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Facing the challenge of hospitality: Ukrainian refugees and local policy in a less developed region

ALINA ŻRÓBEK-RÓŻAŃSKA

corresponding author

University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Faculty of Geoengineering, Institute of Spatial Management and Geography, ul. Prawocheńskiego 15, 10-720 Olsztyn, Poland


✉ alina.zrobek@uwm.edu.pl

 orcid.org/0000-0003-1669-4935

ELŻBIETA ZYSK

University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Faculty of Geoengineering, Institute of Spatial Management and Geography, Poland

✉ elzbieta.zysk@uwm.edu.pl

 orcid.org/0000-0002-2793-6154

KATARZYNA PAWLEWICZ

University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Faculty of Geoengineering, Institute of Spatial Management and Geography, Poland


✉ katarzyna.pawlewicz@uwm.edu.pl

 orcid.org/0000-0002-1804-9596

ANNA ŻRÓBEK-SOKOLNIK

University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Faculty of Geoengineering, Institute of Spatial Management and Geography, Poland

✉ a.zrobeksokolnik@uwm.edu.pl

 orcid.org/0000-0001-5472-6980



Abstract

Motivation: Since the beginning of the war, Poland has welcomed more than 1.5 million Ukrainian refugees. This new reality has put pressure on local authorities, especially those managing less developed, poorer regions with less experience in receiving immigrants, as they faced the sudden urge to accommodate the needs of these new arrivals.

Aim: This article aims to present the profile, needs, and potential of people who have found refuge in less developed areas (i.e., Warmia and Mazury). It helps to anticipate and understand Ukrainian migration — as the influx of refugees has long-term effects, requiring local authorities to take action, i.e., to ensure the availability of social services.

Integrating thousands of refugees requires careful planning, developed infrastructure, and funds. It is also worth considering the benefits of the potential of new residents. Another purpose is to share objective knowledge on the effects of the ongoing war.

Results: Through the research, it has been possible to obtain a great deal of information about people who found refuge in a less attractive area for migration. Profile of the immigrant was created, and the needs in terms of social infrastructure and the set of advantages that immigrants can offer on the labor market were described.

Keywords: refugees; migration; local policy; Ukraine
JEL: F22; H12; H75; J61

1. Introduction

Since 24 February 2022, more than 13 million people have been forced to leave their homes and properties in Ukraine. Nearly 8 million people have emigrated from Ukraine and embarked on the difficult life of refugees, finding refuge across Europe. More than 5 million people have undertaken internal migration within their country's borders (UNHCR 2023). The migration is a response to the threat to life from the ongoing war. The threat of war affects all social and economic groups. It affects people of all ages, educational levels, and family situations. It is characterized by uncertainty — one does not know how long it will last and how much it will deprive people of their precious possessions. The prospects of returning home shortly are dimmed by continued warfare, insecurity, and destruction in home regions. Saving lives and coping with new and difficult refugee circumstances is a challenge several million people have faced in a brief period.

When analyzing the problem of refugees, it should also be noted that the consequences are also felt by those living in and managing the areas where people fleeing the horrors of war arrive. The sudden and unexpected influx of new residents requires effectively managing the resources allocated to help them. In the first instance, the basic needs of housing, food, clothing, and the provision of primary medical and psychological care must be met. Secondly, it is essential to enable economic independence through labor market regulation and support and to provide preschool care and primary education for younger children. Many of these tasks are carried out at the local level. This is a tough challenge for less developed regions with lower migration attractiveness and less reception experience.



To meet this challenge effectively, authorities, local governments, and social and charity organizations should have as much information as possible about the people they direct their various aid measures. Lack of such knowledge results in the poorer matching of the offered assistance to the actual needs and thus may lead to wasting financial and material resources, as and the time and effort of the people involved in assisting. It can also lead to resources running out too quickly.

