukrainian refugees to live in their homes, shows that hospitality in the migration context is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that required emotional labour and other uneasy decisions and is somewhat unsustainable in the long-term; however, such hospitality may alleviate short-term accommodation needs in the case of mass displacement. Yet, as the author underlines, the relationship between hosts and guests was not always tense as such but was often somewhat complicated. Such an encounter in the space of the home activates issues of independence, gender, social class and language and necessitates the greatest amount of negotiation, as well as generating doubts and a rethinking of the situation on the part of the hosts themselves. This complexity clearly demonstrates that offering voluntary accommodation assistance to forced migrants is an extremely important part of the immediate response to a humanitarian crisis – but cannot realistically be considered as a long-term solution.

The final article, prepared by Wiktor Magdziarz, analyses the changes in the policies and practices of Polish local governments in the system of public policies addressing the needs of forced migrants in Poland. In his solid study of local responses based on both legal acts and expert interviews, the author argues that local governments' engagement in the reception of migrants from Ukraine increased significantly. Magdziarz discusses the dynamics of local policies by applying a multi-level governance (MLG) framework for migration policy analysis. The cities' endeavours during the humanitarian emergency – such as communication activities, lobbying, the building of capacity based on the mobilisation of inter-institutional networks, increased engagement in the implementation of state policies, the upscaling and development of local migration policies, as well as involvement in a wide range of ad-hoc humanitarian initiatives – led to a temporary extension of local governments' functional role, while their structural position vis-à-vis other policy stakeholders was redefined. However, since these changes were mostly of an ad-hoc nature and also included strong cooperation with NGOs and humanitarian organisations, it is not clear whether the role of local governments in Poland in migration management has actually extended substantially in the long term.

Conflict of interest statement

No conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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