



Perception of Ukrainian refugees in the V4

Support with some reservations

Centre for Democracy & Resilience

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A more in-depth analysis of the data has been prepared by the Ukraine and Eastern Europe Programme.
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Executive summary

Vladimir Putin's unprovoked attack on Ukraine has not only caused widespread destruction but also prompted substantial refugee flows to Visegrád Group (V4) member states.¹ As of November 2022, about 1.5 million refugees are registered in Poland (approx. 0.04 per capita), 458,000 in Czechia (about 0.04 per capita as well), 100,000 in Slovakia (approx. 0.02 per capita), and around 31,000 in Hungary (approx. 0.003 per capita).²

Against this backdrop, GLOBSEC, with the support of the NED, commissioned a public opinion poll on the attitudes of V4 citizens toward refugees coming from Ukraine. The poll was conducted by the FOCUS agency and its partners with a representative sample of 1000 people in each country. The survey probed the views of respondents on a range of issues, including their attitudes towards hosting refugees, refugee assistance, threat perceptions, and the attribution of blame for the conflict.

The main aim of this study is to (1) describe these beliefs and measure potential shifts in perceptions eight months into the war and (2) pinpoint the most pertinent factors influencing perceptions. It, finally, puts forward recommendations on how local authorities can help alleviate any potential concerns about refugees. The study's main findings and recommendations include the following:

- **Strong general support for Ukrainian refugees.** A majority of citizens in Czechia, Hungary, and Poland take a favourable view towards their countries hosting Ukrainian refugees. The picture is different in Slovakia, where a majority consider this state of affairs to be a negative development.
- **Most people sense no change to their security.** The vast majority of respondents feel the arrival of Ukrainian refugees has not impinged on their safety or affected the crime rate or their lives overall. People living in areas bordering Ukraine, however, tend to feel considerably more insecure.

- **Welfare on people's minds.** While people in the V4 are rather open-minded about their countries hosting refugees, opinions on what sort of support they should receive are rather mixed. A majority of Slovaks and Czechs believe assistance provided to Ukrainian refugees should be slashed. The Hungarian and Polish publics, meanwhile, disagree. Slovaks also stand out as the only populace where a majority believe those fleeing Ukraine should not gain access to free healthcare. Poles and Czechs are content with refugees taking unwanted jobs compared to their more disgruntled peers in Hungary and Slovakia.
- **Whom people blame for the war matters.** One of the most important factors influencing people's views on Ukrainian refugees concerns whom they blame for the conflict. Our data shows that Slovaks are the most divided on this issue and the least likely to say Russia bears responsibility – this partly explains why they harbour the most negative attitudes towards refugees fleeing their eastern neighbour.
- **Following the 'leader'.** Party politics is another decisive factor affecting perceptions of Ukrainian refugees. The voters of parties that promulgate hostile rhetoric against people fleeing the war are considerably more likely to view the presence of Ukrainians unfavourably.
- **The power of information.** People who use social media as a source of news are more prone to holding negative opinions about Ukrainian refugees. Another group that tends to subscribe to more negative beliefs about Ukrainians fleeing the war consists of people who gather information via personal communication channels. The findings are especially alarming on the effects of this latter medium in Slovakia, where the group represents around a quarter of the population.

¹ The Visegrád Group – or V4 – is a formal regional grouping formed in the early 1990s to share opinions and coordinate policies, to some extent, between Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia.
² The numbers are based on rounded estimates from the UNCHR's website: https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine#_ga=2.65449198.1128638748.1666692835-1784297702.1666692835

Recommendations

GLOBSEC's Democracy & Resilience team primarily focuses on matters pertaining to the information space, so this is the domain where the team's expertise can contribute most. There are, naturally, good practices that can be implemented, among others, in the fields of social policy, housing, and integration. The team's recommendations concerning strategic communications include the following:

- **Regularly inform the public about the daily life of Ukrainian refugees.** Public support for the welfare needs of refugees is shaky. Efforts to showcase the day-to-day struggles of people who were compelled to flee with little to nothing in their pockets may lead to an increased understanding of the basic needs they require, including healthcare, transport, and accommodation.
- **Show people the data.** Publish comparative data on welfare spending on Ukrainian refugees compared to overall welfare budgets – this information will illustrate the negligible impact of refugee aid on budgets and citizens. It is particularly important to indicate the funding sources used to cover refugee benefits including, for instance, whether the appropriations come from EU or state coffers.
- **Promote positive personal stories.** Our poll shows that people tend to repeat negative personal experiences. To counter this, there should be an effort to actively promote positive stories, especially ones that spotlight how refugees benefit local communities.
- **Enhance sense of security in cross-border areas:** In Poland and Slovakia, people living in border areas are more likely to perceive refugees as threats. It would be beneficial for authorities and NGOs to dedicate more time and resources to visiting these regions. It is also critical to include police and military officials at these events and engagements and task them with assuring people that they can feel safe and that first responders are present should they need any help.

- **Publish crime statistics:** There is a widespread perception, among certain societal groups, that crime has spiked since the arrival of Ukrainian refugees. The regular publication of crime statistics in a comprehensible format, also at the regional and local levels, could help alleviate these concerns. This intervention is especially relevant in regions bordering Ukraine, where threat perceptions are higher.
- **No one-size-fits-all solution for communication.** The communication of state and non-state actors on refugees should heed age-related sensitivities. Older citizens, for instance, can be better reached and informed through television. Young people, meanwhile, are more likely to consume information on social media platforms, especially Instagram and TikTok.

Key findings in each country

Czechia



- **Clear stance on the war:** A resounding 72% of Czechs assert that Russia is responsible for the war in Ukraine. Meanwhile, only 5% blame Ukraine and 13% point their finger at the US/NATO. Most Czechs – about the same proportion of people that blamed Russia for starting the war – espouse favourable views towards Ukrainian refugees and register no change in their lives. Indeed, 84% of those labelling Russia as the culprit hold positive attitudes towards Czechia hosting Ukrainian refugees (compared to 2% and 8%, respectively, of those faulting Ukraine or the US/NATO) and 77% believe their lives have not changed (compared, respectively, to 4% and 9% for the latter two groups).
- **Welcoming, but only if Ukrainians fend for themselves.** Czechs are generally very welcoming of Ukrainian refugees (73%) but disagree with sustaining support for them at current levels (46% are against, 44% in favour). Czechs, however, are fairly supportive of Ukrainians taking jobs that locals no longer want to fill (63%). Few Czechs, only 16%, fear that refugees are taking jobs from locals.
- **Income plays a role in perceptions of Ukrainian refugees:** The more affluent a household perceives itself to be, the greater its support for providing welfare to refugees. Respondents identifying themselves as coming from average income and poorer households were more likely to say they experienced negative changes due to the influx of refugees.

