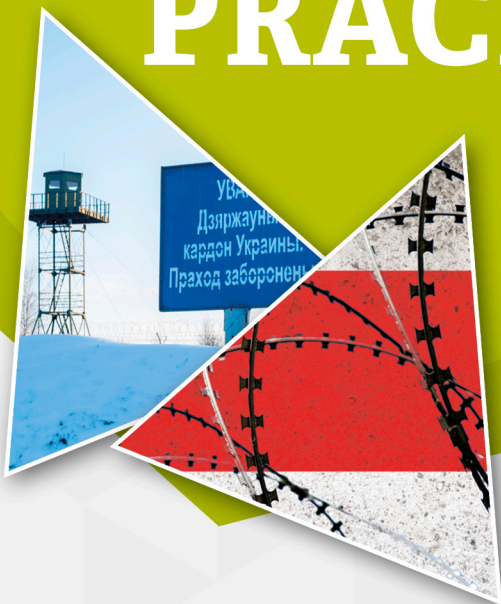


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Andrzej Szabaciuk

Forced migrations in Eastern Europe after 2020



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Reviewers Krzysztof Fedorowicz, PhD
The Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań
Karolina Podgórska, PhD
Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin

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in Eastern Europe after 2020**

Lublin 2022

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■ Main Points

Forced migration from Eastern Europe is mainly a consequence of the neo-imperial policy of the Russian Federation, which uses a whole range of soft and hard power instruments, including mass persecution of political opponents and open armed aggressions against countries pursuing an independent foreign policy. In this way, Vladimir Putin and his entourage are trying to stay in power and at the same time strengthen the importance of the Russian Federation in the regional and global dimension.

The forced migration from Eastern Europe will have a significant impact on the political, social and economic situation of the countries in the region. In Belarus and Russia, some of the best-educated people, e.g. scientists, people with technical education or IT specialists, have decided to emigrate, which may have a negative impact on the competitiveness and innovativeness of the economies of these countries. In the case of Ukraine, the majority of war refugees who came to the European Union countries have higher education, and they are also relatively young. At the current stage of the war, it is difficult to say how large a group of migrants will return to Ukraine when the military operations end.

Russia supports the Belarusian authorities, which was of key importance, especially after the rigged presidential elections in 2020, when, as a result of mass social protests, the position of the Lukashenko regime was very precarious. In this way, Russia indirectly shares responsibility for the mass repression in Belarus, which was the main cause of mass forced migrations.

The Belarusian authorities cynically took advantage of the difficult situation of migrants from the Middle East and North Africa, encouraging them to come to Belarus and misleading them with promises of easy transfer to the EU countries. Upon arrival in Belarus, the "tourists" were beaten, robbed, starved and

forced to leave the country and go to Lithuania, Latvia or Poland. The Lukashenko regime used the tragedy of thousands of people fleeing violence and poverty to put pressure on the European Union countries to lift the sanctions.

Russia is deliberately escalating the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine because it wants to use the drama of the civilian population as part of its strategy to terrorise Ukrainian society in order to weaken its morale, undermine Ukraine's defence capabilities and force it to surrender. The key consequence of the humanitarian crisis caused by the Russian Federation is the mass forced migration of the inhabitants of Ukraine.

Forced migration from the countries of the region will complicate the already difficult demographic situation in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine. After the decomposition of the Soviet Union, all three countries faced a depopulation problem. In Russia, the problem concerned primarily ethnic Russians, whose numbers are steadily shrinking, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only accelerated this process. In addition, the decline in the standard of living caused by the war may result in an increase in the scale of economic migration.

The further course of the war will be of key importance for shaping migration processes, including the scale and dynamics of forced migrations. It will also determine the future geostrategic position of Central and Eastern Europe.

Introduction

In recent years, Eastern Europe has witnessed significant migration processes, the scale of which has not been seen since the disintegration of the Soviet Union and which are a consequence of dynamic political and economic changes taking place in the region. The main reason for these changes is the neo-imperial policy of the Russian Federation, which, using brutal methods, not only seeks to rebuild its influence in the post-Soviet area, but also poses a direct challenge to the current international order. The pressure exerted on Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova proves the desire to reintegrate the post-Soviet area at least partially, and the war with Ukraine, which has been ongoing since 2014, proves the determination of the decision-making centre at the Kremlin. The annexation of Crimea, the Donbas, the Zaporizhzhia oblast and the Kherson oblast as well as clear threats of using nuclear weapons against Ukraine and the countries

that support it, undoubtedly show Russia's willingness to escalate the war, which is supposed to force Ukraine to make concessions or even capitulate. The notorious violations of human rights and the brutal persecution of the opposition in Russia and Belarus are also significant problems. In response, the West decided to impose personal and sectoral sanctions, which left their mark on the economic situation of the region and which influenced the migration decisions of many Eastern Europeans.

Within the migration flows from Eastern Europe, forced migrations constitute a special category, the scale of which was significantly intensified by the new phase of Russian aggression after 24 February 2022. As François Crepeau and Delphine Nakache emphasise, *forced migration* covers a much wider category of people who were forced to leave their place of residence than the term "refugee", referring to the categories defined by, inter alia, the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 New York Protocol. Thus, forced migration results primarily from violations of fundamental human rights: respect for physical and mental integrity, the inadmissibility of torture, freedom of speech, freedom of movement, the right to food and a safe haven, the right to health care and proper education. In extreme cases, there may be forced expulsions or resettlements. However, forced migration can also be caused by natural or man-made disasters, including climate change. It is worth emphasising, however, that the division into forced and voluntary migration is not sharp. As

noted by Stephen Castles, Hein de Haas and Mark J. Miller, people who decide to migrate are not only fleeing danger, but they also have a certain social, cultural and financial capital and hope for a better and safer life. As a rule, the groups that have to stay put are in the worst position. These are the groups that need support the most.¹

It is worth noting, however, that the category of forced migrants in the post-Soviet area also includes people who decide to migrate for economic reasons. The abrupt nature of economic changes in the region, high unemployment, falling wages and the generally low level of social security can also be considered as push factors that force certain individuals, families or entire groups to migrate in order to find decent living conditions. In addition, the fear of a drastic deterioration of the living situation or the violation of elementary human rights in the future may also be a push factor, which is highlighted by, among others, Hilary Pilkington. She also notes that violence or various types of discrimination (including ethnic, religious and social discrimination) may be combined with economic discrimination.²

Forced migrations in the post-Soviet area have a very rich history. Resettlements, expulsions and deportations have for centuries been an important element of both domestic poli-

¹ S. Castles, H. de Haas, M. J. Miller, *The Age of Migration*, London 2014, pp. 221-223.

² H. Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement, and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia*, London–New York 1998, pp. 127-138.

tics and a consequence of conquests and attempts to subjugate new areas. Ethnic, religious or social groups suspected or accused of disloyalty were often persecuted, and these persecutions included deportations or bans on settling in specific regions. In Soviet times, the regulation of population flows was an attempt to artificially limit economic migration from rural areas to cities in order to secure an appropriate number of people to work in agriculture, create new Communist elites, for whom access to the largest metropolises was reserved, and create industrial areas. The collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in far-reaching liberalisation, but ethnic conflicts, separatism and Russia's neo-imperial policy triggered successive waves of forced migrants.³

The year 2020, chosen as the timeline of the study, marked the beginning of a new stage of Russia's neo-imperial policy towards Eastern Europe. The integration pressure on Belarus initiated in 2019 and the increased efforts of the Russian Federation to quickly settle or possibly freeze the conflict in eastern Ukraine, observed since the same year, have led to an increase in political tensions in the region. Aleksandr Lukashenko's attempts to balance between East and West ultimately ended with the rigged presidential elections in Belarus, which resulted in mass demonstrations in the country's largest cities. This had not been seen since the decompo-

³ L. H. Siegelbaum, L. Page Moch, *Broad is My Native Land. Repertoires and Regimes of Migration in Russia's Twentieth Century*, Ithaca 2014, pp. 228-231.

sition of the USSR, and the regime's deepening dependence on Russia. The authorities brutally suppressed the protests, and their participants were subjected to unprecedented repression. The repression caused a mass forced migration, which in the first place affected Lukashenko's opponents in the presidential elections as well as their closest circle and open supporters. Then, representatives of the independent media, members of liquidated NGOs and people accused of supporting the opposition were forced to emigrate. The scale of repression and the uncertainty of tomorrow also encouraged high-end specialists to leave Belarus. This concerned primarily employees of the thriving IT industry, but also ordinary residents, fearing both persecution and a deep recession.

