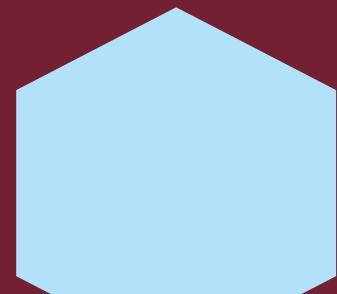


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Neighboring Crisis: Forced Displacement from Ukraine and Poland's Response Strategies (2022–2025)

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Abstract

This article examines the impact of the mass forced displacement triggered by Russia's attack on Ukraine on 24 February 2022 and analyzes Poland's political, institutional, and societal responses between 2022 and 2025. Using qualitative documentary analysis, the study evaluates how legal regulations, state practices, media discourse, and public attitudes collectively shaped Poland's evolving governance of Ukrainian Forced Migrants (UFMs). The analysis is primarily situated within debates on conditional solidarity and welfare chauvinism, with additional insights drawn from securitization dynamics where relevant. The findings show that although Poland rapidly presented itself as Europe's humanitarian leader in the initial phase of the crisis, the prolongation of the war, rising welfare pressures, and increasing political polarization progressively eroded this stance. The 2022 temporary protection law – first framed as a generous humanitarian measure – became embedded in a governance framework marked by public fatigue, political contestation, and fiscal concerns. Media narratives and the moral role of religious institutions

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further influenced societal perceptions, contributing to a shift from unconditional assistance to more conditional and strategically calibrated forms of support. In certain policy areas, especially border practices, elements of securitizing discourse also became visible, reinforcing a more selective approach to protection. Overall, the Polish case illustrates the structural limits of humanitarian solidarity in the absence of long-term, sustainable migration management mechanisms. The analysis shows that the balance between humanitarian responsibility and national interest became increasingly difficult to maintain, suggesting that solidarity is inherently fragile when exposed to economic pressures, political incentives, and shifting public attitudes.

Keywords

Poland, Ukrainian Forced Migrants (UFMs), forced displacement, migration governance, conditional solidarity

Introduction

The war that broke out between Russia and Ukraine on 24 February 2022 has resulted in mass forced displacement. This situation is described as the fastest forced displacement to Europe in the last thirty years.¹ In response to Russia's aggressive invasion, millions of Ukrainian citizens were compelled to leave their homes and seek safety in other countries. Due to its proximity, Poland played a crucial role during the initial days and weeks of the conflict, emerging as the primary destination for Ukrainian Forced Migrants (UFMs).²

Poland's process of managing the large influx of UFM has been characterized from the outset by unprecedented support from society, civil society organizations, and local authorities. However, the scale of the temporary protection regime, rapid access to the labor market, and mounting pressures on housing, education, and healthcare systems have highlighted the need to develop coherent medium- and long-term migration policies.³ The Polish people's act of opening their homes to provide shelter for hundreds of thousands of UFM created an exemplary atmosphere of solidarity across society; during this process, civil society organizations, local authorities, and the private sec-

1. C. Sacchi, *Protection of Perinatal Mental Health During the War in Ukraine*, "The Lancet Regional Health – Europe", 2022, Vol. 15, p. 1, DOI: [10.1016/j.lanepe.2022.100362](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lanepe.2022.100362).

2. W. Pac, *Challenges and Strategies in Poland's Policy Towards Ukraine in the Context of Migration*, "Politics & Security", 2025, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 42, DOI: [10.54658/ps.28153324.2025.11.1.pp.42-54](https://doi.org/10.54658/ps.28153324.2025.11.1.pp.42-54).

tor played critical roles in aid and integration activities. However, in the initial stages of the humanitarian response, the limited availability of public resources and coordination shortcomings were notable, placing significant strain on social services and infrastructure. This situation highlighted the need to establish a sustainable and long-term migration management framework beyond the immediate response to the crisis.⁴

In response to the rapidly changing situation, Poland has taken a series of legal, administrative, and diplomatic measures to both support UFMIs and protect the state's interests. Amendments to the Aliens Act, which came into force in 2023, introduced new mechanisms to manage forced displacement flows into the country and strengthen border procedures. The wave of mass forced displacement following the war has reshaped Poland's approach to migration management, significantly transforming the country's position within the European Union and its regional relations. These issues have also been raised at the European Union level, with Poland calling for a common approach to the migration issue and for increased financial support and solidarity.⁵

This article addresses the issue of forced displacement originating from Ukraine and Poland's response to this phenomenon. The paper also focuses on the main challenges arising from this forced displacement, the strategies adopted by Poland following the outbreak of the Russia–Ukraine war, and the bilateral dimension of Polish–Ukrainian cooperation in managing the crisis. Particular emphasis is placed on the social and political factors shaping Poland's perception of UFMIs, especially the role of the Church, the media, and the government.