Poland



- **Clear stance on who is responsible for the war:** 84% of respondents state that Russia is responsible for the war in Ukraine and the same amount express positive attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees. Among those blaming Russia, 88% indicate positive views towards hosting refugees compared to 1% among Poles that hold Ukraine responsible and 2% that blame the US/NATO. Around 75% of respondents did not notice any change in their lives from Ukrainian refugees coming to Poland.
- **Broad acceptance:** 68% of respondents would welcome a Ukrainian refugee as a family member, 77% as a close friend, and more than 80% as colleagues, guests, or fellow residents. A majority of Poles are against cutting benefits to Ukrainian refugees (54%) and believe it to be beneficial that Ukrainians are taking jobs no one else wants (52%).
- **Few negative experiences:** Most Poles (79%) have not experienced any inappropriate behaviour on the part of Ukrainian refugees, such as breaking the law, insulting people, or demanding special attention. Young Poles (35%), people living in cross-border areas (29%), and respondents identifying themselves as coming from poor households (32%) are more likely to report negative experiences. The reason for the more negative experiences of young Poles could be that they are more likely to inform themselves from social media, which the survey found to be a determinant of more negative views on Ukrainian refugees in some cases.

Slovakia



- **Divided on who is responsible for the war:** Almost as many say the US and NATO are to blame for the war as those faulting Russia: 43% of respondents in Slovakia cast blame on Russia for the war, 7% on Ukraine, and 39% on the US/NATO.
- **No backing for support to refugees:** 68% of Slovaks agree to some extent that support for Ukrainian refugees should be reduced and only a quarter of the population thinks otherwise. Support for slashing funding is especially strong in households that perceive themselves to be poor and among those who do not blame Russia for the war.
- **Few negative experiences but still feel threatened:** 68% of respondents have not experienced inappropriate behaviour from Ukrainian refugees, such as breaking the law, insults, or demands for special attention. A minority of 29% said they had such a negative experience; but this proportion was 40% among the residents of Košický kraj, a region that borders Ukraine. Even though 68% of Slovaks have had no negative experiences, 28% consider Ukrainian refugees to be a threat to society (even 15% of those that reported no negative experiences feel this way). Relatedly, 33% of Slovak respondents, the highest in the V4 region, reported a perceived spike in the crime rate.

Hungary



- **Uncertainty about the war:** A plurality of Hungarians hold Russia responsible for the war (43%), while 21% do not know who to blame. The latter figure is highest among V4 countries and potentially problematic as undecided people could make the most enticing targets to influence and sway through information operations.
- **Positive perceptions towards hosting refugees:** 82% of respondents perceive Hungary's decision to host Ukrainian refugees favourably. Despite this consensus, 65% say they have not personally helped refugees in any way, the highest in the V4. Hungarians, in fact, expect the government to assume this role: 54% say support for Ukrainians should continue at current levels. Yet, by a slim majority, they also want to keep Ukrainian refugees out of the job market: 50% say it is not beneficial for society if they take jobs no one else wants.
- **Almost no negative experiences:** 86% of respondents said they had not witnessed inappropriate behaviour from Ukrainian refugees and 81% do not feel less safe with Ukrainian refugees in Hungary. Nearly 88% feel no change in their lives connected to Ukrainian refugees coming to Hungary.

Key country-specific recommendations

Czechia



- **Focus on small towns.** Residents of small towns are the most likely to feel that their lives have been impacted by the arrival of refugees. Small town mayors should communicate with residents specifically about their concerns related to refugees and address these worries through policies in cooperation with local and national authorities.
- **Pay special attention to social media.** Czech social media users, a rather broad group, are more likely than others to view Ukrainian refugees negatively. National authorities, therefore, need to pay special attention to misinformation that shows up on these platforms about refugees in the country and react to them before they gain traction.

Poland



- **Focus on youth.** In Poland, there is a visible drop in positive attitudes of youth towards Ukrainian refugees compared to the population more broadly. National and local authorities, consequently, should focus on outreach to young people through information campaigns on refugees, especially personal stories via YouTube, TikTok, and/or Instagram.
- **Put influencers to work.** Since young Poles are more likely than others to see Ukrainian refugees negatively, popular influencers could be deployed to change these perceptions, especially in cooperation with NGOs and other members of civil society.

Slovakia



- **Coordinate communication approach with local leaders.** Slovaks are the most likely to see Ukrainian refugees as a threat, especially in areas bordering Ukraine, regional centres, and the capital. Government officials should provide mayors, respected regional figures, and pertinent settlements with tools (mainly data) to alleviate this sense of insecurity. Critical information, such as regional crime statistics, should especially be communicated more actively to local populations.
- **Motivate popular Slovak celebrities to speak up.** Slovaks that stay informed through interpersonal communication harbour the most negative attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees, a phenomenon that is difficult to counter. There is need to intensify cooperation with celebrities and opinion shapers to motivate them to speak up about Ukrainian refugees and share positive stories – people may be more likely to accept these as their own experiences.

Hungary



- **Focus on refugees at work.** Since more than half of Hungarian adults believe they do not benefit from Ukrainians taking jobs no one else wants, Hungarian officials must communicate better about the benefits of this arrangement by highlighting, for instance, how added tax revenue can contribute to society and how refugees often fill roles that locals are not interested in anymore.
- **Counter welfare chauvinism among youth.** Young Hungarians are more likely to agree that support for Ukrainian refugees should be reduced. Personal stories about the struggles of Ukrainians in starting a new life should be aimed at youth through the online news media and social media platforms that they are most likely to visit.

Introduction

The war in Ukraine has not only brought open military warfare back to the European continent for the first time since the Balkan Wars of the 1990s but it has also forced enormous numbers of people to flee the destruction that Vladimir Putin has wrought on the country. As a result, around 1.5 million Ukrainian refugees now reside in Poland, 458,000 in Czechia, nearly 100,000 in Slovakia, and about 31,000 in Hungary.³

Even though the initial response to this influx appeared to be positive and governments across the V4 welcomed refugees, it is notable that the region has seen political movements over the past decade propagate anti-migration narratives and exploit these narratives for political advantage. GLOBSEC, for this reason, commissioned a public opinion poll in all V4

countries to survey how citizens perceive Ukrainian refugees, examine potential issues that could arise, and measure potential shifts in perceptions eight months into the war. The report also puts forward recommendations to both NGOs and state institutions on how best to manage the ongoing refugee crisis. GLOBSEC's recommendations are focused on the information space, where the Democracy & Resilience team's expertise can contribute the most added value.

