(Not) Rolling Out the Welcome Mat: Non-EU Migration in the V4

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Image: Border crossing between Belarus and Poland

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About the Author

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Abstract

This paper examines the non-European migration landscapes that have developed in the four countries of the Visegrád Group (V4 - Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia). This includes various types of migration: state-sanctioned labor-related migration, asylum-seeking migration, and illegal migration. It considers societal effects and political responses to these migratory developments. It does not explore the phenomenon of Ukrainian migration following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. This is a significant development in all four countries, one that warrants separate treatment, and appears in this paper only as it relates to wider processes. This paper aims to present critical migration dilemmas in this region in a manner unlikely to be encountered in Western corporate media.

(Not) Rolling Out the Welcome Mat: Non-EU Migration in the V4 Countries

"We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries," once asserted Soviet dictator Josef Stalin. "We must make good this distance in ten years."

Behind the former Iron Curtain, there is no migration history comparable to that of Western Europe. Cognizant of Western Europe's experiences, Central and Eastern Europeans, including many on the political Left, are opposed to inward migration. As the newer members of the European Union (EU) increasingly realize, the bloc's policy reality can be entirely unaccountable to the will of the people.

The four countries of the Visegrád Group (V4 – Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) have spearheaded intra-EU resistance to Brussels' migration policies. In 2015, Czechia, Hungary, and Slovakia rejected the EU's migrant-relocation mechanism, and the shock of Poland's acceptance led Polish voters to opt for an anti-migration government that quickly joined its regional peers. One decade and numerous elections later, that landscape remains largely the same. In November 2025, all four V4 nations rejected the EU's latest migration quotas.

By EU standards, these four countries are largely homogeneous (with ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia a key exception) and opposed to inward migration, particularly from non-European countries. (All four countries have made notable exceptions for Ukrainian war refugees, and this topic deserves separate treatment.) Nonetheless, all four have witnessed unique developments resulting from recent non-European migration, and these are critical for understanding the region's wider socioeconomic relationship to such migration.

Czechia

According to the Czech government, at the end of March 2025, 1,073,303 foreign nationals were registered in Czechia, which totals approximately ten percent of the country's population. Notable among these are Ukrainians (566,151), Slovaks (122,455), and Vietnamese (69,281). These numbers have expanded rapidly in recent years due to the granting of temporary residence to Ukrainians fleeing the war in their country. Czechia hosts the most Ukrainians refugees in relation to its population size, although Poland hosts more in absolute terms.

As of March 2025, there was approximately one Ukrainian resident for every 30 people living in Czechia.[1] Like Poland, and unlike Hungary and Slovakia, the European Commission classifies Czechia as a country "facing a significant migratory situation," due to the massive inflow of Ukrainains.[2]

In 2024, 121,800 foreigners moved to Czechia, while 85,000 ended their period of residence, for a net migration of over 36,000. The largest of these arrivals were Ukrainians (17,000) and Slovaks (4,700).[3]

Asylum applications (these figures do not include Ukrainian war refugees) have remained steady between 1,000 and 2,000 annually from 2014 to 2024. In 2024, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, and Vietnam were the most common origin countries, at approximately 200 each. Of the 1,517 asylum decisions completed in 2024, the majority were either denied (608) or discontinued (706). At the end of 2024, 1,359 people enjoyed asylum status in Czechia, with the most common origin countries being Myanmar (218), Afghanistan (192), Russia (191), and Belarus (156).[4]

Czechia has one particularly well-established, well-assimilated non-European immigrant community. Vietnamese began arriving in Czechoslovakia as guest workers or students during the communist era. Hungary, Poland, East Germany, and present-day Slovakia also accepted Vietnamese inflows, but the community became particularly well established in what is now Czechia. Vietnamese-Czech public figures are well-known across various sectors of society. The Czech government estimates the country's Vietnamese community at 69,000, the third-highest foreign nationality after Ukrainian and Slovak.[5] By 2011, "Nguyen" reportedly ranked as the ninth-most-common surname in Czechia, with over 21,000 holders.[6] This community is also well documented. For example, Dr. Chad Bryant, an American historian who specializes in Czech history, profiles a Czech-speaking Vietnamese man in his 2021 book *Prague: Belonging in the Modern City*.[7]

Among the V4 countries, Czechia enjoys the most advantageous location to avoid illegal migration. It is the only one surrounded by fellow EU countries.

