

TWO YEARS OF REFUGEE CRISIS 2022-2024 – POLICY AND DECISIONS

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ABSTRACT

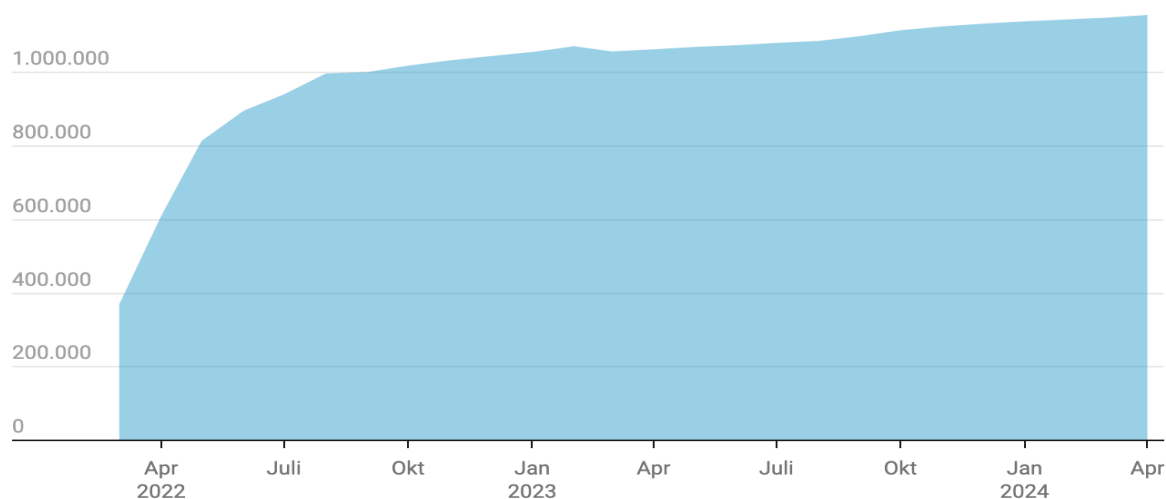
The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 triggered one of the largest refugee crises in recent history, with millions fleeing to neighboring countries, including Germany. At the end of 2021, before the war, around 155,000 Ukrainian citizens lived in Germany (Destatis 2022). According to the EU Parliament, in December 2023, around 6.3 million refugees were recorded as refugees in EU states (Rakic, 2024). This article examines the influx of Ukrainian refugees into Germany, focusing on the legislative frameworks, statistical trends, government support, and integration measures. By exploring the theoretical and legislative background, the aim is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and responses associated with this humanitarian crisis. The article focuses on the humanitarian and legislative efforts in the Free State of Thuringia.

Keywords: Ukrainian refugees; Germany; Russian invasion; refugee crisis; legislative framework; government support; integration; Free State of Thuringia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, more than one and a half million Ukrainian refugees came to Germany (The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2022; BMI, 2024).

Figure 1: Number of refugees from Ukraine in Germany (2022-2024)



(BMI, 2024)

The German Federal Government, on the Federal and local levels, quickly mobilized its legal framework to offer protection and support to Ukrainian refugees. The activation of the Temporary Protection Directive was a pivotal step, enabling swift access to residency, work permits, and social benefits without the protracted asylum application process.

According to statistics, 730.000 refugees of working age, i.e., between 15 and 65 years old – almost two-thirds of them women. In February 2024, 21 percent of refugees were employed, and 37,000 were part-time employed. 119,000 employable Ukrainians attended an integration course in April 2024. Eighty-five thousand of them will complete it by mid-2024. 59,000 Ukrainian citizens are enrolled in school, vocational, or university education. (Bundesregierung, 2024).

Refugees from Ukraine with residence permits can generally choose their place of residence freely - unlike other asylum seekers.