The study's results presented in this article were to profile the needs and potential of people who found refuge from the effects of the ongoing war in a region with lower migration attractiveness. Due to the existing gap in knowledge about refugees who arrived in economically less developed areas, the study was conducted in the Warmia-Masuria voivodeship. It was assumed that the study's outcome would assist in understanding the process of war migration to places less attractive for migration. In turn, the broadened knowledge will contribute to more effective planning and allocation of resources for delivering genuine assistance. In addition, the study results have identified the potential benefits of targeting the advantages of new residents and supplementing objective knowledge of the effects of the ongoing war.

The study described in this article was primarily qualitative. Adapting assistance to actual needs requires getting to know the people being assisted. Identifying the characteristics of people who found shelter in the Warmia and Mazury region required selecting an appropriate research method. It was decided to use direct methods — an interview and a questionnaire. The research was conducted in person — the respondents could ask questions and clarify any ambiguities on the spot. In the case of respondents living in collective accommodation, the survey was preceded by a face-to-face interview with persons responsible for organizing support for refugees in these centers.

As a result of the study, much important information was gained. Firstly, it was established why war migrants, fleeing the terror of the war taking place in Ukraine, decided to come and live in the Warmia-Masuria voivodeship. Secondly, information was collected on the respondents to create a profile of an immigrant arriving there. Thirdly, new residents' needs regarding access to social services and their plans for the near future concerning their activity in the labor market were found. Finally, information was gathered on the newcomers' potential to influence the region's socio-economic development positively.

2. Literature review

The decision to change one's residence and emigrate outside own country is influenced by many factors, including economic, political, environmental, social, and cultural factors. Researchers from various fields analyze the population movement process. The predominant research is on populations seeking higher-income jobs abroad (after considering the costs of changing jobs) and improved living conditions (Brezis & Krugman, 1996; Burzyński et al.,

2018; Yakita, 2021). Beyond that, scholars study the migration process in terms of socio-economic, spatial, demographic, historical, or climatic aspects (Curran & Meijer-Irons, 2014). Signed international agreements facilitating the movement of people have diversified the reasons and settlement intentions, opening up migration opportunities to a broader group of people (Burrell, 2010; Krings et al., 2013). Among the reasons for migration are also political reasons — people are fleeing individual repression (Orla-Bukowska, 2006), terrorism (Fröhlich, 2016; Telford, 2023), and mass repression caused by the ongoing war in their homeland (Bocquého et al., 2023; Dustmann et al., 2017). In recent years, the number of people crossing international borders to flee persecution, war, or environmental disasters has been at an all-time high worldwide and is steadily increasing (Ortlieb & Knappert, 2023).

By moving, migrants create several externalities. Long-term migrants transform their destinations' physical and social space by introducing their lifestyles and values. Prominent examples include Little Odessa or Chinatown in New York, X-Berg in Berlin, Little India in London, and Huedin in Romania. In the case of migration caused by fleeing war, the length of stay of migrants in the host country varies, but so do the effects of externalities. Every immigration marks an influx of people with their needs, values, potentials, and problems. In the initial phase of immigration, a reflex of sympathy is triggered, which can turn into fatigue or even hostility (Nowosielska, 2022). Host country institutions and local actors often need to read more carefully and pay attention to the needs of newcomers, and instead of helping, they create dependency or exclusion (Ghorashi, 2005). Significant arrivals of refugees can lead to potential tensions with host communities, particularly if refugees are viewed as competing for limited material resources and crowding out public services (Zhou et al., 2023). Migrants' inflow has been associated with increased expenditures spent on asylum policies. Consequently, it can be concluded that countries receiving migrants face a considerable challenge related, on the one hand, to the appropriate allocation of financial resources so that they are spent on activities that are a natural response to correctly identified needs and, on the other hand, so that the assistance offered does not arouse social controversy and resentment towards refugees sheltering in the host country. This is notable given the evidence that successful refugee integration positively affects society (Hainmueller et al., 2015).