The second, equally important category of forced migrants are people mainly from the Middle East and North Africa who have been misled by Lukashenko's regime. They hoped that they would be able to easily get to the European Union through Belarus. Even if most of the migrants in this category could be classified as economic migrants when they arrived in Belarus, the escalation of the crisis, the rising costs of maintaining the security services to supervise the migrants and the significant costs of supporting migrants staying in the border area increased the frustration of the regime officials who treated "tourists" from the MENA (the Middle East and North Africa) countries more and more brutally. The migrants were beaten, intimidated, robbed, chased

from place to place. Their access to asylum procedures was limited and finally they were forced to leave the territory of Belarus through less guarded points, indicated by officers of the Belarusian uniformed services, on the Polish-Belarusian border and the Polish-Lithuanian border. The officers directly helped the migrants to cross the border illegally, and when the migrants were turned back, they were repressed and forced to leave Belarus as soon as possible. For this reason, this category of migrants can be classified as forced migrants. In such circumstances, Belarus can hardly be called a safe country for migrants.

In terms of numbers, the largest wave of forced migration after 2020 was people seeking a safe haven after the new full-scale Russian aggression. 24 February 2022 is the beginning of the next stage of the drama of civilians in Ukraine, who once again had to leave their homes en masse and seek shelter in other regions of the country or abroad. The Ukrainian authorities have not yet managed to solve the problem of internally displaced people after the annexation of Crimea and Russia's instigation of artificial separatism in the Donbas, and the new, much more intense aggression has compounded the challenges facing them. It would not have been possible to help so many people in such a short time without the solidarity and support of the society and Ukrainian volunteers. Charity support delivered to Ukraine from virtually all over the world was also of great impor-

tance. However, the situation of Ukrainian forced migrants will largely depend on the further course of the war.

A specific category of forced migrants are labour migrants from the post-Soviet area, who, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and periodically introduced coronavirus restrictions, were forced to temporarily leave the Russian Federation as they did not have the means to support themselves during the lockdown, which caused several months of downtime in many sectors of the economy. Another phenomenon is the mass forced migration of Russians fleeing the country after 24 February 2022, i.e. immediately after the announcement of a new phase of the war. Among those fleeing there were many famous celebrities and people fleeing the country after the so-called “partial” mobilisation announced on 21 September 2022 by Vladimir Putin. Fearing being sent to the front lines in Ukraine, several hundred thousand young men, sometimes with their families, left Russia by all possible routes. Most of them, over 200,000 people, went to Kazakhstan.

The purpose of the study is to analyse the conditions, scale, significance and future development of forced migration in Eastern Europe after 2020 as well as the characteristics of the phenomenon and its significance from the perspective of the Central-Eastern Europe region and in supra-regional terms. The key conditions, geography, scale and future development of the phenomenon analysed in the course of the research are discussed. The migrations

forced by the persecution of the Belarusian opposition by the Lukashenko regime and the migrations related to the transfer of people from the Middle East and Africa through the Polish-Belarusian, Belarusian-Lithuanian and Belarusian-Latvian borders are shown. The forced migration from Russia after the aggression against Ukraine and the so-called “partial” mobilisation as well as the migrations within and out of Ukraine caused by the Russian aggression are characterised.

During the research, the comparative method was utilised to analyse the existing data. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were also used.

1. **Forced migrations from Belarus after the rigged presidential elections of 2020**

From the point of view of the demographic situation in Belarus, 2020 was a breakthrough year in many respects. First of all, the COVID-19 pandemic, as in many other countries in the region, led to a notable increase in mortality among the inhabitants of Belarus. The exact scale of this phenomenon is difficult to determine because the authorities have decided not to disclose statistics on mortality. It is only known that the number of Belarus inhabitants decreased from 9.41 million to 9.25 million in the period from 2019 to 2021.⁴ However,

⁴ И. В. Медведева (ed.), *Беларусь в цифрах. Статистический справочник*, Минск 2022, р. 8.

the very fact that key vital statistics were kept secret may prove that this was a serious problem.

The second key element determining the demographic situation was the mass forced migration resulting from the repression suffered by civic society in Belarus after the rigged presidential elections in August 2020. After mass protests, Belarusian prisons were filled with protesters, who were often tortured there. The scale of repression was unprecedented. According to estimates of the Belarusian opposition, over 40,000 people were affected and at least 10 people lost their lives in unexplained circumstances. The most famous case is the death of Raman Bandarenka, who died in a hospital in Minsk in November 2020 after he was beaten up by the Belarusian Militsiya. The authorities tried to build a false narrative that the cause of his death was alcohol intoxication. The doctor who revealed the contradictory patient record and the journalist reporting the whole case were convicted by a Belarusian court.

The brutal repression against Belarusian society was justified by the ubiquitous state propaganda created with the participation of specialists from Russia. It was with their support that propaganda materials were created about the links between the opposition leaders and the Western services, about the planning of an alleged military coup or organising anti-state partisan groups. The authorities also cracked down on the main opposition media: the popular website Tut.by and the online newspaper *Nasha Niva*. Belsat

TV was declared an extremist organization. Opponents of the regime abroad were also persecuted. The authorities did not hesitate to force a plane with the Belarusian blogger Raman Pratasevich on board to land in Minsk, to intimidate the runner Krystsina Tsimanouskaya at the Olympics in Tokyo and, as is strongly suggested, to contribute to the death of Vitaly Shishov, a Belarusian social activist residing in Kiev.⁵

The repression against the protesters resulted in pressure from Western countries on Belarus to initiate talks with the opposition. The Polish government even offered the possibility of real economic support to Belarus if such talks were initiated. The Lukashenko regime categorically rejected the proposals and responded with increased persecution of opponents and strong anti-Western propaganda. Therefore, the European Union decided to introduce personal sanctions and sectoral economic sanctions, with the support of, among others, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Switzerland.

People participating in protests or manifesting their support for the opposition through clothes or words were often harassed in the workplace. Many of them were laid off. Non-governmental organizations in Belarus were also repressed. According to the Viasna Human Rights Centre,

⁵ A. Szabaciuk, *Białoruś rok po wyborach prezydenckich: próba bilansu (Belarus a year after the presidential election: an attempt to summarize)*, "Komentarze IeS" 2021, no. 427.

after August 2020, the authorities liquidated or started the process of liquidation of 275 non-governmental organizations.⁶ As a consequence, people involved in opposition activities, possibly supporting Lukashenko's opponents, were often forced to emigrate, most often to Poland and Lithuania, which were most open to political migrants from Belarus.

Determining the scale of forced migration from Belarus after 2020 is an extremely difficult task. The more so that not all people who decided to emigrate took advantage of the preferential rules offered to them by the European Union countries. Some migrants left the country on the basis of the previously applicable regulations allowing for the legalisation of work and employment. In response to the mass repression by the Lukashenko regime, two new possibilities were introduced in Poland: Schengen visas and national visas issued for "arrival for humanitarian reasons, state interest or international obligations" and visas issued under the *Poland. Business Harbour* programme. The humanitarian visas issued on the basis of the amendment to the Act on foreigners of 28 October 2020 and the regulation of the Minister of Development, Labour and Technology of 20 November 2020 made it possible for migrants to take up employment without the need to apply for a work permit

⁶ *Ликвидация гражданского общества. Полный список НГО, столкнувшихся с давлением белорусских властей*, Вясна, <https://spring96.org/ru/news/104540> [28.09.2022].

from 1 December 2020. The situation was similar with people who came to Poland under the *Poland. Business Harbour* programme. They were allowed to come to Poland with their families and work without a permit and set up a business.⁷

According to data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 36,614 people received humanitarian visas in Poland in the period from 10 August 2020 to 30 June 2022, of which 10,877 people received visas after 24 February 2022. In the same period, Poland issued 355,992 visas to Belarusians. Until 5 September 2022, the Polish Investment and Trade Agency provided services to over 140 companies under the *Poland. Business Harbour* programme. These companies reported about 49,000 employees for relocation, of whom approximately 35,000 (70%) were relocated due to Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Most of them are citizens of Belarus.⁸

In June 2022, according to data from the Office for Foreigners, 50,505 Belarusians had a Residence Card in Poland. Of these, 27,932 had a permanent residence permit, and 19,607 had a temporary residence permit. In addition, in

⁷ The Act of 28 October 2020 amending the Act on foreigners and certain other acts (Journal of Laws, item 2023); regulation of the Minister of Development, Labour and Technology of 20 November 2020 amending the Regulation on cases in which entrusting work to a foreigner on the territory of the Republic of Poland is allowed without the need to obtain a work permit (Journal of Laws, item 2081).