Strong, but not universal support

Support for the presence of Ukrainian refugees in V4 states, apart from Slovakia, is generally robust. In Slovakia, only 42% judge the country's decision to host refugees to be a positive.⁴ As illustrated in Figure 1, this figure is substantially lower compared to the support levels measured in the other three countries, including Hungary where the government has crafted its political identity based on anti-migration narratives since

2015.⁵ This pattern can, perhaps, be partially explained by the rather small number of Ukrainian refugees staying in Hungary and Budapest's efforts to differentiate between Ukrainians fleeing a conflict and "other" migrants. It must be noted, however, that political and civilian actors across the V4 may conflate the number of registered refugees and the number of those arriving to the country altogether, which could influence perceptions.⁶

How does the V4 see Ukrainian refugees?

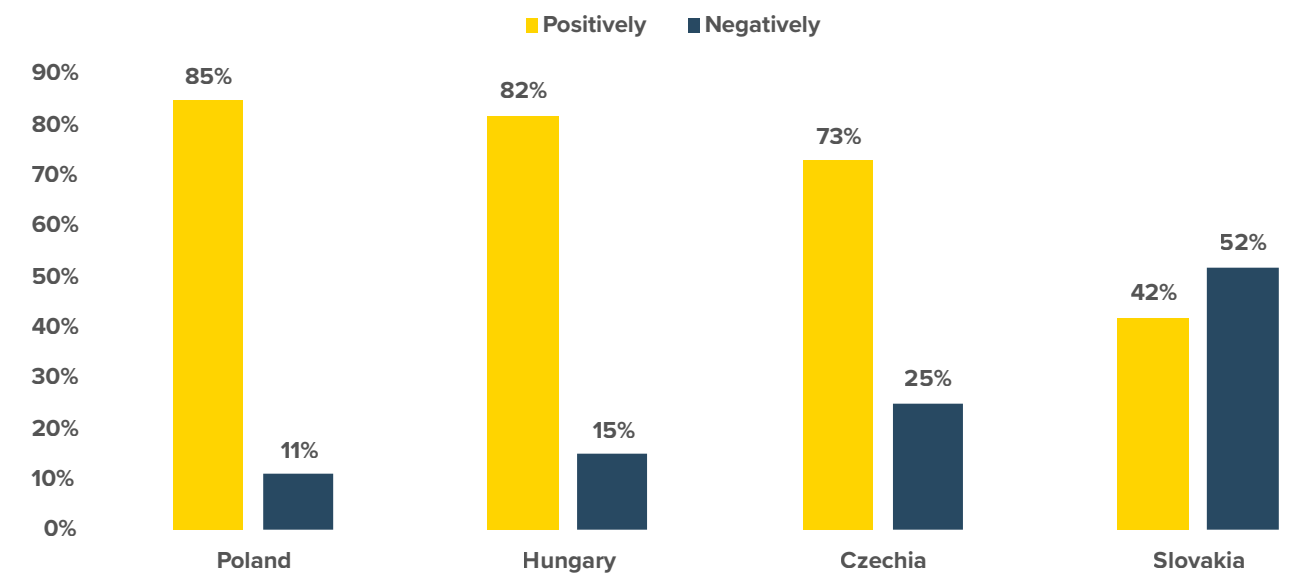


Figure 1 How do you feel about your country hosting Ukrainian refugees?
For the sake of simplicity, we merged the proportion of 'very'/'rather' positive and 'very'/'rather' negative answers.

³ The data is based on the UNCHR's summary of the Ukrainian refugee situation available here: https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine#_ga=2.65449198.1128638748.1666692835-1784297702.1666692835

⁴ For purposes of simplicity, we merged those who evaluated their presence 'very' and 'rather' positively in all cases.
⁵ See, for instance: https://www.politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/HUNGARY_BOOK_ENG_BOOK_ONLINE.pdf
⁶ For the Hungarian government's views on humanitarian efforts to help Ukrainian refugees, please see, among others, the blog of State Secretary for International Communications Zoltán Kovács: <https://abouthungary.hu/blog/hungary-has-helped-more-than-530-000-ukrainian-refugees>

Offering a helping hand

A significant proportion of V4 citizens were personally involved in helping Ukrainian refugees. These contributions, based on our survey, particularly included the provision of essential items, information, and cash. The provision of housing and/or jobs were less frequently mentioned by respondents, though Czechs and Poles were considerably more active in these spheres than their Slovak and Hungarian counterparts (two times higher in the former two countries compared to the latter pair). Hungary, followed by Slovakia, stood out as the most inactive society in providing this humanitarian assistance. Slightly more than half of Slovaks indicated they were not involved in these activities and 65% of Hungarians said the same. **The arrival of Ukrainian refugees, regardless, likely prompted an unprecedented number of people to participate in humanitarian efforts.**

You can be whatever you wish, but not a family member

V4 societies generally expressed openness to welcoming Ukrainian refugees into a variety of interpersonal relationships as friends, neighbours, colleagues, residents, and/or guests in their countries. A more controversial question concerned whether they would welcome them in their homes as family members. A majority of Poles expressed their willingness to do so but the question proved considerably more divisive in the other three countries. In the poll commissioned by GLOBSEC, the same questions pertaining to welcoming refugees in various relationships were probed towards people coming from other countries as well. **The findings reveal that V4 societies hold substantially more favourable perceptions and openness to Ukrainians than they do towards refugees from other countries.**

The divergence in attitudes towards refugees from different countries can best be gauged by measuring societal openness to permitting Ukrainian refugees to enter their countries compared to refugees from other countries. This difference is smallest in Poland at 10 percentage points (88% positive about Ukrainians vs 78% about others). The gap in Slovakia was nearly the same at 11 percentage points though the public expressed less support for all refugees, with only 65% supporting the decision to allow Ukrainian refugees to enter the country. The third largest gulf can be found in Czechia at 16 percentage points (87% vs 71%). The margin, finally, was largest in Hungary by far: 26 percentage points (90% vs 64%). Since the second question also used the word ‘refugees,’ it can be noted that the wording could potentially be a factor in the rather high percentage of individuals indicating their openness to hosting non-Ukrainian refugees. Numerous politicians across the V4 use the

term “refugees” for Ukrainians with a more positive or neutral connotation but label other arrivals as “illegal migrants” or “migrants.”