This article raises another issue. Most studies on refugee migration focus on the scale of an entire country, e.g., Uganda (Zhou et al., 2023), Finland (Toivonen, 2023), Ghana (Abdullah et al., 2023), South Korea (Kim et al., 2023), Turkey (Demirci & Kirdar, 2023) or Poland (Górny & Kaczmarczyk, 2018). Comparative studies between countries are also undertaken, e.g., Austria, Germany, and Sweden (Konle-Seidl, 2018), Sweden, and Denmark (Andersson Joona & Datta Gupta, 2023). To a lesser extent, knowledge of immigration to large cities is developed (Mozetič, 2022). However, it is worth mentioning that the practical handling of refugees is primarily up to local au-

thorities, local communities, and local NGOs, as refugees are new residents in local communities.

The added value of the research is to propose a transition to a different scale — a region, considering its degree of migration attractiveness and its experience in receiving and handling migrants. Warmia-Masuria voivodeship was chosen, which on the one hand, has the most numerous, historically based Ukrainian diaspora in Poland, and on the other hand, attracts migrants to a low degree due to its location and socio-economic development. Due to the selection of the area, our approach is distinctive. We see it as an essential contribution to the literature on refugees and local policy integration at a time when more research attention is paid to the national or global context. Our paper makes several contributions to the existing scholarship on the Ukrainian refugees' presence in the local communities. First, we add to the literature on motives leading to choosing a less attractive region as a place of destination. Second, we supplement existing knowledge of the immigrants themselves and the real needs that involve the resources of local authorities. We highlight the demographic structure of the refugees — age, gender, and family situation. Third, our research provides knowledge of the potential of refugees that, if properly targeted, could contribute to a less developed region.

3. Methods

Data on the Warmia-Masuria voivodeship, allowing it to determine its attractiveness for migration and to present it in comparison with other regions of Poland, were obtained from the Local Data Bank of the Central Statistical Office.

Information relating to refugees was collected in two ways: indirectly through interviews with persons managing assistance in places of group accommodation for refugees (CARITAS Archdiocesan Charity Centre of the Warmia Archdiocese in Rybaki, Leisure Centre Łańsk, Higher Theological Seminary of the Warmia Metropolis Hosianum) and directly through questionnaires and interviews with refugees. Statistical data on the number of refugees in individual poviats comes from the Poland's Data Portal (2023).

The study was based on an attempt to verify the following hypotheses:

1. Warmia-Masuria voivodeship is a region of low migration attractiveness.
2. Region of low migratory attractiveness attracts refugees through the availability of accommodation places.
3. Women and children predominate among immigrants, which generates an increased need for social services.
4. Immigrants represent the whole range of professional potential and can positively complement the human capital of a less developed region with the correct vocational orientation.

To determine the degree of migratory attractiveness of Warmia-Masuria voivodeship, data was collected on:

- registrations from abroad,
- the balance of foreign migration,
- registered unemployment rate,
- average gross monthly remuneration in the enterprise sector.

For data from points 1–3, an average of 5 years (2017–2021) was calculated, while data from point 4 concerned 2021, i.e., immediately preceding the Russian invasion. A migration attractiveness index was calculated and averaged over 2017–2021. This is the relationship between migration balance and turnover. The value of the index is in the range $<-1, +1>$, with negative values indicating an area with an outflow of residents and positive values for an area with an inflow.

The interviews were conducted using the face-to-face method. They were partly categorized and individual. The researchers had a pre-prepared set of questions; however, the questions were made more specific during the interview. The collection of questions was expanded with further questions leading to a better understanding of the refugees' stories and characteristics.

The survey questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part contained 16 questions about the migration process, while the second part contained 13 questions about the respondents. The questions in the first part were multiple-choice questions with matching weights on a 5-point scale and single-choice. A validity index, calculated using the following formula, was used in the analysis of the responses¹:

$$W = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^k n_i w_i}{kN}, \quad (1)$$

where: W — importance index; i — rating index; n_i — number of indications of a given factor in the i -th place; k — maximum rating on a scale from 1 to k (indicating the order of the elements meant assigning them ratings in reverse order); N — number of respondents who answered the question; w_i — rating corresponding to the place of factor i .

