

## ANTI-CRISIS AND AID MEASURES TAKEN IN POLAND FOLLOWING RUSSIA'S AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE, INCLUDING ACTIVITY AT LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL

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**Purpose:** The aim of this paper is to present the anti-crisis and aid measures undertaken in Poland during the first hundred days after the aggression of the armed forces of the Russian Federation in Ukraine, which began on 24 February 2022.

**Design/methodology/approach:** For the purpose of this paper, legal acts were analysed, literature was reviewed, representatives of organisations involved in refugee assistance, Polish and foreign volunteers, and officials responsible for conducting anti-crisis activities were interviewed. The result was a consolidation of various forms of activity in Poland that constituted an institutional and civic response to the war initiated by Russia's attack on Ukraine.

**Findings:** A study of the activity of the local government unit in the face of the situation caused by Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine was carried out by analysing the actions taken in Zabrze in the period of one hundred days after the outbreak of war.

**Originality/value:** The described activities - on the example of the local administration and the local community of Zabrze - confirmed that the emergency situation related to the war in Ukraine activated members of the local government community and mobilised them to directly participate in the implemented aid projects.

**Keywords:** war in Ukraine, assistance to refugees, local government action towards Ukrainians, refugees in Poland, benefits for refugees.

### 1. Introduction

Russia's armed invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 resulted in nearly 3.8 million refugees (3.771 million) in the first 100 days of the war. The procedures introduced in this regard by the government and local administration were analysed. The development of the situation with regard to the transport of refugees, the organisation of their stay, the benefits provided, as well as the measures taken to channel humanitarian support to Ukraine fighting against Russian aggression were presented. Particular focus was placed on the role of local

government, whose forms of activity were presented by discussing specific initiatives implemented in Zabrze.

Anti-crisis and relief efforts were undertaken by state and local government services, NGOs and church organisations, as well as individual volunteers. The paper presents legislative initiatives and regulations introduced to regulate refugees' access to social assistance, health care and the education system. The activity of local government units was also analysed. On the example of Zabrze, the scope, form and character of undertakings implemented by the local administration and the local community to help those fighting in Ukraine and refugees residing in Poland were examined. The research question concerns the activities of central and local government administration.

## 2. Warfare as a cause of the refugee crisis

Russia's invasion of Ukraine began on Thursday 24 February 2022. It was preceded by an address by President Vladimir Putin, who at 3.45 am<sup>1</sup> announced the start of a 'special military operation' to defend the people of Donbass from 'genocide' and to 'demilitarise and denazify Ukraine' (Wilk, Domańska, 2022). According to the invader's narrative, Russia recognised the independence of the Donetsk People's Republic and the Lugansk People's Republic and concluded treaties of friendship and mutual assistance with them, and attacked because of 'the growing threat from Ukraine to Russia' (Andreev, 2022). Meanwhile, European Union leaders stated that Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine grossly violated international law<sup>2</sup>. In addition to military objectives, the war against Ukraine has also been used by the Russian authorities to further transform Russia into a totalitarian state (Legucka, 2022).

In response to the armed onslaught by the Russian Federation, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenski delivered a message to the people in which he appealed for calm and assured them that the Ukrainian army was fully prepared to defend the country (Nieczypor, 2022). At the same time, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted the President's proposal to impose martial law throughout the country. General mobilisation was also announced and diplomatic relations with Russia were severed. On the first day of the war, Russia launched more than 160 ballistic missiles towards Ukrainian targets<sup>3</sup>, the aggressor's troops were approaching Kiev, a wave of panic gripped some residents, causing queues of cars to form on

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<sup>1</sup> 24 February 2022 at 3.45 am Polish time.

<sup>2</sup> *Statement by the Heads of State or Government meeting at Versailles on Russian military aggression against Ukraine*, 10 March 2022 published on the official website of the Council of the European Union and the Council of the European Union at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu> [accessed 2 June 2022].

<sup>3</sup> Statement by a US Ministry of Defence representative quoted by Reuters, reported at 22:37 on 24 February 2022 by RMF FM radio on its official website at <https://www.rmf24.pl> [accessed 2 June 2022].

the border with Poland already on the day of the attack (Drabczuk, 2022).