Hungarian police detaining illegal immigrants at the Hungarian-Serbian border (Shutterstock)

Unlike Poland, it is not subject to the irregular migratory machinations of Belarus. Unlike Hungary and Slovakia, it is rarely a necessary transit country for migrants hoping to reach German-speaking destinations. According to the Czech national police, in the first half of 2025, illegal migration increased year-over-year by 472 (10.3%), to 5,061.

However, transit illegal migration decreased by 62.6% over this same period. Foreigners found to be staying illegally in Czechia make up the majority of illegal migrants (96.5%). Ukraine, Moldova, and Vietnam were the most common countries of origin for this type of migration, while Georgians and Uzbeks recorded the most illegal attempts across the Schengen border. Syrians were the most commonly detected illegal-transit migrants, and most arrived via intra-Schengen flights from Greece. Most of these migrants intended to reach Germany.[8]

In October 2025, former Prime Minister Andrej Babiš triumphed in the Czech parliamentary elections, allowing him to return to the office he vacated in 2021. Babiš is widely perceived as a populist, and he is an ally of regional leaders like Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico, and Polish President Karol Nawrocki.

During the election campaign, Babiš promoted strict anti-migration policies and zero tolerance for illegal migration and EU migrant-redistribution schemes. During the post-election period of government formation, Babiš received some media criticism after members of his ANO party reportedly opined that Czechia would soon need 100,000 new skilled migrants, in addition to the hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians who have already arrived.[9] It is unclear how, or if, official Czech government policies will differ from the ones Babiš promoted during the campaign.

Dušan Drbohlav, of the Department of Social Geography and Regional Development at Charles University in Prague, told *Deník.cz* that migrants have a minimal chance of success with asylum claims in Czechia, and that they usually aim to reach the wealthier countries of Northwest Europe anyway. "We are not very sympathetic to immigrants, with the exception of Ukrainian war refugees. But even for them, state support for their stay and settlement in the future is far from clear," he said.[10]

Hungary

Hungary has developed an international reputation as a no-nonsense, tough-on-migration outlier in twenty-first century Europe. By 2018, *Deutsche Welle* had already published an interactive module titled 'Viktor Orban's [sic] most controversial migration comments.' Among them: "We don't see these people as Muslim refugees. We see them as Muslim invaders."[11] Prime Minister Orbán is well aware of his international reputation on this topic. "I have been chest-deep in the bloodbath of the migration debate for quite some time," he said in 2024.[12]

The Hungarian government is, indeed, steadfast in its opposition to EU migrant-redistribution measures and accepted liberal discourse on this topic. The country does share a piece of the Schengen Zone external border, meaning that it encounters migrants journeying on Balkan routes into Europe, but these migrants overwhelmingly move on to other countries if they succeed in reaching Hungarian soil. The most prominent manifestation of non-European migration to Hungary is the legal, labor-related variety.

A 2025 feature story in *The American Conservative* examines the "Phantom Foreign Couriers of Budapest." In the piece, American expatriate Will Collins, who teaches at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, describes the post-Covid phenomenon of Hungary's guest-worker economy.

None of the gig-workers Collins interviewed said they wanted to remain permanently in Hungary. 'I'm not interested in Hungary,' said one. "The goal, he explained, is to get PR – "permanent residency" – in the United States or Australia."

"The Hungarian language is a formidable barrier to entry in most professions," notes Collins, "but smartphone apps, machine translation, and the straightforward nature of delivery work have made the courier industry surprisingly accessible to outsiders."[13]

"Despite Hungary's restrictive immigration laws and challenging language, there is money to be made in Budapest, a city that has gone from Eastern European backwater to international hotspot in the space of a generation," he writes. He cites pandemic-era consumer habits and a 2022 revision of the Hungarian tax code as reasons for the increase in non-European gig workers.[14]

Contractors manage employment and accommodation for these temporary workers. Delivery businesses like Wolt and Foodora do not actually employ these workers: they consider them freelance contractors. "Foreign couriers…are brought in by a network of contracting agencies who recruit workers overseas and then bring them to Budapest."[15]

Collins notes that several Western European countries attempted the guest-worker model after World War II, but companies increasingly lobbied for permanent work visas, which cut recruiting and training costs. Collins suggests that this guest-worker model might return to a Europe straining under migration burdens. Of course, the temporary nature of this arrangement did not remain so the first time Europe employed it.