In the second part, on the other hand, the questions were exclusively single-choice. Most of the questions included possibly giving one's answer outside the proposed ones ("Other. What?"). The questionnaires were prepared in Ukrainian and Russian. The survey was conducted personally by the authors of this study. The respondents chose a convenient language version and then filled in the questionnaires in the presence of the researchers, which enabled questions to be asked and ambiguities to be clarified on an ongoing basis. The questionnaires were conducted among the following people: those attending Polish language courses organized by UWM staff, those using the helpdesk at the Greek Catholic Church in Olsztyn, those living in centers in Rybaki and Łańsk and the seminary, and those using UWM sports facilities. A total

¹ The importance index used corresponds to the solution proposed by Karaszewski and Sudoł (1997, pp. 17–18).

of 202 completed questionnaires were obtained. The direct survey also allowed for face-to-face interviews with respondents, which provided additional information. In terms of area, the survey covered the city of Olsztyn and olsztyński powiat — the powiats which accepted the most significant number of refugees from Ukraine in Warmia-Masuria voivodeship (Poland's Data Portal, 2023).

Among the strengths of the chosen research method was direct contact with respondents, which made it possible to clarify inaccuracies and prevented misunderstanding of survey questions. In addition, it enabled candid conversations (the researchers were able to communicate in Russian and Ukrainian), which deepened the knowledge and supplemented the picture of the refugees with much additional information. On the other hand, however, the method used was very time-consuming and required the time of several people — the researchers traveled to the respondents' places of residence and spent several hours surveying and interviewing them. As a result, however, it can be assumed that this is the only survey in Poland conducted in such direct contact with respondents.

4. Results

4.1. Verification of the first hypothesis (positive)

The Warmia-Masuria voivodeship is located in north-eastern Poland. This is a disadvantageous location for refugees from Ukraine, as the region directly borders Russia (Kaliningrad Oblast). The area attracted few immigrants from other countries in the years before the hostilities in Ukraine (Table 1).

A similar picture emerged after calculating the foreign migration balance; the average for this voivodeship was -107 , giving it the 14th place in the ranking of Polish voivodeships and the 16th place after calculating the ratio per 1000 inhabitants. The reasons for this can be seen, among other things, in the relatively poor labor market condition, which disincentives the inflow of economic migrants (Chart 1 and Chart 2).

To complete the picture of the voivodeship's migration position, the Migration Attractiveness Index, which was -0.10 , ranked the region 14th in the ranking (for comparison, the Mazovia voivodeship achieved a value of 0.67 and Poland 0.15).

4.2. Verification of the second hypothesis (positive)

The war in Ukraine began on 24 February 2022. On that day, the first groups of people started to cross the Ukrainian-Polish border and seek refuge on Polish territory. According to face-to-face interviews with those managing the refugee sites, there was no interest in the Warmia-Masuria voivodeship until mid-March — the prepared areas initially remained unoccupied. Then refugees were gradually admitted to them. The refugee survey confirms this.

The highest importance rating was given to the region's accommodation and well-organized assistance availability (Table 2). This response coincides with individual responses — re-respondents told us they were afraid to come to Warmia and Mazury due to its proximity to the border but were directed here by employees of refugee assistance points (there were no places available in larger Polish cities). None of the persons interviewed chose this region, so it can be assumed that such situations occurred in a minority of cases. In addition, 80% of those polled declared that they had come to the voivodeship directly from a border crossing, and 20% admitted that they had first tried to find shelter in larger cities (Warsaw was mentioned, among others). Still, the lack of accommodation made them finally come to Warmia and Mazury.

4.3. Verification of the third hypothesis (positive)

The respondents were also surveyed demographically. As a result, a profile of a person who found refuge from war in the Warmia-Masuria voivodeship was created (Scheme 1). An average refugee is a person of the female sex (95% of respondents) of productive age (73%) with 1 or 2 children (52%). They came to Warmia and Mazury from all regions of Ukraine (the spatial distribution of the place of their home towns turned out to be very different), mainly from a large or medium city (80%). They have secondary or higher education (74%) but need a better command of foreign languages (31% declared knowledge of Polish, 24% of English, and 1% of German). They worked in various professions in their hometown, among which services and trade were predominant.