By the evening of 24 February, it was already known that the attacking Russian troops had broken through the Ukrainian defences in the border zone on all directions of attack. Groups operating from the Belarusian side entered the Kiev and Chernihiv regions, while a grouping from Russian territory entered the northern part of the Sumy region. All were heading towards Kiev (Wolf 2022).

Ukrainian citizens fleeing from the armed conflict mostly headed towards the border with Poland. After crossing it, they reported to the reception points that were set up at the border crossings: Dorohusk-Jagodzin, Dolhobyczow-Uhrynów, Zosin-Uscilug, Hrebenne-Rawa Ruska, Medyka-Szeginie, Korczowa-Krakowiec, Krościenko-Smolnica, Budomierz-Hruszew<sup>4</sup>. There it was possible to receive medical assistance, obtain food, apply for international protection and obtain information for refugees.

For the Ukrainian citizens arriving in large numbers in Poland, assistance was organised by local authorities, foundations and NGOs. Numerous volunteers provided support at borders, reception points and refugee accommodation. Throughout the country, civic mobilisation could be observed immediately after the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Residents organised emergency accommodation, provided transport, helped find jobs, temporary shelter, donated clothing, food, school supplies for children, etc. Third sector associations provided legal and psychological assistance, etc.

During the first 100 days of the Russian invasion, Polish Border Guard officers cleared 3.771 million Ukrainians at border crossings<sup>5</sup>. The figure captures the scale of the described activities undertaken by government institutions, local governments, organisations and associations, as well as all the volunteers individually helping refugees.

### **3. Legislative action as a reaction to the facts caused by the armed conflict in Ukraine**

On the 16th day of the aggression, the Polish Parliament adopted the Law on *Assistance to Ukrainian Citizens in Connection with the Armed Conflict on the Territory of that State*<sup>6</sup>.

The document set out the rules for legalising the stay of Ukrainian citizens who came to the territory of Poland from Ukraine, but only in connection with warfare, as well as Ukrainian

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<sup>4</sup> Reception points for Ukrainian citizens on the territory of Lubelskie Voivodeship, information of 24 February 2022 published on the official website of the Voivodeship Office in Lublin at [www.lublin.uw.gov.pl](http://www.lublin.uw.gov.pl) [accessed 15 June 2022].

<sup>5</sup> Data disseminated by the Border Guard on its official account at [https://twitter.com/straz\\_graniczna](https://twitter.com/straz_graniczna) [accessed 3 June 2022].

<sup>6</sup> Law of 12 March 2022 *on assistance to citizens of Ukraine in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of the country* (Journal of Laws 2022, item 583).

citizens with the Card of the Pole<sup>7</sup>, who also came with their immediate family because of the Russian attack on their country. The law recognises the stay of refugees coming to Poland as legal for 18 months counting from 24 February 2022. It also sets out the conditions for refugees to continue to stay in the territory of the Republic of Poland after obtaining, pursuant to Art. 38.1 para. 3 temporary residence permit for a period of 3 years at a time. What is particularly important, the Act provided for a special mode of assigning PESEL numbers to Ukrainian citizens<sup>8</sup> and obtaining a trusted profile<sup>9</sup> providing remote access to public services provided by the Polish administration. After registration in the Universal Electronic Population Register System (Powszechny Elektroniczny System Ewidencji Ludności - PESEL), refugees were entitled to a single cash benefit of PLN 300<sup>10</sup> per person for subsistence, i.e. according to Article 31.1 of the Act, in particular for: covering expenses for food, clothing, footwear, personal hygiene products and housing fees. Under Article 33.1, refugees could also be granted food aid under the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived. The law opened up the possibility for refugees to apply for legal work subject to Article 22.1 para. 2, that the entity employing the foreigner had to notify the relevant district labour office of this fact within 14 days. Under the conditions provided for Polish citizens, Ukrainians could also benefit from intermediation and training services on the employment market. Article 23 of the Act stated that after obtaining a PESEL number, Ukrainian citizens could undertake and carry out economic activities on the territory of the Republic of Poland on the same terms as Polish citizens. In an analogous manner<sup>11</sup>, Article 31.1 also guaranteed refugees access to most health care services<sup>12</sup>.

