

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Refugee integration through social support:
A clustering approach in host countriesValeriia Shcherbak^{1*}, Svitlana Tereshchenko¹, Tetiana Kostyshyna²,
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(admin@snau.edu.ua)**Citation:** Shcherbak, V., Tereshchenko, S., Kostyshyna, T., Riashchenko, V. & Yatsenko, V. (2025). Refugee integration through social support: A clustering approach in host countries. *International Journal of Population Studies*. 11(6): 130-143. <https://doi.org/10.36922/ijps.4502>**Received:** August 12, 2024**1st revised:** October 3, 2024**2nd revised:** November 25, 2024**3rd revised:** December 17, 2024**4th revised:** January 14, 2025**Accepted:** April 30, 2025**Published online:** May 16, 2025**Copyright:** © 2025 Author(s). This is an Open-Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, permitting distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.**Publisher's Note:** AccScience Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.**Abstract**

In the context of mass displacement caused by war and other crises, the integration of refugees has become a critical task for host countries. This study examines nine recipient countries, with a detailed focus on Poland, Germany, and the Czech Republic, chosen for their geographical proximity to Ukraine and their differing levels of social support and integration programs. Effective social support measures are essential for fostering an inclusive society and achieving sustainable socioeconomic development. The study aims to classify host countries based on their integration efforts and identify key indicators influencing refugee integration, such as access to social services, employment rate, language proficiency, and participation in integration programs. Using hierarchical clustering (Joining Tree method) and K-means cluster analysis, the study groups countries based on similarities in their integration policies and outcomes. Statistical data collected over 3 years (2022 – 2024) were analyzed to highlight patterns and relationships among integration indicators. Germany, characterized by advanced social support – €357 in social assistance on average per person per month and 85% access to integration programs – formed a distinct cluster with Great Britain, reflecting a high level of integration effort. Poland and the Czech Republic, grouped in a separate cluster, demonstrated moderate but improving integration policies. The findings highlight the multifaceted nature of refugee integration, where access to services and employment opportunities play foundational roles, while language proficiency and social participation ensure long-term inclusion. This study confirms the importance of well-developed social support systems in facilitating refugee integration and offers evidence-based insights for improving integration policies. The findings contribute to ongoing migration policy debates, providing practical recommendations for fostering inclusive and sustainable societies.

Keywords: Migrant integration; Social support; Refugees; Inclusive society

1. Introduction

Migration is a complex, multifaceted process that significantly influences the economy, society, and cultural dynamics of both origin and destination countries. Modern migration flows are characterized by great diversity, encompassing economic migrants seeking better opportunities, as well as refugees fleeing conflicts and persecution. Migration – the movement of people from one place of residence to another – can be voluntary or forced, temporary or permanent, and occur within a country or across its borders. The reasons for migration include economic advancement, family reunification, or access to education. In contrast, refuge involves the forced displacement of people who left their country due to well-founded fears of persecution based on race, nationality, religion, citizenship, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Refugees often leave their country to escape threats to their lives and safety. Striking examples include the mass displacement of people from Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Venezuela, and other regions affected by war, political instability, or economic crises. The displacement of Ukrainian refugees represents the displacement of the largest group of individuals within the European Union (EU) in recent years. A larger number of people were displaced during the Second World War. It is estimated that the number of Ukrainian refugees has exceeded 7,000,000 since the start of military operations in February 2022 (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2024; International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2023). This mass displacement has created significant social and economic challenges not only for host countries but for Europe as a whole. This study focuses on three European countries – Poland, Germany, and the Czech Republic – chosen for their geographical proximity to Ukraine and the presence of their large Ukrainian refugee populations. Notably, as the war enters its 3rd year, local communities are increasingly experiencing so-called “refugee fatigue” due to the presence of a large number of displaced persons (Wesolowsky, 2024). The novelty of this study lies in the development of an innovative integration model. Based on a comprehensive analysis of existing social support and integration systems from 2022 to 2024, the study identifies the most effective mechanisms for the integration of Ukrainian refugees.

2. Literature review and analytical framework for refugee integration

2.1. The impact of social support on the integration of refugees

The integration of refugees into host countries is a complex process significantly influenced by the level and quality

of available social support. Numerous studies highlight the crucial role of social support in ensuring successful integration, emphasizing the need for coordinated policies that address the specific needs of these groups. While the integration of refugees into host societies offers numerous benefits, it also carries the potential risk of “refugee fatigue.” A recent study on the Ukrainian refugee crisis highlights that the absence of long-term strategies and the burden on cities hosting large refugee populations may contribute to a growing sense of fatigue, both among refugees and local communities (Hierro and Maza, 2024). This phenomenon can undermine the effectiveness of integration policies and weaken the social cohesion of host communities. Addressing this issue requires a multi-level approach involving long-term planning, city-led relocation initiatives, and targeted support measures to strengthen the resilience of both refugees and host communities. Existing research underscores the importance of well-defined and coordinated integration policies. A study by De Coninck (2022) highlights the need for equitable policies, pointing out disparities in integration approaches for different refugee groups. In its *Rights and Support for Ukrainian Refugees in Receiving Countries* report, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2022) highlights the effectiveness of coordinated EU measures in providing essential services to refugees. The OECD (2022) emphasizes labor market integration as a key component of inclusion, where successful integration often depends on the active involvement of local communities. A study by Jelínková *et al.* (2023) highlights the crucial role of local municipalities in supporting refugee integration, while Panizzon and Riemsdijk (2019) advocate for a multi-level migration management approach that ensures coordination among international, national, and local levels.