This article aims to provide an analysis of Poland's governance of the forced displacement crisis triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and to evaluate the country's political, legal, and institutional responses between 2022 and 2025. The study examines how the Polish state, public institutions, media, and society jointly shaped the evolution of Poland's approach to UFMIs. In this context, particular attention is paid to legal regulations, the activities of public institutions, media discourse, and societal attitudes, enabling a holistic assessment of the national response.

To guide the inquiry, the study is structured around the following research question: How and why did Poland's policy toward UFMIs evolve from an initial model of humanitarian solidarity into a security- and interest-driven governance framework between 2022 and 2025, and what political, social, and institutional dynamics shaped this transformation?

3. *OECD Economic Surveys: Poland 2023*, OECD Publishing 2023, pp. 20–22, <https://www.oecd.org/economy/poland-economic-snapshot/>, (access 17.10.2025); M. Duszczyk, P. Kaczmarczyk, *Poland and War Refugees from Ukraine – Beyond Pure Aid*, "CESifo Forum", 2022, Vol. 23, No. 4, pp. 37–38, <https://www.ifo.de/en/publikationen/2022/article-journal/poland-and-war-refugees-ukraine-beyond-pure-aid>, (access 17.10.2025).

4. *Transformational Humanitarian Response: The Example of Poland*, Humanitarian Leadership Academy / Save the Children 2023, pp. 6–7, 12–14, 16–17, 22–23, <https://www.humanitarianleadershipacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Transformational-Humanitarian-Response-The-Example-of-Poland.pdf>, (access 17.10.2025).

5. *Pact on Migration and Asylum*, European Commission 2024, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum_en, (access 17.10.2025); *Changes in migration law*, Office for Foreigners 2023, <https://www.gov.pl/web/udsc-en/changes-in-migration-law>, (access 17.10.2025).

The study is conceptually grounded in three complementary strands of migration theory. First, the shift from humanitarian to restrictive policies is interpreted through the lens of securitization theory, which explains how states frame migration as a security threat to legitimize exceptional governance measures.⁶ Second, welfare chauvinism literature provides an analytical basis for understanding how political actors emphasize the protection of national welfare systems and prioritize citizens over non-citizens – a dynamic visible in Poland's debates on social assistance for UFMs.⁷ Third, the analysis draws on scholarship on humanitarian and conditional solidarity, which highlights how initial moral commitments to protection often erode under economic pressures, social fatigue, and political contestation.⁸ Together, these perspectives offer a coherent theoretical framework for explaining Poland's movement from early humanitarian openness to a more selective, interest-driven governance model between 2022 and 2025.

Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative research design centered on document analysis, supported by descriptive quantitative data. Document analysis was selected as the primary method because it enables systematic examination of legal texts, institutional publications, and policy documents that reflect Poland's evolving migration governance. Within this framework, the research analyzes official reports, legislative acts, and regulatory documents issued by the Polish government, the European Commission, and international organizations. Statistical data published by central Polish institutions, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Family and Social Policy, and the Central Statistical Office (GUS), were incorporated to contextualize policy changes with empirical indicators.

The data corpus includes documents related to the European Union's New Pact on Migration and Asylum, European Commission progress reports, official legislation and implementation documents on the temporary protection regime and Aliens Act in Poland, as well as publications from national research centers such as the Centre of Migration Research (CMR). Reports produced by international organizations (UNHCR, OECD, Humanitarian Leadership Academy), academic articles, public opinion surveys, and media coverage were also examined to capture different dimensions of the crisis. Together, these sources provide a comprehensive, multi-layered overview of Poland's policy trajectory between 2022 and 2025.

Document selection followed a criterion-based strategy. Official state documents were included due to their authoritative nature; reports from research centers and organizations provided ana-

6. B. Buzan, O. Wæver, J. de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, Lynne Rienner 1998; O. Wæver, *Securitization and Desecuritization*, in: *On Security*, ed. R.D. Lipschutz, Columbia University Press 1995, pp. 46–86.

7. G. Brochmann, A. Hagelund, *Immigration Policy and the Scandinavian Welfare State 1945–2010*, Palgrave Macmillan 2012; W. Kymlicka, K. Banting, *Immigration, Multiculturalism, and the Welfare State*, "Ethics & International Affairs", 2006, Vol. 20, No. 3, pp. 281–301, DOI: [10.1111/j.1747-7093.2006.00027.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7093.2006.00027.x).

8. D. Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*, University of California Press 2012.

lytical depth; academic works offered theoretical framing; and public opinion surveys and media content captured societal narratives and shifts in public perception. This triangulation ensures reliability, analytical richness, and methodological transparency.

The analytical process followed a structured form of qualitative content analysis. All selected documents were reviewed and thematically coded across three core dimensions: state policy responses, societal attitudes, and institutional practices. Coding was conducted iteratively, meaning that analytical categories were refined as new patterns emerged within the material. Special attention was paid to identifying critical junctures – such as the adoption of the temporary protection law or shifts in public discourse – that signaled changes in governance. This approach ensured systematic comparison across sources and allowed the findings to be grounded in verifiable textual evidence rather than descriptive summarization alone.