What is extremely important for refugees with children, the document also laid down rules for the provision of assistance and social services, shelter, education, care and upbringing, organisation of leisure time, including culture and sport, and public health. Provision was made for support provided by the governmental composite administration and local government units. In particular, this concerned collective accommodation and catering. On the other hand,

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<sup>7</sup> The Card of the Pole may be obtained by a person who, declaring his/her affiliation with the Polish Nation, meets the conditions set out in the Act of 7 September 2007 *on the Card of the Pole* (Journal of Laws of 2007, No. 180, item 1280).

<sup>8</sup> The PESEL number in the Universal Electronic Population Register System is an eleven-digit numerical symbol that uniquely identifies a natural person in accordance with Article 15 of the Act of 24 September 2010 *on Population Register* (Journal of Laws 2010 No. 217, item 1427).

<sup>9</sup> The trusted profile is an electronic tool for contacting the Polish public administration, which can be set up by a person who has been assigned a PESEL number. Thanks to the trusted profile, he or she has the possibility to confirm his or her identity in electronic administration systems and to sign documents remotely. For refugees, it was particularly important to use the trusted profile in contacts with the Social Security Office.

<sup>10</sup> During this period, the average salary in Poland amounted to PLN 6235.22. Source: Communication of the President of the Central Statistical Office of 11 May 2022 on the average salary in the first quarter of 2022 published on the official website of the Central Statistical Office at <https://stat.gov.pl> [accessed 2 June 2022].

<sup>11</sup> That is, on the principles and to the extent to which persons covered by compulsory or voluntary health insurance were entitled to benefits under the Act of 27 August 2004 *on health care services financed from public funds* (Journal of Laws of 2021, item 1285).

<sup>12</sup> Under the law, spa treatment and spa rehabilitation as well as the administration of medicinal products dispensed under health policy programmes were excluded from these benefits.

for Poles who individually hosted refugees in their homes and at the same time bore the costs of accommodation and food, the Act gave the possibility in Article 13.1 to apply for a monetary benefit on this account for no longer than for a period of 120 days<sup>13</sup> from the day of arrival of the Ukrainian citizen on the territory of the Republic of Poland.

### 3.1. Support for refugees on the example of entitlements to free travel within Poland

Citizens of Ukraine have been able to enjoy free rail travel after crossing the border since 26 February. This applied to second-class PKP Intercity trains of the TLK and IC economy categories throughout Poland. At first, journeys were made only on the basis of a passport confirming Ukrainian citizenship and included transfers on subsequent domestic connections<sup>14</sup>. It is worth noting that it was already announced on 30 March that the rules would change from 1 April. The reason given was the numerous abuses involving the extortion of free travel by 'labour migrants' rather than people fleeing the effects of hostilities. Entitlement to free transport was maintained for those with Ukrainian citizenship: (1) children and young people up to the age of 18; (2) women (regardless of age); (3) men over the age of 60; (4) men aged 18-60 with disabilities or reduced mobility<sup>15</sup>. At the same time, the presentation of a passport was required, which confirmed the crossing of the border after 24 February 2022. Another method of documenting entitlements was to present a document with a photo confirming identity (ID card, driving license, school and student ID, etc.) and, at the same time, a PESEL notification indicating the foreigner's status as a person who crossed the border after 24 February, or a registered railway ticket of the Ukrainian Railways (*Ukrzaliznytsya*) for travel from Ukraine to Poland (this possibility was introduced from 8 April 2022) or a certificate for a Ukrainian citizen to issue a railway ticket (this possibility was introduced from 14 April 2022).

The introduction of the restrictions has caused a number of problems, one of which was highlighted by the Ombudsman, who signalled the need to widen access to the concession and to simplify procedures, as the solutions adopted by the carriers do not meet all the needs of the refugee crisis, specifically, for example, men aged 18-60 with no visible or recognised disability who cannot benefit from free travel are often the only guardians of minor children. In addition, many Ukrainian citizens cross the border using a simplified procedure as they do not carry a valid passport. The Border Guard Service is then unable to confirm - to the satisfaction of the carriers - the date on which they crossed the border, which in turn often results in a de facto

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<sup>13</sup> Originally, a period of 60 days was set, which was changed to 120 days in accordance with Article 1 of the Act of 27 April 2022 amending the Act on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine in Connection with the Armed Conflict on the Territory of Ukraine (Journal of Laws of 2022, item 930). The amount of the cash benefit was PLN 40 per day per 1 person hosted by the Polish applicant.