The protection status of refugees formulated in the directive differs from the institutional framework otherwise applicable in the asylum procedure - above all, by waiving the asylum procedures and immediately establishing legal and planning security by issuing a temporary residence permit, initially until March 5, 2024.

In addition, the activation of the directive created faster and more comprehensive opportunities to take up employment and access the BAMF's integration courses and other language programs. Moreover, unlike other refugees, Ukrainians were not subject to a general obligation to live in shared accommodation. Nor are there any residence requirements for most of them. These were only introduced with a delay and limited to the group of refugees from Ukraine who were dependent on public housing. Finally, the Ukrainian refugees were

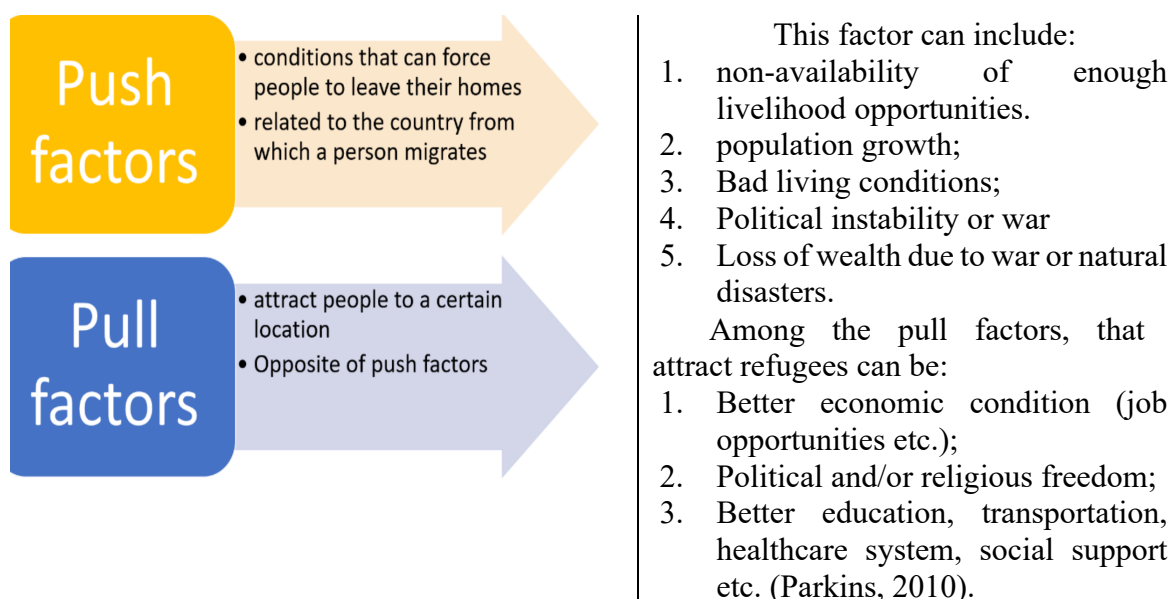
not integrated into the benefits system of the Asylum Seekers Management Act but into the basic security system under the Social Security Code II. This not only resulted in higher benefit rates but also the direct integration into the support structure of the job centers (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2023).

Surveys and study results indicate that this contributed to many Ukrainians being able to move into their private accommodation relatively quickly. At the beginning of 2023, almost 80 percent of refugees stated that they now live in private apartments and houses. A further 13 percent of refugees stated that they live in "other accommodation," such as hotels, and only 8 percent were housed in shared accommodation (BMI, 2024).

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The movement of refugees can be analyzed through various theoretical lenses, including push-pull theory, which explains migration based on factors that push individuals out of their home countries and pull them toward destination countries.

