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## UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN POLAND – NUMBER AND DISTRIBUTION

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### Abstract

This article continues and specifies the research presented in the publication by K. Kopeć (2022). That article presented the course of refugee migration of Ukrainians to Poland in effect of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, from the perspective of several months. This article examines it from the perspective of 2025, i.e., three years since the outbreak of the war. The aim of the article is primarily to present and analyze the number and distribution of Ukrainian citizens who are refugees in Poland. The scale of Ukrainian migration to Poland and, consequently, the changes in the national structure of inhabitants of Poland that have been taking place since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, are the largest since the end of World War II. This mitigates depopulation processes in Poland but cannot reverse the negative trends in this regard. Peripheral areas, located far from agglomerations, are rarely chosen by refugees as places of residence. Among the migrants, there is an exceptionally large predominance of young and middle-aged women, and a very large proportion of children. A considerable number of refugees require support in childcare, preschool, and school education. Integrating Ukrainians living in Poland into Polish society, especially children and youth, has become a challenge. The Polish state does not want to create a situation in which Ukrainians, especially today's children and youth, in a few years' time will live in Poland on the margins of social and economic life due to social, educational, and economic exclusion.

### Key words

migration, refugees, war in Ukraine, Poland.

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## 1. Introduction

This article continues and specifies the research presented in the publication by K. Kopeć (2022). That article presented the course of refugee migration of Ukrainians to Poland as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, from the perspective of several months. This article examines it from the perspective of 2025, i.e., three years since the outbreak of the war. The aim of the article is primarily

to present and analyze the number and distribution of Ukrainian citizens who are refugees in Poland.

The scale of Ukrainian migration to Poland and, consequently, the changes in the national structure of Poland's population that have been taking place since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, are the largest since the end of World War II. Today's perspective shows that these changes will largely be permanent – it seems that only major events, such as the expansion of warfare into Poland, could change this.

Recently, during the three years since Russia's

attack on Ukraine, numerous scientific publications have appeared on the issue of Ukrainian migration. Among them one can mention the article by P. Czaplinski and V. Dzhaman (2023), which presents migration processes in Ukraine prior to the war and in the short term after its outbreak. In the context of the long-standing uncertainty and, as a result, Ukrainians' propensity to migrate, the publication by A.T. Lloyd and I. Sirkeci (2022) offers interesting observations. In turn, E. Guild and K. Groenendijk (2023) presented the determinants of migration from Ukraine after the outbreak of the war from the perspective of the European Union. E. Ociepa-Kicińska and M. Gorzałczyńska-Koczkodaj (2022) described the forms of aid provided in Poland and by Poles to refugees during the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2022. A. Stawicki and M. Dziekanowska (2025) presented a distinct perspective on the reaction and self-organization of Polish society to the sudden influx of war refugees from Ukraine after February 24, 2022. M. Duszczyk et al. (2023) analyzed the situation of Ukrainian war refugees living in Poland and the related challenges in the first year of the war.

## 2. Conditions for the stay of Ukrainian citizens who are refugees in Poland

The basic document that regulates issues regarding the stay of war refugees from Ukraine in Poland is the Act of 12 March 2022 on aid to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the armed conflict in the territory of this country (Ustawa..., 2022). It gave Ukrainian citizens and their family members a possibility to legalize their stay in Poland. This applies only to those who have legally arrived in the territory of Poland since 24 February 2022. This Act was revised in the Act of 15 May 2024 amending the Act on aid to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the armed conflict in the territory of this country and certain other acts (Ustawa..., 2024)<sup>1</sup>.

Legalization of stay under the aforementioned Act involves the assignment of a PESEL number [personal identification number] with the UKR status. This status grants the following entitlements:

1. Legal stay – it confirms coverage by temporary protection and entitles to a legal stay in the territory of Poland.

2. Access to the labor market – it allows for employment on the same terms as Polish citizens, including access to public employment services.

3. Healthcare – it gives access to the public healthcare system.

4. Social benefits – it allows benefitting from various cash and non-cash assistance, such as the 800+ program, family benefits, and social welfare benefits.

5. Traveling within Schengen – it allows traveling within the Schengen zone for 90 days within a 180-day period, provided the individual has a valid travel document.

6. Business activity – it allows conducting business activity under the same conditions as Polish citizens.

Importantly, the UKR status can be lost if one leaves Poland for a period longer than 30 days, regardless of the destination – including when traveling to Ukraine or another EU member state. Such lost entitlement can be regained upon re-entry to Poland, but this entry must be from the territory of Ukraine (provided the migrant still meets the other conditions for temporary protection). Furthermore, the UKR status can be lost:

- following the issuance of a residence card by the Polish authorities,
- following the submission of an application for international protection or a declaration of submission of such an application,
- in connection with being granted temporary protection by another EU member state.

Refugee children from Ukraine could benefit from the Polish education and training system – but they were not required to do so. In practice, some children continued their education online in Ukrainian schools. There were also those for whom emigration to Poland resulted in the interruption of their education. This changed on September 1, 2024, when refugee children from Ukraine became subject to compulsory education in Poland. This means:

1. Compulsory one-year preschool preparation – this applies to children who turn 6 in a given calendar year. Such a child must attend kindergarten, a preschool class in primary school, or another form of preschool education.

2. Compulsory schooling – this applies to children who turn 7 in a given calendar year. Compulsory schooling lasts until the completion of primary school, but no longer than after turning 18.