In his 2009 book *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe: Immigration, Islam and the West*, which predated the 2015 European migration crisis by over a half-decade, American columnist Christoper Caldwell documented West Germany's *Gastarbeiter* (guest worker) activities in the 1960s and 1970s:

> "Three quarters of the 18.5 million [*Gastarbeiter*] who came to Germany between 1960 and 1973 [returned home]. But the gap between what natives understood the *Gastarbeiter* invitation to mean widened steadily. Few guest workers could earn as much back home as they could in Europe. Recruiting, vetting, and medically examining replacements was expensive. So corporations pressured the government to make *Gastarbeiter* contracts renewable, to let workers' families join them in Germany, and to permit those who had formed families to stay…Virtually no one in Germany would have considered this an acceptable outcome at the time the *Gastarbeiter* program was launched. But any mass movement of labor – even a planned one, such as Germany's – develops momentum."[16]

Though these decisions affect the entire society, a relatively small number of business executives and politicians tend to make them. Collins concludes, "The benefits of app-based delivery services are enjoyed mainly by affluent Hungarians and foreign visitors while the costs – crowded city streets, arguments in traffic, an aura of squalor that seems to metastasize whenever couriers congregate around fast food restaurants – is felt by everyone."[17]

Hungary currently employs an estimated 100,000 foreign guest workers. In 2024, 133,000 foreign workers spent some time in Hungary, and 255,000 foreigners lived in the country under 24 legal statuses. Between 2016 and 2019, prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Ukrainian guest workers in Hungary increased by over 40 percent.

Asian guest workers began to arrive in large numbers after 2020, as the government approved a so-called "2+1" residence permit of two years with an option for a one-year extension. India, Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines have been among the prominent origin countries of these permit-holders. For the semi-skilled positions to which these permits correspond, Hungarian-language knowledge is not a requirement.[18]

József Nógrádi, director of a firm that manages recruitment and HR services, told *InfoRádió* that Hungary, Czechia, and Austria have very similarly sized labor markets, though Hungary employs fewer foreign workers than those peers. "All three countries have a workforce of around 4-5 million, but Austria and Czechia have around one million foreign workers, while Hungary has only 100,000," he said.

Hungary has an established non-European population in the form of its Chinese community. Visitors to central Budapest might notice the ubiquitousness of Chinese shop-owners. The environment is even more striking for visitors to Budapest's Chinese neighborhood in Kőbánya, east of the city center. The heart of the district is the Monori Center, a mixed-use development full of Chinese businesses.

Budapest is appealing to middle-class Chinese looking to reside in Europe in part because of Hungary's so-called "Golden Visa" program, established in 2013, which eases the path to residency for those investing in real estate; and the availability of affordable, high-quality education in Hungarian schools and universities.[19] In fact, Chinese have moved to Budapest throughout the post-communist period, and estimates suggest the current Chinese population of Budapest is 30,000.[20] Olympic gold-medalist speed-skating brothers Shaolin Sándor Liu and Shaoang Liu, sons of a Chinese father and Hungarian mother, are popular public figures in Hungary.[21]

Polish soldier carrying an infant refugee from Ukraine (Shutterstock)

Despite the Hungarian government's unwavering stance against illegal migration, migrant encounters often occur on Hungarian soil due to the country's geographic position. The border with non-EU Serbia, in other words, an external border of the Schengen Zone, is where most such encounters occur. The number of recorded encounters has ranged from several hundred to several thousand per week, as reported by Hungarian police. Numbers rise and fall with the perceived advantages of a particular route; in Autumn 2023 (see section on Slovakia), for example, Hungary experienced a surge of encounters.[22] In 2015, at the height of the migration crisis, the presence of a large collection of migrants in Hungary was a consideration of Germany's then-Chancellor Angela Merkel.[23]

At Bácsalmás, on the Hungary-Serbia border, signs in Arabic, Pashto, Urdu, and other origin-country languages line the low-voltage electric fence and manifest themselves in recorded police warnings. Despite Hungary's unwavering migration policies, the profitability of human smuggling ensures that encounters remain common at this small section of the Schengen external border. Earlier in 2025, two Pakistani smugglers were found dead on the Serbian side of the border, victims of a violent clash over control of an underground tunnel.[24] The smuggling cost just for this crossing from northern Serbia into Hungary was estimated at €2,500 in 2021.[25]

By any measure, Hungary remains less affected by non-European migration than most EU member states. Nonetheless, developments on guest-worker policy are worth monitoring particularly as neighbors have followed that path into unprecedented territory (see Poland section below).