Figure 2: Push and Pull Factors



Russia's invasion of Ukraine represents a significant push factor, including violence, destruction, and political instability. Germany, on the other hand, offers pull factors such as safety, economic opportunities, and a supportive legal framework for asylum seekers. Those factors directly influenced the context of the "Volume of Migration," "which can be visible in the statistical analysis (Figure 1), "Streams and Counter-streams of Migration," as can be

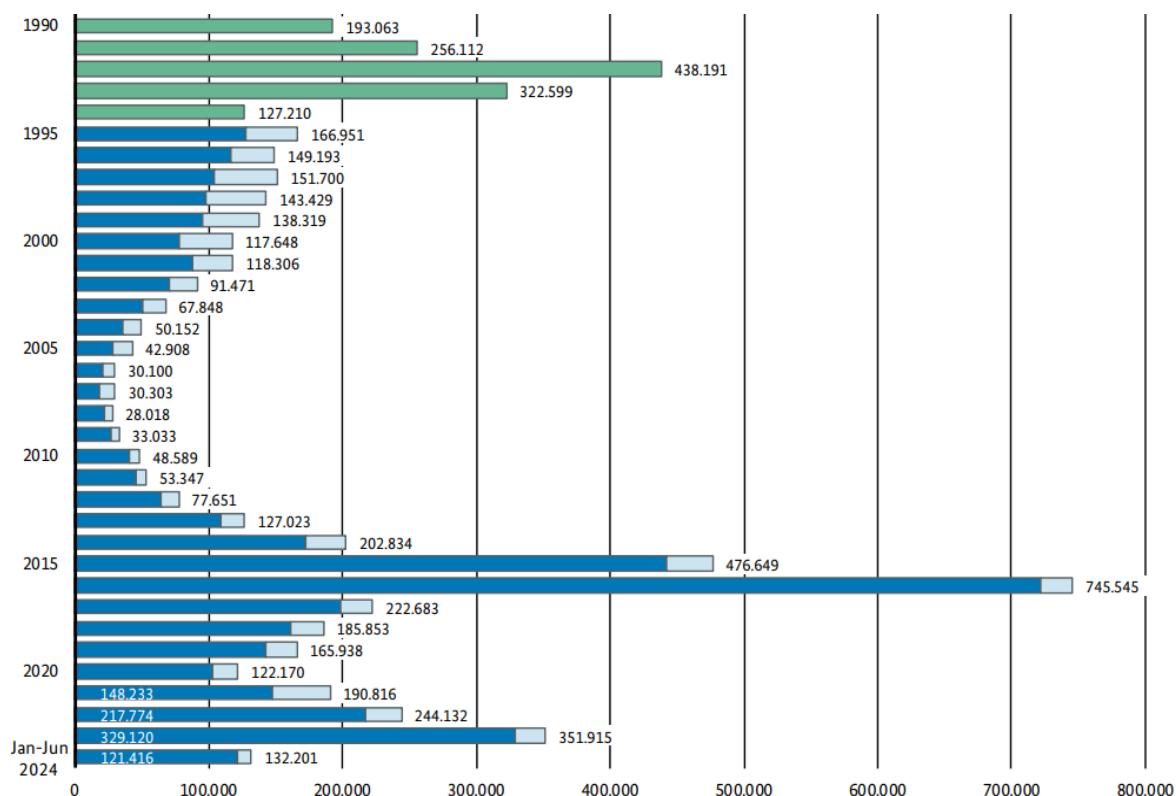
discovered from the differentiation the Ukrainian refugees in different EU countries and the “Characteristics of Migrants” as an example of women migration (60%) (BMI, 2024; Parkins, 2010; Bundesregierung, 2024; Robinson, 1996).