Threat and crime perception: the majority feels nothing has changed

The poll also surveyed people’s perceptions regarding whether their lives have been impacted by the influx of Ukrainian refugees both generally and more specifically with respect to the crime rate. The poll further probed the extent to which refugees were perceived as a threat.

Among those perceiving a change, people were more likely to note a turn for the worse rather than

a positive one. However, **the proportion of those identifying negative changes is dwarfed by the share of those who see absolutely no change in either their lives or the crime rate.** Slovaks were the most likely to say that their lives had changed negatively and that the crime rate had increased. Czechs, meanwhile, showed the greatest preponderance towards claiming they experienced inappropriate behaviour from Ukrainian refugees. As for general threat perceptions, a majority of people in the V4 said the presence of Ukrainians in their country is neither a threat nor a benefit to their societies. Slovaks, however, were substantially more likely than others to assert that refugees pose a threat to their society. This finding reinforces a long-term trend identified across several GLOBSEC research outputs, including the Voices of Central and

Eastern Europe’ and GLOBSEC Trends 2022 according to which Slovaks generally harbour relatively high threat perceptions towards other groups. An alarming 56% of respondents in March 2022, for instance, considered migrants to be a threat to their values and identity. While this figure represented a drop from 72% in 2020, it was the highest number among the nine countries included in the survey.⁸

Would you agree to allow Ukrainian/other refugees enter to (country)?

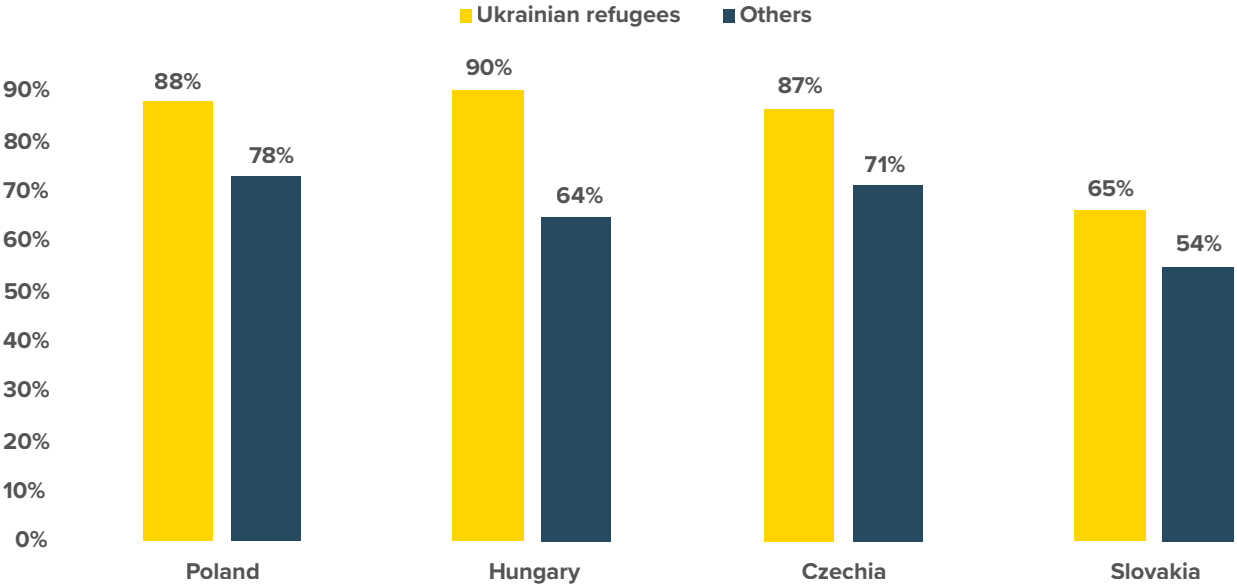


Figure 2 The proportion of respondents who would welcome refugees from Ukraine and other countries.

Have there been any changes to your life because of Ukrainian refugees coming to [country]?

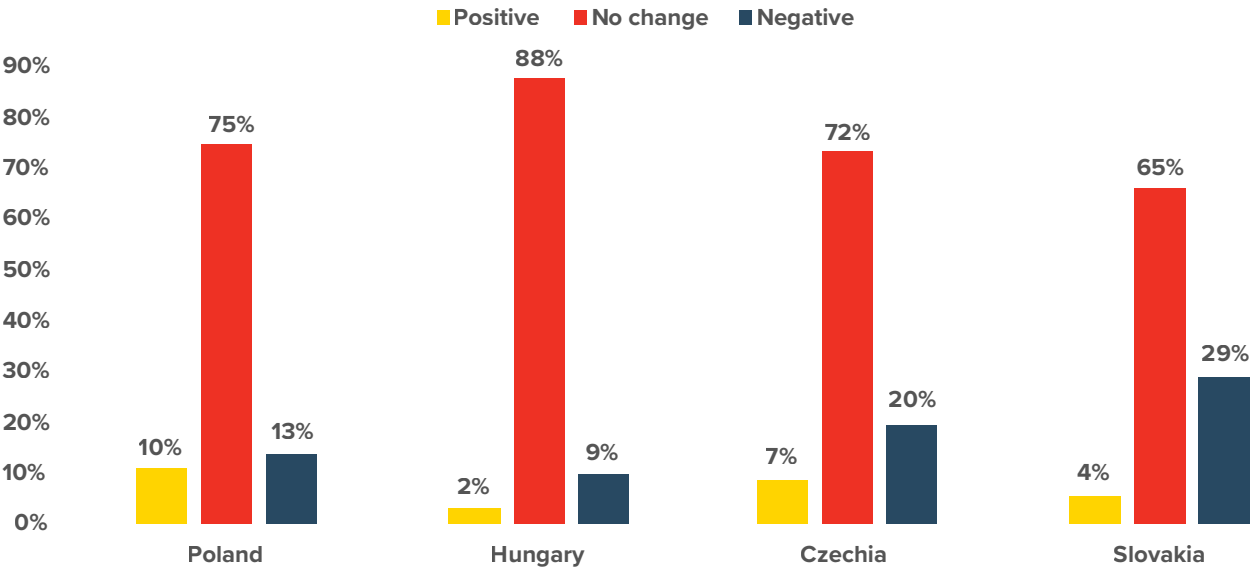


Figure 3 Have there been any changes to your life because of Ukrainian refugees coming to (country)? If yes, is this change positive or negative? For the sake of simplicity, we merged the proportion of ‘very’/‘rather’ positive and ‘very’/‘rather’ negative answers.