"Nothing is so permanent as a temporary worker," goes a derivation of a quote attributed alternatively to Milton Friedman and Ronald Reagan.

Poland

In November 2025, Poland joined its V4 neighbors in announcing its rejection of the EU's migrant-redistribution scheme and its noncompliance penalties. "Poland will not be accepting migrants under the Migration Pact," wrote Prime Minister Donald Tusk. "Nor will we pay for it." Echoing numerous other international observers, Euronews explained, "Tusk is under pressure to take a hard line on migration, which is highly contested by the conservative opposition."[26]

Polish political realities are more complex than these observers suggest. Prime Minister Tusk is content to make symbolic gestures to the anti-migration electorate while giving EU institutions most of what they ask. Brussels, in turn, seems to bless this tightrope-walk. After all, Tusk's party lost emphatically in 2015, after consenting[27] to the EU's migrant-redistribution plan earlier that year.

The government had previously assured Poles that the enormous numbers of resettled Ukrainians would exempt Poland from Brussels migrant-relocation mandates: however, after a European Commission ruling in early 2025, it had to admit that it spoke out of turn.[28] The European Commission maintains that Poland, like Czechia, is "facing a significant migratory situation" after accepting hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian refugees.[29]

Politicians of all stripes have relied on the theory that migrants arriving on Polish territory will continue to a wealthier country like Germany. Mounting evidence suggests that this is changing. Suddenly, there are economic pull factors. Poland has been an economic success story over the last two decades, and its living standards are quickly converging with those of Western Europe. Furthermore, the EU's recent migration pact stipulates that all countries pay similar financial benefits to arriving migrants: that money stretches further in Poland than in Germany.

According to opposition Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* – henceforth, PiS) politician and former EU parliamentarian Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, the EU-mandated benefits will represent "a higher standard of living and housing than the Polish average wage. All of this will take place at our expense, because there are no EU funds for it. It will be Poland that will have to fund all this."[30]

As a large member state with little recent migration history (excepting from neighbors Ukraine and Belarus), Poland is no stranger to the EU migrant-redistribution pressure it is currently facing. The topic is, perhaps unsurprisingly, intertwined with eternal rival Germany. Berlin has dispatched thousands of migrants to Poland with the spurious claim that they first entered EU territory there.[31] Polish media have circulated photos of German police vans depositing migrants across the border.

Robert Fico, Slovakia's prime minister, speaking with media (Shutterstock)

"Mr. Prime Minister [Tusk], I ask you to show some courage in your dealings with the German authorities, for just because Germany has a problem, because they did something stupid a few years ago, does not mean that they have to share this stupidity with us and that we have to accept it," implored outgoing President Andrzej Duda, whose term expired in 2025.[32]

Since 2021, the situation at the Belarusian border has garnered international headlines. Making cynical use of "weapons of mass migration," the government of Alexander Lukashenko has facilitated the flow of migrants from the Middle East and Africa to the EU's northeastern fringe. Poland has constructed dozens of miles of armored border wall and patrolled diligently, and social-media users often post triumphant footage of border pushbacks: nonetheless, this is only part of the story.

Poles were outraged when, in June of 2024, a German police van deposited a Middle Eastern family in a parking lot across the Polish border without notifying Polish officials.[33] The incident generated a diplomatic row and cast a lens on the frequency of these German 'pushbacks.' In another episode that week, German police dropped six African men across the border, that time after notifying Polish authorities.[34] On that occasion, journalist Aleksandra Fedorska reported, "Since the beginning of [2024], officials from Germany have sent back to Poland over 3,500 migrants."[35] Some of these reportedly never crossed the Polish-German frontier, having arrived in Germany via other routes.