As presented, the push-pull theory can, in a short way, explain the main factors, intensities, and characteristics of migration according to the type or the character of “push” and “pull” factors (Robinson, 1996; Parkins, 2010; Avasarkar 2012). Additionally, integration theory is critical in understanding how refugees assimilate into host societies, emphasizing the roles of social support systems, economic opportunities, and cultural adaptation. In the current article, the relevant theoretical accent is made on socialization or organizational socialization (OS). The organizational socialization (OS) approach helps to shape the attitudes, values, and norms of the new members and helps in the process in which individuals gain the required social knowledge and skills for successful integration (Chao, 2007; Schein, 1988; Van Maanen and Schein, 1979; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

2.1 Integration

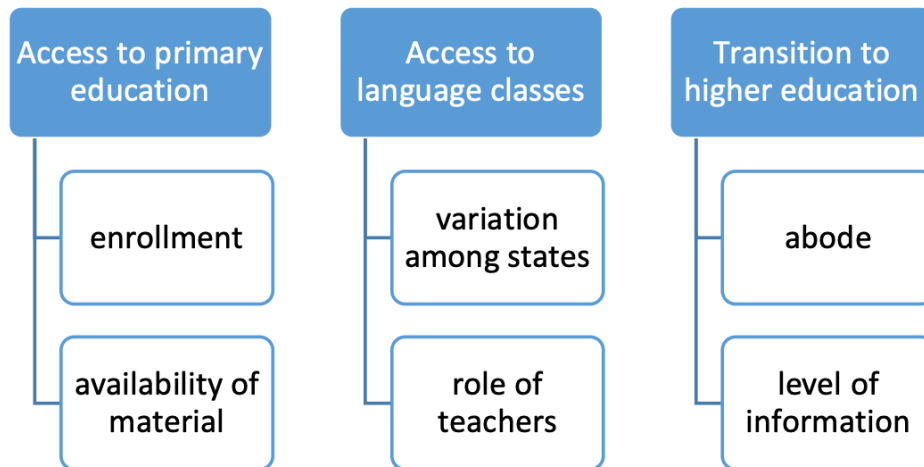
The German Government can be called a place that collects refugees and has practical experience with government reaction and integration. However, each case can be checked separately depending on various factors—economic, ethnic, religious, etc. The current article has a specific goal of presenting the situation with the Ukrainian refugees, but factors from previous experience (refugee waivers) also have relevance to the topic.

Figure 3: Development of asylum application numbers since 1953 – from 1995 onwards, division into first and follow-up applications



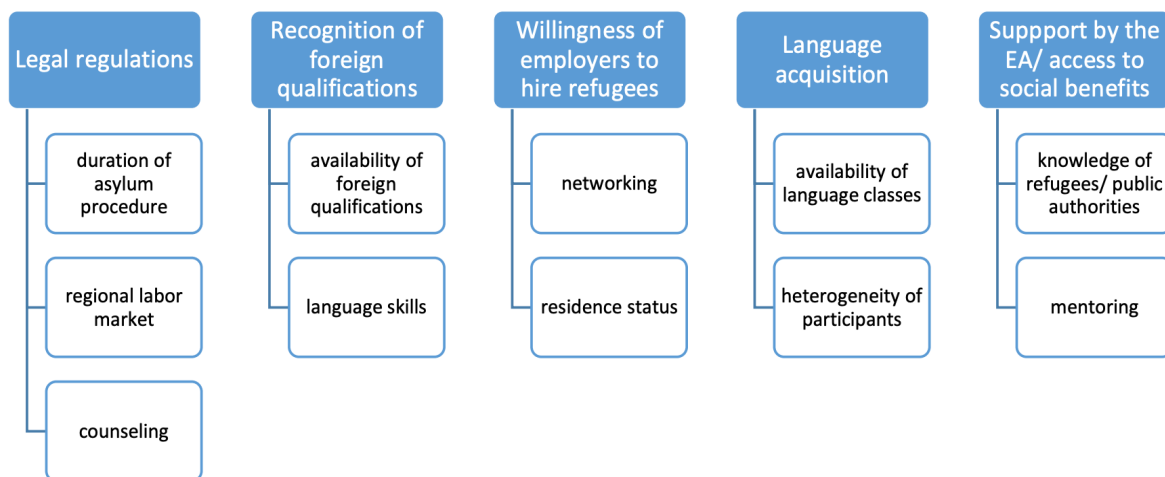
When it comes to the German Model of immigration and integration, it can be claimed that it was officially recognized in 2006 as the ‘National Integration Plan’ 2006 and a National Action Plan on Integration (Klusmeyer and Papademetriou, 2009). Nevertheless, German economic statistics can be interpreted differently between multicultural mosaic and pragmatic ways of work-life integration (Pfafferott and Brown, 2006; (Kunst and Sam, 2013; Kunst, 2016; Schiffauer, 2005). This article, due to its specific goals, will present rather a practical way that can be presented through Education and work as a factor to improve language and social skills, as well as recognized and implemented in various laws and restrictions (see legislative framework) (Die Bundesregierung, 2011; Weiser, 2013; Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, 2015).