<sup>14</sup> *PKP Intercity: There will be free rides for Ukrainians*, information dated 26 February 2022 published on the rail transport industry website at [www.rynek-kolejowy.pl](http://www.rynek-kolejowy.pl) [accessed 20 June 2022].

<sup>15</sup> *Free travel for Ukrainian nationals on PKP Intercity trains*, information from the carrier's service of 26 February, updated 1 June 2022, and published at [www.intercity.pl](http://www.intercity.pl) [accessed 15 July 2022].

impossibility to take advantage of free travel. The problem is not solved by the possibility to obtain a PESEL number, as this requires waiting several days<sup>16</sup>. In response to the arguments presented, the Minister for Infrastructure, who was the addressee of the Ombudsman's letter, stated that - referring to the constitutional principle of equality of citizens in the face of the legislation in force - in no case is the right to a statutory discount linked to nationality or citizenship held, even in an extraordinary situation such as an armed conflict<sup>17</sup>.

Gradually, entitlements to free travel on PKP Intercity or regional railways were limited or withdrawn, and at the end of the analysed period, such a possibility existed only in strictly defined cases<sup>18</sup>. The situation was similar with free travel for cars registered in Ukraine on toll roads in Poland. In this case, too, tolls on state and concession sections were abolished after 1 March and reintroduced on 1 June 2022, albeit with the exception of vehicles carrying humanitarian aid for Ukrainian citizens (subject to prior notification of the convoy). After 24 February, Ukrainians could also count on movement assistance provided by individual cities. For example, the municipal transport operator in the capital city informed: for refugees, public transport is free of charge, and the vehicles of the Warsaw Municipal Transport run with the flags of Ukraine and Warsaw<sup>19</sup>. Moreover, this applied to all Ukrainian citizens. It was only after 15 April that a provision was introduced making the granting of free travel conditional on confirmation of arrival in Poland on or after 24 February<sup>20</sup>. The entitlement for refugees was in force until 31 May 2022, after which it was abolished.

#### **4. Anti-crisis and aid measures of the local authority on the example of Zabrze**

A study of the activity of the local government unit in the face of the situation caused by Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine was carried out by analysing the actions taken in Zabrze in the period of one hundred days after the outbreak of war.

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<sup>16</sup> Letter from Ombudsman Marcin Wiśk to Minister of Infrastructure Andrzej Adamczyk dated 19 April 2022, reference V.565.69.2022.GH.

<sup>17</sup> The constitutional principle of equality before the law was invoked by Andrzej Bittel, Secretary of State at the Ministry of Infrastructure, in a letter to Ombudsman Marcin Wiśk dated 20 May 2022, reference DTK-8.4602.124.2022.

<sup>18</sup> *Train journeys for citizens of Ukraine / npoi3d nommoM dw opoMad^H ykpaiHu*, information dated 1 July 2022 from the website of the Railway Transport Authority at <https://utk.gov.pl> [accessed 22 July 2022].

<sup>19</sup> *Warsaw for refugees from Ukraine*, information published on 26 February 2022 on the official website of Warsaw Public Transport at [www.wtp.waw.pl](http://www.wtp.waw.pl) [accessed 20 July 2022].

<sup>20</sup> *Free WTP rides for Ukrainian citizens - changes from / 3MiHU Bid 15.04.2022*, information published on 13 April 2022 on the official website of Warsaw Public Transport at [www.wtp.waw.pl](http://www.wtp.waw.pl) [accessed 20 July 2022].