3. Compulsory education – after completing primary school, if the child has not yet reached the age of 18, they must continue their education in a secondary school, technical school, vocational school, or another form of education.

An exception to this obligation was made for pupils who in the 2024/2025 school year studied online at a school operating within the Ukrainian education

<sup>1</sup> The amendment specified the functioning of temporary protection (UKR status) for Ukrainian citizens until September 30, 2025. The next amendment should enter into force by that time.

system in the highest grade of the curriculum. Parents or guardians of children with learning difficulties due to health reasons may apply for a certificate of special education. In such cases, individual teaching methods may be used, and the educational program may be adapted to the needs of the minor.

To increase the effectiveness of the introduced compulsory education, it has been linked to the payment of the 800+ benefit. The program, formally called «Family 800 plus,» is a childcare benefit available in Poland to families with dependent children, regardless of the family's income. This amounts to PLN 800 per month per child under the age of 18<sup>2</sup>. As a result, Ukrainian citizens living in Poland with the PESEL number with the UKR status receive this support for their children, meeting not only the requirement of residing in the territory of the Republic of Poland by both the recipient and the child for whom the benefit is granted but also meeting the educational obligations by the child<sup>3</sup>.

Ukrainian citizens who are refugees are entitled, just like Polish citizens, to receive PLN 300 annually under the «Good Start» program (known as the 300+ program) for each child under the age of 20 (or under 24 in the case of a pupil with disability) who is residing in Poland and starting or continuing school in the current year. As a rule, the benefit is to be paid by September 30th. It aims to financially support families with expenses related to the start of the school year. The 300+ benefit is also paid regardless of the family's income.

Moreover, Ukrainian citizens who arrived in Poland due to war-related activities, and who have legally resided in Poland as individuals with UKR status continuously for at least 365 days, are entitled, under the «Active Parent» program, to the «actively in nursery» benefit<sup>4</sup>. This benefit is available for a child attending a nursery, children's club, or under the care of a daycare provider. As a rule, it amounts to PLN 1,500 per month per child, but not more than the child's care fee (excluding meals). If the child has a disability certificate, the benefit amounts to a maximum of PLN 1,900 per month, but not more than the child's care fee.

<sup>2</sup> By the end of 2023 Until the end of 2023, the program was commonly known as 500+, and the benefit paid was PLN 500 per month.

<sup>3</sup> The expected amendment of the Act of 12 March 2022 on aid to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the armed conflict in the territory of this country (Ustawa..., 2022) in September 2025 will most likely also include a requirement for the beneficiary to work in Poland.

<sup>4</sup> The program was introduced on October 1, 2024. It replaced the earlier benefit, which was available to both Polish citizens and Ukrainian citizens who are refugees. It amounted to up to PLN 400 per month of subsidy for a child's stay in a nursery, children's club, or daycare.

A significant aspect of migration is the spread of infectious diseases and the level of vaccination coverage among migrants. The Ukrainian calendar of vaccinations for children mostly coincides with the Polish one<sup>5</sup>. However, the problem lies in the fact that Ukraine is one of the least vaccinated countries in Europe.

According to WHO data, in 2020, the vaccination rate in Ukraine against measles was 81.9%, against polio – 84.2%, against pertussis – 81.3%, and against hepatitis B – 80.9%. This is primarily the result of several years of collapse in the vaccination system after 2010, related to the poor socio-political situation and the subsequent Russian invasion of Crimea and Donbas in 2014.

According to A. Misiurewicz-Gabi (2022), the strong anti-vaccination movement in Ukraine is an especially important added factor. Free vaccinations under the national vaccination schedule are administered in Ukraine on a voluntary basis, so it is possible to refuse vaccination. Compared to other countries, Ukraine has a non-restrictive vaccination system with weak educational, informational, and promotional activities regarding vaccinations (Trushchenkova et al., 2023).

According to the National Institute of Public Health, State Institute of Hygiene – State Research Institute, in 2008–2010 the percentage of the child population vaccinated in accordance with the mandatory vaccination schedule was remarkably high (over 90%), but it significantly decreased in later years. In 2014–2016, the percentage of children vaccinated with the third dose of DTP against diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis according to the vaccination schedule was very low (20%). The percentage of children vaccinated against measles according to the vaccination schedule also decreased, reaching only 31–57% in 2010–2016, significantly below the threshold required to achieve herd immunity (above 95%), which led to the measles epidemic in 2017–2019 (nearly 100,000 cases were reported in Ukraine at that time). A national vaccination campaign began in Ukraine on February 1, 2022, but was interrupted by Russia's aggression.

According to data presented by O.I. Laktionova and K.D. Koliada (2023) on vaccination coverage in Ukraine in 2022, another decline in vaccination coverage against infectious diseases occurred. However, it should be appreciated that despite the demanding situation resulting from the defensive war and Russia's attacks on infrastructure and the civilian population, the Ukrainian state is striving to implement vaccinations in accordance with the vaccination

<sup>5</sup> The difference lies in the different polio vaccination schedule and the fact that the Ukrainian calendar of mandatory (free) vaccinations does not include pneumococcal and rotavirus vaccinations.

schedule. It also benefits from the support of UNICEF and WHO, which provide free vaccines – particularly against rubella, mumps, measles, and diphtheria – as well as equipment for organizing mobile vaccination centers. Both in Ukraine and in Western Europe, there is full awareness that the war cannot suspend the provision of healthcare to the population in Ukraine<sup>6</sup>.