Discrimination and bias can significantly hinder refugee integration. Sow (2022) discusses the impact of racial biases in international law on refugee integration, while Bajaj and Stanford (2022) highlight the negative effects of racism and discrimination on the mental and physical health of refugees. Economic integration is also crucial for successful refugee settlement. Kolodiziev *et al.* (2024) and Uzoma *et al.* (2020) underscore the importance of providing refugees with opportunities to participate in the labor market and become self-sufficient.

Cultural adaptation and social inclusion are essential for the well-being of refugees. Several studies explore various aspects of cultural and social integration, including the role of language, social networks, and community participation (Burliai *et al.*, 2023; Dotsey, 2024; Kuppenko *et al.*, 2023; Trung, 2023; Zanin and De Freitas, 2023).

Access to education is vital for refugees to acquire new skills and effectively integrate into host societies. A number of studies highlight the importance of education in the integration process and the challenges faced by refugee students (Artyukhov *et al.*, 2023; Fiialka, 2022; Kozmenko *et al.*, 2023; Nestulya *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, the health and well-being of refugees are significantly impacted by their integration experiences. In addition, Lee *et al.* (2023) emphasize the necessity for accessible healthcare services for refugees.

The level of social support provided to refugees is crucial for their successful integration. Addressing various dimensions of integration – such as policy frameworks, community engagement, discrimination, economic opportunities, cultural adaptation, education, and health – enables host countries to foster more inclusive and welcoming environments for refugees. The reviewed studies collectively underscore the need for a comprehensive integration approach that incorporates cultural, social, and economic aspects, grounded in principles of equality and justice. By addressing the specific needs of refugees through well-designed social support systems, host countries can foster more inclusive societies where all individuals have the opportunity to thrive.

The integration of refugees can significantly influence the socioeconomic development of host countries. While large-scale migration presents challenges, evidence from several studies highlights the economic contributions of refugees to host countries and the pull factors influencing their migration decisions. For instance, Mulska *et al.* (2021) discuss the migration vector from Ukraine, highlighting the importance of socioeconomic opportunities in EU countries as key drivers of migration. Kolodiziev *et al.* (2024) demonstrate that migrants contribute significantly to economic growth, particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises, where their entrepreneurial spirit and innovative ideas can revitalize local economies. The OECD (2022) underscores the importance of policies that facilitate labor market integration, highlighting the potential of refugees to fill labor shortages and stimulate economic development.

Beyond economic contributions, migrants can significantly influence the demographics and social fabric of host countries. Shcherbak *et al.* (2020) examined the role of migration in rural areas, focusing on its potential for social revitalization and community development. Kozlovskiy *et al.* (2024) explored how migration fosters innovation and entrepreneurship, further contributing to social dynamics. A study by Zanin and De Freitas (2023) highlights the importance of inclusive policies for integrating marginalized groups, such as LGBTQ+

refugees, which help strengthen the cultural and social cohesion of host societies.

While the potential benefits of migration are evident, successful integration requires careful policy design and effective implementation. In response to the Ukrainian crisis, several key documents were developed to manage the mass influx of refugees. Notably, Council Decision (EU) 2022/382 established temporary protection measures for Ukrainian refugees in the EU, forming the foundation for their integration (EUR-Lex, 2022). Goodwin *et al.* (2023) highlight the importance of integrating both internal and external refugees to enhance Ukraine's national resilience. De Oliveira (2023) examined refugees' experiences in Brazilian cities, offering insights into the challenges of integration in new environments. In addition, Saadi *et al.* (2023) conducted a bibliometric analysis of project management related to humanitarian crises, highlighting the need for a sustainable approach to effective refugee integration. Zhao *et al.* (2023) investigated migrant transport integration in Hong Kong, demonstrating that access to public transportation is crucial for fostering social inclusion. Brücker *et al.* (2023) identified key barriers to integration, such as language barriers and discrimination, emphasizing the need for targeted support policies. Uygun *et al.* (2023) highlight the need for favorable working conditions to enhance migrants' job satisfaction and maximize their economic contributions. Sow (2022) further emphasizes the need for non-discriminatory policies to ensure the full inclusion of refugees.

The socioeconomic impacts of refugee and migrant integration are multifaceted, yielding both positive and negative outcomes. When managed effectively, migration can enhance economic growth, social cohesion, and cultural enrichment. Key factors influencing successful integration include: a comprehensive and inclusive policy framework that addresses the specific needs of refugees; adequate social support services to facilitate integration into new communities; access to employment and entrepreneurship opportunities; opportunities for education and training; and fostering positive interactions between refugees and host communities. By addressing these interconnected factors, policymakers can maximize the benefits of migration, creating more inclusive and resilient societies.

2.2. Research hypothesis

The hypothesis of this study posits that countries with well-developed social support systems for refugees – including access to housing, employment assistance, healthcare, education, legal aid, and financial benefits – demonstrate higher levels of refugee integration. This integration,

in turn, fosters the creation of an inclusive society and positively contributes to the socioeconomic development of host countries.