7 <https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/projects/voices-central-and-eastern-europe>
8 <https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/publications/globsec-trends-2022-central-and-eastern-europe-amid-war-ukraine>

Welfare chauvinism persists

The last key set of questions in the poll concerned support provided by V4 states to Ukrainian refugees. It showed that while people agree that those who flee the war should get some form of support, they are also wary about the effect this assistance may have on their own lives. Welfare chauvinism, in this regard, remains an important consideration. It should, nonetheless, be noted that the poll was conducted in September when inflation and the energy crisis were raging (though inflation continued to soar afterwards even higher).

V4 societies are split regarding financial support for Ukrainian refugees: Majorities of Czechs and Slovaks agree that these benefits should be slashed while Poles and Hungarians see it differently. Most Slovaks further believe that Ukrainian refugees should not gain free access to healthcare – the other three populaces took the contrasting point of view. That said, **certain benefits that locals do not share in** (e.g., free public transport and subsidised rent) **are vastly unpopular in all four countries.** The matter of employment is another thorny topic where V4 societies hold broadly different ideas. **Majorities of Czechs and Poles say it is beneficial if refugees take jobs no one else wants while Hungarians**

are extremely protective even towards these “unwanted” jobs. Most respondents, nonetheless, in all four countries rejected the idea that Ukrainian refugees are making it harder to find work, albeit only by an extremely slim margin (less than a single percentage point) in Slovakia.

Our country benefits from Ukrainian refugees who are taking jobs no one wants

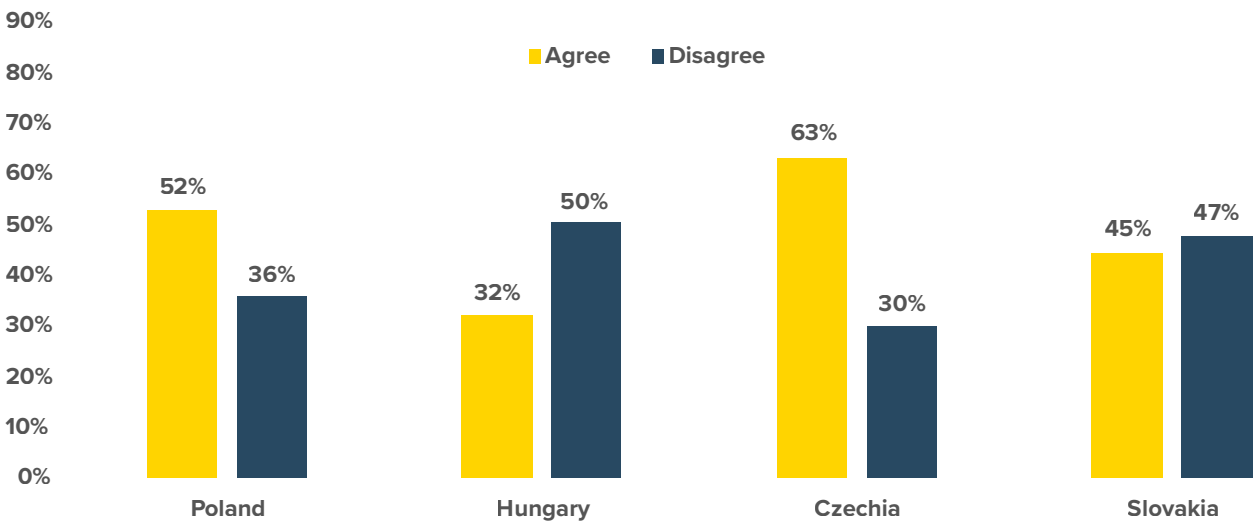


Figure 5 Support for Ukrainian refugees taking jobs no one else wants. For the sake of simplicity, we merged the proportion of 'strongly agree'/'agree' and 'strongly disagree'/'disagree' answers.

Support to Ukrainian refugees should be reduced

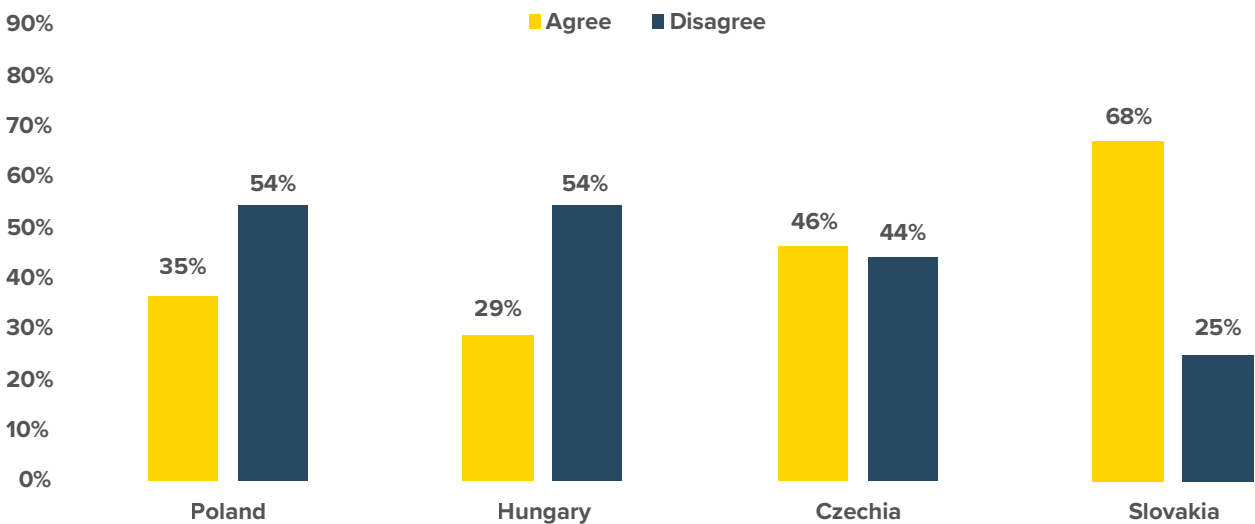


Figure 4 Support for reducing benefits to Ukrainian refugees. For the sake of simplicity, we merged the proportion of 'strongly agree'/'agree' and 'strongly disagree'/'disagree' answers.