In the epidemiological context, migration is also driven by the fact that, according to A. Misiurewicz-Gabi (2022), HIV is a significant problem in Ukraine (over 250,000 people are infected, 150,000 of whom are actively treated), as is tuberculosis, which primarily affects men over 40 years old. According to K. Korzeniewski et al. (2024), 0.5 million Ukrainians are living with active tuberculosis, and 29% of new tuberculosis cases and 46% of old tuberculosis cases are multidrug-resistant. Poor sanitary conditions, malnutrition, and elevated levels of stress associated with ongoing warfare contribute to the exacerbation of chronic diseases, the development of acute gastrointestinal or respiratory infections, and ectoparasites (scabies, lice).

### 3. The number and distribution of Ukrainian citizens who are refugees in Poland

The benefits of granting the UKR status to Ukrainian citizens who are war refugees are substantial. They not only legalize their stay but, above all, enable employment and provide healthcare and social services. As a result, Ukrainian citizens staying in Poland have been and continue to apply for the UKR status. Applications can be submitted at any municipal office. One can assume that they are submitted at the offices of the municipalities where they live – or at the municipal office of a nearby municipality. By August 11, 2025, 1,969,500 such applications had been submitted<sup>7</sup>. Of these, 66.9% concerned women and 33.1% men. This disproportion is due to the ban on men aged 18–60 to leave Ukraine<sup>8</sup>. As a result, this disproportion is even more pronounced in data aggregated for the 18–65 age cohort. Applications from women in this age range accounted for 48.1%,

while from men they accounted for 16.2%<sup>9</sup>. For comparison, according to data published by K. Kopeć (2022), 1,261,000 applications had been submitted by July 31, 2022. Of these, 71.1% concerned women and 28.9% men.

The above data shows that the migration of Ukrainian citizens to Poland following Russia's invasion of Ukraine is characterized by a significant predominance of women, as well as a very large proportion of children – as many as 30.5% of applications concern those under the age of 18. If the submitted applications are broken down into the group including children (under 18) and women, this represents a staggering 82.5%, while the group including applications from men aged 18 and over only 17.5%. Another characteristic is that elderly people constitute a small percentage among refugees from Ukraine. Only 5.2% of applications concern those over 65.

Figure 1 and Figure 2 present the number of persons figuring in the register of citizens of Ukraine and their family members who have been granted a foreigner status based on a special law per 1,000 inhabitants of powiats in Poland. Figure 1 shows the state as of July 31, 2022<sup>10</sup>, according to the publication by K. Kopeć (2022), while Figure 2 presents the state as of February, 11, 2025<sup>11</sup>. During this time, the number of Ukrainians listed in the register decreased from 1.261 million to 0.993 million. The main reason for removal from the register was leaving the territory of Poland.

As of July 31, 2022, the following areas with a higher number of Ukrainian citizens fleeing Ukraine compared to the number of residents of Polish powiats were distinguished (Kopeć, 2022):

1. the coastal strip: Szczecin, Koszalin, and Gdańsk;
2. Warsaw and its surroundings (especially the Grójec Powiat) and the surroundings of Łódź;
3. western and southwestern Poland;
4. large cities – in particular Wrocław, Warsaw, Poznań, Katowice, Kraków, Tricity (Gdańsk, Gdynia, Sopot), and Rzeszów;
5. the Tatra Powiat in the south;
6. the Bieszczady and Lesko Powiats.

Comparing this with the figures from February, 11, 2025, one can notice a decrease in the number of Ukrainian refugees, but their spatial distribution has changed only slightly.

<sup>6</sup> More on the guidelines for Ukraine resulting from the European public health policy in the publication by D. Lavrentii (2025).

<sup>7</sup> The data on submitted applications have been sourced from the Chancellery of the Prime Minister (Dane statystyczne dot. wniosków..., 2025).

<sup>8</sup> This is due to a decree in force in Ukraine on the general mobilization of men aged 18–60 signed by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on February 24, 2022, shortly after 11:00 PM Eastern European Time, which results in a ban on their leaving Ukraine. The primary exceptions are those with at least three dependent children under the age of 18 and single parents.

<sup>9</sup> In the age cohort under 18, 14.9% of applications were from women and 15.6% from men, while in the age cohort over 65, 3.9% were from women and 1.3% from men.

<sup>10</sup> The calculations used the number of inhabitants in powiats according to data from Statistics Poland – as of June 30, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> The calculations used the number of inhabitants in powiats according to data from Statistics Poland – as of January 1, 2024.