Figure 3: Education as an Integration Tool



The second pillar is Labor Market Integration

Figure 4: Work as an Integration Tool



The type of integration through learning and working processes is explained in various theoretical and practical ways developed at the regional and government levels, involving public and third-sector initiatives (Die Bundesregierung, 2011; Weiser, 2013; Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, 2015). Moreover, the integration involves a sort of “political integration” that includes organizational courses, involvement in the local community activities, and developing an identity: “Integration by Identity is easily identifiable by German Citizenship (Josue, 2018).

In the current research, it is most important to prove that it is according to the goals of the German integration plans toward the refugees from Ukraine in 2022-2024.

3. LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Germany's legislative framework for refugees, including Ukrainian refugees, is structured around several key laws and regulations that provide protection, social support, and integration measures. The most pertinent legal instruments and their specific paragraphs and categories are outlined below:

1. The Basic Law was accepted 23. May 1949) (Grundgesetz) - The Grundgesetz (Basic Law) forms the constitutional basis of Germany's asylum policies. The first article of the law declares, 'Human dignity is inviolable. Respecting and protecting it is the obligation of all state authorities.

Article 16a of the Basic Law guarantees the right to asylum for those persecuted on political grounds (Bundesministerium für Justiz, 2024).

- a. Article 16a Part 1 (Right of asylum): This article provides that politically persecuted individuals have the right to seek asylum in Germany. However, the interpretation or right to give such protection according to Part 2 needs the specific approval of the German Federal Council (Bundesministerium für Justiz, 2024).
2. Asylum Act (Asylgesetz) The Asylum Act outlines the procedures for granting asylum and the rights of asylum seekers.
 - a. Section 1 (Scope and application): Defines the application of the Asylum Act.
 - b. Section 2 (Legal status during the asylum procedure): Details the rights and obligations of asylum seekers during the asylum process.
 - c. Section 3 (Recognition of refugee status): Specifies the criteria for recognizing refugee status in accordance with the Geneva Convention (Bundesministerium für Justiz, 2024a).
3. Residence Act (Aufenthaltsgesetz) The Residence Act regulates the entry, stay, and integration of foreigners in Germany.
 - a. Section 24 (Granting of residence for temporary protection) - Provides temporary protection to displaced persons from non-EU countries experiencing conflict, including Ukraine. This section has been critical for Ukrainian refugees, enabling them to receive residence permits without undergoing the full asylum process. Ukrainian refugees are granted temporary protection under this section, allowing for up to three years of stay with the potential for extension. They receive immediate access to the labor market, education, and