⁸ *Poland Business Harbour – cieszący się popularnością rządowy program po raz kolejny zostaje rozszerzony (Poland Business Harbour – a popular government program is once again extended)*, https://www.paih.gov.pl/20220905/poland_business_harbour# [28.09.2022].

the first half of 2022, 293 Belarusians were granted refugee status, and 293 people were granted subsidiary protection. The vast majority of temporary residence permits were related to taking up work. It is also worth noting that only 28% of permits were issued to people over 40 years of age. The dominant group were people aged 20 to 39 (55%).⁹ It should be emphasised that the number of Belarusian citizens with various types of valid residence permits in Poland has been systematically growing in recent years. According to Eurostat, this number was 55,902 as of 31 December 2019, 61,533 on the same day in 2020, and 133,595 on the same day in 2021. This number is expected to increase further this year due to Russian aggression against Ukraine. It should also be noted that Poland is the most popular migration destination for Belarusians in the European Union according to Eurostat data. The second most popular migration destination is Lithuania. In the case of other countries popular among emigrants from Belarus (Germany and the Czech Republic), the scale of emigration is much lower.

⁹ Author's own calculations based on data of the Office for Foreigners.

Table 1. Number of different types of valid residence permits issued to citizens of Belarus by country. As of 31 December of a given year

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Poland	48,615	49,599	55,902	61,533	133,595
Lithuania	9,338	12,215	18,665	24,432	32,249
Germany	19,304	19,862	17,681	17,147	17,618
Czech Republic	5,429	6,386	7,144	7,118	8,020

Source: Eurostat

The *Poland. Business Harbour* programme was primarily aimed at IT specialists. However, specialists from other industries and people who were looking for employment in the European Union, who were afraid of repression or saw no chance of a quick change in the political and economic situation in Belarus, also decide to emigrate. Another factor that may encourage emigration is the fear of an escalation of the war in Ukraine and the potential direct involvement of the Belarusian army in military operations.

2. **The Poland-Belarus border crisis and the problem of forced migration**

The problem of forced migration is also related to the Poland-Belarus border crisis, which is a consequence of the unconventional policy of the Lukashenko regime aimed at exerting pressure on the European Union Member States by increasing migration pressure. It should be noted that this is not the first time that politicians have tried to use mass migration and the personal drama of hundreds of thousands of people to achieve their foreign policy goals. Kelly Greenhill cites the example of Libya under the dictator Muammar al-Qaddafi, who in 2004 managed to negotiate with the European Union the lifting of sanctions in exchange for a promise

to stop the growing wave of asylum seekers flowing into the European Union.¹⁰ Another example is the EU-Turkey Refugee Agreement, which was intended to stop the illegal flow of Syrian refugees from Turkey in exchange for humanitarian aid for the refugees and a promise to abolish visas in the near future and return to accession negotiations.¹¹

A similar strategy of combining migration policy with foreign policy can be observed in the Russian Federation. With the development of the assumptions of this policy after the financial crisis of 2008 and the increasing neo-imperial pressure of the Russian authorities on the post-Soviet states, access to the Russian labour market was treated as an instrument of pressure on the poorer countries of the post-Soviet area, dependent on financial transfers from labour migrants working in Russia. This concerned primarily the countries of Central Asia. For example, financial transfers from abroad accounted for as much as 44.1% of Tajikistan's GDP in 2008 and 32.5% of Kyrgyzstan's GDP in 2018.¹² This forced some CIS countries to make political concessions to the Russian Federation, e.g. on the reintegration of the post-Soviet area.¹³

¹⁰ K. M. Greenhill, *Weapons of Mass Migration. Forced Displacement, Coercion, and Foreign Policy*, Ithaca 2010, pp. 1-2.

¹¹ K. Rygiel, F. Baban, S. Ilcan, *The Syrian Refugee Crisis: The EU-Turkey "Deal" and Temporary Protection*, "Global Social Policy" 2016, vol. 16, no. 3.

¹² Personal remittances, received (% of GDP). World Bank data [30.09.2022].

¹³ A. Szabaciuk, *30 lat rosyjskiej polityki imigracyjnej i jej znaczenie z perspektywy Federacji Rosyjskiej i obszaru poradzieckiego (30 years of Russian immigration policy*

The Russian Federation has also used migration policy as an element of foreign policy in other situations. As Caress Schenk notes, after Turkey shot down a Russian fighter jet near the Syrian-Turkish border, Russia lifted the visa-free regime for Turkish tourists and introduced restrictions on the employment of Turkish workers. In turn, after the annexation of Crimea and the destabilisation of Donbas, facilitations in migration law were used, and a simplified naturalisation procedure was introduced to encourage selected categories of Ukrainian citizens to emigrate and settle in Russia.¹⁴ Similar actions were taken by Russia after the start of the new phase of aggression against Ukraine, i.e. from 24 February 2022.

However, these are not the only attempts by Russia to use migration pressure in foreign policy. Some experts accuse Russia that by supporting the Bashar al-Assad regime in the fight against the opposition, it wants to deepen the political chaos in Syria and thus deliberately destabilise the region in order to stimulate new migration flows to the European Union.¹⁵ There are also accusations that the blockade

and its importance from the perspective of the Russian Federation and the post-Soviet area), "Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej" ("Yearbook of the Institute of Central and Eastern Europe") 2021, vol. 19, no. 2, p. 367.

¹⁴ C. Schenk, *Assessing Foreign Policy Commitment Through Migration Policy in Russia*, "Demokratizatsiya" 2016, vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 471-488.

¹⁵ H. Ellyatt, *Putin "weaponizing" migrant crisis to hurt Europe*, CNBC, 30 September 2022, <https://www.cnbc.com/2016/03/02/putin-weaponizing-migrant-crisis-to-hurt-europe.html> [30.09.2022].

of Ukraine's Black Sea ports, which has been ongoing since February 2022, is aimed at causing a serious food crisis and, as a consequence, a mass migration of Africans, mainly to the European Union.¹⁶ Although the grain deal signed in Turkey enabled Ukraine to export part of last year's harvest, the ongoing war will make it impossible to return to the level of exports from previous years.