The Polish Border Guard is stretched thin on the western border, as resources are desperately needed on the eastern border with Belarus, to which the Belarusian regime has been ferrying Middle Eastern and African migrants for years in a form of hybrid warfare (Moscow is surely involved in the proceedings). The posting is thankless: Sergeant (promoted posthumously) Mateusz Sitek, a 21-year-old soldier, succumbed to his wounds in June 2024, after a migrant stabbed him through a fence.[36] Despite these conditions, military police arrested three border guardsmen for firing warning shots into the air and ground to deter aggressive migrants. "This is a shocking case, considering the fact that our soldiers were recently repeatedly attacked by aggressors from the Belarus side," said then-President Andrzej Duda.[37]

A 2024 Ipsos poll suggested 67 percent of Poles believe migrants should be repelled at the Belarusian border, and those who manage to cross should be returned to Belarus; only 19 percent believe their asylum claims should be processed in Poland.[38] Voters of the Left alliance were evenly split on this question, and voters of all other parties strongly supported border-protection measures. Some establishment media called the poll results "shocking."[39]

In a 2025 poll from pro-opposition *Telewizja Republika*, 83 percent opposed accepting migrants sent back from Germany.[40] Voters appear united, yet migrants continue to arrive, a familiar theme in 21st-century liberal Europe. Official foreign-residency figures continue to rise.[41]

A small number of activists seemingly enjoy more agency than the silent majority. Activist groups like Podlaskie OPH operate along the Belarusian frontier and actively usher migrants into Poland. Group chats instruct migrants where to cross and where to go after arriving in Poland.[42] Taxis funded by NGOs ferry migrants to legal offices that will process their asylum claims. Soon after taking power in late 2023, Marshal of the Sejm (chair of the lower house of the Polish Parliament) Szymon Hołownia posed for a photo with newly arrived migrants and NGO activists in the Sejm (Parliament), a move that drew significant criticism from opposition voices.[43]

Activists have also encouraged migrants to seek legal compensation from the Polish state. In two 2024 cases, regional courts ruled against the Polish Border Guard, and in favor of an Afghan and an Ethiopian, both of whom injured themselves after falling from border barriers.[44] In such cases, the activist-backed illegal-entrants can then pursue additional civil cases against the Polish state.

In the quiet Zambrów district, near the Belarusian border, residents have reported fear and helplessness over groups of migrant men roaming the area. "Young girls are afraid to go out, because if a few of those guys come out from across the street, the girls have to walk to the bus stop with their parents," explained one local inhabitant. "There was a case where a man walked behind the apartment block with a phone and recorded the block and the children's playground," reported another. "One man stood insolently for two days, looking through the windows."[45]

In the political sphere, the pro-migration Left has thus far talked less brazenly than its counterparts in Western Europe. Its arguments meekly posit that globalism is inevitable. Left (*Lewica*) alliance parliamentarian Agnieszka Dziemianowicz-Bąk asserted, "the Polish job market needs hands to work, and it also needs migrants."[46] Thus, "Diversity is Our Strength" is not a tenable political slogan—for now.

That does not mean that Polish society figures shy away from activism. Award-winning filmmaker Agnieszka Holland released the election-year film *Green Border (Zielona granica)*, which sympathetically characterized the interlopers at the Belarusian frontier. In one entirely fictional scene, a Polish Border Guard officer hands a migrant a thermos full of water with shards of broken glass. The Vatican, still an important voice in Polish society, screened the film before the 2023 parliamentary elections.[47]

Perhaps the most significant, and politically most difficult to characterize, form of recent migration is the legal, economic variety. PiS swept to power on firm opposition to the EU's migrant-redistribution scheme in 2015. In the eight years of PiS governance, Poland regularly clashed with the EU on migration matters and built stout border defenses. At the same time, it quietly admitted record numbers of non-European workers.[48] One minister attempted suicide after a corrupt cash-for-visa scheme was uncovered during the 2023 campaign.[49]

Current Prime Minister Donald Tusk and his coalition partners have been eager to bludgeon their PiS opponents over this duplicity, but they awkwardly do so from a firmly pro-EU platform. In 2024, the Tusk government quietly announced the opening of 49 migrant settlement centers across the country,[50] though it postponed concrete action until after the 2025 presidential election. In November 2025, pro-government *Wprost* reported that seven of Poland's 16 voivodeships (administrative divisions, or provinces) had decided not to establish such centers, and two others did not even consider it.[51] PiS figures often note that current government leaders urged voters not to participate in two referenda on the topic in 2023; accordingly, they failed to meet the binding participation threshold.[52]