Average number of respondents agreeing with the following support for refugees

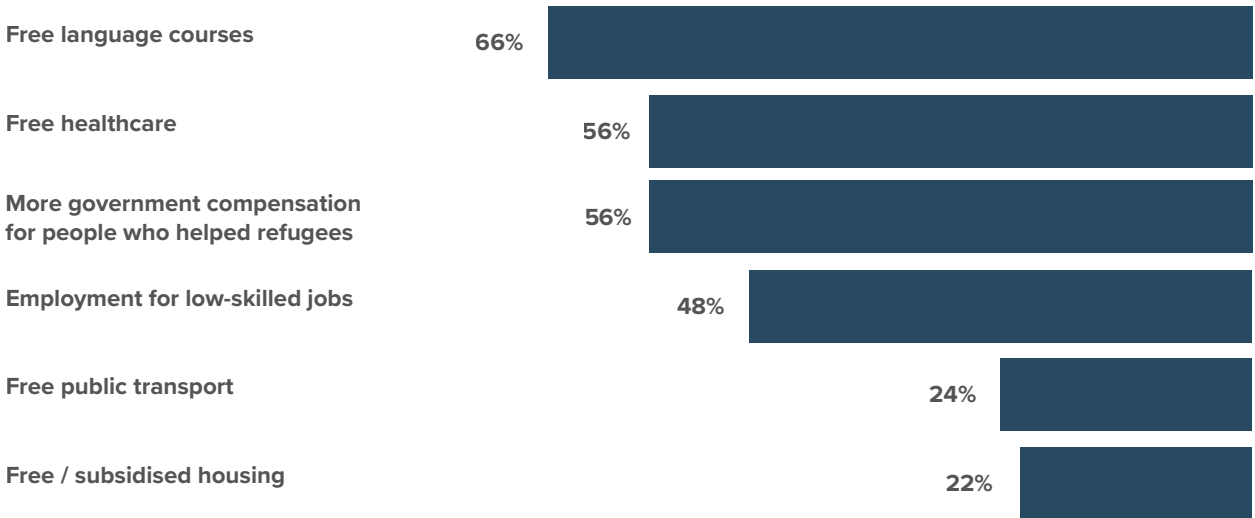


Figure 6 Average support for various benefits offered to Ukrainian refugees.

Variation across different social strata

The polling revealed several factors that contributed to more negative perceptions across all four Visegrád member states. Other variables, meanwhile, were specific to individual countries.

Age differences

As it pertains to the influence of age demographics on perceptions towards refugees, V4 societies differ widely. In Poland, younger citizens (those between 25 and 44 years of age) were the least likely to say that hosting refugees is a positive. The youngest sub-group (18-24) and middle-aged citizens (35-54) were also more likely to judge refugees as bringing negative changes to their lives. Younger people were, furthermore, most likely to believe the crime rate had increased and, finally, favoured cutting support for refugees.

Meanwhile, in Czechia, the most negative sentiment towards Ukrainian refugees is espoused by older citizens (especially those between 45 and 64 years of age). People over 55 were also the least likely to be involved in providing direct assistance to refugees. The older the individual, the more likely they are to say that support for refugees should be reduced and the higher their threat perception. However, interestingly, it was the youngest citizens (18-24) who most often said they had experienced inappropriate behaviour from Ukrainian refugees.

In Slovakia, middle-aged citizens and those aged 65 and over were the most likely to report they had experienced inappropriate behaviour from Ukrainian refugees. Young people generally express more positive perceptions of refugees and indicate the greatest openness to accepting them as family members.

In Hungary, the 25-34 and 45-54 age groups were the most likely to perceive negative changes in their lives as a result of refugees. Those between 35 and 54, meanwhile, were more inclined to claim they had witnessed inappropriate behaviour. The younger the individual generally, though, the more likely they perceived hosting Ukrainian refugees negatively and preferred to see support for refugees reduced.

It is not always the poor who perceive refugees negatively

Another key common factor accentuating negative perceptions concerns the financial situation of households or – more precisely – how households perceive their situation. **In general, the less secure a respondent perceives their household situation, the more likely they hold negative views about Ukrainian refugees**, especially with respect to safety and welfare-related questions. That said, some perceived affluent and safe individuals in Poland and Hungary, in particular, also espoused negative opinions

and reported an increase in crime. In Hungary, this group was more likely to perceive negative changes in their lives or to claim they experienced inappropriate behaviour. And in Poland, they tend to see the hosting of refugees by their country in a more negative light.

In general, people with less formal education, especially those only with elementary or secondary-level education without a school leaving exam, are less likely to indicate favourable views towards Ukrainian refugees.

The size of the settlement was another factor bearing the same effect although perceptions varied widely by country. In Poland, rural areas were most likely to perceive negative changes to their lives; in Hungary and Czechia, meanwhile, small towns felt the same way; and in Slovakia, people living in larger cities, regional centres, and the capital believed their lives were detrimentally impacted.

Geographically, respondents in cross-border areas (note: Czechia and Ukraine do not share a border), **apart from Hungary, were considerably more likely to harbour negative perceptions towards Ukrainian refugees.** In Poland, 29% of people residing in these border areas said their lives had changed for the worse due to the influx of refugees compared to 13% of all Poles. The same figures stood at 52% in Slovakia compared to 29% for the entire population. A similar pattern held on the question concerning people's experiences