Due to their family situation, average refugees benefit from various social services provided by state and local government entities, associations, and foundations. Analyzing accommodation needs, it was noted that in the surveyed sample, almost half (45%) of the people used centers run by a church or governmental/ local governmental organizations, and 16% used unpaid hospitality with strangers (according to the Prime Minister's Decree of 16 March 2022, those hosting refugees from Ukraine could apply for subsidies). One in five refugees rented a flat or room for a fee (20%), and the remaining 18% used the hospitality of friends or relatives.

The second need addressed by local authorities was the provision of access to preschool and school education. Respondents declared that due to the children staying with them, they use these services to the extent: of 15% from preschool care, 22% from primary school services, and 9% from secondary school services. In addition, 12% of respondents reported that their children used online learning, 8% used home education, and 0.5% used special schooling. The remaining respondents did not use education services because their children were of an age that was not compulsory for education or because they did not have children.

Another service provided by local governments was related to mobility. Local authorities introduced a temporary fee waiver for refugees using public

transport. In the sample, 83% said they used it, and 8% used coaches organized by the municipality or organizations.

The survey also asked about using other services and benefits (Chart 3). More than half declared they used help desks for Ukrainian citizens. These included a point run by the provincial governor, the Greek Catholic Church, and CARI-TAS of the Warmian Archdiocese. Also, more than half used health care organized by local authorities in cooperation with municipal health centers.

One in three people used a social assistance center and went to associations and foundations, including non-governmental ones, for help. Only 4% of respondents responded negatively to whether they use organized social assistance and services. On the other hand, 100% admitted that they obtained a Personal Identification Number from a municipal office and used it due to financial benefits (e.g., 500+).

4.4. Verification of the fourth hypothesis (positive)

Refugees in their hometowns had a variety of occupations: 21% worked in public or private administration, 14% in the education sector, and 12% in commerce. In addition, they worked in health care, catering, and the beauty industry and ran their businesses (4% of respondents each). The surveyed group also included those with professions such as interior designer, aerial acrobatics trainer, ballet dancer, psychologist, cook, florist, and sportspeople. The survey asked them what plans they had for activity in the local labor market.

The vast majority (73%) declared they would like to take up a permanent or casual job, 9% intended to study, and 3% continued working remotely. Some people (15%) stated that they did not plan to take up a job (Chart 4). This group included people who hoped to return home quickly, mothers caring for infants, and a father caring for a disabled child.

Refugees were also asked about the type of work they would undertake. The predominant responses were trading (15%), casual profession (13%), office service (9%), and catering (8%). In addition, respondents would take up manual work and work in the education sector (7% each), and 4% could care for an older person.

5. Discussion

Research on the migration process agrees that migrants leave a place with inferior characteristics and go to an area with better living conditions. Migration undertaken because of war partly confirms this claim but contradicts it. If we look at the issue from the following point of view: a place subject to warfare is a worse place to live than a place with peace. Migration undertaken because of war is little different from migration undertaken for any other reason. However, let us look at the results presented in this article. A picture that contradicts these self-evident laws emerges — an educated woman with children abandons

her home and job in a large city and settles in a remote village in a region with low migration attractiveness, where there is little chance of taking up a position compatible with her qualifications and work experience. This situation is unprecedented and invites discussion and further research on this type of migration. This problem is relatively new in Polish literature and should be discussed in the future.

6. Conclusions

The study, the results of which are presented in this article, drew the following conclusions:

1. War forces people to flee to save their lives and health. The Russian invasion forced millions to leave Ukraine and find refuge abroad. The first refugees moved towards the major cities of Poland, where places to stay were quickly exhausted. Due to the lack of accommodation in more attractive locations, some people came to towns and villages in the Warmia-Masuria voivodeship.
2. Mostly educated women of working age with children, who before the war lived in medium-sized and large towns in Ukraine, working mainly in services and trade, came to Warmia and Mazury. Because of their family situation (children staying with them), they need access to social services such as education, health care, public transport, and financial support.
3. Most immigrants are ready to take up gainful employment during their stay in Poland. Their education and diverse work experience can fill the gaps in the local labor market. Some immigrants declare their willingness to take up casual work, which may be an opportunity for the region to supplement the workforce in less popular professions among native-born residents.