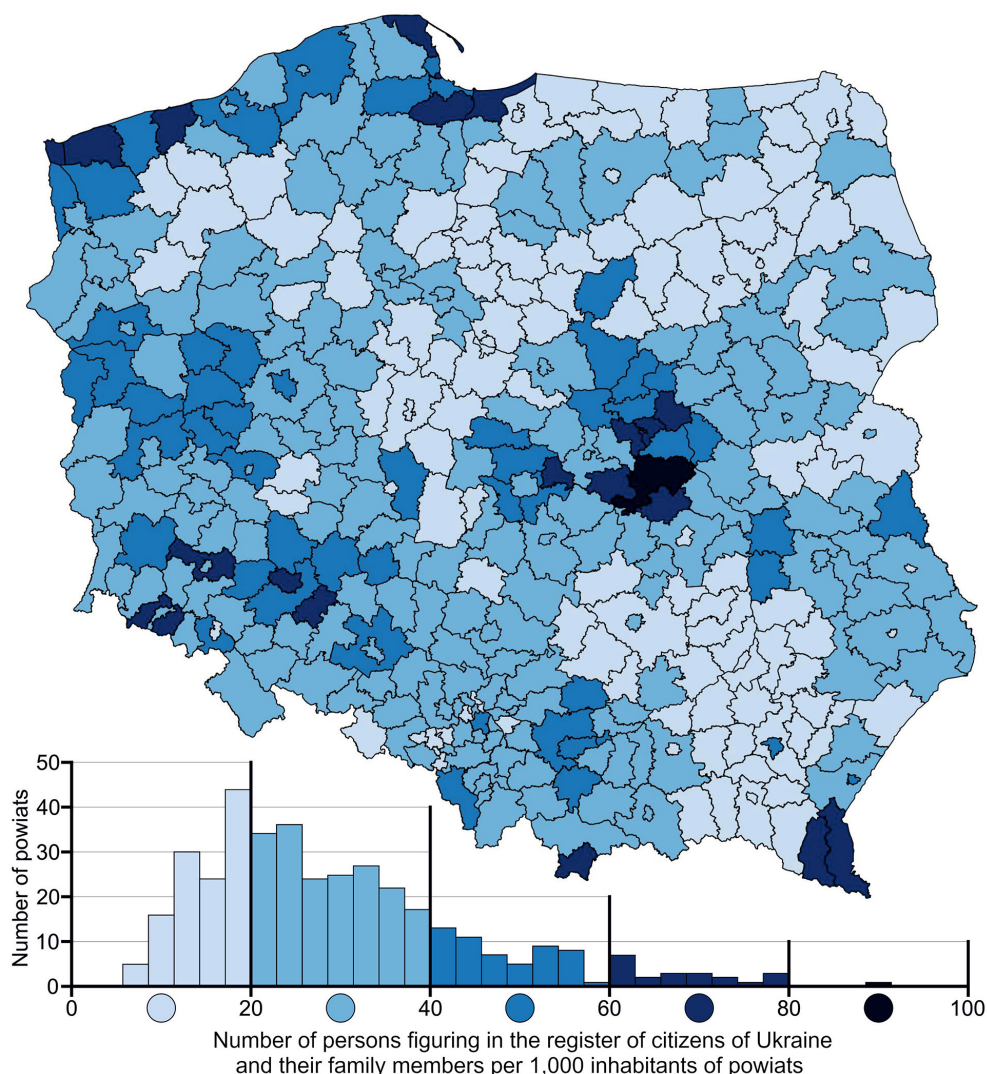


Fig. 1. Number of persons figuring in the register of citizens of Ukraine and their family members who have been granted a foreigner status based on a special law per 1,000 inhabitants of powiats in Poland – as of 31 July 2022.

Source: Kopeć, 2022.

However, while in 2022 the highest share of refugees from Ukraine among powiat residents was recorded in the Grójec Powiat (the Masovian Voivodeship) – 91.4 per 1,000 population, in 2025, the highest number of refugees among residents was in the city of Wrocław (the Lower Silesian Voivodeship) – 84.5 per 1,000 population. Thus, Wrocław advanced from the 6th place in the ranking (74.0 per 1,000 population in 2022), while the Grójec Powiat dropped to the 4th place (66.4 per 1,000 population in 2025). In 2025, Wrocław was followed by the Pruszków Powiat (the Masovian Voivodeship) with 72.2 per 1,000 population, and then the city of Przemyśl (the Subcarpathian Voivodeship) with 71.2 per 1,000 population. Both in 2022 and in 2025, the Kolno Powiat (the Podlaskie Voivodeship) had the smallest number of registered refugees from Ukraine with 5.2 per 1,000 population in 2022 and 3.0 per 1,000 population in 2025.

As of September 1, 2024, compulsory education in Poland was extended to refugee children from Ukraine. As a result, data from the education system has become a source of reliable information about where refugees from Ukraine live in Poland.

Figure 3 presents the number of preschool, primary school, and secondary school students who are refugees from Ukraine per 1,000 students in Polish powiats as of December 31, 2024. The spatial distribution is similar to that presented in Figure 2. However, a higher percentage of refugee students from Ukraine is visible in towns and cities with powiat rights – among the 30 powiats with the highest percentage, there are as many as 21 of them.

This is primarily due to the fact that students living in neighboring rural powiats commute to schools in cities with powiat rights. This may be partly due to the fact that refugees with children more often choose