In addition, the study adopts a case study approach, examining Poland as a representative example of a state confronted with sudden, large-scale forced displacement. Key events, such as the adoption of the temporary protection law, the grain crisis, and growing aid fatigue, are analyzed as critical junctures that illustrate the movement from humanitarian to securitized policymaking. The research also incorporates secondary data analysis, particularly news reports from major international outlets, to trace evolving public discourse and political messaging surrounding UFMs. Integrating qualitative findings with quantitative indicators allows for a contextualized and evidence-based explanation of Poland's policy transformation after 2022.

For terminological consistency, this article uses the term “Ukrainian Forced Migrants” (UFMs) to describe individuals displaced by the Russian invasion of 24 February 2022. This terminology is adopted because the majority of those fleeing Ukraine fall neither under formal refugee status nor within the category of asylum seekers, but instead are beneficiaries of the temporary protection regime. The term aligns with the definition provided by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which defines forced migration as “a migratory movement in which an element of coercion exists, including threats to life and livelihood arising from natural or man-made causes.”⁹

9. *Glossary on Migration*, International Migration Law Series, No. 34, International Organization for Migration 2019, p. 77, https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf, (access 30.11.2025).

Poland's Strategic Orientation Following the Russia-Ukraine War

Many European countries, particularly Poland, have begun to harbor security concerns due to the Russian threat, and the region has entered a new period of turmoil.¹⁰ This change may be considered to have played a significant role in the escalation of the reaction towards Russia.¹¹ Poland and Ukraine share similar assessments that Russia is the main source of instability and aggression in Europe, posing threats to peace and the security of their citizens.¹²

The most significant impact of the war on Poland is the increase in its importance for European security. Poland has become a critical strategic actor as a result of the war.¹³ Following the invasion of Ukraine, Poland has both spearheaded military aid to its neighbor, Ukraine, and taken steps to become Europe's largest land force.¹⁴ Poland has also become the main hub for American weapons sent to Ukraine. It plays a significant role in providing humanitarian aid to UFMIs in Poland and in the dynamic development of the Polish army and NATO's eastern flank. Moreover, Polish authorities are steadily increasing defense spending, contributing to Poland's growing importance as a defender of NATO's eastern flank.¹⁵

Russia's war against Ukraine, which began in February 2022, has resulted in the largest movement of UFMIs in Europe since the Second World War, estimated by the UNHCR at 5.2 million people. In the first two months, approximately 3 million UFMIs fleeing the war crossed the Polish border, over 95 per cent of whom were Ukrainian citizens.¹⁶ In response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Poland adopted the Act on Assistance to Ukrainian Citizens in Connection with the Armed Conflict in the Territory of that State on 12 March 2022. Poland's temporary protection law does not appear to fully comply with the Temporary Protection Directive and the Council's implementing decision.¹⁷ As the EU's temporary protection law has never been applied before, there is no existing practice that can be examined in this regard or compared with the legal situation of persons fleeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine.¹⁸ Procedures are handled in different ways and by different institutions. The Polish system is based on Temporary Protection, which provides persons fleeing war with the opportunity to enter Poland safely and stay in special accommodation or organized shelters (before finding a place to rent or be accommodated).¹⁹ From the outset of the war, the Polish government began systematic and organized efforts to establish reception centers for UFMIs. Reception points are locations where UFMIs can rest, eat, receive medical assistance and psychological counselling, apply for international aid, complete the necessary documents to obtain residency rights, be referred to one of the reception centers established for Ukrainians, and obtain information about transportation options to other Pol-

10. Ö. İşığıçok, S. Kariman, *Ukraynalı Mülteciler Örneği Üzerinden Avrupa'nın Mültecilere Bakış Açısının Değerlendirilmesi*, "Uluslararası Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi", 2022, Vol. 7, p. 1585.

11. M.N. Çelikaslan, *Ukrayna-Rusya Savaşı: Avrupalı Bir Milletin Yıkımı*, "Türk Yönetim ve Ekonomi Araştırmaları Dergisi", 2022, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 56.

12. I. Kolosov, *Military's Medical Cooperation Between Poland and Ukraine: Labour Law Features*, "The security architecture of European and Euro-Atlantic spaces", 2022, p. 127, DOI: [10.30525/978-9934-26-225-8-9](https://doi.org/10.30525/978-9934-26-225-8-9).

13. M.S. Erol, D. Başaran, *Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı Bağlamında Polonya'nın Artan Jeopolitik Önemi*, "Uluslararası Kriz ve Siyaset Araştırmaları Dergisi", 2022, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 18.

14. C. Sağlam, *Doğu Cephesinde Yeni Bir Şey Yok: Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı Sonrası Avrupa'da Savaş Hazırlıkları*, "Güvenlik Stratejileri Dergisi", 2023, p. 207, DOI: [10.17752/guvenlikstrtj.1365782](https://doi.org/10.17752/guvenlikstrtj.1365782).