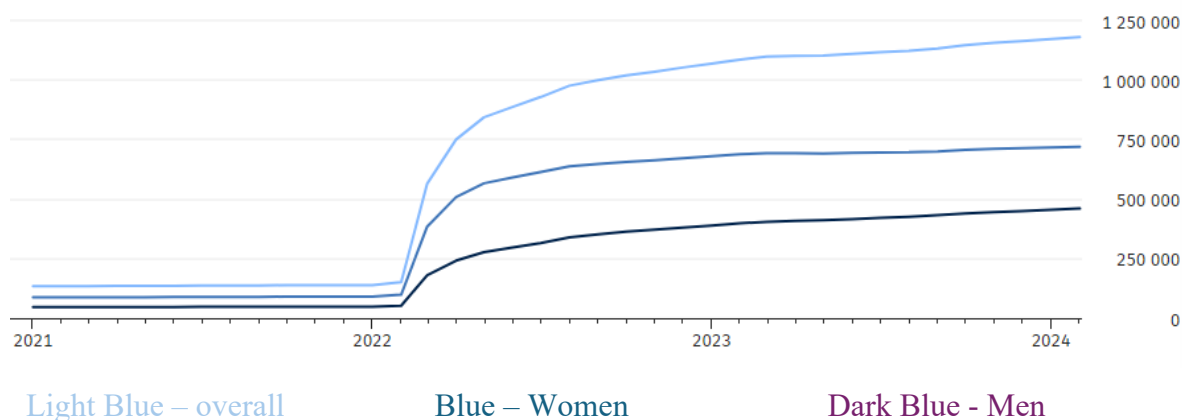
vocational training (Bundesministerium für Justiz, 2024b). This art of protection, compared to others presented in Paragraphs 3 and 4 of the Asylum Act (Asylgesetz), provides improved and faster or immediate integration and access to basic rights such as education, social support, work permits, and health insurance. Paragraphs 3 and 4 of the Asylum Act According to the Duration of asylum procedures was 7.6 months in 2022 (Deutscher Bundestag, 2023). The Ukrainian refugees mostly wait a couple of days to go through the same process.

4. Temporary Protection Directive (2001/55/EC) Activated by the European Union in response to the Ukrainian crisis, this directive offers immediate and temporary protection to those fleeing the conflict.
 - a. Article 2 (Scope): Defines who is eligible for temporary protection.
 - b. Article 5 (Implementation in member states): This article details how EU member states should implement the directive, including provisions for residency, access to employment, education, and social welfare.
 - c. Article 12 says: ‘engage in employed or self-employed activities, subject to rules applicable to the profession, as well as in activities such as educational opportunities for adults, vocational training and practical workplace experience moreover, general law in force in the Member States applicable to remuneration, access to social security systems relating to employed or self-employed activities and other conditions of employment shall apply’ (Official Journal of the European Communities, 2001).
 - d. Article 13 Provides medical assistance and support
 - e. Article 14 Provides the person under 18 access to the education system with the same rights as existed for the citizens (Official Journal of the European Communities, 2001).
5. Social Code (Sozialgesetzbuch, SGB) - The Social Code outlines the social benefits available to refugees. SGB II (Basic Security for Job Seekers)
6. Sections 19-28: Describe the benefits available to job seekers, including financial assistance and integration programs.
 - a. SGB XII (Social Assistance): Sections 27-36: Provide for the basic needs of individuals unable to support themselves, including refugees (Bundesministerium für Justiz, 2024).

4. STATISTICS - UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN GERMANY FROM 2022 TO 2024

The influx of Ukrainian refugees into Germany has been substantial. According to the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), over 1 million Ukrainian refugees were registered in Germany by the end of 2022. This number grew steadily, with periodic peaks corresponding to escalations in the conflict. By mid-2024, the total number of Ukrainian refugees in Germany had reached approximately 1.5 million (BMI, 2024). The demographic profile of these refugees is diverse, including elderly women (64%) and men (36%). The number of children and elderly individuals is under, reflecting the non-combatant nature of those fleeing the war.

Figure 5: Ukrainian Refugees in Germany by Gender



(Statistisches Bundesamt, 2024)

4.1 Statistics on Ukrainian Refugees in Thuringia

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Thuringia, a federal state in central Germany, has seen a significant influx of Ukrainian refugees. According to the Ministry of Migration, Justice, and Consumer Protection of Thuringia:

1. 2022: Approximately 25,000 Ukrainian refugees registered in Thuringia.
2. 2023: The number increased to around 30,000 by the end of the year.
3. 2024 (mid-year): The current estimate stands at approximately 35,000 Ukrainian refugees.