Belarus, drawing on the experience of other countries, tried to cause a migration crisis by opening a new migration route from the Middle East and Africa, leading through the territory of Belarus to the European Union, primarily to Poland and Lithuania, which were most eager to impose severe sanctions on Lukashenko's regime and directly decided to support the Belarusian democratic opposition. However, the primary cause of the change in Belarus's policy was the fallout from the forced landing of a Ryanair plane in Minsk with Raman Pratasevich on board. Lukashenko directly warned the West about the consequences of tightening sanctions against Belarus. He first suggested loosening border controls at the border with the European Union when, on 26 May 2021, he said in the Belarusian parliament "We have been stopping drugs and migrants, now they will take them themselves and catch them." On 22 June 2021, during

¹⁶ E. Braw, *Russia is Taking Advantage of the Invasion-Stirred Migration Crisis*, "Foreign Policy", 18 July 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/07/18/russia-ukraine-war-migration-food-crisis-putin/> [30.09.2022].

the Brest celebrations commemorating the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War, he said, “Today they [the West] are howling. Ah, the Belarusians are not defending us. Thousands of illegal migrants have flooded Lithuania, Latvia and Poland. They [the West] demand that we protect them from contraband, drugs. All the way across the Atlantic we hear calls: help us, as before, stop radioactive materials so that they do not get to Europe. It makes me want to ask, ‘Are you crazy?’ You have unleashed a hybrid war against us and demand that we defend you as before?”¹⁷

Information collected by the Belarusian opposition and independent Belarusian and Ukrainian journalists as well as intelligence data from Western services confirms that Belarus deliberately tried to provoke a migration crisis on the European Union’s eastern border. These activities were planned by the Belarusian services and were to be code-named “Sluice”. According to the Belarusian journalist Tadeusz Giczka, a former editor of the Nexta channel, a special operation under this codename was prepared by the Belarusian services as early as in 2010–2011. He gained knowledge on this subject from former officers of the Belarusian services who belong to the BYPOL organization founded in Warsaw by former Belarusian uniformed officers who decided to

¹⁷ A. Szabaciuk, *Kryzys na granicy polsko-białoruskiej w percepcji władz Federacji Rosyjskiej i Białorusi* (*The Poland-Belarus border crisis in the perception of the authorities of the Russian Federation and Belarus*), “Komentarze IEŚ” 2021, no. 477.

leave Belarus after the rigged presidential elections. The persons behind the idea of the operation were the current head of the Belarusian KGB, General Ivan Tertel and his brother Yuri. The aim of their activities was to obtain funds from the European Union for border protection. In May 2021, the scale of this operation was significantly increased, and it did not consist only in tolerating illegal crossings of the Polish-Belarusian border but developed into a wide-ranging action of issuing tourist visas to Middle Easterners and misleading them by suggesting that they could easily get to the European Union through Belarus. This resulted in a significant increase in interest in “tourist” flights from airports in Baghdad, Beirut, Damascus and indirectly from Istanbul. The whole process was coordinated by Belarusian travel agencies, which charged high fees for assistance in organizing arrival to Belarus.¹⁸ Based on surveys of the migrants, Human Rights Watch found that the cost of a package including visas, travel insurance, transport to the border, hotel accommodation and optionally an air ticket ranging in price from USD 3,000 to USD 17,000.¹⁹

¹⁸ T. Giczan, *Operacja „Śluza”. Co naprawdę się dzieje na polsko-białoruskiej granicy* (Operation “Sluice”: What’s really going on at the Polish-Belarusian border), <http://waidelotte.org/operacja-sluza-co-naprawde-sie-dzieje-na-polsko-bialoruskiej-granicy/#more-152> [30.09.2022].

¹⁹ „Umierajcie tutaj albo idźcie do Polski” (“Die here or go to Poland”), Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/pl/report/2021/11/24/380464> [3.10.2022].

These actions are part of a series of irrational ideas that Aleksandr Lukashenko has decided on over the last few years, wanting to respond to the European Union sanctions, or possibly to obtain additional budget revenues. The repertoire of such actions includes restrictions on crossing the Poland-Belarus border under the pretext of Covid restrictions²⁰ and the abolition of visas on 1 July 2022 for citizens of Lithuania, Latvia and Poland who want to visit Belarus.²¹

By triggering the migration crisis, the Lukashenko regime hoped to force the lifting of sanctions affecting the most profitable branches of the state's economy. It is worth noting that the Belarusian authorities had actually declared their intention to begin talks on the situation at the border from the beginning of the intensification of undocumented migration. In a statement for Sputnik Belarus on 2 September 2021, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus Vladimir Makei stated that Belarus has been unsuccessfully proposing talks on migration issues with the European Union since April. The issue of possible negotiations was clearly stated by Aleksandr Lukashenko himself on 12 September 2021, during the "Zapad-2021" military exercise. During a press

²⁰ A. Szabaciuk, *Razem z „bratnim narodem”. Szczepienia przeciwko wirusowi SARS-CoV-2 na Białorusi (Together with the “brotherly nation”. Vaccinations against the SARS-CoV-2 virus in Belarus)*, *Komentarze IeS* 2021, no. 305.

²¹ *Visa-free entry for citizens of Lithuania, Latvia and Poland*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, [https://mfa.gov.by/en/visa/freemove/states/\[3.10.2022\]](https://mfa.gov.by/en/visa/freemove/states/[3.10.2022]).

conference at one of the military training areas, he categorically rejected the possibility of any talks with the West until the sanctions were lifted: "If you want to live safely, come here. We will arrange a place, we will meet, we will discuss these issues. But until these senseless sanctions are lifted and the destruction of our people stops, no one will talk to them, we will not kneel."²²

The Belarusian authorities have decided to use the tragedy of thousands of people from the Middle East and Africa for hybrid attacks aimed at neighbouring countries of the European Union. According to Frontex data, in 2021, 7,915 people illegally crossed the eastern border of the European Union with Belarus. It increased by 1069% compared to the previous year.²³ However, this number may not include all those who managed to enter the European Union illegally.

The Belarusian authorities sought to expel the migrants from their territory as quickly as possible. Belarusian border guards made it easier for migrants to cross the border by directing them to less guarded points of the border and helping them to cut the barbed wire fence. Migrants were beaten, starved, intimidated, robbed of money and electronic equipment. Bribes were extorted from them for the opportunity to leave the border region. People who were unable

²² A. Szabaciuk, *Kryzys na granicy... (The Poland-Belarus border crisis...)*.

²³ *EU external borders in 2021: Arrivals above pre-pandemic levels*, Frontex, <https://frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/eu-external-borders-in-2021-arrivals-above-pre-pandemic-levels-CxVMNN> [3.10.2022].

to cross the border or were turned back by Polish uniformed services were treated particularly brutally. Over a dozen people died at the Poland-Belarus border due to difficult weather and terrain conditions.²⁴ Some of the migrants, after unsuccessful attempts to cross the border, were evacuated to their countries of origin, mainly to Iraq.

Poland, Lithuania and Latvia responded strongly to the actions of Lukashenko's regime, increasing the intensity of border controls, building barriers at the border with Belarus and turning back people crossing the border illegally (which provoked protests from some NGOs and human rights defenders). An unequivocal attitude towards Lukashenko's actions was also taken by the European Union, which in December 2021 introduced another, fifth package of sanctions, hitting the Belarusian economy even harder. In 2022, the intensity of illegal migration from Belarus decreased significantly. More and more often, decisions to emigrate to Europe were made by people who had spent the last few months in the Russian Federation. Belarusian individuals and/or organisations are believed to be making a profit by offering assistance with illegal border crossing.

The policy of the Lukashenko regime towards migrants proves that Belarus is not a safe country for people who want to apply for refugee status. The authorities made it difficult for them to access asylum procedures, and their

²⁴ „Umierajcie tutaj albo... (*Die here or...*).

freedom of movement within the country was restricted. Migrants were used in a cynical policy towards the European Union, exploiting the tragedy of people who wanted to provide their loved ones with a better, safer life.

3. **Forced migrations from Ukraine after 24 February 2022**

The recent years have been an extremely difficult period, especially for the inhabitants of eastern and southern Ukraine. The annexation of Crimea and Russia's instigation of artificial separatism in the Donbas in 2014 radically changed the living conditions of millions of people in this area. Armed aggression, the persecution of people with pro-Ukrainian views, unemployment and the lack of prospects for a quick improvement in living conditions prompted millions of residents to leave. Some of these people moved to areas of Ukraine not covered by military operations. Others decided to go abroad. After 2014, people who, fleeing the war in

the Donbas, sought refuge mainly in Ukrainian territories, most often decided to go to the Ukrainian-controlled parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Alternatively, they went to neighbouring oblasts (the Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia oblasts), hoping that the war would end soon and they would be able to return home. This concerned mainly pensioners and sick people. Younger people and people not expecting a quick end to Russian aggression went to more distant oblasts. Most of them went to the Kyiv oblast. Officially, approximately 1.7 million migrants have been registered as internally displaced persons (IDPs). However, according to the World Bank's calculations, 2.7 million people had to leave their place of residence as a result of the war, and about 4 million people suffered the immediate effects of the first phase of the war. As a consequence of military operations, 30–40 thousand Ukrainian military and civilians were killed during the first phase of the war.²⁵