15. Ł. Jureńczyk, *Changing the Importance of Poland in the Security Policy of the United States in the Context of the War in Ukraine*, "Przegląd Politologiczny", 2023, No. 1, pp. 54–61, DOI: [10.14746/pp.2022.28.1.4](https://doi.org/10.14746/pp.2022.28.1.4).

ish cities. As a result, amid the wave of public support for UFM, Poland became the focus of global attention and was even described in the international media as “the world’s largest NGO.”²⁰

Viewed collectively, these developments suggest that Poland’s strategic orientation during the war not only reflected its geopolitical concerns but also laid the foundations for a gradual securitization of migration governance. The country’s central role in European defense and its self-presentation as a frontline security actor reinforced policy narratives that framed the arrival of UFM as part of a broader national security landscape rather than solely a humanitarian responsibility. This early fusion of humanitarian mobilization with security-driven statecraft created the conditions for a later shift toward more selective and interest-based policies, illustrating how Poland’s strategic posture in the Russia–Ukraine war accelerated the move from unconditional solidarity to a more securitized and regulated approach to forced displacement.

Faith-based Solidarity: The Church’s Position Regarding Ukrainian Forced Migrants

Although Poland and Ukraine belong to different denominations within the same religion (Poland Catholic, Ukraine Orthodox), the two countries have established close relations throughout history.²¹ During the initial period of the mass arrival of UFM in Poland, the Catholic Church provided assistance both institutionally and socially.²² On 25 February 2022, the Polish Bishops’ Permanent Council Conference held an emergency online meeting and issued a statement pledging to “pray for the millions of people affected by the attack.” Furthermore, the conference strongly condemned “Russia’s brutal military attack” and “the barbaric decision by the Russian president to launch military operations against Ukraine,” calling for “repentance and an end to military actions that have cost many lives, including civilians.”²³

Priests, nuns, and other clergy have been working for UFM since the beginning of the war. Nuns have also been actively involved in preparing and distributing hot meals, hygiene products, clothing, and blankets, helping people move from areas affected by the war, seeking job opportunities for UFM in Poland, and creating new jobs at their own centers.²⁴ Another statement made by the Church is that denomination is not important for the Catholic Church; everyone who comes here is warmly welcomed.²⁵ The late Catholic leader, Pope Francis, thanked the Polish people for their aid to Ukraine, including “those who bring support and hope to the people of Ukraine who remain in the war-torn country and suffer this torment.”²⁶ Poland has earned the gratitude of Ukrainian authorities and citizens by taking a leading role in international aid, and the Catholic Church has also played a signifi-

16. M. Duszczyk, P. Kaczmarczyk, *War and Migration: The Recent Influx from Ukraine into Poland and Possible Scenarios for the Future*, “CMR Spotlight”, 2022, Vol. 4, No. 39, p. 5, <https://www.migracje.uw.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Spotlight-APRIL-2022.pdf>, (access 17.10.2025).

17. While the Temporary Protection Directive (2001/55/EC) provides a harmonised EU framework guaranteeing minimum rights such as residence permits, access to the labour market, and social assistance, Poland’s Special Law of 12 March 2022 (Specustawa) introduced a nationally tailored system that diverges from several of these provisions. Unlike the TPD’s uniform EU-wide scheme, Specustawa created separate registration procedures, differentiated access to benefits, and distinct time limits for specific forms of assistance. These discrepancies indicate that Poland aligned itself with the EU emergency framework in principle while retaining considerable domestic discretion in its practical implementation.

18. M. Łysieniak, *Following the EU Response to the Russian Invasion of Ukraine? The Implementation of the Temporary Protection Directive in Poland*, “Central and Eastern European Migration Review”, 2023, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 184–194, DOI: 10.54667/ceemr.2023.14.

19. M. Kosielski-Pajak, P. Sadowski, *British and Polish Temporary Protection*

cant role by providing effective assistance at every level to UFMIs, including financial aid, medical and psychological support, and shelter.²⁷

In sum, the Church's response demonstrates that its early humanitarian mobilization played a key role in shaping Poland's normative framing of UFMIs as morally deserving victims, reinforcing the initial phase of unconditional and value-driven solidarity. By emphasizing universal compassion and rejecting denominational boundaries, religious actors strengthened a discourse of moral obligation that temporarily insulated UFMIs from politicized or exclusionary narratives. However, this strong ethical framing also reveals the limits of humanitarian solidarity: because it rests on moral sentiment rather than institutional guarantees, it is vulnerable to erosion as political pressures, welfare concerns, and securitization dynamics intensify. In this sense, the Church's response illustrates how faith-based humanitarianism can generate powerful but fragile forms of inclusion – forms that later become subject to conditionality as the broader governance landscape shifts from moral imperative to state-centered interests.