The successful integration of refugees requires a comprehensive approach, encompassing access to education, healthcare, the labor market, and social services. Inclusive societies are characterized not only by the availability of these resources but also by the dynamic interaction between social cohesion and stability. Social cohesion helps reduce tension and conflict, while the absence of conflict further promotes cohesion, creating a reinforcing cycle of stability (Bajaj and Stanford, 2022; Lee *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, research demonstrates that migrants can significantly contribute to the economies of host countries, particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises, provided they have access to financial resources and legal support (Kolodiziev *et al.*, 2024). Social support measures – such as combating discrimination and promoting access to services – are essential to prevent marginalization and ensure successful integration (Trung, 2023; Zanin and De Freitas, 2023). Therefore, this study hypothesizes that effective social support and integration measures form the foundation for an inclusive society, which, in turn, positively impacts the socioeconomic development of host countries. Integration, as used in this study, refers to the process through which refugees achieve economic, social, and cultural participation within the host country. This encompasses access to employment, education, language acquisition, participation in local social networks, and inclusion in societal structures, enabling mutual adaptation between refugees and host communities.

This study aims to investigate the relationship between social support systems and the integration of refugees within host countries, exploring the role of social support systems in facilitating the integration of refugees into host societies. Furthermore, the study evaluates how different dimensions of social support contribute to the development of an inclusive society. Finally, the research proposes actionable recommendations to strengthen social support systems and enhance both the integration process and societal inclusion.

This research was conducted from 2023 to the first half of 2024, utilizing data from reports on the integration of Ukrainian refugees by the United Nations (UN) and other public organizations, as well as government reports from host countries during this period.

2.3. The Ukrainian migration crisis: An overview

The outbreak of war in Ukraine in February 2022 triggered the largest migration crisis in Europe since World War II. The

ongoing conflict has forced millions of people to flee their homes, resulting in large-scale displacement both within Ukraine and across its borders. By early 2024, over 7,000,000 Ukrainian refugees had been registered across Europe (Global Report on Internal Displacement, 2024). This crisis has displaced nearly one-third of Ukraine's population, with most refugees seeking asylum in neighboring European countries (Data Friendly Space, 2024) (Figure 1).

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of Ukrainian refugees across European countries as of January 2024. Poland, Germany, and the Czech Republic have hosted the largest number of refugees. Table 1 presents detailed statistics on the number of refugees in these countries, as well as in other European countries.

Most Ukrainian refugees have sought safety in neighboring countries such as Poland, Romania, Hungary, and Slovakia. These countries have provided immediate assistance and opened their borders to all refugees, enabling millions to find temporary shelter. Poland has received the highest number of refugees, hosting approximately 1.64 million people (OECD, 2022). Romania has also played a significant role, with nearly one million individuals crossing its borders, though many continued their journey to other European countries. This war-induced crisis has led to a sharp increase in the refugee population across Europe, posing significant challenges to host countries.

As shown in Table 2, the majority of refugees are women and children (up to 90%), necessitating the development of specialized social support and integration programs. In addition, there have been reports of forced relocation of Ukrainian citizens to Russia, further contributing to the total number of displaced individuals.

In summary, the war in Ukraine has resulted in massive population displacement, with over seven million people

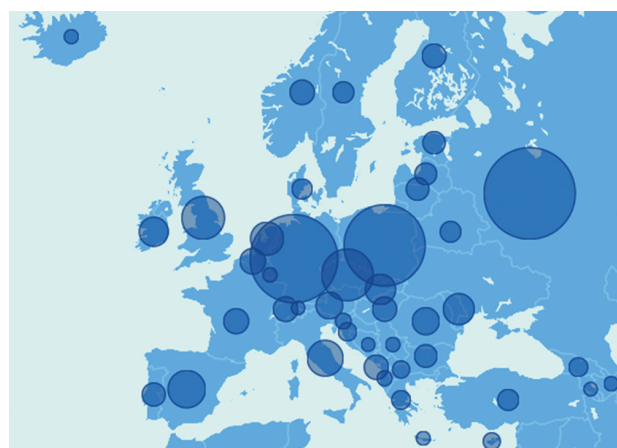


Figure 1. The distribution of Ukrainian refugees across European countries as of January 22, 2024. Retrieved from People in Need (2024).

becoming refugees. Most of these refugees have fled to neighboring countries, creating significant challenges for social integration. It is essential to note that host countries are making efforts to provide necessary assistance and support for the successful adaptation of refugees in their new environments.

3. Data and methods

3.1. Data

The selection of indicators to assess refugee integration was based on secondary data sources, highlighting the need for an in-depth analysis tailored to the context of the present migration crisis. Instead of collecting primary data through direct surveys and interviews, this study relied on secondary data from official reports and databases, employing an integrated approach using quantitative methods. The datasets, which included a representative sample of refugees segmented by factors – such as age, gender, education level, and employment status – were gathered from well-established sources such as EUR-Lex, IOM, and the OECD. These sources provided detailed information on social support measures and integration processes for Ukrainian refugees in various European countries. This integrated approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the migration situation across multiple countries and demographic groups.