The war that started in 2014 was also an important push factor that stimulated emigration. According to UNHCR data, as of 14 August 2015, over 1.1 million people have left for neighbouring countries since the beginning of the first phase of Russian aggression. Most of them went to the Rus-

²⁵ *Conflict in Ukraine. Socio-economic impacts of internal displacement and veteran return. Complete Report*, World Bank, Washington 2017, pp. 4-8; A. Szabaciuk, *Zapomniane ofiary wojny. Osoby wewnątrznie przesiedlone (IDP) na Ukrainie (Forgotten victims of war. Internally displaced persons (IDP) in Ukraine)*, "Studia Europejskie" 2016, no. 3, pp. 67-70.

sian Federation (911,000), Belarus (126,000), Poland (68,000) and Hungary (5,960).²⁶ However, these calculations are incomplete. Russia decided to encourage Ukrainians to come by simplifying the rules for legalisation of stay and employment, and then liberalising the criteria for naturalisation. However, as a consequence of the economic downturn caused by Russian aggression, which affected most of the post-Soviet states, the western direction of migration, i.e. to the European Union, became very popular. As a result, the number of people migrating to Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Germany, Spain, Italy and Portugal increased. The number of these people could reach even two million per year. Most of these people migrated as part of short-term economic migration, which was additionally facilitated by the fact that Ukraine was granted visa-free travel by the European Union in 2017.²⁷

The largest group of economic and educational migrants, estimated at approx. 1.5 million people, chose Poland as their destination. The high popularity of migration to Poland results from a number of factors, including historical, political and economic conditions as well as geographical

²⁶ *Ukraine – Internally Displaced People*, <https://www.unhcr.org/ua/en/internally-displaced-persons> [3.10.2022].

²⁷ A. Szabaciuk, *Znaczenie imigracji zarobkowej z Europy Wschodniej do Polski po 2014 roku (The importance of economic immigration from Eastern Europe to Poland after 2014)*, Lublin 2020, pp. 41-65.

and cultural proximity.²⁸ In this way, Poland quickly transformed from an emigration country into an emigration and immigration country, popular not only among migrants from Eastern Europe.

A new phase of Russian aggression against Ukraine, initiated by the so-called “special military operation” on 24 February 2022, brought an unprecedented scale of destruction, forced millions of people to leave their homes in a hurry and caused the largest humanitarian crisis in Europe since World War II. The massive and violent course of the population movements required the Ukrainian authorities and its allies to take extraordinary and quick actions to help those in need. The nature of forced migrations in the first days of the new phase of the war resulted primarily from uncertainty regarding the further course of military operations and the fear of Russia taking over the entire territory of Ukraine. Some people migrated towards the relatively safe oblasts of Ukraine. Others decided to go abroad, waiting in long queues at border crossings. The massive nature of population flows posed a serious challenge to the Ukrainian transport infrastructure. The main burden of transporting people was taken by Ukrainian Railways, which in the first days of the full-scale invasion limited the size of luggage that

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-63.

passengers could take with them.²⁹ The situation stabilised in the second half of March.

According to UNHCR data, over two million war refugees left Ukraine as early as 8 March. The largest group went to Poland (by 4 March, more than 1 million Ukrainian refugees crossed the Polish-Ukrainian border).³⁰ However, the number of forced migrants who found their way to the European Union was steadily increasing. On 24 March 2022, there were already 3.67 million war refugees and 6.5 million internally displaced people who had fled the war but remained in Ukraine, and 12 million were people directly affected by the war and in need of humanitarian support.³¹ In April and May, after the fighting had shifted to the south and east of Ukraine, more and more people decided to return home. Based on UNHCR data, as of 4 October 2022, 7.64 million war refugees from Ukraine ended up in Europe. 4.21 million of them were covered by various forms of temporary protection or an analogous form of protection regulated by national law.³² According to surveys conducted by UNHCR between May and August 2022, 99% of war refugees were of Ukrainian nationality. Women constituted the vast majority (86%), and the age of the average surveyed person was 35–59 years

²⁹ Author's interview with Natalia from Kiev, 10 March 2022.

³⁰ UNHCR, *Ukraine situation: Flash Update 1*, New York 2022, pp. 1-4.

³¹ UNHCR, *Ukraine Situation Flash Update 5*, New York 2022, pp. 1-5.

³² *Ukraine refugee situation*, UNHCR, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine> [9.10.2022]; UNHCR, *Ukraine situation Flash Update 32*, New York 2022, pp. 1-3.

Table 2. War refugees from Ukraine after 24 February 2022 in selected European countries

Country	Data as of	Refugees from Ukraine covered by temporary protection	Refugees from Ukraine recorded in a given country	Number of border crossings from Ukraine	Number of border crossings to Ukraine
Russia	3.10.2022	No temporary protection possible	2,852,395	2,852,395	No data
Poland	11.10.2022	1,436,558	1,436,558	6,782,275	4,798,663
Germany	4.10.2022	709,148	997,895	No border with Ukraine	No border with Ukraine
Czech Republic	4.10.2022	442,259	442,443	No border with Ukraine	No border with Ukraine
Italy	27.09.2022	157,609	170,646	No border with Ukraine	No border with Ukraine
Spain	2.10.2022	145,838	145,838	No border with Ukraine	No border with Ukraine
Bulgaria	27.09.2022	136,169	56,734	No border with Ukraine	No border with Ukraine
Great Britain	3.10.2022	134,200	134,200	No border with Ukraine	No border with Ukraine
France	26.09.2022	105,000	105,000	No border with Ukraine	No border with Ukraine
Slovakia	4.10.2022	96,140	96,336	836,372	573,544
Romania	18.09.2022	67,064	80,498	1,246,945	959,826
Moldova	4.10.2022	No temporary protection possible	93,117	644,246	285,368
Hungary	4.10.2022	30,000	30,000	1,511,020	No data

Source: *Ukraine refugee situation...*

(49%). Most often they were people with higher education (47%), who were professionally active in Ukraine (73%).³³

According to calculations by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the current estimated number of internally displaced people in Ukraine is 6.97 million (as of 23 August 2022). It is worth emphasizing, however, that the number of those who decide to return home is growing systematically. An estimated 6.01 million people have returned home. At the same time, war refugees who have returned home from abroad account for only 15% of the total number of returnees. Among the internally displaced people, the largest group are residents of the Donetsk oblast (21%), Kharkiv oblast (21%), Kyiv oblast (10%), Mykolaiv (oblast 10%) and the Zaporizhzhia oblast (8%).³⁴

The largest number of internally displaced people left for the Dnipropetrovsk oblast (10%), Kyiv oblast (10%), Kharkiv oblast (9%), Zaporizhzhia oblast (6%) and the Lviv oblast (6%). The most popular destinations were oblasts in eastern Ukraine (28%), western Ukraine (25%), northern Ukraine (17%) and central Ukraine (15%). Most of the IDPs in Ukraine are women (70%), people aged 25–35 (25%) and people aged 35–45 (25%). In addition, members of families who decide to leave are often elderly (46% of families), mothers with chil-

³³ *Regional Protection Profiling & Monitoring*, UNHCR, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine> [9.10.2022].

³⁴ IOM, *Ukraine Internal Displacement Report. General Population Survey, Round 8*, 23 August 2022, pp. 1-3.

dren (38%), chronically ill people (36%) and disabled people (25%).³⁵

The key problem faced by forced migrants is the lack of money (60% of IDP families have this problem). Most families try to deal with this problem by spending savings (75%), saving on food (68%), reducing other important expenses besides food (67%), saving on health expenses (54%). It should also be noted that more than half of migrant parents have problems with the availability of formulas for feeding infants and children.³⁶

The massive and violent course of the forced migration caused by Russian aggression necessitated a huge involvement from civic society. This concerned both Ukraine and some of the countries, primarily Poland, that took on the greatest burden of helping forced migrants. In Ukraine, the flourishing of non-governmental organizations and organizations focused on providing humanitarian and military aid was the result of the “Revolution of Dignity” and Russian aggression in 2014. Along with the escalation of tensions in Kiev’s Maidan, participants of anti-government protests were supported, and the army was supplied with the necessary equipment (helmets, bulletproof vests, night-vision goggles, drones, medical kits); provisions were delivered and help was provided to forced migrants from eastern Ukraine.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 3-8.