The Representation of Ukrainian Forced Migrants in Polish Media

Russia's large-scale attack on Ukraine in February 2022 has fundamentally transformed not only Poland's demographic structure but also the country's political and media discourse on migration and solidarity. As of early 2024, the number of UFMIs living in Poland under temporary protection status is estimated at approximately 950,000, with children constituting 40 per cent of this group.²⁸ In the first months of the war, public opinion polls recorded exceptionally high levels of support for accepting people fleeing Ukraine, with approval reaching 94 per cent; this figure later declined to 57 per cent.²⁹ However, as the conflict dragged on and the cost of aid became an issue, this positive attitude gradually diminished, with fatigue and discontent becoming apparent in public discourse.

During the 2023 election campaign, the Ukraine issue increasingly became an internal political tool in Poland. Particularly during the process known as the "toxic grain crisis," grain imports from Ukraine were at the center of both economic and political debates. Following Russia's attack on Ukraine, the European Union launched the "grain corridor" initiative to support the Ukrainian economy, allowing Ukrainian grain to be temporarily transported through EU countries. However, within a short time, part of this grain entered the Polish domestic market, causing a significant drop in the income of local producers. This situation led to intense protests by Polish farmers and weakened the rhetoric of solidarity with Ukraine. The crisis was transformed into an internal political struggle by

Schemes Addressing Displaced Persons from Ukraine, "Journal of Jurisprudence and Legal Practice", 2023, Vol. 31, No. 4, p. 911, DOI: [10.5817/CPVP2023-4-5](https://doi.org/10.5817/CPVP2023-4-5).

20. A. Kasińska-Metryka, K. Pałka-Suchojad, *New and Old Stereotypes of Ukrainians in Polish Society*, in: *The Russia–Ukraine War of 2022*, eds. A. Kasińska-Metryka, K. Pałka-Suchojad, Routledge 2023, p. 80.

21. K. Aydin, *Avrupa Birliği'nin Düzensiz Göç Yönetimi Politikaları Kapsamında Polonya*, Master's thesis, Çankırı Karatekin University 2024, p. 61.

22. R. Spiewak, et al., *The Roman Catholic Parish in the Face of the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis*, "Religions", 2023, Vol. 14, No. 8, p. 3, DOI: [10.3390/rel14081048](https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14081048).

23. F. Mróz, *Geographies of Care: The Catholic Church in Poland's Assistance to Refugees from Ukraine During Russia's Invasion of Ukraine*, "Journal of Religion and Health", 2023, Vol. 62, No. 1, p. 448, DOI: [10.1007/s10943-022-01729-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-022-01729-9).

24. K. Aydin, *Avrupa Birliği'nin...*, op. cit., p. 61.

25. Ukraine: 'The Church has opened its doors to everyone', Aid to the Church in Need 2022, <https://www.churchinneed.org/ukraine-the-church-has-opened-its-doors-to-everyone/>, (access 22.10.2025).

actors using the argument of “protecting the labor of Polish farmers.” During this period, both the ruling party and the opposition stirred up public sentiment with populist slogans such as “ungrateful Ukrainians.” In the media, Ukrainian grain was frequently labelled “poisonous” or “dangerous,” and an economic dispute was framed as a “moral and national threat.” As Oksana Babakova noted, “the grain crisis stemmed not from internet trolls, but from the Polish media’s love of sensational headlines.”³⁰

This change has also been clearly observed in social attitudes. While 72 per cent supported accepting UFMs in 2022, this figure had fallen to 52 per cent by the beginning of 2024.³¹ Similarly, a study conducted by the Associated Press shows that support has fallen from 94 per cent to 57 per cent.³² This change reflects the phenomena described by Babakova as “war fatigue” and “the politicization of gratitude”; that is, the perception that Ukraine does not sufficiently appreciate Poland’s generosity has grown stronger.³³

Far-right parties, particularly the Confederation movement, have amplified such narratives through social media campaigns, including the hashtag #StopUkrainizationOfPoland. According to platform-level engagement data, these campaigns have generated an estimated 20–30 million monthly views, circulating messages such as “Ukrainians are receiving aid while Poles are being disadvantaged.” Although mainstream parties have not adopted overtly hostile positions, some have echoed calls for “limiting aid,” reflecting shifts in public sentiment. Media reports referring to issues such as “refugees (sic) misusing aid” or “filling schools” have also become more common, illustrating how themes of cultural competition and perceived economic pressure have entered public debate.³⁴

Despite this, the contribution of Ukrainians to Polish society and the economy is undeniable. According to international press data for 2025, the Polish economy grew by approximately 2.7% in 2024, thanks to the arrival of Ukrainians (referred to in the media as “refugees”) gaining direct access to the labor market.³⁵ However, this economic benefit has not completely alleviated the tension in public perception. Several international reports published in the fall of 2025 noted an “alarming rise in anti-Ukrainian xenophobia” in Poland, with Ukrainian children facing verbal harassment and ostracism in schools, and adults avoiding speaking Ukrainian in public.³⁶ During the same period, the Polish President’s veto of a law extending social assistance to “refugees” (sic) signaled a shift in the policy debate, reflecting a growing political emphasis on fiscal restraint rather than further expansion of support mechanisms.³⁷

26. P. Rytel-Andrianik, *Church in Poland's efforts to help over two million Ukrainians*, Vatican News 2023, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2023-02/ukraine-war-anniversary-church-poland-aid-refugees.html>, (access 22.10.2025).

