

## Selective Solidarity and EU Migration Governance: Visegrad Responses Amid the Russia-Ukraine War

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### ABSTRACT

The 2022 Russia-Ukraine war triggered one of the largest displacement crises in Europe since World War II, prompting varied migration responses across the continent. Notably, Visegrad countries: Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, and Slovakia; exhibited selective migration policies, embracing Ukrainian refugees while maintaining restrictive stances toward asylum seekers from the Global South. This paper employs Anssi Paasi's border framing theory and Matt McDonald's securitization of migration framework to examine how peace and security are discursively constructed and operationalized through racialized and geopolitical lenses. Through discourse analysis of political speeches, policy documents, and media narratives from 2022 to 2024, the research reveals how the Visegrad states mobilize narratives of proximity, cultural affinity, and perceived threat to legitimize differentiated humanitarianism. The result is a “solidarity paradox” in which inclusion is framed not through universal human rights but through selective identity-based securitization. This paradox not only undermines EU commitments to equitable asylum governance but also illustrates how borders are reimagined both symbolically and institutionally in times of crisis.

**Keywords:** *Selective migration, securitization, border framing, peace and security, EU migration governance*

### INTRODUCTION

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 marked a turning point in European migration governance. Millions of Ukrainian refugees crossed into the European Union (EU), generating one of the largest displacement crises on the continent since World War II (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2023). Over 5 million Ukrainians fled abroad by mid-2025 to countries like Poland, Germany, and Czech among top host countries in the EU (APnews, 2025).

The EU responses with unprecedented unity and make it little more difficult such as activating the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) to provide Ukrainians immediate residency, work rights, and access to social services. However, the counter-responses of the Visegrad countries which are Poland, Hungary, Czech, and Slovakia is soften towards the refugees. While these states welcomed Ukrainian refugees with open arms, their actions stood in sharp contrast to their restrictive stance during previous migration crises, particularly the 2015–2016 influx of asylum seekers from the Middle East and Africa (Holányi, 2025).

This paper analyses how Visegrad/V4 backlashes the refugees from the Ukraine reflected a selective solidarity, and examines its consequences for EU migration governance responded to Ukrainian displacement, and how these responses highlight the condition and identity-driven nature of solidarity in Europe. The divergent backlashes highlight what scholars called selective solidarity—support for refugees based on identity, cultural proximity, and geopolitical narratives rather than universal humanitarian commitments (Szalai & Göbl, 2023).

The primary aims of this study is to examine and to find out the reason this “solidarity paradox” among Visegrad countries happened. The following paper also provide an empirical study of the collective actions of the Visegrád Group (V4) during two major successive crises - the migration crisis and the war in Ukraine (Kaniok, 2025). The secondary goal of this essay is to find a gap and novelty from the previous research by analysing actors (state) and its policy regarding the ukrainian asylum seeker. This paper is structured as follows. First, we review relevant literature on the crisis between Russia and Ukraine, focusing on the V4. Then, we present our analytical and theoretical approach in the methods section. The third section explores how the war in Ukraine generated a large number of asylum seekers. Here, we identify the reasons why refugees choose the Visegrad member states as their destinations, arguing that the Visegrad member states have historically not accepted refugees and view them negatively. This conclusion discusses our findings by comparing them with relevant literature.

## **METHODS**

This study employs a qualitative research design, which is particularly suitable for examining the complex and discursive nature of migration governance. Qualitative research allows for the interpretation of meanings, narratives, and representations that underpin policy choices and political practices (Creswell, 2014). In line with the study’s objective to investigate how Visegrad countries frame solidarity and security in the context of migration, the research adopts discourse analysis as its primary methodological approach. Discourse analysis is especially appropriate in international relations and migration studies because it enables the exploration of how language, symbols, and representations shape political outcomes and institutional practices (Fairclough, 2013).

The type of data utilized in this research is secondary data, collected from a combination of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources consist of political speeches, press releases, parliamentary debates, and official policy documents issued by the governments of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia between 2022 and 2024. These materials are essential to capture the official narratives of Visegrad states regarding Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers from the Global South. Media reports, particularly from regional outlets, are also considered part of the primary material, as they both reflect and shape public discourse. Secondary sources include scholarly articles, books, and research reports from think tanks and non-governmental organizations addressing migration governance, securitization, and European asylum

policies. The inclusion of both official and scholarly materials strengthens the validity and comprehensiveness of the study.