#### 4.1. Characteristics of the test field

Zabrze is a Polish city with county rights located in the Silesian Voivodeship, in the Silesian Highlands, on the Kłodnica and Bytomka rivers. It has a population of approximately 172,000 people in an area of 80 km<sup>2</sup> (CSO, 2019), making it the fourth most populous city in the Upper Silesian and Zagłębie Metropolitan Area. It is one of the central centres of the Upper Silesian conurbation. Before 1989, it was a coal and steel monoculture with several mines, coking plants and steelworks. The period of political transformation resulted in the restructuring or liquidation of heavy industry and mining. Today, Zabrze is a regionally recognised centre of medicine, service-based economy and transfer of modern technology, culture, sport and post-industrial heritage tourism. Visitors can explore, among other things, the globally unique underground routes (180, 320 and 355 metres underground) in the "Guido" Historic Coal Mine or the underground boat trip (approximately 1 100 metres long) in the original excavations of the former Main Key Heritage Adit. For its preservation, renovation and adaptation for tourism of post-industrial sites, the city received the European Commission's Europa Nostra Award in 2019. Zabrze is also a centre of science with, among others, faculties of the Silesian University of Technology, the Silesian Medical University, the Faculty of Medicine of the Higher Technical School, the Institute of Medical Technology and Apparatus, the Prof. Zbigniew Religa Foundation for Cardiac Surgery Development, the Institute of Fundamentals of Environmental Engineering of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN), the Centre for Polymer Chemistry of the PAN and the Silesian Medical Technology Park Cardio-Med Silesia, the Institute for Chemical Processing of Coal.

#### 4.2. Local government reception and distribution point for humanitarian aid at the NGO Centre

Information about the scale of Russian aggression against Ukraine, reported by the mass media and disseminated on social media, triggered a wave of solidarity with the victims across Poland. One of its manifestations was the willingness to donate gifts for refugees. The government, together with the composite administration and the local government, became involved in coordinating the provision of support. The Silesian Governor's order No. ZKI 6330.21.1.2022 of 26.02.2022<sup>21</sup> addressed to the local self-government units ordered the organisation in municipalities of ad hoc accommodation for refugees together with food and the provision of social and psychological care.

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<sup>21</sup> The Silesian Governor's order No. ZKI 6330.21.1.2022 of 26 February 2022 was revoked by the Silesian Governor's revocation order No. ZKI 6330.21.2.2022 of 18 March 2022 due to the entry into force on 12 March 2022 of the Act on Assistance to Ukrainian Citizens in Connection with Armed Conflict on the Territory of Ukraine (Journal of Laws 2022, item 583).

The day before, only one day after the day of the invasion, i.e. still on 25 February 2022, a central point for receiving and distributing humanitarian aid started operating in Zabrze. It was set up at the premises of the Centre for Non-Governmental Organisations, an institution functioning within the City Hall and dealing with cooperation with entities grouping citizens (in 2021, 390 such organisations were registered in Zabrze) involved in the social life of the city through their activity in associations, unions or foundations, etc. Through messages disseminated via the city's website, the city's Facebook profile and media belonging to municipal institutions, residents found out where they could donate. Throughout the first weekend of the war, the people of Zabrze filled the premises of the Centre for Non-Governmental Organisations on their own initiative with clothing, food (especially with an extended shelf life), drinks, personal hygiene products, cleaning products, etc. The points were open daily (on weekdays from 8.00 a.m. to 7.00 p.m. and on Saturdays and Sundays from 10.00 am to 3.00 pm) and in the first weeks of military operations in Ukraine enjoyed great interest from residents.

Employees of the municipal office received the donations, drew up transfer protocols, sorted them, grouped them according to product categories, described them and packed them into containers for further dispatch. At first, the addressees were the Government Strategic Reserve Depots in Lubliniec, from where the support was to reach Ukraine with funds at the disposal of the government administration. The first shipment of humanitarian aid from Zabrze (made up of 18 Europallets filled with residents' gifts) set off on 2 March 2022. Some of the gifts brought by residents were transferred directly to Ukrainian citizens who had arrived in Zabrze and needed in-kind support.

Around 70 volunteers were involved in the functioning of the NGO Centre over the following weeks. Among them were young people from the uniformed classes of Zabrze schools, members of NGOs, police officers, firefighters and municipal guards working at the reception of delivered products, their segregation, classification and subsequent loading onto trucks, which from the second transport was directed to Rivne, Zabrze's Ukrainian partner city.