27. F. Mróz, *Geographies of Care...*, pp. 444–464.

28. O. Babakova, *Ukrainian Migrants and Refugees in Polish Political Discourse*, Casimir Pulaski Foundation 2024, p. 5.

29. V. Gera, *Poland once threw its doors open to millions of Ukrainian refugees, but the mood has shifted*, Associated Press 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/poland-ukrainians-presidential-election-4982cc03f7b5a88c8e21c-c340087e7e8>, (access 23.10.2025).

30. O. Babakova, *Ukrainian Migrants and...*, op. cit., pp. 9–11; A. Ptak, *Thousands of Polish farmers have marched in Warsaw against EU climate policies and Ukrainian imports*, Notes from Poland 2024, <https://notes-frompoland.com/2024/02/27/thousands-of-farmers-protest-in-warsaw-against-eu-climate-policies-and-ukrainian-imports/>, (access 23.10.2025); G. Gigitashvili, *Tailored Russian Disinformation Targets Polish Farmer Protests*, Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab) 2024, <https://dfrlab.org/2024/06/03/tailored-russian-disinformation-targets-polish-farmer-protests/>.

When considered in light of Poland's shifting political landscape, the transformation of media narratives illustrates how public discourse became a central arena in which the boundaries of solidarity were renegotiated. The sensational framing of the grain crisis and appeals to "gratitude" re-framed economic tensions as moral and national issues, reinforcing a logic of conditional solidarity in which support for UFM's became tied to expectations of reciprocity. Simultaneously, depictions of Ukrainians as beneficiaries of disproportionate aid or as contributors to social and economic strain activated welfare-chauvinist interpretations of fairness and resource competition. As these themes circulated across mainstream and social media, they normalized more exclusionary understandings of who deserves assistance, thereby facilitating a broader shift from humanitarian openness toward more selective, interest-driven, and occasionally securitized approaches to forced displacement.

State Policy and Crisis Management: The Polish Government in the Face of Ukrainian Forced Migrants

The developments that took place during the Russia–Ukraine war in 2022 led the West to approach Poland not ideologically but within the framework of its geopolitical stance and preferences, thus strengthening the hand of the Law and Justice Party (PiS) government.³⁸ Under the governance of the Law and Justice Party, which has assumed a leading position among Western powers in responding to Russia, the Polish government – while attaining a position of moral ascendancy through its support for Ukraine – has nonetheless continued its trajectory amid ongoing legal and institutional controversies.³⁹ However, as the war continued, relations between Poland and Ukraine deteriorated due to ongoing disputes over grain exports.⁴⁰

Donald Tusk's government, which came to power in December 2023, assumed office with the goal of initiating a process of "normalization" in relations with the European Union (EU) and restoring the rule of law. However, the geopolitical dynamics created by the Ukraine war shaped the Tusk administration's domestic policy as well as its foreign policy. While the government's policy toward Ukraine initially appeared to be founded on the principles of humanitarian and European solidarity, it gradually evolved into a balancing act between economic interests, domestic public pressure, and security concerns.

The Tusk government largely maintained the security-oriented policies implemented under the Law and Justice Party (PiS). No radical shift occurred in the areas of border protection, migration management, or asylum policy.⁴¹ The government's response to the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, adopted by the European Parliament in May 2024, clearly reflected this continuity. It

[information-targets-polish-farmer-protests/](#), (access 23.10.2025).

31. O. Babakova, *Ukrainian Migrants and...*, op. cit., p. 13.

32. J. Malmén, *Poles are beginning to tire of Ukrainian refugees [Polacker börjar tröttna på ukrainska flyktingar]*, Omni 2025, <https://omni.se/polacker-borjar-trottna-pa-ukrainska-flyktingar/a/eM-LxxO>, (access 22.10.2025).

33. O. Babakova, *Ukrainian Migrants and...*, op. cit., pp. 13–14, 19.

34. Ibidem, pp. 11–17.

35. *Ukrainian Refugees Give Poland Big Economic Boost, Report Says*, Reuters 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/ukrainian-refugees-give-poland-big-economic-boost-report-says-2025-06-10>, (access 23.10.2025).

36. J. Iwaniuk, *In Poland, a Troubling Surge of Anti-Ukrainian Xenophobia*, Le Monde 2025, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/09/26/in-poland-a-troubling-surge-in-anti-ukrainian-xenophobia_6745755_4.html, (access 23.10.2025).