Table 1. Number of Ukrainian refugees in various European countries (as of January 2024)

Country	Number of refugees
Poland	1,640,510
Russia	1,212,585
Germany	1,125,950
The Czech Republic	547,670
Great Britain	210,800
Spain	186,045
Bulgaria	168,570
Italy	163,570
Moldova	116,615
Romania	106,786

Source: Ukrainian Refugee Crisis (2024).

Table 2. Main demographic characteristics of Ukrainian refugees

Category	Percentage of total refugees
Women and children	90%
Men (18 – 60 years old)	10%
Returnees	4 – 5 million people

Source: Ukrainian Refugee Crisis (2024).

The analysis was conducted using two models designed to assess the impact of social support systems on refugee integration. These models explored the relationships between various indicators of integration, such as access to employment, social services, and participation in integration programs, based on the data from the cited reports. Statistical methods, including K-means cluster analysis and dendrogram, were used to assess these relationships. Detailed results of the analysis are presented in the subsequent sections.

Table 3 provides a description of the main indicators of integration and social support for refugees, while Table 4 presents the statistical sources of information.

3.2. Methods

The proposed methodology consists of the following steps:

- i. Step 1: Identifying the key integration indicators using hierarchical clustering (Joining Tree Clustering)

Hierarchical clustering using the Joining Tree method was employed to identify the most significant indicators influencing refugee integration. This approach organizes the indicators into clusters based on their similarities, allowing the determination of their relative importance in shaping integration outcomes (Toronen, 2004). The initial set of indicators used to identify the most influential factors for refugee integration is presented in Table 3.

Normalization of indicators was carried out using the Z-score method to ensure comparability across different scales (Glänzel *et al.*, 2008):

$$Z = \frac{X - \mu}{\sigma} \tag{I}$$

where X is the raw score, μ is the mean, and σ is the standard deviation of the dataset.

The Ward hierarchical clustering algorithm was employed to construct dendrograms, representing the grouping of indicators based on their similarities (Murtagh and Legendre, 2014). This method minimizes within-cluster variance while maximizing between-cluster variance. The formula for calculating distances is as follows:

$$D_{ij} = |X_i - X_j|^2 \tag{II}$$

Where D_{ij} is the distance between indicators X_i and X_j , while $|X_i - X_j|$ is the Euclidean distance (Silbergleit *et al.*, 2015).

- ii. Step 2: Classification of host countries using K-means Clustering

Based on the significant indicators identified in the dendrogram, the K-means clustering algorithm – an unsupervised machine learning method – was employed

Table 3. The description of the main indicators of integration and social support for refugees

Factor	Explanation	Indicator	Symbol
Level of social support	Access to social services (%)	Percentage of refugees with access to social services (housing, medical care, and social benefits)	X ₁
	Amount of social assistance (€)	Average amount of benefits or social assistance received by refugees	X ₂
	Access to integration programs (%)	Percentage of refugees participating in language courses and adaptation programs	X ₃
Demographic characteristics	Distribution by age groups (%)	Youth: 15 – 35 years old	X ₄
		Middle-aged and elderly: 36 years and older	X ₅
	Gender (%)	Women or men (choose one)	X ₆
	Education (%)	Primary and secondary education	X ₇
Higher education		X ₈	
Length of stay	Average duration of residence (years)	Average length of stay of refugees in the country	X ₉
Host country policy	Composite index assessing migration policy (units)	Migration policy index	X ₁₀
	Legislation and regulations	Number of laws to support migrant integration (e.g., access to citizenship and employment)	X ₁₁
Employment rate of refugees	Employment rate (%)	Percentage of refugees officially employed in the host country	X ₁₂
	Employment stability (%)	Percentage of employed refugees working on permanent contracts	X ₁₃
Level of language proficiency in the host country	Language test (%)	Percentage of refugees who have successfully passed language proficiency tests	X ₁₄
	Participation in language courses (%)	Percentage of refugees who have completed language courses	X ₁₅
Level of involvement in social activities	Participation in social organizations (%)	Percentage of refugees participating in community and volunteer organizations	X ₁₆
	Social ties (%)	Percentage of refugees with local social ties (e.g., participation in local events)	X ₁₇

Table 4. Data sources of information

Data source	Information used
EUR-Lex: Council Implementing Decision (European Union) 2022/382	Scope and nature of assistance provided to Ukrainian refugees
United Nations International Organization for Migration: Displacement Tracking Matrix	Internal displacement data and demographic characteristics of refugees
Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development: The potential contribution of Ukrainian refugees to the labor force in European host countries	Employment data and employment potential of refugees
Rights and support for Ukrainian refugees in receiving countries	Refugee reception policies in different countries
Ukrainian Crisis Situational Analysis	Humanitarian aid data and demographic characteristics

to classify the host countries into distinct groups (Fusco and Perez, 2019). This algorithm is widely used for its simplicity, computational efficiency, and ability to handle large datasets. K-means clustering works by minimizing within-cluster variance while maximizing between-cluster variance, making it an effective tool for grouping similar data points.

K-means objective function:

$$\text{Minimize} \sum_{k=1}^K \sum_{i \in C_k} \|x_i - \mu_k\|^2 \quad (\text{III})$$

Where K is the number of clusters, x_i is the data point for each country (vector of indicators), C_k is the set of countries in cluster k , and μ_k is the centroid of cluster C_k .