To meet the real needs of migrants and realize their potential for the benefit of the region, regional and local authorities should:

- provide a safe place to stay, adapted to the needs of mothers with children;
- enable mothers to become independent of financial support by taking up employment, which in turn requires:
 - assistance in learning the Polish language;
 - help in getting acquainted with labor and civil law in Poland;
 - mediation in finding a job;
 - the organization of courses and training to match their skills with the requirements of the labor market;
 - making places available for their children in local kindergartens and schools;
- mitigate potential conflicts between refugees and municipal residents by:
 - disseminating reliable information on the situation of refugees;
 - organizing integration activities.

The recommendations outlined above represent a significant challenge for local authorities and organizations, as they require the involvement of many people, a considerable amount of financial resources, social skills, and diplo-

macy. This is especially difficult in regions with little experience dealing with immigrants. The study found that while some refugees were assisted by an experienced institution (CARITAS Poland), most were cared for by organizations that spontaneously undertook this difficult task (e.g., the seminary).

The research results can serve organizations, whether governmental, local governmental, non-governmental, or private, assisting refugees. They can also contribute to mitigating labor market imperfections more effectively by filling its gaps with the potential of immigrants. A limitation of the present study is its limited territorial scope. The study covered the city of Olsztyn and olsztyński powiat. This area was chosen because of the most significant number of refugees in these districts in the Warmia-Masuria voivodeship. However, the results of surveys conducted in communities far from the regional capital may differ slightly. Therefore, it is planned to extend the study to other districts of the voivodeship. The authors hope that the insights in the publication will contribute to further action by local authorities in line with the OECD Global Forum idea of ‘Better policies for better lives.’

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Appendix

Table 1.
Registrations from abroad in voivodships, average 2017–2021 (Poland=100%)

Voivodship	Share
Mazovia	16
Małopolska	12
Lower Silesia	10
Silesia	10
Pomerania	7
Podkarpacie	6
Wielkopolska	6
West Pomerania	6
Lublin	5
Podlasie	4
Łódź	4
Kuyavia-Pomerania	4
Warmia-Masuria	3
Opole	3
Lubusz	3
Świętokrzyskie	2

Source: Own preparation based on Statistics Poland (2023).

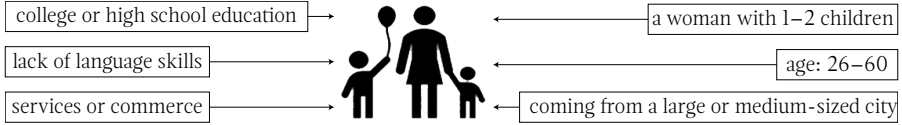
Table 2.
Reason for choosing Warmia-Masuria voivodeship as a place of refuge

Reason	Importance indicator
accommodation availability	0.60
well-organized assistance in the region	0.58
the choice was made spontaneously	0.43
advice from family/friends	0.40
I had no choice	0.29
invitation from friends in Poland	0.24
largest Ukrainian diaspora	0.20
the family who came before the war	0.18
the family who came during the war	0.11
previous stay in Warmia and Mazury	0.09
other (which ones?)	0.00

Source: Own preparation.

Scheme 1.