Irrespective of political blame, scenes that would have been unfathomable a decade ago are proliferating across Poland. In 2024, a Senegalese man defecated in a reservoir, evoking widespread shock and social-media commentary:[53] He was later deported.[54] In April 2025, a Jamaican man stabbed and severely wounded a fellow passenger exiting a Warsaw tram.[55] In July 2025, a Venezuelan migrant murdered a young woman in Toruń after a botched rape attempt.[56] In 2024, camera footage showed an African man attempting to pick the lock of a parked car in Warsaw, climbing and jumping on top of others, and eventually assaulting a delivery driver on a motorized scooter. "Until recently, such scenes could only be seen in the countries of Western Europe," wrote the staff of pro-opposition *wPolityce.pl*.[57] This genre of news story, once enumerable by hand, is increasingly common.

Arrivals from the Caucasus, who count among the most numerous non-European migrants in Poland, have become prominent in the country's criminal ecosystem. In May 2025, Warsaw police officers arrested seven members of the so-called Georgian mafia.[58] That same month, PiS parliamentarian Paweł Jabłoński claimed a Chechen gang controlled part of Warsaw, and Mayor Rafał Trzaskowski was powerless to confront it.[59] In November 2025, members of a Georgian gang allegedly stole valuable texts from a library at the University of Warsaw.[60] By 2021, over 10,000 Georgians possessed residence permits, making them one of the fastest-growing foreign groups in Poland.[61]

The soft power of non-European migrants has a mounting psychological impact on Polish society. In March 2025, Muslim worshippers filled the street in front of a mosque in Gdańsk to mark Eid:[62] similar scenes were visible in Warsaw, Kraków, and Wrocław. A Jordanian-funded three-story mosque in Warsaw will hold over 1,000 people.[63] In industrial Katowice, the Center of Islamic Culture sits just off the main thoroughfare. In October 2025, Dr Umar Al-Qadri, an Ireland-based imam who is a promoter of Muslim activism and a staple figure of Islam-related topics in Irish media, visited Poland, where he allegedly had an altercation with a fellow passenger on a return flight to Ireland.[64]

Polish border guard officers on duty at the Polish-German border (Shutterstock)

"Poland has clearly changed its status and become an immigration country, i.e., a country to which people come rather than leave.," said Dr. Paweł Kaczmarczyk, an economics professor at the University of Warsaw and director of the university's Center for Migration Research, in a March 2025 interview. "In my opinion, this is something we should accept and learn to function better in this reality, because considering the needs of the Polish labor market, but also the general political and geopolitical situation, I would expect migration to intensify rather than a radical reversal of trends," he added. He specifically noted the presence of Colombians and other South Americans and cited the activities of labor-recruitment agencies for this development.[65]

In January 2021, over a year before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Polish government released a report outlining the makeup of the country's foreign population. At that time, Ukrainians (244,200) already represented nearly ten times the number of the second-largest group, Belarusians (28,800). Non-European origin countries in the top ten included Vietnam (10,900), India (9,900), Georgia (7,900), and China (7,100).[66] The next similar report will be instructive both for the quantity and identity of new arrivals in the preceding half-decade.

Since 2021, permanent immigration to Poland from European countries has ranged from 13,500 to 17,500 per year; from Asia, between 750-950 annually; from North and South America, between 750-950 annually; from Africa, between 100-200 annually; and from Oceania, less than 100 annually.[67] These figures do not include individuals living in Poland with work visas, asylum claims, or illegal status.

In the first three quarters of 2025, over 11,000 people applied for international protection in Poland, a decrease of nine percent from the same period in 2024. Citizens of Ukraine (over half), Belarus, and Russia represented 80 percent of these, though culturally distant Afghanistan and Tajikistan followed with over 200 each. During that same period, asylum claims were approved for 3,100 applicants, with nearly all originating in Ukraine, Belarus, or Russia. Over 2,300 cases were discontinued, which means the applicant likely left Poland. Notably, Ethiopians factored prominently on this list, with over 200 such cases. At the end of September 2025, 6,700 foreigner asylum applicants were receiving assistance from the Polish state, with about 10 percent of those living in specialized accommodation centers.[68]

The corresponding asylum-application figures from 2024 are notable. After the three consistently highest arrival figures from Eastern European neighbors, Somalia and Eritrea registered as fourth- and fifth-highest sources of asylum applications, with over 600 each. India counted among the top three origin countries for rejected claims, and Eritrea, Somalia, and Syria were the three highest sources of discontinued claims.[69]

Politically divided, economically thriving Poland has not developed any kind of comprehensive approach to the pressing matter of legal non-European migration. On the irregular, or illegal, variety, its political leaders remain steadfast.