The advantages of the algorithm include its speed and ease of implementation, particularly for partitioning large datasets into distinct groups. In addition, its iterative approach ensures the optimization of cluster centroids, facilitating meaningful classifications.

The elbow method was employed to determine the optimal number of clusters, balancing explained variance

and interpretability (Park and Kim, 2022). Z-score normalization (Equation I) was applied to the data for K-means clustering to ensure consistency with the hierarchical clustering approach.

The resulting clusters represent distinct profiles of integration policies and outcomes, with each cluster containing countries that exhibit similar patterns in social support, employment, and language proficiency. The cluster composition and interpretation are detailed in the results section. Both the dendrogram and the K-means analyses were conducted using STATISTICA 13 software (StatSoft, now part of TIBCO Software Inc., United States) (Batinca and Treleven, 2014), providing robust insights into the determinants of refugee integration and enabling detailed comparisons of host countries based on their integration policies.

4. Results

This section presents the findings of the study, focusing on the identification of key integration indicators and the classification of host countries based on their integration policies and outcomes. The methodologies applied, including hierarchical clustering and K-means clustering were used to analyze the relationships among the indicators and to group countries into meaningful clusters.

4.1. Step 1: Identifying key integration indicators using hierarchical clustering (Joining Tree clustering)

Figure 2 presents a dendrogram generated through hierarchical cluster analysis using the Joining Tree method to identify the most significant indicators influencing the integration of Ukrainian refugees in host countries. The dendrogram visually organizes the relationships among key integration indicators, showing their clustering based on similarity and relative contribution to the integration

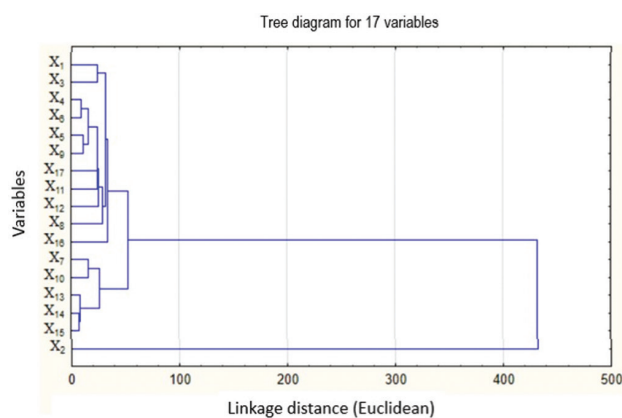


Figure 2. Dendrogram illustrating the hierarchical grouping of integration indicators into clusters (cluster analysis using STATISTICA 13)

process. This method allows for the identification of the most impactful indicators, enabling a focused analysis of refugee integration efforts across host countries. The dendrogram highlights the hierarchical grouping of integration indicators into clusters, emphasizing their relative importance. The selected indicators that represent key dimensions of integration are shown in Table 5.

The dendrogram provides a hierarchical grouping of integration indicators, revealing their relationships and relative importance:

- i. Primary indicators: Employment rate (X_{12}) and language proficiency (X_{14}) formed the closest cluster, indicating a strong interdependence. Employment often depends on refugees' ability to communicate effectively in the host country's language, making these indicators crucial for socioeconomic integration. Together, they reflect the direct impact of integration policies and serve as key measures of success.
- ii. Secondary indicators: Access to social services (X_1) and integration programs (X_3) clustered together, highlighting the foundational role of support systems in facilitating refugees' access to basic needs and integration pathways. Social ties (X_{17}) and participation in social organizations (X_{16}) formed a separate cluster, emphasizing their interconnected yet distinct roles in fostering community participation and long-term social cohesion.
- iii. Tertiary indicators: Indicators such as youth age group distribution (X_4) and higher education attainment (X_8) were positioned further down the hierarchy. These factors influence integration indirectly by shaping opportunities and access to services, but are less critical than primary and secondary indicators.

The dendrogram suggests that employment rate (X_{12}) and language proficiency (X_{14}) are the most significant indicators, forming the basis for evaluating the success of integration efforts. Access to social services (X_1) and integration programs (X_3) is crucial for the initial stages of integration, while social participation ($X_{16} - X_{17}$) contributes to long-term inclusion and community cohesion.

4.2. Step 2: Classification of host countries through K-means Clustering

The analysis confirms that employment rate (X_{12}) and language proficiency (X_{14}) are the most significant indicators, forming the basis for evaluating the success of integration efforts. Access to social services and integration programs provides critical support in the initial stages of integration, while social participation contributes to long-term inclusion and community

Table 5. Integration factors and indicators

Factors	Explanation	Indicator	Symbol
Level of social support	Percentage of refugees with access to social services (e.g., housing and medical care)	Access to social services (%)	X_1
	Average amount of benefits or social assistance received by refugees	Amount of social assistance (€)	X_2
	Percentage of refugees participating in language courses and adaptation programs	Access to integration programs (%)	X_3
Employment rate of refugees	Percentage of refugees officially employed in the host country	Employment rate (%)	X_{13}
Level of language proficiency	Percentage of refugees who passed language proficiency tests	Language test (%)	X_{14}

cohesion. The hierarchical structure of the dendrogram highlights the multifaceted nature of refugee integration, where foundational support facilitates socioeconomic and cultural adaptation. By identifying the most impactful indicators, the dendrogram offers valuable guidance to policymakers and researchers in prioritizing areas for intervention, ensuring that integration efforts are targeted and effective.