#### **4.3. Coordination of assistance for Zabrze's twin town of Rivne (Ukraine) with the involvement of Zabrze twin towns from Western Europe**

Partner cities establish and maintain relationships to enhance mutual cooperation. According to the law in force, decision-making in matters of cooperation with local and regional communities of other countries is the responsibility of the local government<sup>22</sup>. A cooperation agreement between Zabrze and Rivne was signed on 25 January 2001. Cooperation in recent years has included social policy, culture, medicine, sport and ecology, including mutual participation in sectoral conferences on the exchange of good practice in the fields of tourism,

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<sup>22</sup> Pursuant to Article 18(1)(12a) of the Act of 8 March 1990 *on Municipal Self-Government* (Journal of Laws of 1990, No. 16, item 95), adoption of resolutions on twinning with foreign towns falls within the remit of the municipal council.

health care and air quality improvement, as well as the activities of the European Network of "Cities for Children" coordinated by the City of Zabrze. Rivne is a regional city in western Ukraine with a population of approximately 245,000 with an airport and a nuclear power plant. It is located on the Ustva River on the main road between Warsaw and Kiev, about 200 km from the Polish border.

The first shipment of humanitarian aid to the city of Rivne (33 pallets) was dispatched on 5 March 2022. A new quality of support was the appeal of the Zabrze authorities to their partner and friend cities. In response, more convoys of aid dedicated to Rivne arrived at the NGO Centre. The logistics of these were coordinated by the Zabrze City Council's Office for International Cooperation. Ukrainian trucks were used for transport to the war zone. Thus, among others, a transport of donations from Germany left Zabrze for Rivne on 10 March, from Portugal on 11 March, from France on 15 March, from Italy on 9 April and from Spain on 13 April. The local government's involvement in the international forum was described by the mass media: Zabrze is actively involved in helping Ukraine, which is affected by the armed conflict. It is to this city that gifts donated by the inhabitants of Zabrze's partner cities (including Essen) and friendly local authorities from other European countries are brought, and from here they are transported by collective transport directly to the Ukrainian city of Rivne<sup>23</sup>.

Subsequent days of armed aggression in Ukraine had the effect of clarifying the list of products expected by recipients in Rivne, where there was no armed fighting. However, wounded people who had been injured by hostilities in other regions of Ukraine were being transported to the city. Therefore, medical supplies and hospital supplies, as well as food, were first on the priority list for humanitarian aid.

#### **4.3.1. Creation of a sub-account on the local government's bank account as a method of financing the dedicated aid provided to the city of Rivne**

Thanks to the creation on 4 March of a special sub-account<sup>24</sup> on the account of the Zabrze City Hall, individuals and companies interested in financially supporting Ukrainian citizens could make donations there. In the first instance, the funds collected were used to purchase medicines and dressing materials for the hospital in Rivne.

As early as 18 March, it was possible to dispatch the first transport of medical supplies purchased for the hospital in Rivne. The Zabrze-based sanitary transport company 'Eskulap' also donated an ambulance. On 11 April, an ambulance donated to Ukrainian doctors arrived at the hospital in Rivne along with another shipment of humanitarian aid. In addition, donations collected by shopping centre customers, sponsored by businesses, from the Polish Red Cross pool and deposited at the NGO Centre by local residents continued to be sent. During the period

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<sup>23</sup> *Zabrze wspiera Ukrainę, oferując pomoc i koordynując działania na wielu płaszczyznach*, material published on 16 March 2022 in the SŁĄSK section of the ONET.PL news portal at <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl> [accessed 9 June 2022].

<sup>24</sup> An account number was activated: 03 1050 1070 1000 0090 3268 5357, where donors wrote the title of the transfer: "Donation for aid to Ukraine". Both domestic and foreign donations were possible. The account was operated by ING Bank Śląski S.A.

under review, cars filled with several tonnes of items needed there still left for Rivne on 13 and 17 May.