37. S. Walker, *Poland's President Vetoes Legislation to Prolong Benefits for Ukrainian Refugees*, The Guardian 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/aug/25/polands-president-vetoes-legislation-to-prolong-benefits-for-ukrainian-refugees>, (access 22.10.2025).

rejected the regulation requiring the relocation of asylum seekers among EU member states and financial contributions from countries opposing it, stating that Poland would not take part in the “mandatory refugee quota” (sic) system.⁴² This attitude reinforced comments that the Tusk administration, despite its pro-European rhetoric, was continuing the populist immigration approach inherited from the PiS era.⁴³

The “grain crisis,” sparked by the entry of Ukrainian grain into the Polish market, has been one of the most serious tests of the Tusk government’s Ukraine policy. Throughout 2024, Polish farmers staged mass protests, claiming that cheap Ukrainian grain was harming domestic producers. In response to this pressure, the government temporarily halted grain imports from Ukraine.⁴⁴ This decision caused disappointment in the Kyiv administration, leading to comments that Poland had strayed from the humanitarian solidarity approach of the initial period of the war.⁴⁵

Essentially, Poland’s Ukraine policy under Donald Tusk has undergone a shift in tone rather than direction. While humanitarian and pro-European rhetoric remained intact, policy implementation was guided by pragmatism, security priorities, and public sentiment. By 2025, Poland had shifted from its initial “moral leadership” stance to a more measured, expedient balance that reflected both the limits of solidarity and the constraints of domestic politics.

The election of Karol Nawrocki as president in August 2025 ushered in a new era in Polish state policy and crisis management. Nawrocki, who ran as an independent candidate supported by the Law and Justice Party, adopted a discourse that emphasized the principles of national sovereignty and security continuity over humanitarian expansion.⁴⁶ Although he initially stated that he would continue to support Ukraine’s struggle against Russia, his rhetoric soon became increasingly cautious regarding the long-term economic and social burden posed by UFMs.⁴⁷

The approach to UFMs increasingly moved from broad emergency support toward more restrictive welfare considerations. At the end of August 2025, President Nawrocki vetoed a law extending social assistance to approximately one million people, referred to in public debate as “refugees” (sic), living in Poland.⁴⁸ This law aimed to extend housing and child benefits provided under emergency measures that came into effect in 2022. Nawrocki justified his decision by stating that “Polish hospitality cannot replace a sustainable policy” and that the aid system should be restructured to protect the interests of Polish taxpayers.⁴⁹ This stance has been seen as an effort to con-

38. M.S. Erol, D. Başaran, *Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı...*, op. cit., p. 29.

39. B. Lobina, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: The Impact of Rule of Law Backsliding on the EU’s Response to the Russo-Ukrainian War*, “European Papers – A Journal on Law and Integration”, 2023, Vol. 8, No. 3, p. 1154.

40. M. Temizer, *Tensions Rise Between Ukraine and Poland [Ukrayna ile Polonya Arasında Gerilim Yükseliyor]*, Anadolu Ajansı 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/ukrayna-ile-polonya-arasinda-gerilim-yukseliyor/2997711>, (access 25.10.2025).

41. This continuity was particularly visible at Poland’s eastern border, where the securitised emergency regime introduced during the 2021–2022 Belarus border crisis remained in force. While UFMs from Ukraine benefited from facilitated entry, accelerated documentation and broad access to assistance, asylum seekers arriving via Belarus continued to face pushbacks, restricted procedures, and heightened militarisation of the frontier. This stark contrast illustrates Poland’s dual-track migration approach, in which geopolitical alignment, perceived cultural proximity, and national security framing shaped differentiated border practices during the same period.

42. G. Gotev, *Tusk Vows to ‘Protect’ Poland Against EU Migrant Relocation*, Euractiv 2024, <https://www.euractiv.com>

solidate the conservative voter base at a time when public fatigue over long-standing UFMAs is growing.

Despite Nawrocki's continued cooperation with the Kyiv government in defense and security matters, his domestic policy increasingly reflects a broader European shift toward more restrictive welfare and migration policies. This orientation emphasizes the protection of national welfare systems while placing greater limits on access to assistance for non-citizens.⁵⁰

When examined through the lens of Poland's evolving governance priorities, the state's response to UFMAs demonstrates how humanitarian commitments made during the initial phase of the war were gradually reshaped by security imperatives, welfare considerations, and domestic political pressures. The continuity between PiS and Tusk-era policies – despite stark rhetorical differences – shows that migration governance increasingly operated within a securitized framework that treated border protection, EU negotiations, and welfare distribution as interconnected arenas of national interest. At the same time, the grain crisis and Nawrocki's veto illustrated how concerns over fiscal burden and fairness activated welfare-chauvinist logics, enabling political actors to recalibrate solidarity in more conditional and selective terms. Taken together, these dynamics reveal how Polish state policy moved from early moral leadership to a more interest-driven equilibrium in which support for UFMAs became contingent on economic, political, and security calculations rather than on humanitarian imperatives alone.