The K-means cluster analysis categorized the nine host countries into three distinct clusters based on their integration indicators. The results, shown in Figure 3, present the average values of key integration indicators for each cluster. These clusters reveal patterns of similarity in social, economic, and policy-related aspects of refugee integration across the host countries.

Figure 3 presents the graphical distribution of average values for key integration indicators across the three clusters. It highlights the significant disparities between clusters, particularly in access to services, employment stability, and social participation. Cluster 3 shows the highest values across integration indicators, while Cluster 2 exhibits the lowest. The data used to determine the composition of each cluster are provided in Tables 6-8.

Cluster 1 – which includes Poland, the Czech Republic, and Spain – can be characterized as offering “moderate support for integration.” This cluster represents countries with moderately effective integration policies. The average distances to the cluster center are 0.39 for Poland, 0.10 for the Czech Republic, and 0.44 for Spain. Key characteristics include balanced access to social services and integration programs, moderate employment rates, and participation in language testing. Poland and the Czech Republic demonstrate similar approaches to refugee integration, supported by practical social policies. Spain shares several of these characteristics but shows slightly lower performance in employment stability and social participation.

Cluster 2 – which includes Bulgaria, Italy, Moldova, and Romania – can be characterized as providing “limited

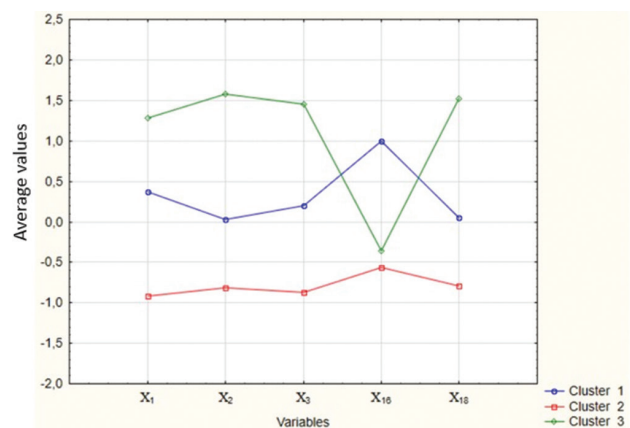


Figure 3. Plot of mean values for each cluster, illustrating the average levels of key integration indicators used to assess the integration of Ukrainian refugees in host countries (cluster analysis performed using STATISTICA 13)

support for integration.” The average distances to the cluster center are 0.08 for Bulgaria, 0.09 for Romania, 0.41 for Moldova, and 0.43 for Italy. This cluster includes countries with limited integration policies and infrastructure. Key characteristics include limited access to social services and integration programs, low employment rates, and minimal participation in language courses. These countries face economic constraints and institutional challenges that hinder their capacity to support large-scale refugee integration.

Cluster 3 – which includes Germany and Great Britain – can be characterized as providing “advanced integration support.” Both countries show an average distance of 0.51 from the cluster center. This cluster represents countries with advanced integration support. Key characteristics include extensive social assistance, comprehensive integration programs, strong language proficiency among refugees, and active participation in community organizations. Integration policies in these countries prioritize long-term socioeconomic integration of refugees.

Countries from Cluster 1 – such as Germany, Poland, and the Czech Republic – were selected for detailed

Table 6. Composition of the first cluster

Members of Cluster 1	Average distance to the cluster center
Poland	0.393973
Czech Republic	0.103242
Spain	0.435879

Table 7. Composition of the second cluster

Members of Cluster 2	Average distance from the cluster center
Bulgaria	0.08187732
Italy	0.4254286
Moldova	0.4137162
Romania	0.09214597

Table 8. Composition of the third cluster

Members of Cluster 3	Average distance from the cluster center
Germany	0.507379
Great Britain	0.507379

analysis due to their representativeness and strategic relevance. These countries play a key role in responding to refugee flows from Ukraine and exhibit moderate yet improving integration policies, offering valuable insights into practical solutions within resource-limited settings. As a leader in advanced integration policies, Germany – from Cluster 3 – serves as a benchmark for best practices. Its approach to long-term refugee integration offers a valuable example for other host countries. By focusing on these selected countries, the analysis captures a range of integration policy levels, providing a comprehensive perspective on the challenges and opportunities of refugee integration across Europe.

4.3. Comparative analysis of social integration factors and refugee integration levels

Table 9 presents a comparative analysis of key factors influencing refugee integration in Poland, Germany, and the Czech Republic. By evaluating indicators such as access to social services, social assistance, integration programs, demographic characteristics, language proficiency, and social cohesion, the analysis provides insights into the relationship between social support systems and refugee integration outcomes.