#### **4.4. Support for refugees coming to Zabrze**

Another area of support was assistance for refugees who arrived in Zabrze. The day after the Russian aggression in Ukraine, a telephone number<sup>25</sup> was made available within the Crisis Management Department of the Zabrze City Hall, which provided information on the forms of assistance prepared for Ukrainians. The mass media managed or cooperating with the local government (traditional and social media) published useful information for refugees, as well as news relevant for volunteers and those wishing to support Ukrainians fleeing war (e.g. by joining in the preparation of humanitarian aid).

On 1 March, however, a Consultation and Information Point for Ukrainians was set up<sup>26</sup>. The point's staff provided refugees with practical information on educational and social offers, emergency assistance and housing. The point, run by the City Centre for Family Support, supported refugees in legalising their stay and also facilitated the completion of procedures to obtain a PESEL number. In Zabrze, refugees could, for example, have their photographs taken free of charge, which were necessary to submit documents. The point's staff also provided information on how to access the social support system (e.g. one-off benefits, family benefits, the 500+ programme, the possibility for children to continue schooling). Consultations related to these issues were conducted by telephone in Ukrainian and Russian. On site, official formalities related to a longer stay in Poland and the use of health benefits were completed. At the same time, the people of Zabrze were able to register there their willingness to provide accommodation for refugees. An employee of the Poviats Employment Office was on duty at the point, providing information on employment opportunities. In parallel, information on assistance for Ukrainian refugees was provided 24/7 by the Crisis Management and Civil Protection Department. This department also coordinated the distribution of more than 400 24-hour accommodation places (including food and social care). The accommodation provided by local authorities was located in hotels (the "Ambassador Hotel" owned by the Municipal Centre for Sport and Recreation), hostels (the "Guido Hostel" owned by the Coal Mining Museum), sports facilities (the "Hala Pogoń" owned by the Property Management Unit) and municipal buildings (e.g. the premises of the municipal nursery school). Shelter for refugees was also provided by Zabrze families, as well as entities administered by the Catholic Church. At the end of the period under study, the estimated number of Ukrainian citizens fleeing military action in Zabrze was around 3,000<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> The number 32/37-33-388 provided by the Crisis Management Department dedicated to helping Ukrainians could be called around the clock.

<sup>26</sup> The Consultation and Information Point for Ukrainians operated at 9 Wyzwolenia Street.

<sup>27</sup> Based on estimates from the Department of Emergency Management and Civil Protection of the Municipal Office in Zabrze.

#### 4.5. Position of the municipality towards Russia's aggression against Ukraine

It is noteworthy that in addition to the described forms of assistance to refugees and the city of Rivne, the Zabrze local government four days after the invasion began unanimously passed a resolution in which it stood in solidarity with the struggling Ukraine and joined the protests against the unjustified aggression of the Russian Federation against an independent and sovereign country. The document, adopted during a session of the City Council on 28 February 2022, stated, among other things: "we strongly condemn President Vladimir Putin's violation of international law through the Russian Federation's support of separatist republics that are an integral part of the territory of democratic Ukraine. We are pained and compassionate to learn of the consequences of the hostilities affecting both soldiers and civilians, especially children, women and the elderly. For the sake of the refugees, we have prepared accommodation, food and social and psychological assistance (...). At the same time, we appeal to companies, institutions and all residents of our city to be open to the needs of Ukrainians seeking refuge from the Russian invasion of their homeland, as well as to be kind to the citizens of this country residing in Poland. We believe that the Russian people are opposed to a war that poses a threat to peace in Europe and the world"<sup>28</sup>. Expressing their opposition to the barbaric aggression, the councillors voted during the same session to break the partnership with the city of Kaliningrad in Russia<sup>29</sup>. At the same time, they declared support for the Ukrainian partner city of Rivne, providing humanitarian aid and taking action for war refugees<sup>30</sup>.