Data collection was conducted through systematic document review. Following Bowen’s (2009) guidelines for document analysis, the process entailed identifying, selecting, and critically examining textual data relevant to the research questions. Policy documents and speeches were accessed from official government archives and verified news outlets, while academic sources were retrieved through databases such as Scopus, JSTOR, and Google Scholar. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that the selected materials reflected the core dimensions of the research problem, particularly discourses around proximity, cultural affinity, racialization, and perceived security threats.

The data analysis technique applied in this research is qualitative discourse analysis, guided by both Paasi’s (1996) border framing theory and McDonald’s (2008) securitization of migration framework. First, texts were subjected to coding in order to identify recurring themes, metaphors, and rhetorical strategies that construct categories of inclusion and exclusion. Second, these discursive elements were examined in relation to broader geopolitical and racialized imaginaries. In this sense, discourse analysis provided not only descriptive insights but also interpretive depth, illustrating how selective solidarity was legitimized within national and regional contexts. Schreier’s (2012) systematic approach to qualitative content analysis further informed the coding process by ensuring consistency, transparency, and analytical rigor.

To enhance the credibility of the findings, triangulation was applied across different types of sources. Comparing government statements, media narratives, and scholarly analyses enabled cross-validation and reduced potential bias (Patton, 2002). This methodological strategy ensured that the study captured both the official discursive framing and its critical reception, thereby providing a more balanced understanding of the “solidarity paradox.” By systematically integrating discourse analysis with theoretical frameworks of border and security studies, the research delivers both empirical grounding and conceptual innovation.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The Visegrad states’ openness contrasted with their rejection of Muslim-majority refugees in 2015–2016. Identity-based perceptions—viewing Ukrainians as white, Christian, and culturally similar—shaped public and political willingness to host. Opinion surveys in Hungary, for instance, showed sharp contrasts in attitudes toward Syrian versus Ukrainian refugees, reflecting identity cues rather than abstract policy preferences (Bíró-Nagy, 2022). The Visegrad member states had projected a negative narrative on refugees before the outbreak of the Ukrainian war. They rejected refugees from Muslim-majority countries between 2015 and 2016. However, after the outbreak of the Ukrainian war, they became more open to refugees from Ukraine, citing ethnic, religious, and cultural similarities due to their proximity. This, of course, creates a solidarity paradox, as the Visegrad member states appear to be selective in their treatment of refugees.

Visegrad Responses to the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis are varies. Poland became the largest host of refugee, accepting more than 1.3 million Ukrainians by 2023. The government passed emergency legislation within two weeks, granting rights to healthcare, education, and employment (AP News, 2023). Civil society and volunteer networks provided housing, food, and integration support. Czechnya received over 500,000 Ukrainians, adopting rapid visa schemes and social support measures. Institutional capacity constraints created pressure but were mitigated by EU financial support. Slovakia accepting less refugees among other Visegrad member but coordinated transit routes and humanitarian corridors, emphasizing logistical rather than long-term integration measures. Hungary, despite its hardline anti-migrant rhetoric in 2015, admitted Ukrainians by framing them as “real refugees” fleeing war, unlike “economic migrants” from Africa or the Middle East (Szalai & Göbl, 2023).

Despite initial unity, the Visegrad states faced significant challenges. For instance, Institutional capacity limits of asylum systems struggled to process millions of arrivals is weak. Public opinion fatigue in Poland, support for refugees dropped from near-universal approval in 2022 to around 57% in 2024 (AP News, 2023). The Civil society reliance such as NGOs and grassroots groups often filled governance gaps, raising questions about sustainability.

### CONCLUSION

The Russia–Ukraine war reshaped European migration governance, demonstrating both solidarity and other possibilities. The Visegrad countries openness toward refugee displayed unprecedented especially Ukrainian refugees displayed a solidarity paradox because they rooted their openness in identity and geopolitics. This showed a very contrast behaviour compare to their previous view and asylum policy about refugees especially non-European refugees. This phenomena underscores the conditionality of solidarity EU asylum policy.

Following the above explanation, the challenge of reconciling selective solidarity for the EU need a universal commitments to protect the refugee. Unless solidarity redefined globally in the EU beyond cultural affinity, the EU migration governance will remain disintegrated and vulnerable to political shift. The future research should investigate deeply the Ukainian long-term trajectory, implication and slodarity cohesion in Visegrad member.

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