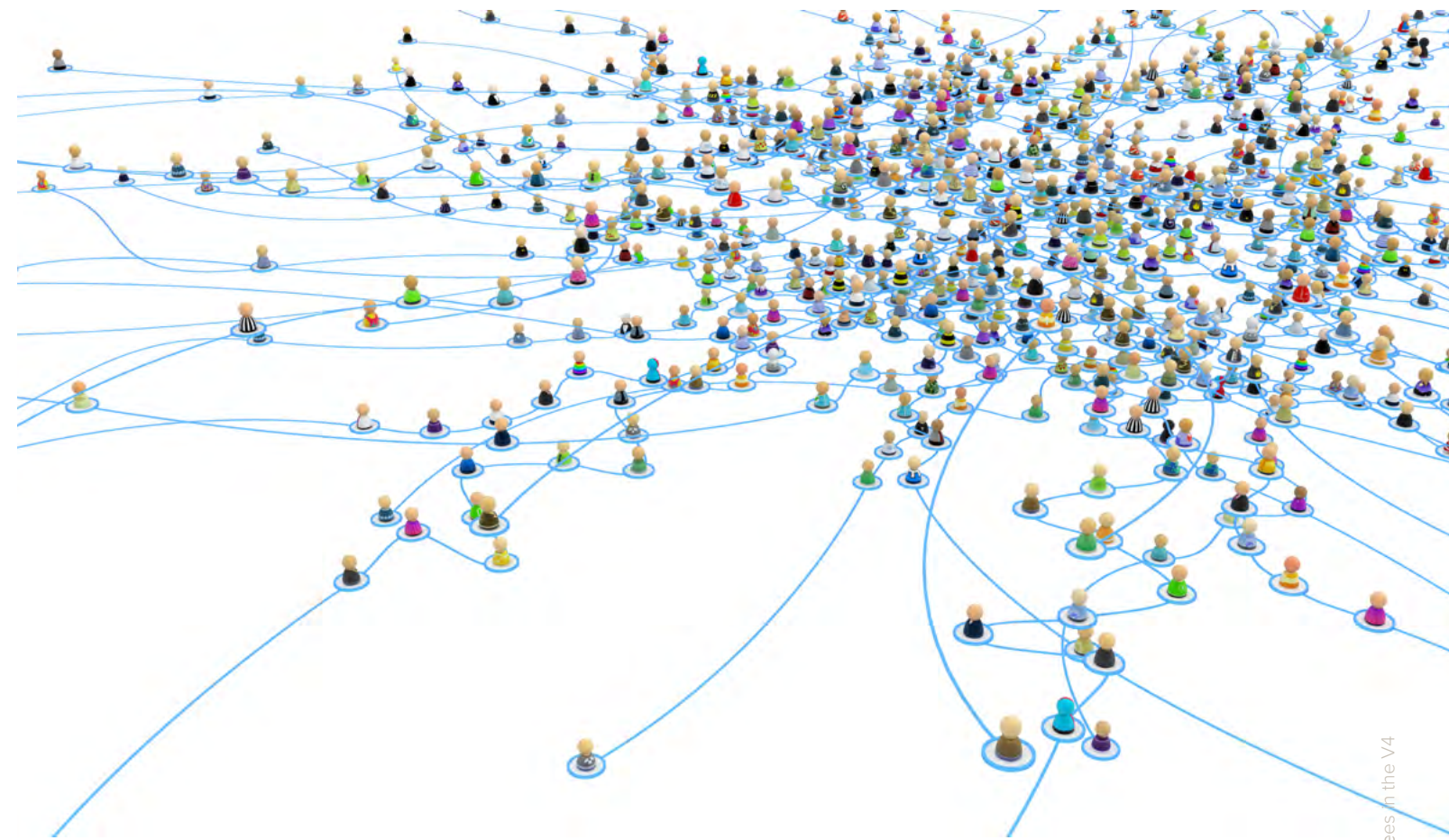
with inappropriate behaviour. **Cross-border regions saw more refugees passing through their territory, and this activity, regardless of the actual behaviour of those passing, could create a false sense of insecurity.**

Party politics remains key

As usual, the party-political polarisation of the V4 countries is reflected in the results of the poll including the notion that people

subscribe to the beliefs of their preferred “leaders.” **Hence, parties that try to score political points by attacking Ukrainian refugees have (mostly) successfully turned their own voter base against these flows.** In Poland, for example, Konfederacja voters are more likely to espouse negative views about refugees in almost all cases;⁹ the situation is similar for SPD¹⁰ (and, to a much lesser extent, ANO) voters in Czechia, SMER, Aliancia, and Republika voters in Slovakia¹¹, and Mi Hazánk followers in Hungary.¹²

Broader “coalitions” against Ukrainian refugees can be found in a couple cases though. In Slovakia, for example, supporters of the SMER, SME Rodina, Aliancia, Republika, and HLAS political parties are all more likely to demand a reduction of support to Ukrainian refugees. And Jobbik voters in Hungary are also among those more likely to agree with this view.



9 See, for instance: <https://notesfrompoland.com/2022/03/17/media-boycott-polish-far-right-conference-on-ukraine-refugee-privileges/>
10 See, for instance: <https://romea.cz/en/news/czech/czech-far-right-mp-gives-distasteful-xenophobic-speech-in-lower-house-attacks-romani-refugees-with-the-nazi-term>
11 See, for instance: <https://fb.watch/gEEmVy8lBa/>
12 See, for instance: <https://mobile.twitter.com/MiHazank/status/1499625641343344642>

A lot depends on whom one blames for the war

One of the most important factors across all four countries concerned the assigning of blame: people claiming either Ukraine or the US/ NATO were responsible for the war in Ukraine were far more likely to perceive Ukrainian refugees negatively. A plurality, at minimum, blamed Russia for the war in all countries (the figure stood below 50% in both Hungary and Slovakia). In Hungary, the proportion of those unable or unwilling to answer was close to 21%.

The answers to this question, undoubtedly, are also broadly contingent on the political affiliations of respondents. SPD and, to a lesser extent, ANO, Konfederacja, SMER,

Republika, and Mi Hazánk voters are less likely to blame Russia for the war. Hungary presents an especially distinct case – Fidesz voters generally avoid faulting Russia for the war but they are also positive inclined towards hosting Ukrainian refugees. Aliancia voters, interestingly, are rather closely aligned with Fidesz on whom they blame for the war but hold also rather unfavourable views towards hosting Ukrainians fleeing the war.

Where does the information come from?

The survey also measured where people receive information about events in the world. The data clearly shows that television remains the single most important source of news to citizens across the V4. Radio ranks lower in popularity at around 20% in all V4 countries.

The print media appears to be largely unimportant for Poles, with only 6% selecting it as their regular news source compared to 12-15% in the other three countries. Social media is the least important news source to Hungarians – they are also the least likely to use personal communications as a method to gather information. The media consumption habits of Slovaks are rather unique in that they are substantially less likely than others

to use online media as a source of news and considerably more likely to inform themselves through personal communication channels (a quarter of the population does so). Only 28% of Slovak respondents claimed to use digital media as news sources, strikingly low compared to Hungary, the next country in the ranking, where 47% of respondents selected online news as a preferred source.

The different platforms from which individuals consume news could be a particularly important factor in shaping different attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees. One commonality between all countries – people getting their news from personal communications are more likely to hold negative views towards Ukrainians. Another common “feature” in the four countries concerns the finding that social media users tend to be less positive about Ukrainian refugees, apparently indicating that negative messages

about refugees may be proliferating more on these platforms.

Czechs who keep informed through social media and personal communication channels were less likely nearly across the board to support refugees from Ukraine. As exceptions, television viewers and radio listeners, that said, were more likely than social media users to agree that support should be reduced for Ukrainians fleeing the war.

Turning to Hungary, consumers reliant on personal communication and relations for news certainly espouse more negative views on the topic. But this sub-group is rather small comprising only 9% of all respondents. Social media users – a more substantial group – feel more negatively about refugees on some issues; for instance, they are less likely to express positive views towards their country hosting refugees.

Who is responsible for starting the war in Ukraine?