## 5. Conclusions

According to 'Information on preliminary results of the National Population and Housing Census 2021'<sup>31</sup>, Ukrainian citizens accounted for 47 per cent of permanent residents of Poland with citizenship other than Polish. In 2021, there were a total of 53 000 persons (CSO, 2022, p. 8). Women predominated in this group (54 per cent). In the 10 years separating the two editions of the census, the number of permanent residents of Poland with Ukrainian citizenship increased fourfold (Kuzior et al., 2020). In 2011, it amounted to 13.4 thousand people, although Ukrainian national-ethnic identification was declared by as many as 49 thousand people during

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<sup>28</sup> Resolution No. XLV/697/22 of the Zabrze City Council of 28 February 2022 *on the resolution of the Zabrze City Council*. Source: Zabrze City Council Public Information Bulletin at <https://bip.miastozabrze.pl> [accessed 13 June 2022].

<sup>29</sup> Resolution No. XLV/698/22 of the Zabrze City Council of 28 February 2022 *on the termination of cooperation between the City of Zabrze and the City of Kaliningrad in the Russian Federation*. Source: Zabrze City Council Public Information Bulletin at <https://bip.miastozabrze.pl> [accessed 13 June 2022].

<sup>30</sup> Resolution No. XLV/698/22 of the Zabrze City Council of 28 February 2022 *on support for the partner city in Rivne, Ukraine*. Source: Zabrze City Council Public Information Bulletin at <https://bip.miastozabrze.pl> [accessed 13 June 2022].

<sup>31</sup> The information was published on 26 April 2022.

the census. In contrast, according to the previous census of 2002, there were only 5.4 thousand Ukrainian citizens.

Research published in 2012 indicated that at that time there were no strong links between Ukrainians settled in Poland and labour migrants from Ukraine. Migrants coming to Poland for temporary work functioned, so to speak, in isolation from the Ukrainian community (Brunarska, Grotte, Lesińska, 2012, p. 8). But the group of migrants was already counted in millions. The number of declarations of entrustment of work to a foreigner (the most popular legal basis for the work of Ukrainian citizens in Poland) alone increased sharply from about 220 thousand in 2013 to over 1 million 700 thousand in 2017, remaining at a comparable level in the following years.

It is worth noting that a 2016 survey of Ukrainian migrants managed to identify the main problems foreigners faced (Kindler, Górny, Jaźwińska, 2022, 123). The most common (more than half of the respondents) were: separation from family (75 per cent of the respondents), lack of good knowledge of current legislation (60 per cent ) and low wages (56 per cent ).

Even before Russia's military action in Ukraine began in February 2022, migration, caused not only by traditional reasons such as study, relocation to a new place of residence and the search for better paid work, but also new ones - the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation (March 2014) and the military conflict in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions (since April 2014), has become a major socio-economic problem (Kuzior, Lobanova, 2017, p. 226-227). According to the Kremlin leadership, without the return of Ukraine (with its territory, resources and human capital) to the bosom of Russia, any attempt to revive its imperial status is unproductive (Vasylenko, 2017, p. 22). Therefore, the removal of President Viktor Yanukovich from power in February 2014, perceived as an announcement of Ukraine's integration into the European Union and NATO, was one of the reasons for the start of the armed aggression known as 'hybrid war', which already contributed to the increase in the number of Ukrainian citizens arriving in Poland. However, the number of people arriving after 2014 was radically lower than the scale of departures triggered by the 24 February 2022 invasion.

UN data published in July 2022 shows that nearly 10 million (9,926,884) people have left Ukraine since the beginning of Russian aggression. Of this group, nearly 5 million (4,944,264) refugees have arrived in Poland, and more than 1.2 million (1,234,718) Ukrainians have applied for temporary protection<sup>32</sup>. In Poland, they were given the opportunity to benefit from the education, health and social care system, to provide work and to carry out economic activities. In the first 100 days of the Russian-induced war, refugees were also able to count on the spontaneous support of non-governmental associations, volunteers and a significant part of the

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<sup>32</sup> *Ukraine Refugee Situation*, data from the official website of the UN Refugee Agency published on 22 July 2022 at <https://data.unhcr.org> [accessed 28 July 2022].

population, in addition to the anti-crisis, intervention and assistance measures of the state and local administration. Interestingly, usually citizens only marginally benefit from the possibility to actively shape the reality around them (Szostok 2019, p. 143). The described activities - on the example of the local administration and the local community of Zabrze - confirmed that the emergency situation related to the war in Ukraine activated members of the local government community and mobilised them to directly participate in the implemented aid projects.

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