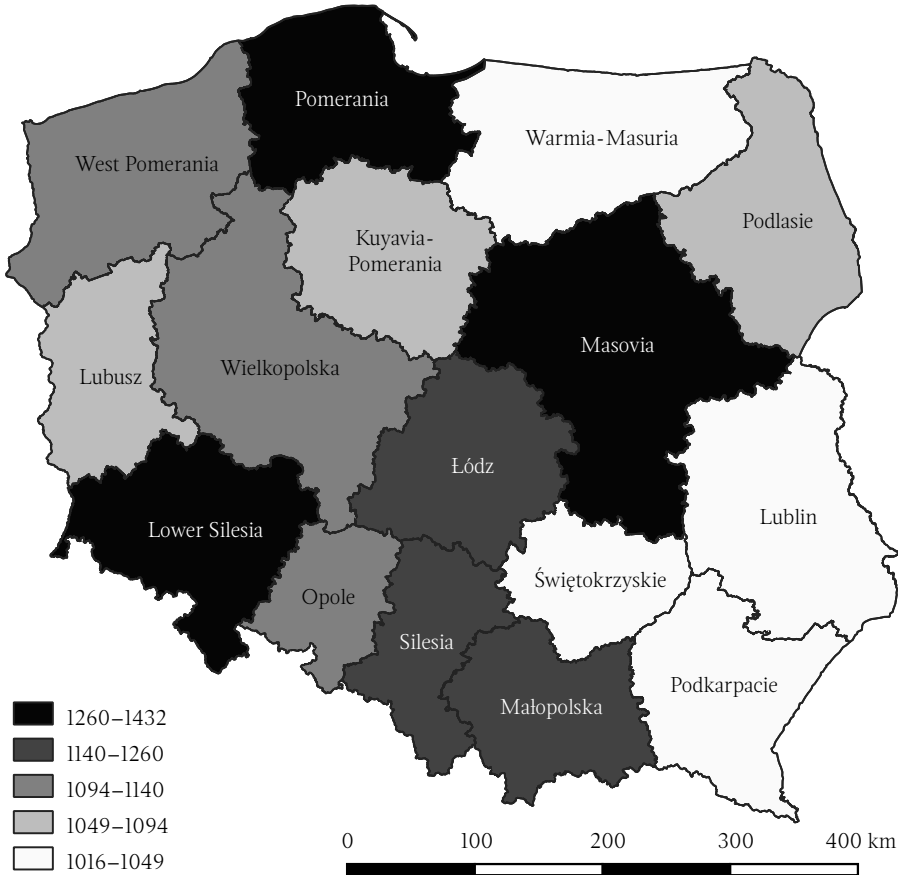
Profile of an average refugee from Ukraine who found refuge in the Warmia-Masuria voivodeship



Source: Own preparation.

Chart 1.

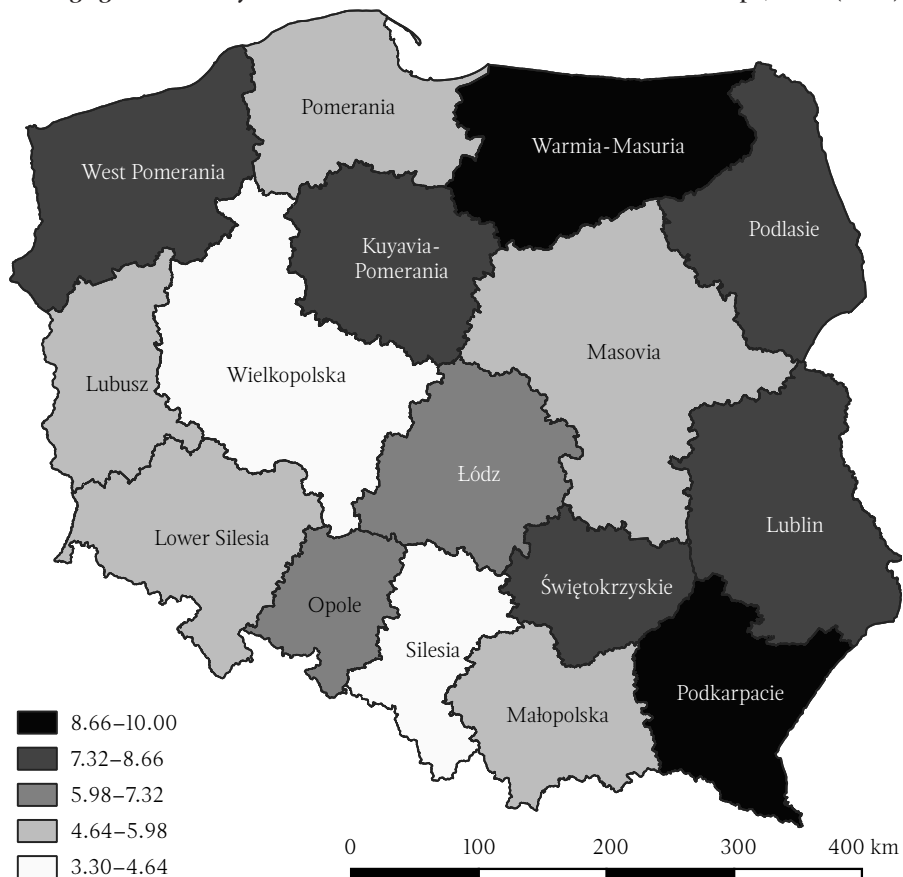
The registered unemployment rate in the voivodeships, average 2017–2021