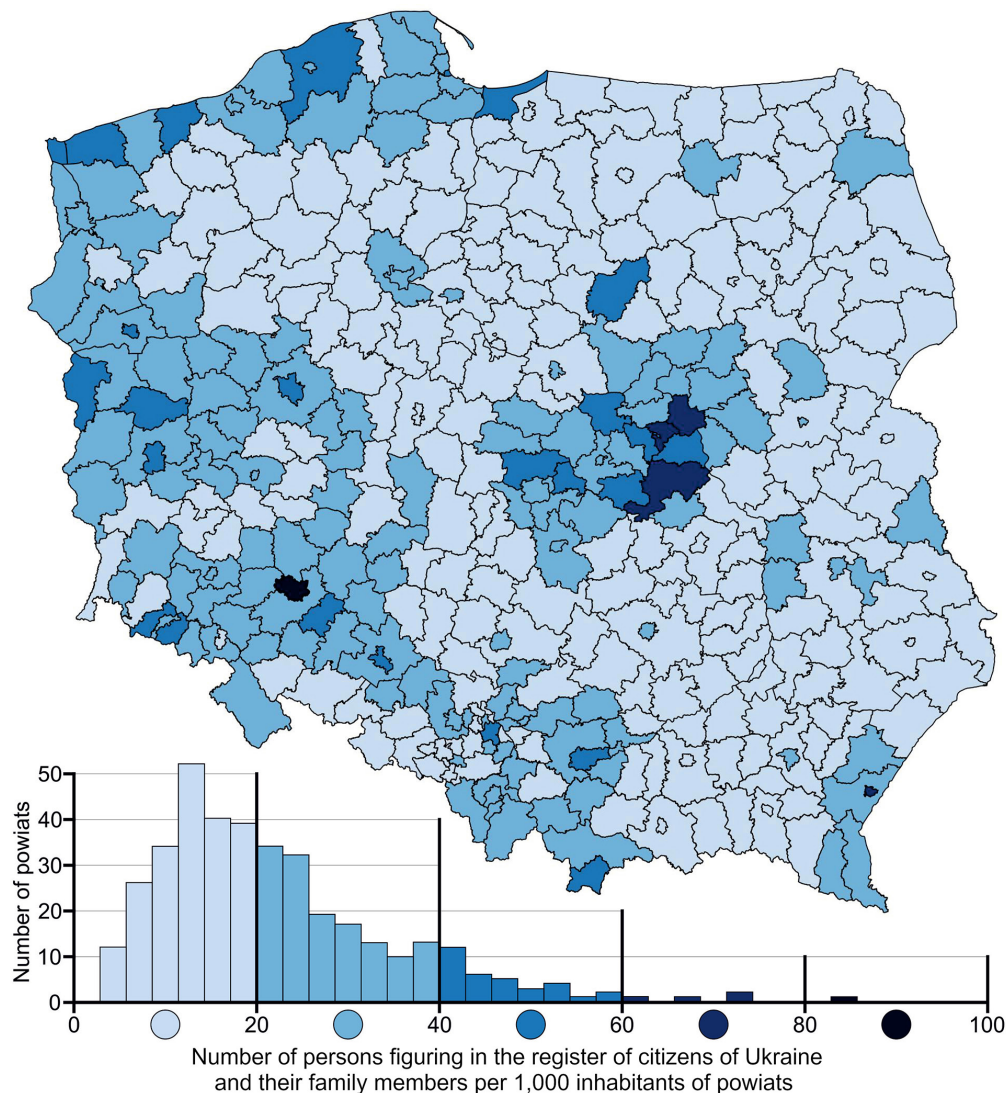


Fig. 2. Number of persons figuring in the register of citizens of Ukraine and their family members who have been granted a foreigner status based on a special law per 1,000 inhabitants of powiats in Poland – as of 11 February 2025.

Source: own study based on data from the Chancellery of the Prime Minister (Dane statystyczne dot. wniosków... 2025).

larger cities – precisely so that their children have easier access to kindergartens and schools.

The highest percentage of refugee students from Ukraine is in the city of Wrocław (the Lower Silesian Voivodeship) – 74.2 per 1,000 students, followed by Świnoujście (the West Pomeranian Voivodeship) – 73.6 per 1,000 students, and Gorzów Wielkopolski (the Lubuskie Voivodeship) – 67.7 per 1,000 students. The Kolno Powiat (the Podlaskie Voivodeship) has the lowest share of refugee students from Ukraine – 1.1 per 1,000 students.

One can still uphold the assumptions from K. Kopeć's (2022) publication that the residence of refugees from Ukraine in Poland is determined by three main, partially interrelated factors: (1) the place of assistance in terms of accommodation and employment after arrival in Poland; (2) the availability and cost of accommodation; (3) employment

opportunities. Therefore, a higher percentage of refugees from Ukraine live in urban agglomerations, tourist areas, and areas with developed fruit and vegetable cultivation.

The picture of where refugees from Ukraine live in Poland is somewhat complemented by information on the percentage of students from Ukraine among all students. Figure 4 presents the number of students from Ukraine registered after February 24, 2022 (as of February 17, 2025) per 1,000 students in Polish voivodeships. The highest share was in the Opole Voivodeship – 70.3 per 1,000 students, and in the Lublin Voivodeship – 63.4 per 1,000 students.

Even before Russia attacked Ukraine in 2022, the migration of Ukrainians in Poland was seen as an opportunity to mitigate depopulation processes (Jakóbczyk-Gryszkiewicz, 2018; Śleszyński, 2016). However, relatively few refugees from Ukraine