The demographic breakdown includes a high proportion of women and children, reflecting the non-combatant nature of many of those fleeing the conflict.

5. INTEGRATION

Integration efforts for Ukrainian refugees in Germany focus on promoting social inclusion and economic self-sufficiency. Language acquisition is a primary focus, with numerous free language courses offered to refugees. Employment initiatives include job placement services, vocational training, and recognition of qualifications obtained in Ukraine.

Additionally, community integration programs encourage cultural exchange and social cohesion, involving refugees and residents in various activities and events. Despite these efforts, challenges remain, such as housing shortages, bureaucratic hurdles, and the psychological impact of displacement.

The Thuringian government, in collaboration with various local and international organizations, has implemented several measures to integrate Ukrainian refugees into society. These efforts include:

1. Language and Education Programs:
 - a. Language Courses: Free German language courses are provided to refugees to facilitate communication and integration into the job market.
2. Educational Integration: Special programs have been established to integrate Ukrainian children into the local school system. These programs include preparatory classes and additional language support.
3. Employment Initiatives: More than 1,400 professional qualifications from Ukraine were recognized in 2022. Professional qualifications acquired abroad can be recognized in Germany following a corresponding application and procedure. In 2022, 1,521 procedures for Ukrainian professional qualifications were completed, of which 1,449 were approved. The most common professions are health and nursing, with 354 recognized qualifications, followed by doctors (285 recognitions), teachers (231), and engineers (108). 55% of all applications approved were in the field of medical health professions (792).

In 2022, a total of 52,290 professional qualifications from more than 150 training countries were recognized as fully or partially equivalent to qualifications acquired in Germany.

In 2021, 1,500 recognition procedures for professional qualifications obtained in Ukraine were completed, and 1,431 applications were approved. Figures for the 2023 reporting year will be published in September 2024 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2024).

- a. Job Placement Services: The Thuringian Employment Agency offers job placement services tailored to Ukrainian refugees, helping them find suitable

employment opportunities. According to the Federal Employment Agency, 730,000 of the people who have fled to Germany are of working age, i.e., between 15 and 65 years old—almost two-thirds of them women.

- b. In February 2024, 21 percent of refugees were employed: 119,000 found employment in Germany, subject to social insurance contributions, and 37,000 had a mini-job. Despite the difficult economic environment, the federal government is confident that even more people who have fled Ukraine will take up work (Bundesregierung, 2024).
 - c. Vocational Training: Various vocational training programs are available to help refugees acquire new skills or enhance existing ones, improving their employability in the German job market.
4. Healthcare and Psychological Support:
- a. Healthcare Access: Ukrainian refugees have access to comprehensive healthcare services, including medical check-ups, vaccinations, and specialized care for those with chronic conditions.
 - b. Psychological Support: Recognizing the trauma experienced by many refugees, Thuringia provides psychological counseling and support services.
5. Social Integration Programs:
- a. Community Engagement: Local communities and NGOs organize cultural events, social gatherings, and volunteer programs to foster interaction between refugees and residents.
 - b. Integration Courses: These courses cover various aspects of life in Germany, including legal rights, social norms, and cultural practices, aimed at helping refugees adapt to their new environment. 119,000 employable Ukrainians attended an integration course in April 2024. Eighty-five thousand of them will complete it by mid-2024. All others are expected to do so between September 2024 and March 2026. The job center will closely supervise those who have completed the course via the “Jobturbo” and should gain work experience as quickly as possible and receive meaningful further qualifications (Bundesregierung, 2024).