"Dear Madam President [Ursula von der Leyen], the European Commission is facing important decisions in the near future, so I would kindly like to inform you that Poland will not agree to any actions by European institutions that would aim to deploy illegal migrants in Poland, and I hope that you will take this fact into account in your actions," wrote President Karol Nawrocki in a letter addressed to European Commission in October 2025.[70]

"The European Union does not own the countries and cannot order sovereign states what to do in matters such as their own security," asserted Marcin Przydacz, head of President Karol Nawrocki's Office of Political Affairs, on Poland's rejection of EU migrant-distribution mandates. "It is not yet the case that Brussels will decide what happens on the streets of Polish cities, but rather the sovereign authorities of the Polish state."[71]

Slovakia

Like its Slavic neighbors, Slovakia has been a destination for Ukrainian war refugees since 2022. Accordingly, visitors will notice Cyrillic letters on, for example, Bratislava public transportation. Taxi and rideshare drivers often hail from Ukraine, if not the Caucasus or further afield.

Yet, unlike Poland, Slovakia is primarily a transit country for non-European migration. Occasionally it becomes a flashpoint on the European migratory map. This occurred in 2023, when the country was undergoing a nearly year-long period of rule by an unelected, technocratic government.

Wolt driver, Online Food Delivery Service in Budapest, Hungary (Shutterstock)

At that time, a bureaucratic misunderstanding brought migrants north, off the most direct routes to Austria and Germany. According to incorrect rumors, a registration document initiated by a previous Slovakian government would allow uninvited migrants to remain legally in the country. Furthermore, Austria and Hungary imposed border policies complicating common Balkan routes. This suddenly made Slovakia an attractive waystation relative to its geographic location.[72] Migrants quickly flooded southern Slovakian towns like Nové Zámky, which is a stop on the international rail line between Budapest and Bratislava, and Veľký Krtíš, which is near the Hungarian border but offers no obvious logistical advantage in reaching points west.

"This is a type of migration where foreigners arriving on the Balkan Peninsula, mainly from Turkey (by land or sea), pass through individual countries on the peninsula and in Central Europe in an effort to reach their destination countries," said Martina Sláviková, a spokeswoman for the Presidium of the Police Force of the Slovakian Republic.[73]

These events coincided with fiercely contested Slovakian parliamentary elections, which occurred on September 30. "This progressive, stupid government, which is guided by the principles of Soros' migration policy, is turning Slovakia into a base camp for illegal migration," said former Prime Minister Robert Fico, subsequently reelected to that role, while campaigning. "We have no idea what kind of environment they come from, whether it's a terrorist one," he added. "This is what it looks like when the state does not care about the safety of its own citizens," said Peter Pellegrini, the former prime minister and sometime Fico ally who subsequently won the presidential contest in April 2024.[74] As Slovak voters, especially those in the comparatively pro-Fico rural regions, mirror general V4 regional attitudes toward non-European migration, this was effective political rhetoric.

In October 2023, Slovakia introduced temporary border controls at the Hungarian border to stem the tide. By that time, over 40,000 migrants had entered Slovakian territory in 2023, an eleven-fold increase from the previous year.[75] By the end of the year, the number climbed to over 47,000.[76] A handful applied for asylum, but most continued to Western Europe. In some districts, local inhabitants formed citizen patrols.

Furthermore, in the three-year period from 2021-23, Slovakian authorities arrested nearly 400 human smugglers.[77] "Europe is not for everyone who wants to have a better life," said former Deputy Prime Minister Richard Sulík. "It cannot absorb a billion people from Africa."[78]

In February 2024, *Denník Štandard* reported that over 100 Middle Eastern children were classified as missing from the Center for Children and Families in Medzilaborce, the country's only facility for unaccompanied-minor migrants.[79] "Since Slovakia is not a destination country for illegal migrants, they run away shortly after being placed in the center and a search is launched for them," wrote Ladislav Hollý. According to Vladislav Fejo, the center's director, Middle Eastern parents often send their children to Europe with smugglers, with the expectation they will send money home. "It happens that we know where the children are, but they are still 'hanging' on the police website," said Fejo. Usually, the children have no documents, and authorities must use the names and birth dates provided by the migrants.