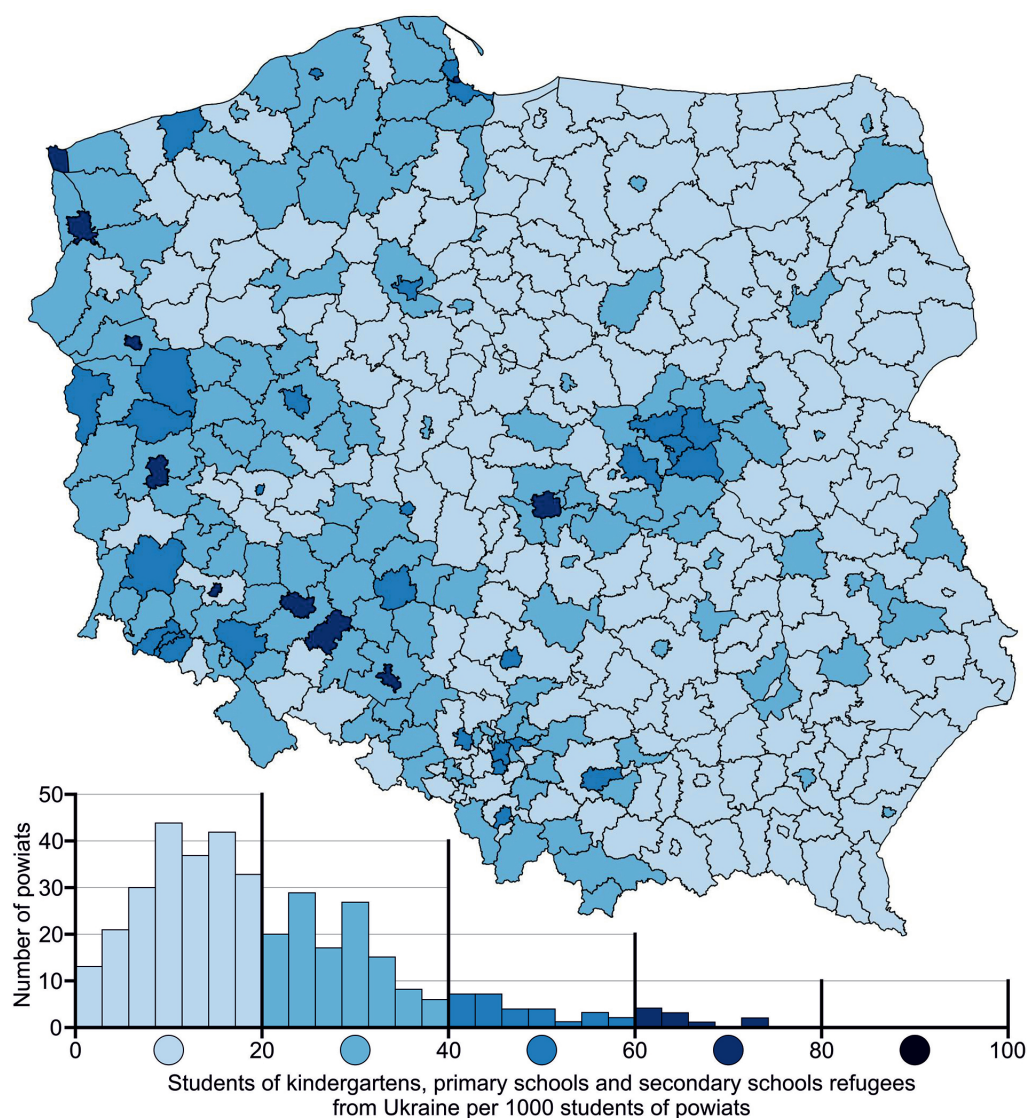


Fig. 3. Number of kindergarten, primary school, and secondary school pupils who are refugees from Ukraine per 1,000 students in powiats in Poland – as of 31 December 2024.

Source: own study based on data from the Chancellery of the Prime Minister (Uczniowie – uchodźcy z Ukrainy, 2025).

settle down in the areas undergoing the most severe depopulation in Poland, particularly those located outside the vicinity of large cities in eastern, northeastern, and central Poland (i.e., Podlasie, the Suwałki Region, Warmia and Masuria, the Lublin Region, Masovia, and the Łódź Region). By contrast, they settle down in significantly greater numbers in areas where the population is already increasing due to internal migration – particularly in large cities and their vicinity as well as in resort and tourist towns (Kopeć, 2022).

As shown in Figure 5, since 2017, the majority of live births with non-Polish citizenship in Poland have been to children with Ukrainian citizenship. This number grew to reach 6,500 in 2021. With the influx of refugees, it jumped to 13,700 in 2022, reached 14,800 in 2023, but decreased slightly to 13,400 in 2024.

As shown in Figure 6, births with Ukrainian citizenship only slightly mitigate the decline in the number of births that has occurred in Poland since 2017. In 2022, 2023, and 2024, they accounted for 4.5%, 5.4%, and 5.3% of all live births, respectively.

#### 4. Conclusion

The gender and age profile of refugees from Ukraine to Poland (an exceptionally large predominance of young and middle-aged women and a very large share of children) results in specific outcomes. Primarily, a considerable number of refugees require support in childcare and preschool and school education. Taking steps to integrate Ukrainians living in Poland into Polish society has become a challenge, particularly integrating children and youth.