After 24 February 2022, some of the previously operating organizations became involved in helping the Ukrainian army and people affected by the war. New people joined the existing organizations, and new organizations were created. With the support of local authorities, these organizations also distributed humanitarian aid and partly also military aid, which was delivered to Ukraine from virtually all over the world.³⁷

The situation was similar in Poland and in a number of other European countries. This was especially true of countries bordering Ukraine. Without the involvement of non-governmental organizations and the work of numerous volunteers and people who decided to support Ukrainian refugees financially, materially or by inviting them to their homes, hotels, etc., it would be impossible to help so many people in need in such a short time. Their activities were, of course, supported by the state administration and local authorities, which organized a system of assistance and support for war refugees.

Poland is the country through which the largest wave of war refugees from Ukraine have passed. Since 24 February, about seven million refugees from Ukraine have crossed the Polish border, which is almost six times more than the

³⁷ H. Bazhenova, *Rola ruchu wolontariackiego w obronie Ukrainy przed rosyjską agresją* (*The role of the voluntary movement in defending Ukraine against Russian aggression*), "Komentarze IEŚ" 2022, no. 665.

number of refugees who have crossed the border with Romania, the second European Union country in terms of the number of war refugees admitted from Ukraine.³⁸ It is an extremely difficult task to precisely estimate the number of people from Ukraine staying in Poland. The scale and nature of the phenomenon make precise calculations difficult. An additional problem is the mass return of refugees to Ukraine, which is particularly visible from April–May 2022. According to various estimates, before the war, there were from 1 to 1.5 million Ukrainians in Poland. Precise calculations are hampered mainly by the short-term nature of economic migration from Ukraine and the current visa-free regime. The cited IOM studies estimate that 15% of war refugees from Ukraine who left for the European Union decided to return. However, it is not certain whether the data refers only to persons granted temporary protection by the European Union countries or to all persons who left Ukraine. Certainly, some persons covered by temporary protection could have left for other European Union countries or North America. In addition, tens of thousands of Ukrainians from Poland went to Ukraine to fight in the war against Russia. Another group consists of people who reached Poland by crossing the border with Hungary or Romania, or possibly

³⁸ According to the latest data of the Polish Border Guard, in the period from 24 February to 13 October 2022, 6.974 million people entered Poland from Ukraine, and 5.188 million people left Poland for Ukraine. The Polish Border Guard post of 13 October 2022 on Twitter.

via the Baltic States. This category mainly includes Ukrainians fleeing mobilisation from the occupied areas or from Russia. It should also be noted that as a result of Russian disinformation, some people are afraid to apply for a social security number (PESEL) in Poland, fearing the alleged consequences after returning to Ukraine. With this in mind, it can be estimated that there are currently 2.5 to 3 million people from Ukraine in Poland. This group includes both former economic and educational migrants and the new wave of war refugees.

We are currently observing a stabilisation of the situation on the front line in Ukraine, which also reduces the scale of forced migration both within Ukraine and beyond its borders. However, Russia's attempts to escalate the armed conflict are worrying, as evidenced by Vladimir Putin's announcement of a "partial" mobilisation on 21 September 2022, combined with nuclear blackmail as well as the annexation of the Donbas, the Zaporizhzhia oblast and the Kherson oblast approved on 5 October 2022. If these decisions lead to an escalation of military operations in the south and east of Ukraine, the scale of forced migration from this region may increase dramatically. All the more so because the majority of internally displaced people who have fled the territories occupied by Russia or located near the front line are currently residing in eastern Ukraine. The Russian offensive in this area may result in significant population movements.

The scale of forced migration may also be increased by the consistently used strategy of attacking civilian facilities and critical infrastructure, primarily in regions adjacent to the front line. Russia's shelling of residential areas, heat and power plants, water treatment plants, shopping centres and agricultural warehouses is aimed at breaking the morale of Ukrainian society and the Ukrainian army. Typical elements of this war are the following: scorched earth policy used by the Russians, brutal repressions, filtration camps, forced displacement deep into Russia, illegal displacement of Ukrainian orphans to Russia and their Russification, forced granting of Russian citizenship, destruction of all physical traces confirming that given areas belong to Ukraine, including the destruction of cultural assets. The brutality of Russian actions may encourage people to leave, especially when there is a risk that the areas liberated by Ukrainian troops will be re-occupied by Russia.³⁹

Russian attacks on civilian infrastructure and Ukrainian enterprises as well as serious logistical difficulties and the collapse of foreign trade as a result of ongoing military operations are having a negative impact on the labour market. Unemployment has risen sharply in Ukraine. According to calculations by the National Bank of Ukraine, the unem-

³⁹ B. Jensen, *Crippling civilian infrastructure has long been part of Russian generals' playbook – Putin is merely expanding that approach*, "The Conversation", 14 October 2022.

ployment rate in Ukraine was 35% in July 2022. However, it can be expected that in areas near the front line and those destroyed by the Russian occupation, the unemployment rate is much higher. In addition, Russian aggression has contributed to a decline in wages. According to the Bank's calculations, nominal earnings fell by 12% in 2022. However, the real decline was 27%.⁴⁰

A serious problem is also the persistently high inflation, which, according to the calculations of the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, exceeded 22.2% per annum in July 2022.⁴¹ However, the challenge is not only the increase in prices, but also the decreasing availability of some imported goods, e.g. drugs, which is a consequence of the protracted war. The difficult economic situation combined with difficult living conditions and fears for one's life may contribute to an increase in the scale of forced migrations, including trips abroad, in the coming months.

In this context, the Ukrainian diasporas in Europe and North America will be of great importance, as they may facilitate and reduce the possible costs of forced migration abroad. The migration preferences of Ukrainians, observed over the last 10 years, are also important for understanding their response to forced migration. With this in mind,

⁴⁰ Національний банк України, *Інфляційний звіт. Липень 2022 р.*, Київ 2022, рр. 2-30.

⁴¹ Державна служба статистики України, *Експрес-випуск*, Київ 2022, р. 1.

it should be expected that the popularity of migration to Poland, Germany, Spain and Italy will increase. However, Poland will remain the most popular destination, largely due to its geographical and cultural proximity, which makes learning the language and integrating into the host society relatively effortless.⁴²

The failure of mobilisation in the Russian Federation and further advances by the Ukrainian army in the east and south of Ukraine may stop population movements and increase the scale of returns to the liberated territories. However, the lack of electricity, water and heat supplies in war-torn areas may be a problem, which may slow down this process. Difficult weather conditions, especially in winter, may increase the scale of forced migration and the number of people requiring humanitarian assistance.

⁴² A. Szabaciuk, *Znaczenie imigracji zarobkowej...* (*The importance of economic immigration...*).

4. **Forced migrations from the Russian Federation**

The neo-imperial policy of the Russian Federation is having a significant impact on the demographic situation of the post-Soviet area. This policy also conditions the demographic processes in Russia itself and stimulates mass forced migration from this country. This is all the more important as Russia has been struggling with the problem of depopulation in recent decades. This problem was partly overcome thanks to mass economic immigration from the CIS countries. However, this trend did not last long. A negative demographic balance has been observed since 2018, which was further deepened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to data provided by the Federal Service for State Statistics (Rosstat), the natural population decrease in the Russian Federation in 2020 amounted to 702,100 people compared to 317,200 people in 2019.⁴³ Such a rapid acceleration of the depopulation process can be explained primarily by a significant increase in excess mortality.

The COVID-19 pandemic also had a negative impact on the situation of economic migrants, some of whom, as a consequence of the introduction of COVID-19 restrictions and the temporary freezing of the economy, were left without a livelihood or money to pay for legal employment permits or to return to their countries of origin. This problem was important because, according to the Rosstat's surveys, 168,000 Russian enterprises and 1.5 million households employed immigrants in 2019. In this situation, some economic migrants decided to return home. According to the calculations of Dmitry Poletaev and Andrei Korobkov, in May 2021, 2.68 million migrants from the CIS worked in Russia. This was 30% less than in May 2020 and 38% less than in May 2019. In addition, the condition of about 68% of migrant families deteriorated.⁴⁴

⁴³ П. А. Смелов (ed.), *Демографический ежегодник России*, Росстат, Москва 2021, p. 16.