Conclusion

This study has shown that Poland's response to the mass arrival of Ukrainian Forced Migrants between 2022 and 2025 cannot be understood solely through administrative measures or humanitarian mobilization. Rather, it reflects a dynamic interplay between geopolitical positioning, shifting public sentiment, institutional interests, and the evolving logic of national welfare and security. Poland's initial phase of extraordinary openness – rooted in moral urgency, civic mobilization, and strong religious framing – created a powerful narrative of unconditional solidarity. Yet, as the crisis evolved, this humanitarian consensus proved fragile, increasingly constrained by political competition, socio-economic pressures, and governance dilemmas.

Across the different domains analyzed in this article – state policy, religious engagement, media representation, public opinion, and local implementation – a pattern emerges that closely aligns

[com/news/tusk-vows-to-protect-poland-against-eu-migrant-relocation/](https://www.wbj.pl/politico-polands-tusk-takes-center-stage-in-eu-immigration-debate/post/143743), (access 25.10.2025).

43. *Politico: Poland's Tusk takes center stage in EU immigration debate*, Politico 2024, <https://www.wbj.pl/politico-polands-tusk-takes-center-stage-in-eu-immigration-debate/post/143743>, (access 25.10.2025).

44. K. Stezycki, *Polish Farmers March Against 'Green Poison' EU Climate Rules and Ukrainian Imports*, Reuters 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/polish-farmers-march-against-green-poison-eu-climate-change-rules-2024-05-10/>, (access 30.10.2025).

45. V. Gera, *Polish Farmers Block Ukraine's Border as They Intensify Protests Against Non-EU Imports*, Associated Press 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/29e17ea1a6667b4a8f21a25af604ae1e>, (access 30.10.2025).

46. J. Krupa, *Nationalist Karol Nawrocki Sworn in as Polish President*, The Guardian 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/aug/06/nationalist-karol-nawrocki-sworn-in-as-polish-president>, (access 30.10.2025).

47. C. Ciobanu, *Right-Wing Populist Karol Nawrocki Wins Polish Presidency*, Balkan Insight 2025, <https://balkaninsight.com/2025/06/02/right-wing-populist-karol-nawrocki-wins-polish-presidency>, (access 30.10.2025).

with the mechanisms described by securitization theory, welfare chauvinism, and conditional solidarity. Media narratives shifted from empathy to contestation, amplifying concerns over economic strain, reciprocity, and the boundaries of national obligation. Religious actors sustained an ethos of moral duty but could not shield public debate from politicization or fatigue. State authorities, despite rhetorical continuity between the PiS and Tusk administrations, progressively recalibrated their approach by reinforcing border protection, tightening welfare access, and prioritizing national economic interests. President Naurocki's 2025 veto symbolized this broader transition: a move from emergency generosity to a more selective, interest-driven model of protection.

A related observation – although not the primary focus of this study – concerns the contrast between Poland's facilitated reception of Ukrainians and its more restrictive approach at the Belarus–Poland border. Whereas UFMIs benefited from expedited procedures and broad access to assistance under the Special Law, asylum seekers arriving through Belarus encountered significantly stricter controls and a more securitized environment. This contrast illustrates how contextual factors such as geopolitical alignment, perceived proximity, and security concerns can shape differentiated state practices within the wider landscape of Polish migration governance. It also suggests that the implementation of temporary protection, while formally anchored in EU legislation, remains subject to national discretion and political priorities.

Taken together, these developments illustrate how Poland's migration governance evolved from an early model of exceptional humanitarian solidarity toward a more regulated, conditional, and interest-based framework. This shift does not negate the scale of support extended to UFMIs, but it highlights the structural limits of solidarity when crises become prolonged and intersect with domestic political pressures. The Polish case therefore offers broader lessons for European migration governance: even when states demonstrate remarkable responsiveness in the face of sudden displacement, durable protection requires stable welfare systems, clear legal alignment with EU frameworks, and political narratives that resist the instrumentalization of vulnerability. Without such foundations, solidarity remains inherently temporary – expansive in moments of moral urgency, but increasingly selective as geopolitical, economic, and social concerns regain prominence.

48. H. Bienvenu, *Poland's New President Vetoes Bill Extending Aid to Ukrainian Refugees*, Le Monde 2025, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/08/27/poland-s-new-president-vetoes-bill-extending-aid-to-ukrainian-refugees_6744742_4.html, (access 30.10.2025).

49. Polish President's Veto Threatens Ukraine's Starlink Access Amid Refugee Aid Dispute, Reuters 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/polish-presidents-veto-threatens-ukraines-starlink-access-amid-refugee-aid-2025-08-25>, (access 30.10.2025).

50. A. Pikulicka-Wilczewska, *Where Does Poland's New President Stand on Ukraine?*, Al Jazeera 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/6/6/where-does-polands-new-president-stand-on-ukraine>, (access 30.10.2025).

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