The data presented in Table 9 support the hypothesis that countries with a well-developed social support system for refugees demonstrate higher levels of refugee integration. Germany, with consistently higher scores across most indicators, exemplifies this trend. In contrast, Poland and the Czech Republic, while making efforts to

Table 9. Comparative analysis of social integration factors and refugee integration levels in Poland, Germany, and the Czech Republic

Indicator	Poland	Germany	Czech Republic
Access to social services (%)	85	92	80
Social assistance amount (€)	300	350	250
Access to integration programs (%)	75	85	70
Average age of refugees (years)	38	35	40
Youth share (15 – 35 years old) (%)	45	50	40
Higher education level (%)	30	40	25
Length of stay (years)	2	3	1.5
Language proficiency level (scale 1 – 5)	3	4	3
Employment rate (%)	60	70	55
Participation in community life (%)	65	75	55
Language proficiency (%)	70	80	65
Social cohesion (index)	0.6	0.8	0.5
Integration level (index)	0.7	0.85	0.65

support integration, show room for improvement in their social support systems.

Key findings from the analysis highlight significant disparities in refugee integration across host countries. Germany demonstrates strong performance, with higher integration levels attributed to its well-developed social support system, including comprehensive social services, integration programs, and initiatives that foster social cohesion. In contrast, Poland and the Czech Republic show room for improvement, particularly in enhancing social assistance and expanding language programs, which are crucial for successful integration.

Demographic factors also play a significant role, as the average age of refugees and the proportion of youth influence integration outcomes, necessitating tailored approaches to address specific demographic needs. In addition, fostering social cohesion is crucial for creating inclusive societies and ensuring long-term integration. These findings highlight the importance of robust social support systems in facilitating refugee integration and contributing to the socioeconomic development of host countries.

4.4. Recommendations for improving social support systems for the integration of Ukrainian refugees

Table 10 presents recommendations aimed at improving the social support systems for the integration of Ukrainian refugees in Poland, Germany, and the Czech Republic. These recommendations are derived from an analysis of key data sources, including EUR-Lex, IOM, OECD, and reports on the Ukrainian refugee crisis.

The analysis was based on official reports and studies, such as the EU Council Implementing Decision (2022), the IOM’s internal displacement report (2024), and the OECD’s assessment of the labor force potential of Ukrainian refugees (2022). These sources provided a comprehensive overview of the refugee situation in the three countries, focusing on key indicators such as access to social services, employment, and integration programs. The analysis identified both the strengths and weaknesses of each country’s integration systems, enabling the development of tailored, data-driven recommendations.

To enhance the integration of Ukrainian refugees, country-specific recommendations highlight tailored approaches for different host nations. In Poland, efforts should focus on expanding the availability of social services up to 90%, particularly in rural areas where access is currently limited. This includes improving healthcare services, childcare facilities, housing support, and language training programs to address basic needs and promote adaptation. It is also recommended to raise social assistance to €320, with particular emphasis on targeted support for families and elderly refugees to ensure they meet essential living standards. In addition, fostering entrepreneurship among refugees can be supported through small business grants, mentorship programs, and training tailored to their specific needs.

In Germany, efforts should focus on maintaining its high level of social services (90%) while enhancing mental health support by increasing access to multilingual counselors and integrating mental health services within

existing refugee support centers. The present social assistance amount of €357 should be regularly adjusted for inflation to ensure continued adequacy. To improve employment outcomes for low-skilled refugees, Germany could expand vocational training programs and strengthen partnerships with employers to facilitate workforce entry. Tailored programs for young refugees and their families, such as professional development courses and childcare support, are essential for successful integration.

The Czech Republic should aim to increase access to social services to 85%, with a focus on improving access to housing and medical services. This could involve the implementation of subsidized housing projects and fostering stronger partnerships with healthcare providers to ensure timely and adequate care. Social assistance should be increased to €250, with a particular focus on families and vulnerable groups. Expanding access to integration programs to at least 75% is essential, particularly through enhanced language and cultural courses. Vocational training and educational initiatives should focus on middle-aged refugees, with an average age of 40, while programs for older adults should offer skill-building workshops and community engagement activities.

These recommendations highlight the need for tailored approaches that address country-specific challenges and demographic needs. Collaboration between governments, non-governmental organizations, and local stakeholders, along with ongoing evaluation and adjustments, is crucial for ensuring effective integration policies and support systems.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that the effectiveness of refugee integration is strongly influenced by the availability and quality of social support systems in host countries. Countries with well-developed social support mechanisms provide refugees with better access to essential services, employment opportunities, and social participation,

Table 10. Recommendations for improving social support systems for Ukrainian refugee integration in Poland, Germany, and the Czech Republic

Indicator	Poland	Germany	Czech Republic
Access to social services (%)	Increase to 90%, with a particular focus on rural areas	Maintain at 90%, with an emphasis on strengthening mental health support	Increase to 85%, improving access to housing and medical services
Amount of social assistance (€)	Increase to €320, balancing the allocation for different groups	Maintain at €357, with adjustments for inflation	Increase to €250, with a focus on families and vulnerable groups
Access to integration programs (%)	Increase to 80%, expanding language and adaptation programs	Maintain at 85%, while adding professional and cultural programs	Increase to 75%, with a focus on enhancing language and cultural courses
Average age of refugees (years)	Focus on vocational training for the average age group (38)	Support youth (35), with a focus on young families	Support middle-aged individuals (40), and develop programs for older adults

thereby fostering inclusive societies and contributing to socioeconomic development. Social support not only facilitates access to essential resources but also plays a crucial role in reducing social tensions and promoting stability in host societies. Previous research has shown that structured support frameworks, including language training, vocational programs, and housing assistance, significantly enhance refugees' ability to integrate into their new environments (OECD, 2022; Jelínková *et al.*, 2023). Our findings align with the findings of previous studies, highlighting that host countries with robust integration policies experience fewer social conflicts and higher levels of social cohesion. Germany, which offers structured and comprehensive support programs, demonstrates higher refugee integration rates compared to Poland and the Czech Republic, where policies are still evolving and require further refinement.