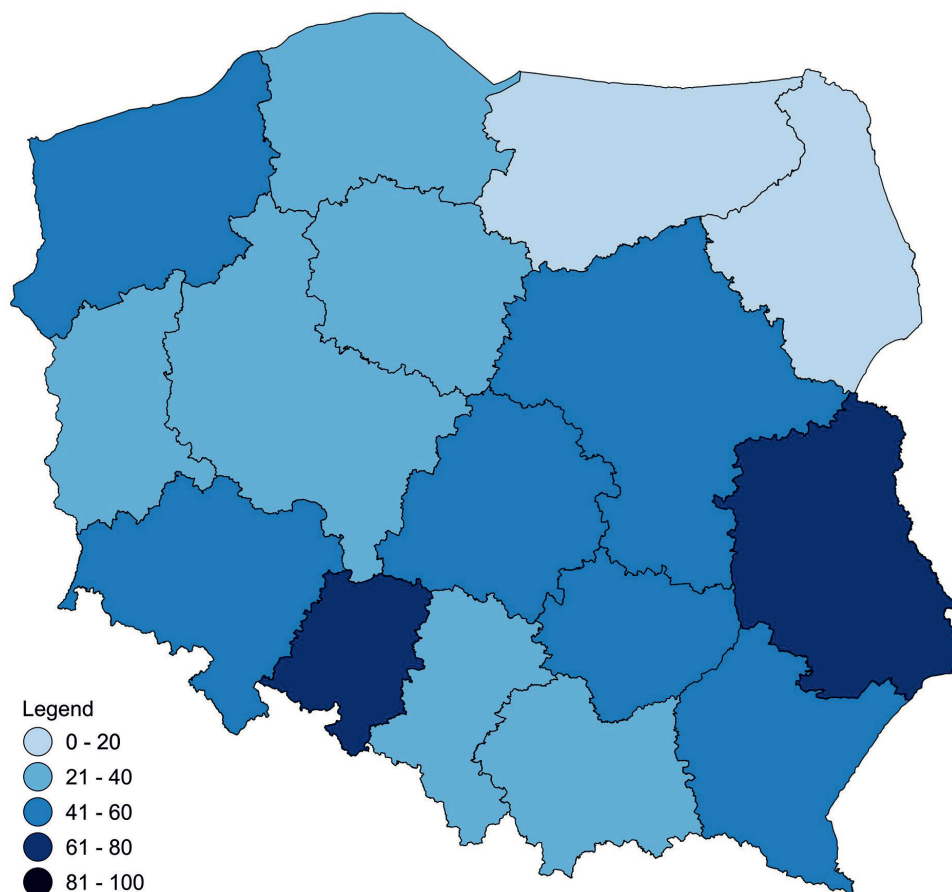


Fig. 4. Number of students from Ukraine registered after February 24, 2022, as of February 17, 2025, per 1,000 students in the 2023/2024 academic year in Polish voivodeships.

Source: own study based on data from The Chancellery of the Prime Minister (Studenci – obywatele Ukrainy, 2025).

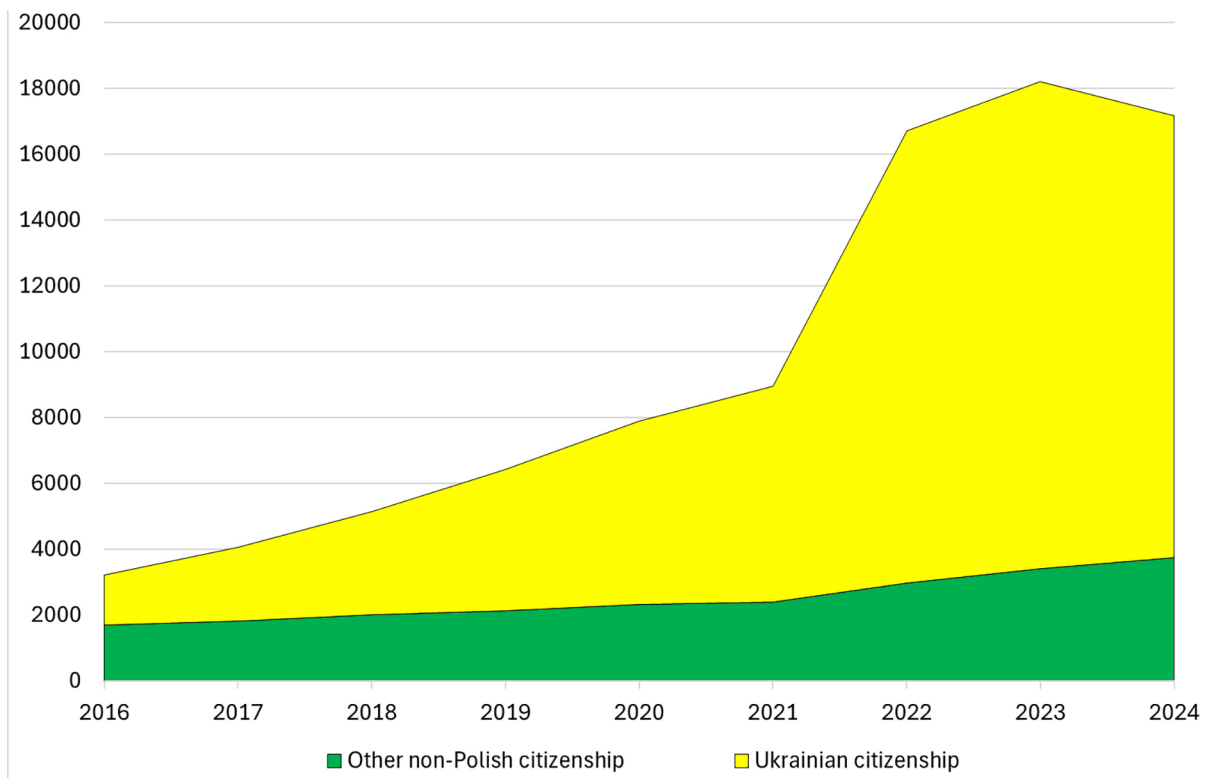


Fig. 5. The number of live births in Poland with Ukrainian and other non-Polish citizenship in 2016–2024.