⁴⁴ Д. В. Полетаев, А. Коробков, *Международная миграция в эпоху пандемии: разрыв связей, денежные переводы и мигрантофобия*, Фонд развития и поддержки Международного дискуссионного клуба «Валдай», Москва 2021, p. 9.

This situation was primarily a consequence of a decrease in the amount of financial transfers to migrant families in their countries of origin. According to estimates by Vladimir Mukomel and Mikhail Denisenko, the amount of financial transfers could have fallen by as much as 30%. However, it should be emphasized that the difficult living situation in most CIS countries and problems with finding a permanent and well-paid job continue to encourage residents of the post-Soviet countries to migrate to the Russian Federation for work. From the point of view of the majority of citizens of Central Asian countries, economic migration to Russia remains practically the only chance for a decent life. Currently, they do not have real opportunities to diversify the directions of economic migration, as is the case with citizens of Eastern European countries, who more and more often decide to leave for the European Union.⁴⁵

A factor that may significantly determine the scale of economic migration to Russia is currently the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. However, it is too early to state unequivocally whether the war against Ukraine will stimulate economic migration from the CIS countries or whether it will be a stimulus that will inhibit economic migration to Russia.

⁴⁵ М. Б. Денисенко, В. И. Мукомель, *Трудовая миграция в России в период коронавирусной пандемии*, "Демографическое Обозрение" 2020, vol. 7, no. 3, p. 102.

There is no doubt, however, that Russia's decision to launch a new phase of aggression against Ukraine has forced some citizens of the Russian Federation to go abroad. The reasons for their decision to emigrate vary. As early as 24 February 2022, some people feared that they would be mobilised into the Russian army and sent to the front line. They did not believe the authorities' assurances that no general mobilisation was planned. Other people, e.g. IT specialists, engineers, scientists or high-end specialists who knew that they would find a job abroad, decided to emigrate, fearing the economic crisis and isolation of the Russian Federation and fearing that it would be difficult for them to emigrate in the future. Some businesspeople have owned real estate and businesses abroad for a long time, and they have been transferring their income there. Famous intellectuals and show-business celebrities also decided to emigrate, e.g. Alla Pugacheva with her husband Maxim Galkin, Ksenia Sobchak, Valery Leontiev, Ivan Urgant and Semyon Slepakov. Some of them openly criticised the decision to attack Ukraine.

NGO activists (see closure of the Carnegie Moscow Center) and independent media journalists have also decided to leave Russia. Some of them have continued their work abroad, refusing to accept censorship and restrictions on the freedom of speech. *Novaya Gazeta* suspended its operations in Russia and resumed publishing in Latvia in May 2022. A newspaper is published there under the title *Novaya Gazeta Europe*. Also, a web portal of the same name has

been launched, where articles by former editorial staff and new collaborators are published. The situation was similar with the “Dozhd” online TV channel, which was forced to suspend its operations in March 2022. The channel resumed its operations in Latvia in July 2022. A similar situation took place with the popular news website “Meduza”, blocked by Roskomnadzor, the Russian media regulator. The website was relaunched after the editorial office moved to Latvia.

The exodus of independent media has been mainly due to the legal changes approved by Vladimir Putin on 4 March 2022. According to these regulations, journalists can face up to 15 years in prison for spreading “false” information about the Russian armed forces or for allegedly calling for the imposition of sanctions on Russia. Also, the BBC’s Russian-language news service, Bloomberg, Radio Svoboda and the Russian section of Deutsche Welle, among others, ended their operations in Russia fearing penalties and as a result of Roskomnadzor’s warnings. In Russia, access to the Nas-toyashcheye Vremya internet TV and the Mediazona website is also blocked.⁴⁶ Impeding access to independent media and Western social media sites (e.g. Facebook) was an attempt to prevent access to reliable information on the course of the war and its consequences. Currently, in Russia, access to blocked content is possible only through special brows-

⁴⁶ *Журналисты и западные медиа покидают Россию*, Голос Америки, 29 September 2022, <https://www.golosameriki.com/a/6474219.html> [11.10.2022].

ers that allow the use of a VPN or by the use of dedicated applications or computer programs.

It is worth noting that emigration from the Russian Federation encompasses more than just the above-mentioned categories of people. Some of those who decided to emigrate had been considering working abroad for a long time, and the outbreak of the war was only a factor that accelerated the implementation of these plans. Similar phenomena have often been observed in the last three decades since the decomposition of the Soviet Union. Migrations were often associated with economic and political crises. Their culmination took place in the 1990s.⁴⁷ However, increased migration activity could also be observed after the financial crisis of 2008 and as a result of the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine in 2014. The new stage of Russia's war against Ukraine after 24 February 2022 is a major factor in shaping migration flows from the Russian Federation.

According to Julia Florinska's calculations, more than 100,000 people decided to leave the Russian Federation after the aggression against Ukraine in February 2022. If we take into account the people who were abroad at the time and did not decide to return, the number could be as high as 150,000. The vast majority left the country within the first two weeks of the start of the new phase of the Russian

⁴⁷ А. де Танги, *Великая миграция. Россия и россияне после падения железного занавеса*, Москва 2012.

war against Ukraine (24 February to 3 March 2022). Approximately 25,000 people may have left for Georgia, while about 30,000 to 50,000 may have departed for Armenia, and around 15,000 for Israel.⁴⁸ According to Rosstat's calculations, as of the beginning of September 2022, 419,000 people left Russia in 2022 – twice as many as the year before.⁴⁹ However, some of them returned, unable to find employment abroad.

The largest wave of emigration, involving mainly young men, is a consequence of the announcement of “partial” mobilisation in Russia on 21 September 2022. Although Putin made clear in his speech that the army would first recruit reservists and people with military training who have skills useful from the point of view of the army, the mobilisation process so far and reports from independent Russian media cast doubt on these claims. Another cause for concern is the secrecy of Point 7 of the mobilisation decree, which, according to Dmitry Peskov, the spokesman for the Russian president, specifies the number of conscripts (300,000 people) and the distribution of mobilisation quotas by region. Some citizens fear that the authorities are not telling the whole truth and that in fact a covert general mobilisation is

⁴⁸ *Сколько людей уехало из России из-за войны? Они уже никогда не вернуться? Можно ли это считать очередной волной эмиграции?*, Meduza, 29 September 2022, <https://meduza.io/feature/2022/05/07/skolko-lyudey-uehalo-iz-rossii-iz-za-voyny-oni-uzhe-nikogda-ne-vernutsya-mozhno-li-eto-schitat-ocherednoy-volnoy-emigratsii> [6.10.2022].

⁴⁹ *Россию после 21 сентября покинули около 700 000 граждан*, “Forbes”, 4 October 2022 [6.10.2022].

being carried out. Another problem may be the ethnic composition of the recruited soldiers, i.e. conscripting a much larger number of representatives of ethnic and national minorities to the war.⁵⁰

Fear of mobilisation forced tens of thousands of people to leave the Russian Federation. According to information collected by the Federal Security Service and published by *Novaya Gazeta Europe*, over 260,000 people have already gone abroad. Most of them went to Kazakhstan. Georgia is also a popular destination.⁵¹ Data obtained by *Forbes* from the administration of the Russian Federation's president suggest that 600,00 to 700,000 people may have left Russia. (Dmitry Peskov questioned these calculations.) According to the authorities of Kazakhstan and Armenia, 200,000 and 80,000 people, respectively, have relocated to these countries. Some European Union countries, including Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland and Poland have restricted entry to their countries for Russian citizens.

Vladislav Inozemtsev, a well-known Russian economist, claims that the announcement of the mobilisation by the Russian authorities will have disastrous consequences for

⁵⁰ A. Szabaciuk, *Orędzie Władimira Putina z 21 września 2022 r. i jego znaczenie (Vladimir Putin's speech of 21 September 2022 and its meaning)*, "Komentarze IEŚ" 2022, no. 692.