Lower rates of higher education attainment among refugees in Poland (30%) and the Czech Republic (25%), compared to Germany (40%), may reflect systemic barriers, such as limited access to universities or language training. While this study did not directly assess disruptions in the Ukrainian education systems, a previous study by Artyukhov *et al.* (2023) suggests that these disruptions can delay skill acquisition and hinder employment opportunities.

Germany's well-established educational programs, including language courses and vocational training, facilitate smoother transitions for refugees into the labor market. In contrast, Poland and the Czech Republic need to expand their educational initiatives to improve access to higher education and skill-building opportunities for refugees. Future policies should focus on improving educational support, particularly for young refugees, to foster their long-term economic contributions to host countries.

Employment is one of the most significant factors in refugee integration. This study confirms that refugees with stable employment are more likely to achieve social and economic inclusion. Germany's advanced labor market integration programs lead to higher employment rates among refugees compared to Poland and the Czech Republic, where challenges, such as language barriers and labor market segmentation persist.

A previous study suggests that refugee entrepreneurship plays a key role in economic adaptation, fostering innovation, and addressing labor shortages (Kolodiziev *et al.*, 2024). However, for lower-skilled refugees, barriers to employment remain a significant challenge. Studies indicate that these challenges can be overcome through targeted vocational training and structured job placement

programs, which can improve labor market participation rates (Brücker *et al.*, 2023; Dotsey, 2024). Our findings support these views, highlighting the need for tailored labor policies that address the specific needs of displaced individuals.

Several studies indicate that strong support networks enhance mental health outcomes and foster a sense of belonging among refugees (Burliai *et al.*, 2023; Kuppenko *et al.*, 2023). However, disparities in the treatment of Ukrainian refugees compared to other groups raise concerns regarding the equity of present integration policies.

Ensuring non-discriminatory practices and equitable access to social services is essential for fostering inclusive societies. Interaction between refugees and local communities – through cultural exchange programs, volunteer initiatives, and community-building activities – has been shown to significantly enhance integration outcomes and reduce the risk of social fragmentation. Countries that foster such social bonds tend to experience smoother refugee integration processes.

5.1. Limitations

Despite the valuable insights provided, several limitations remain, including a reliance on secondary data sources. This analysis was exclusively based on the secondary data obtained from reports by international organizations, such as OECD, IOM, and Data Friendly Space. Although these sources are reliable, the absence of primary data – such as interviews or surveys – may limit the depth of context-specific insights. Another limitation of this study involves temporal constraints, as the data reflect conditions during the early stages of the Ukrainian refugee crisis. As integration processes evolve over time, certain findings may become outdated or require reevaluation in future studies. In addition, the study's geographical focus on Germany, Poland, and the Czech Republic limits the generalizability of the findings to other host countries with different policy frameworks and socioeconomic conditions. Finally, while the study addresses social support and education, it does not extensively examine psychological resilience, trauma recovery, or cultural identity – factors that are also essential to long-term integration.

5.2. Policy recommendations and future considerations

The findings of this study provide clear policy implications for host countries. Poland and the Czech Republic should prioritize expanding language training programs, enhancing employment support services, and improving access to housing to enhance integration outcomes. Germany, while demonstrating strong

integration policies, can further refine its approaches to address emerging challenges, including promoting long-term employment stability and expanding psychological support for refugees.

A holistic integration strategy should not only focus on immediate support measures but also on long-term policies that promote refugee self-sufficiency. Future research should examine the long-term impacts of integration policies, assessing how sustained support influences refugee adaptation over time. In addition, comparative studies across different refugee groups could provide valuable insights into best practices for fostering inclusive and resilient societies.

6. Conclusions

This study evaluates the role of social support systems in refugee integration across Poland, Germany, and the Czech Republic, demonstrating that well-established support structures – such as access to social services, employment opportunities, language training, and community participation – play a crucial role in enhancing integration outcomes. Germany's well-funded, structured approach fosters high levels of social cohesion, while Poland and the Czech Republic, with moderate yet evolving frameworks, require targeted improvements in service accessibility and economic opportunities. Language proficiency emerges as a key factor in refugee integration, directly influencing employment opportunities and societal engagement. Social participation and the development of local networks further enhance inclusion, emphasizing the need for initiatives that bridge the gap between refugees and host communities. The study also highlights the importance of addressing challenges such as discrimination, housing, and job stability through targeted policies. It recommends that policymakers prioritize expanding language education, employment programs, and inclusive community engagement to optimize integration outcomes. This research provides an evidence-based framework for migration policy discussions, highlighting the need for further exploration of long-term impacts, including generational inclusion, economic self-sufficiency, and demographic shifts in host countries.

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