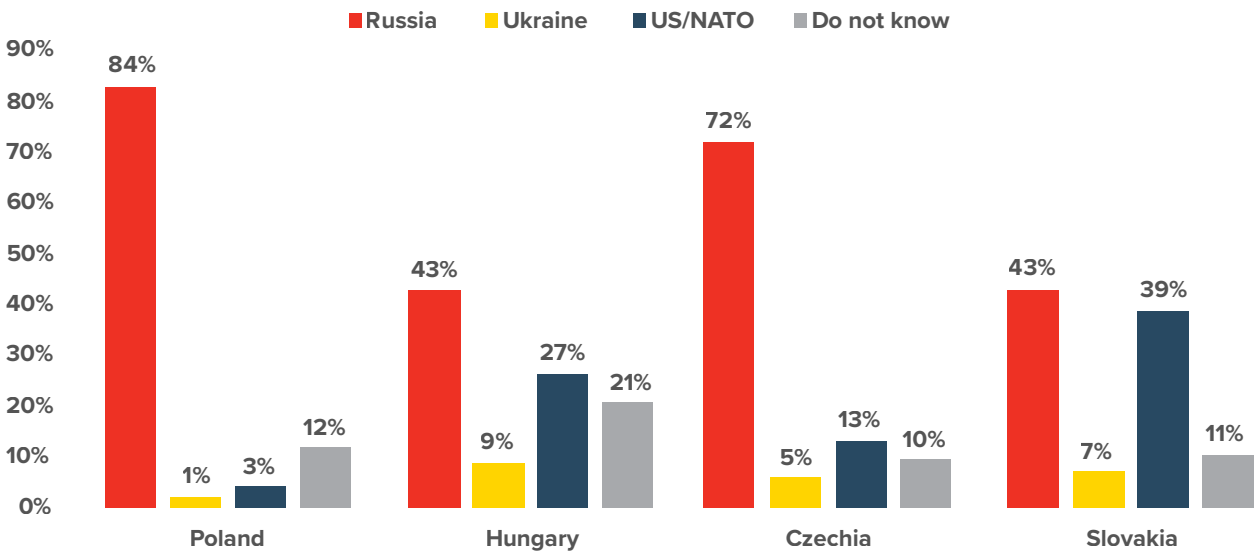


Figure 7 The proportion of respondents blaming Russia, Ukraine, the US and NATO for the war, and the proportion of those who did not know or did not answer the question.

Where do you usually get your news about what is happening in your country and in the world?

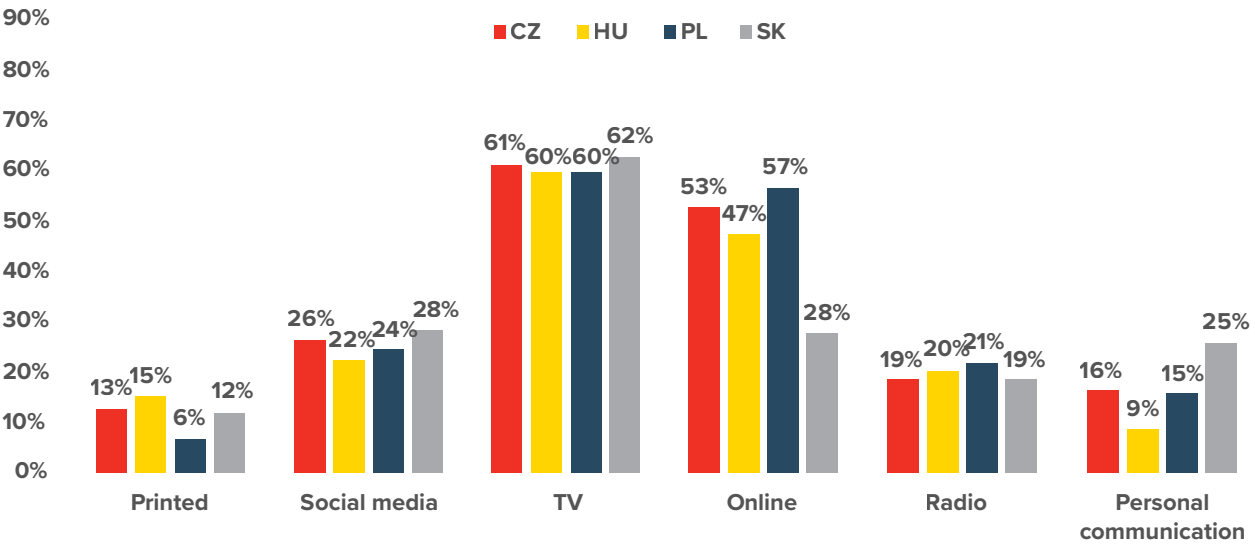


Figure 8 Where do people get their news from? The question was multiple choice and all respondents could pick two answers. The percentage of ‘other’ responses and those who declined to answer were left out because very few gave such responses.

Poles dependent on their personal contacts for news often, too, stand out for their negative opinions on refugees. But social media users take the “crown” on a few issues. A total of 30% of Polish social media news consumers, for instance, reported negative behaviour from Ukrainian refugees, more than 10 percentage points higher than the entire population. This finding indicates that social media posts might be internalised as part of the

“personal experiences” for users who never actually experienced the event themselves. Since younger citizens were more likely to state they get information from these platforms, this could explain why young people in Poland have adopted a more negative perspective on refugees.

Among Slovaks, the personal communication channels subgroup is considerably larger than in

other countries. And they are far more likely to hold negative views about both Ukrainian refugees and Ukraine. This group is substantially less likely to name Russia as the war culprit, an indicator for generally less support for refugees too. Social media users were also less likely to back, for instance, government benefits for Ukrainians fleeing the war.

Experiences shaped by words

All told, it is notable that perceptions and even experiences can often be influenced by political party affiliations and the sources of information we consume. This indicates that the way people “experience” current events in V4 countries and, no doubt, beyond is dictated substantially by what leaders from their preferred political communities are saying. Citizen perceptions can also be influenced by personal communication channels whereby the negative lived experiences of one individual can become the negative experience of another through the personal stories they share. **Therefore, in some ways, perceptions are formed not by what people see with their own eyes but by “personal stories” often taken out of context or generalised with respect to an entire group (e.g., Ukrainian refugees). These views are typically diffused to voters based on their preferred political leaders, media sources, and/or social groups.**¹³

Ukrainian refugees, regardless, are generally perceived favourably by V4 citizens. But political voices and organisations lending their assistance to helping them, including governments and NGOs, must remain vigilant if they wish to maintain this relatively rose landscape.

¹³ See, for instance, this official statement from the Police of the Slovak Republic on a fabricated story about Ukrainian refugees that went viral: <https://www.facebook.com/hoaxP2/photos/a.317666309061243/1328218841339313> (in Slovak)





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