Source: Own preparation based on Statistics Poland (2023).

Chart 2.

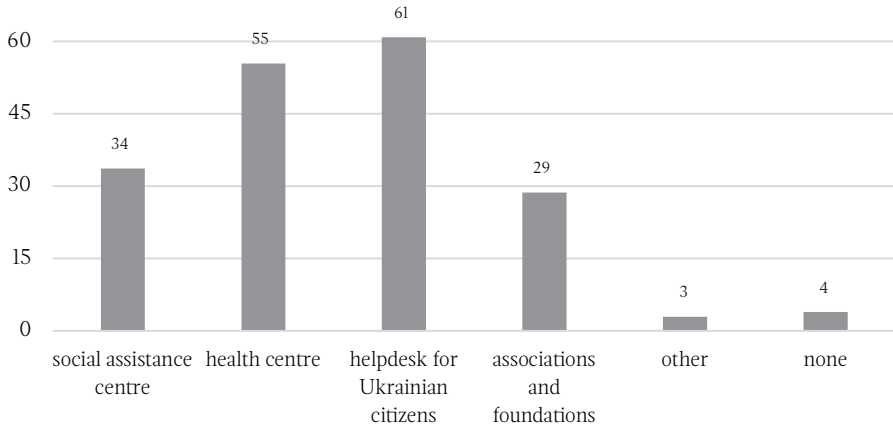
Average gross monthly salaries in the business sector in the voivodships, 2021 (EUR)



Source: Own preparation based on Statistics Poland (2023).

Chart 3.

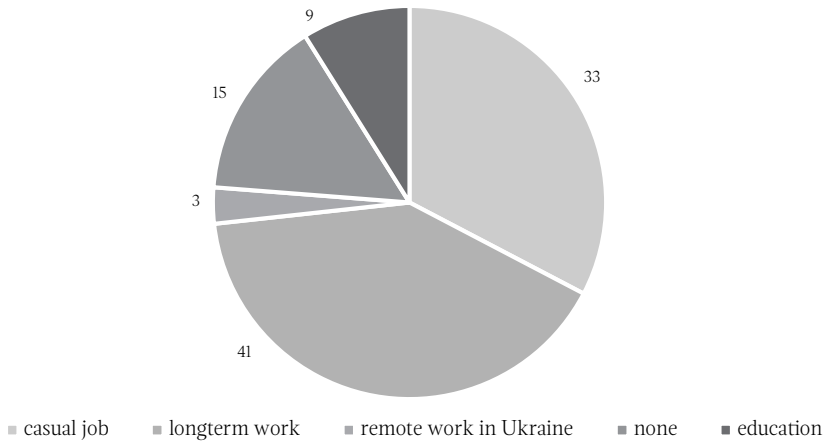
Degree of use of social services and benefits by Ukrainian refugees in the study area (%)



Source: Own preparation.

Chart 4.

Ukrainian refugees' plans to become active in the Polish labor market (%)



Source: Own preparation.