In August 2025, Irish *Gardaí* (police) issued missing-person reports for a supposed teenager who appeared as a scar-faced African man with male-pattern hair loss in his photograph.[80] Some Irish political figures began circulating missing-person details of a man with a nearly identical name and photograph from Slovakia in 2023.[81] Irrespective of this man's identity, the case is instructive in understanding Slovakia's role in migratory activity.

According to Slovakian government records, a man identified as Suhaib Mohammad Hassan went missing in March 2023.[82] At this time, the subject had reportedly just turned 15 years old, with a listed birthday of January 1 (the outlandishly ubiquitous birthdate among EU new arrivals[83]). His hairline is clearly receding in the Slovakian photo, though the hair-loss is not as advanced as in the Irish one two years later. He also possesses the same distinct scar above his left eye. According to the report, Mr Hassan had been living in Medzilaborce, suggesting he was one of the escapees from the Center for Children and Families.

The missing-person database from the Humenné district (which includes Medzilaborce) separately lists 'Slovak persons' and 'foreign persons', with the latter list including several dozen names consistent with Arabic-speaking countries and other parts of the Muslim world, ostensibly confirming the *Denník Štandard* report.[84]

Construction site of a wall defending Polish and Belarussian border (Shutterstock)

Several days after the Irish missing-person report, Gardaí announced the missing individual was located and safe.[85] His activities in Slovakia, if he indeed spent time there, are less easily ascertained. The person named in the 2023 report, along with most of the other foreigners listed in the Humenné database, likely left Slovakia for Western Europe.

Slovakian government statistics confirm most illegal migrants do continue to other countries after arriving in Slovakia, and the number of arrivals has subsided after the crisis conditions of 2023. Through the first half of 2024, just over 1,200 illegal migrants had arrived on Slovakian soil, a return to pre-2022 levels. Slovakian officials credited, in part, Serbian government policies for this shift, as many of the migrants reaching Slovakian territory arrive via Serbia and Hungary.[86]

"The Police of the Slovakian Republic has thoroughly checked and continues to check all foreigners staying illegally in the territory of the Slovakian Republic on the basis of collected biometric data (especially fingerprints) in relevant national and international databases in order to maximize the security of the Slovakian Republic, but also of the entire Schengen area," explained police spokeswoman Martina Sláviková.[87]

Legal immigration figures are not overwhelming, but they demonstrate trends that Slovakian policymakers and voters should note. The number of legal (permanent or temporary) foreign residents has tripled over the past decade, from just under 85,000 to over 294,000. Ukrainians are the most numerous of these, and the top six origin countries are in Central or Eastern Europe, except for Vietnam.[88] In 2023, Slovakia experienced net immigration of just over 1,400, a notable development in a country that has largely experienced net emigration since its accession to the European Union in 2004.

As of December 2024, over 29,000 citizens of non-EU countries had been granted work permits in Slovakia. Here, too, Ukrainians predominate, although more-distant origin countries like India, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan also figure notably. Over 52,000 people without work permits have some sort of working arrangement in Slovakia, and the majority of these are Ukrainians.[89]

"The Slovakian labor market also employs self-employed persons from third [non-EU] countries who are not registered with the labor, social affairs, and family offices, as this is not their area of competence," notes the Press and Communication Department of the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family (*Ústredie práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny*).[90]

Conclusion

Anti-migration political attitudes – particularly when excluding the special case of Ukrainian war refugees – are arguably just as firm in 2025 as they were in 2015, at the time of that year's European migration crisis. The various types of legal and illegal migration inevitably make for a more complicated environment. Poland, with its large and rapidly developing economy, seemingly is becoming a desirable migration-destination country, in addition to one that sits at a critical geopolitical location. Hungary and Slovakia remain significant transit countries for migrants hoping to reach the wealthier countries of Western Europe. All four countries are juggling the needs of a modern economy with the haunting migration experiences of nearby Western Europe.

Are the V4 countries biding their time until a new political system replaces the cheap-labor-dependent manifestation of liberalism currently dominant in the West? Or are they slowly progressing toward an inevitable end state of mass migration and its concomitant societal effects? The answer will determine what to make of the unique migration ecosystems that have developed in this pivotal region of Europe.

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