⁵¹ *Своим исходом. Десятки тысяч россиян пытаются сбежать от войны через границы сопредельных стран*, "Новая Газета. Европа" 2022, <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2022/09/28/svoim-iskhodom> [30.09.2022].

the country's economy. The mass emigration of young and well-educated people, combined with the sending of hundreds of thousands of people to the Ukrainian front line, will cause an unprecedented recession. According to his forecasts, the expected decline in Russia's GDP may exceed 10% this year. The economic downturn will also be a consequence of mass evasion of mobilisation. The increasing practice of mobilising conscripts at the workplace, rather than at their place of residence, may induce millions of people to avoid going to work so as not to be drafted into the army. In his opinion, this may result in a temporary outflow of three to four million people from the labour market. As a consequence, this practice, combined with Western sanctions, will result in a significant decrease in the state's income and will significantly lower the standard of living of the average Russian.⁵² In the long term, this may stimulate further emigration from the Russian Federation.

⁵² В. Л. Иноземцев, *Финальный отчет путинской эпохи. Владислав Иноземцев – о последствиях мобилизации для экономики и Кремля*, "The Insider", <https://theins.ru/opinions/inozemtsev/255405> [30.09.2022].

Conclusions

Mass forced migration in Eastern Europe after 2020 has radically changed the face of the region – millions of people have been forced to leave as a result of violations of fundamental human rights, political repression, Russian aggression and the deepening economic downturn as a consequence of successive packages of sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation and Belarus. The common denominator with regard to these population movements was the Russian Federation's neo-imperial policy aimed at restoring Russia's dominant position in Eastern Europe by, among other things, stopping the pro-Western aspirations of the countries in the region

and, consequently, remodelling the international order and gaining the status of a global power and becoming one of the key actors in the multipolar system.

Preventing the emergence of an alternative to the United Russia party and Vladimir Putin, the Russian authorities systematically persecute the pro-democratic opposition and even murder political critics and potential opponents in the presidential election. The Russian Federation also supports the Lukashenko regime, shoring up its political position after the rigged presidential election in August 2020 through brutal and massive repression. Russia helped Lukashenko by declaring that security forces would be sent to Belarus if the situation escalated and by sending Russian political propaganda specialists at a critical moment during the protests, thus making Belarus politically and economically dependent on Russia. Similar measures, although counter-productive, were attempted against Moldova. The victory of Moldovan president Maia Sandu's pro-Western political group significantly weakened Russian influence in that country.

However, the key place in Russia's plans for the region was occupied by Ukraine, a country with a strategic location, a significant population potential and great economic importance, especially for food security. Since 2014, the authorities at the Kremlin have not ceased in their efforts to subjugate Ukraine, using a whole range of political, economic, cultural and military instruments. Of course, Russian pressure on Ukraine has been visible practically since the

collapse of the Soviet Union, but the annexation of Crimea and the destabilisation of the Donbas have started a completely new stage in the Kremlin's aggressive policy towards Ukraine. The rhetoric present in President Vladimir Putin's speeches, undermining the rights of Ukraine as a sovereign state entity and denying Ukrainians the right to national identity, proves that the Russian authorities think about Ukraine and Belarus in terms of the nineteenth-century nationalist doctrine of the triune Russian nation.

The annexation of Crimea and Russia's instigation of artificial separatism in the Donbas did not bring the expected results. Ukraine did not bow to Russian pressure. After the trade war, it shifted its exports to the European market and found an alternative to Russian hydrocarbon raw materials. It has also started talks about rapprochement with the North Atlantic Alliance and the European Union. The talks resulted in the signing of the Association Agreement between the European Union and Ukraine (2017). Ukraine was also granted NATO Enhanced Opportunities Partner status (2020).

The new phase of Russian aggression, which began on 24 February 2022, resulted from the failure of the Kremlin's previous policy towards Ukraine, which did not make Ukraine subordinate but actually accelerated its integration with the Western structures. In addition, the effect of this policy was the painful sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation. The war, which was supposed to quickly decide

the fate of Ukraine, has been going on for over nine months at the time of writing and has brought Russia huge losses of military personnel and equipment. The war has also revealed all the weaknesses of the Russian army and the moral degeneration of Vladimir Putin and his closest entourage. Systematic attacks on civilian targets and critical infrastructure conducted by the Russians during the first days of the war did not break the morale of the Ukrainians. The same is true when considering the war crimes committed by the Russian army against civilians. The repeated threat of using nuclear weapons did not persuade Ukraine to capitulate either. This threat also did not stop the allies from continuing to provide humanitarian, financial and military support.

Russia's attempt to subjugate Ukraine has resulted in the drama of millions of people being forced to leave their homes in search of a safe haven. In addition, the Russians use the methods of the Stalinist era in the occupied territories. They persecute civilians, forcibly displace them deep into Russia and destroy all traces confirming that given areas belong to Ukraine. It is also worth noting that, unlike most European countries, Russia has not offered the Ukrainians temporary protection; although, according to Russian data, the largest group of war refugees has ended up there. On the other hand, by a decree of 11 July 2022, Vladimir Putin extended the simplified naturalisation procedure, which had up until

that time been applicable to residents of the Donbas, to all citizens of Ukraine.⁵³

Since 2014, Ukrainians have been one of the largest groups of foreigners applying for Russian citizenship. Russian citizenship was granted to 24,141 people in 2014, 67,400 in 2015, 78,459 in 2016, 85,000 in 2017, 270,301 in 2018, 498,076 in 2019, 409,564 in 2020 and 376,875 in 2021. This gives a total of over 1.8 million people.⁵⁴ Most often, the procedure involved residents of the Donbas and Ukrainians who decided to move to Russia. In this way, Russia strengthened itself in the Donbas and prepared the ground for future annexations. Currently, it is pursuing a similar policy in the occupied areas of the Kherson oblast and the Zaporizhzhia oblast.

The effective defence of Ukraine, the high morale of the society and of the army have proved that the Ukrainians know exactly what they are fighting for and are ready to pay a high price for victory. They cannot afford to fail, because the collapse of Ukraine will result in the final subordination of Belarus to Russia, and in the future also the subordination of Moldova, which will have a negative impact on the geostrategic situation in Central Europe.

Mass forced migration of the inhabitants of the Russian Federation and Belarus proves that some of them do not

⁵³ *Putin decree gives all Ukrainians path to Russian citizenship*, Reuters, 11 July 2022.

⁵⁴ Author's own calculations based on data of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation.

agree to the neo-imperial policy of the decision-making centre at the Kremlin. In Russia itself, the scale of forced migration in 2022 is unprecedented. According to various estimates, the migration likely involved 500,000 to a million people. The ongoing war may have a significant impact on the population in the region, which could result in forced migration and affect the scale of potential returns. It will also exacerbate the depopulation of Ukraine and the Russian Federation, which have been strongly affected by natural population decreases in recent decades.

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Andrzej Szabaciuk **Senior Analyst at the Eastern Europe Team**

Historian and political scientist. PhD in History (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University). Assistant Professor at the Department of Theory of Politics and Eastern Studies of the Institute of Political Science and Public Administration of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (KUL). Intern at the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences (2013) and at the Ukrainian Catholic University (2013). Visiting fellow at the Nanovic Institute for European Studies at the University of Notre Dame in the United States (2019). Research interests: international relations in the post-Soviet area, problems of security in the Eastern Europe region, migration policy, ethnic policy and religious policy, the situation of national and religious minorities in the East and the role of the Catholic Church in the socio-political life of the former Eastern Bloc countries.

The purpose of the study is to analyse the conditions, scale, significance and future development of forced migration in Eastern Europe after 2020 as well as the characteristics of the phenomenon and its significance from the perspective of the Central-Eastern Europe region and in supra-regional terms. The key conditions, geography, scale and future development of the phenomenon analysed in the course of the research are discussed. The migrations forced by the persecution of the Belarusian opposition by the Lukashenko regime and the migrations related to the transfer of people from the Middle East and Africa through the Polish-Belarusian, Belarusian-Lithuanian and Belarusian-Latvian borders are shown. The forced migration from Russia after the aggression against Ukraine and the so-called “partial” mobilisation as well as the migrations within and out of Ukraine caused by the Russian aggression are characterised.

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