Source: own study based on data from Statistics Poland



The Polish state does not want to create a situation in which Ukrainians, especially today's children and youth, will be living in Poland on the margins of social and economic life in a few years' time due to social, educational, and economic exclusion. After all, a sizable part of them will remain in Poland even if the war ends. Therefore, efforts are being made to encourage Ukrainians to integrate socially, learn the language, engage in education, and engage in cultural activities.

This also explains why, as of September 1, 2024, refugee children from Ukraine have been subject to compulsory education. In the long term, the continuation of a situation in which such a large group of children and young people living in Poland function outside the Polish education system would result in exclusion and lead to serious social problems.

To improve the functioning of children and young people from Ukraine in Poland, they have an opportunity to learn Polish additionally – at least four hours a week. Yet they are not required to take mandatory Polish language exam for eighth-grade students. Furthermore, where possible, schools have offered a choice of using help from an intercultural assistant.

The increase in the number of children in Poland since February 24, 2022, has generated and continues

to generate a greater demand for pediatric care, and an increase in the number of women requiring gynecological care. Administering preventive vaccinations poses a significant challenge. Ukrainian citizens raising children in Poland have free access to them in accordance with the current Polish Immunization Program.

Due to the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, a large number of young and middle-aged women quickly entered the Polish labor market, and as a result, trade and some service sectors, in particular, experienced easier access to workers. The war in Ukraine has caused changes in consumer behavior globally and in Poland (Perchla Włosik, Wardzała, 2023), and the sudden increase in the number of children in Poland has led, among other things, to increased demand for children's products – resulting in growth in a segment that, due to declining birth rates in Poland, had been recording increasingly weaker outcomes<sup>12</sup>.

Migrants from Ukraine to Poland are mitigating depopulation processes. This will continue in the long term, as it is mainly young and middle-aged women and children who have found refuge in Poland. However, this process should not be overestimated – depopulation in Poland is intensifying, and the areas most affected are also less likely to be chosen as places of residence by refugees from Ukraine.

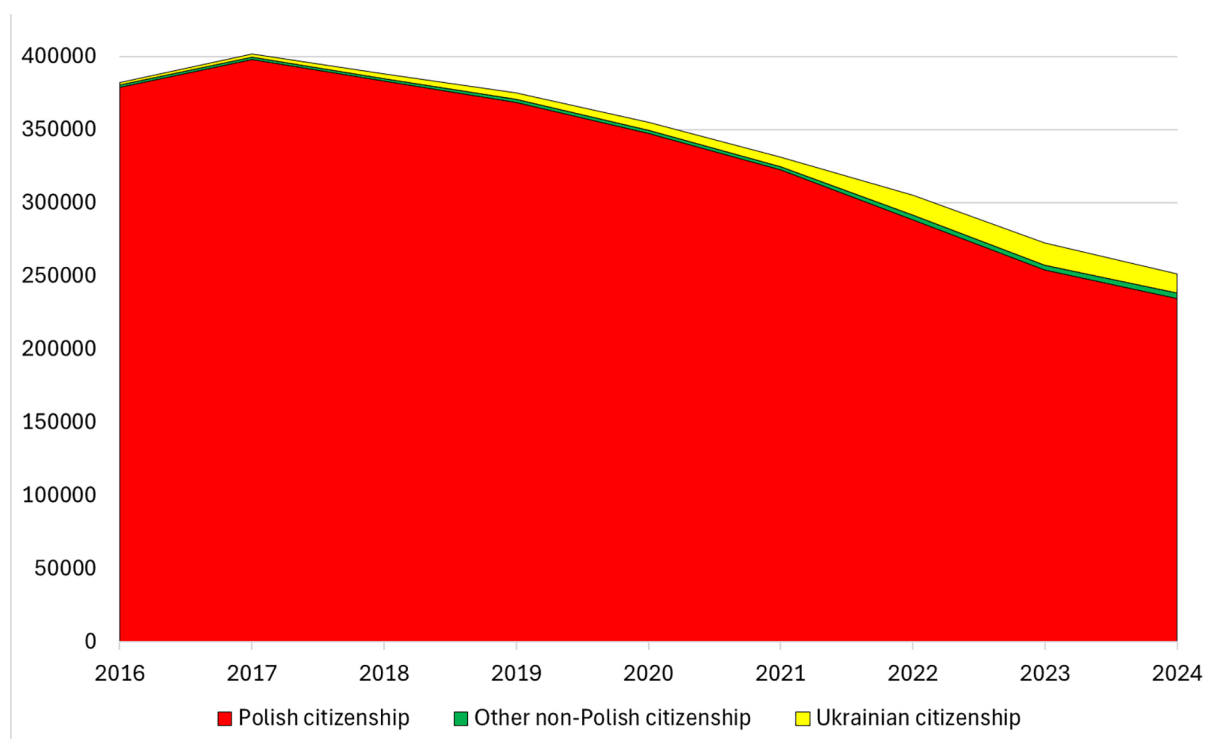


Fig. 6. The number of live births in Poland with Polish, Ukrainian, and other non-Polish citizenship in 2016-2024.

Source: own study based on data from Statistics Poland

<sup>12</sup> Based on information from PMR Market Experts

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