5.1. Actions of the Thuringian Government

The Thuringian government has taken several specific actions to support Ukrainian refugees:

1. Housing Initiatives:
 - a. The state has allocated additional funding to municipalities for the provision of temporary and permanent housing solutions for refugees.
 - b. Renovation and repurposing of public buildings and unused facilities into refugee accommodations have been expedited to address housing shortages.
 - c. Financial Support: The state provides financial assistance to refugees through the federal Asylum Seekers' Benefits Act (Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz), which covers basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter.
 - d. Additional state-funded programs offer supplementary support for education, childcare, and transportation.
3. Legal Assistance: Refugees can obtain free legal advice and representation to help them navigate the complex asylum and residency processes.
 - a. The Thuringian government ensures that Ukrainian refugees are informed about their rights and the services available to them.
4. Coordination with NGOs and International Organizations:
 - a. Thuringia works closely with NGOs such as Caritas and the Red Cross, as well as international organizations like the UNHCR, to coordinate aid and streamline services for refugees.
 - b. Regular consultations with these organizations help identify gaps in support and develop strategies to address emerging needs.

6. DISCUSSION

The critical importance of the German government's efforts to accept and integrate refugees from Ukraine cannot be overstated. Germany's swift and comprehensive response has profoundly influenced the living conditions and prospects of Ukrainian refugees. The uncertain trajectory of the war, coupled with evolving legal frameworks, has significantly shaped these refugees' intentions and experiences within Germany.

According to data from the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (2023), 37 percent of Ukrainian refugees intend to remain in Germany either permanently or for several years, 34 percent plan to stay until the end of the war, 27 percent remain undecided, and 2 percent anticipate leaving Germany within a year. Furthermore, 74 percent of respondents reside in private accommodations, while only 9 percent are housed in shared facilities (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2023).

Germany's approach to the Ukrainian refugee crisis underscores several key points. First, the German government responded promptly to the war by accepting a substantial number of refugees. Second, both federal and state governments have provided extensive support, including health insurance, social assistance, housing, and education, all of which have been essential for the well-being and integration of refugees. Third, the government ensured that children and adolescents had unrestricted access to education. Fourth, local and central governments have facilitated the initial integration of refugees by offering language courses, integration programs, and, critically, free access to the labor market.

However, despite these commendable efforts, significant challenges persist, particularly in the federal state of Thuringia. A critical issue is the uneven distribution of resources and services across the state, particularly in rural areas where access to specialized services such as trauma counseling, language courses, and employment placement programs is often limited. Additionally, the existing social infrastructure in Thuringia is under considerable strain, as it was already accommodating refugees from other regions. This has resulted in longer wait times for essential services, potentially impeding the integration process.

Looking ahead, it is iThuringia must adopt region-specific and targeted approach to integration. This could involve increased investment in rural areas to ensure equitable access to necessary resources for all refugees, regardless of their location. Moreover, enhancing collaboration between local governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private sector partners could yield more innovative and effective solutions for job creation and social integration. To address the growing demand for housing and social services, Thuringia could also explore the development of public-private partnerships aimed at expanding housing availability and improving service delivery. By focusing on these areas, Thuringia could not only enhance the integration of Ukrainian refugees but also strengthen social cohesion within the state.

SUMMARY

The refugee crisis resulting from the war in Ukraine is not just a challenge on the humanitarian or local level for one or two EU states; it represents the largest war in Europe since World War II. The security, integration, and reception of refugees have become significant concerns for both local and international communities. Europe's open-border policies toward Ukrainian refugees have not only provided shelter from physical danger and

death but also offered substantial support for future integration, employment, and social and medical assistance.

As highlighted in this report, the German government's extensive support and openness played a crucial role in assisting refugees from the beginning of the war and continues to do so two years later. Germany's significant support has positioned it as the second-largest host of Ukrainian refugees in Europe and a leading example in providing social and economic aid.

While the future remains uncertain regarding the end of the war, the number of refugees who will stay in Germany, and how they will influence Germany's cultural mosaic, the necessary integration tools have been provided to ensure the success of Ukrainian refugees, both at the federal and central government levels.

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