



What Can We Learn from the Reception of Ukrainian Refugees?

LENA NÄRE

DALIA ABDELHADY

NAHIKARI IRASTORZA

*Author affiliations can be found in the back matter of this article

The 24th of August 2022 marked the 31st anniversary of Ukraine's declaration of independence from the USSR in 1991 and the start of the seventh month of the unjustified Russian invasion. In addition to bringing death and destruction into Ukraine, the war has had many other expected and also unexpected consequences. In Russia the regime has moved towards full totalitarianism, while abroad xenophobic sentiments against Russians have increased. The global economy has been hit hard leading many people around the world who were already living in poverty into further destitution. The war has convinced Sweden and Finland to renounce their military non-alliance and seek NATO membership and increased rearmament in Europe and beyond.

As with other forms of military aggression, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has forcibly displaced millions of people within Ukraine and across national border. According to UNHCR, over 7 million Ukrainians left their country since the beginning of the war – mostly to neighbouring countries like Poland and Slovakia but also to Germany and the Nordic countries, out of which almost 4 million have registered for Temporary Protection or similar national protection schemes in Europe (UNHCR 2022). By the end of August, over 140,000 Ukrainians were officially residing in Sweden (44,546), Finland (36,652), Denmark (33,396), Norway (23,912) and Iceland (1,500; UNHCR 2022).

In contrast to the reception of previous groups of refugees from Syria and other countries in the global south, however, this has not been labelled as a 'refugee crisis' even though in many receiving countries the number of Ukrainian arrivals has already exceeded the number of refugees who arrived in 2015–2016. On the contrary, even right-wing populist parties have welcomed Ukrainians in the Nordic countries. While Sweden Democrats' Jimmie Åkesson has stated that Ukrainians must be helped but only on a temporary basis and that they should not integrate in Sweden

EDITORIAL

HUP HELSINKI
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Lena Näre

University of Helsinki,
Helsinki, Finland

lena.nare@helsinki.fi

KEYWORDS:

Ukrainian refugees; refugee crisis; temporary protection scheme; refugee reception

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Näre, L., Abdelhady, D and Irastorza, N. 2022. What Can We Learn from the Reception of Ukrainian Refugees? *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 12(3), pp. 255–258. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.620>

(Rohvedder 2022), Riikka Purra, the leader of the Finns Party has explicitly compared the current situation with the asylum crisis of 2015 and offered a racist, misandric and Islamophobic explanation why Ukrainians deserve to be helped instead of Middle Eastern refugees (Muhonen 2022). According to Purra, those fleeing from Ukraine deserve protection because they are Europeans, Christians and mostly women and children (Muhonen 2022). The image of men being the main protagonists of the ‘crisis’ in 2015–2016 was reproduced in the media but does not stand up to closer scrutiny. Eurostat data from years 2015 to 2016 is clear: approximately 51% of all those who applied for asylum in the EU-27 countries were adult men, while 48% belonged to the category of ‘women and children’ (Eurostat 2022). In fact, after adult men, the second largest category of applicants, 30%, were children under the age of 18, while 18% of asylum seekers were adults (Eurostat 2022).

Moreover, what Purra does not mention is that due to general mobilisation, Ukrainian men are not free to exit their country, even if they would like to. She also forgets that the journey from Middle East, Africa and Asia to European Union is not comparable to travels within Europe. Purra and Åkesson both also evoke the old-age idea that Ukrainians will be given protection on a temporary basis and after the war is over, they will no doubt return home, because as Purra declares ‘Ukrainians are patriotic people’ (Muhonen 2022).

The temporary protection visa scheme that was introduced to receive Ukrainians is the first of its kind in the history of the European Union. The main advantages of the new scheme are the expeditious process and the granting of the right to work and study. At the same time, it keeps Ukrainians firmly outside the welfare state or with limited access to it, depending on the country of residence. Yet, as migration scholars very well know, people seldom act as they are expected to. It is impossible to know in advance whether migration is temporary or permanent, this can only be determined in retrospective.

To sum up, the reception of Ukrainians has not caused a moral panic in the Nordic countries, but has shed light on the racism and hypocrisy of European migration policies. While Ukrainians have been granted the right to work and participate in the receiving societies without having to endure year-long asylum processes, the hospitality welcoming them is still provisional. Importantly, we can only speculate how different the reception of refugees in 2015–2016 and their participation in society would have been, had they been White Europeans who were granted the right to protection as well as the right to work and study upon arrival. Hopefully, the preferential treatment received by Ukrainian refugees based on their racialised privilege and the critical analyses of the differential treatment will serve as a lesson to extend this practice to future groups of refugees regardless of their national origin, religion or skin colour.

In the coming years, research analysing the labour market and societal position of Ukrainian refugees who stay in their various receiving countries, and comparing that to the experience of previous groups of migrants, should be conducted to inform and lead future policy decisions. In fact, policy and public discussions on any topic should be informed by research and facts, especially for controversial social phenomena such as migration. Debates about migration are often about values and opinions and not facts, which often leads to societal polarisation instead of informed policy and planning. Our role as a research community is to continue discussing and investigating the problems facing many migrants, but also the potential they carry

to revive economies, invigorate democratic institutions and strengthen communities. Our analyses should inspire those concerned to consider various options that would lead policies and societies in the right direction.

The Nordic Journal of Migration Research continues to work towards providing a high-quality open access publication platform for research on migration in the Nordics and beyond. Next year will bring changes to the journal, as Lena will be stepping down in January 2023 after serving the journal for 10 years. During these years, the journal has secured its position as the leading publication platform for migration research in the Nordics and one of the forerunners in ethical open access publishing. From January 2023 onwards, the journal will move into continuous publishing model, which will hopefully decrease publication times. For more information on the recruitment process of a new Editor-in-Chief, to be working with Nahikari and Dalia, please see [here](#).

Finally, we are pleased to report the winner of the 2020–2022 NJMR Best Paper Prize: ‘Europe Trouble: Welcome Culture and the Disruption of the European Border Regime’, by Marie Sandberg and Dorte Jagetic Andersen, which was officially announced at the 21st Nordic Migration Conference held at the University of Copenhagen on 17–19 August 2022. As guest editors of a special issue, they also curated a collection of excellent articles on the role of volunteers in the informal reception of humanitarian migrants and the ways they disrupt the European border regime. By granting the award to their inspiring editorial, we also want to recognise the important work that guest editors do for this journal.

In addition, this year would like to recognise two honorary mentions to articles that were especially appreciated by the NJMR editorial team: ‘Little Norway in Somalia – Understanding Complex Belongings of Transnational Somali Families’ by Ayan Handulle, and ‘Becoming Nordic in Brazil: Whiteness and Icelandic Heritage in Brazilian Identity Making’ by Kristín Loftsdóttir, Eyrún Eypórsdóttir and Margaret Willson.

Congratulations to all the authors!

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors confirm that they are editors-in-chief of Nordic Journal of Migration research.

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Lena Näre  orcid.org/0000-0001-6096-9276

University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland

Dalia Abdelhady  orcid.org/0000-0002-9447-0390

Lund University, Lund, Sweden

Nahikari Irastorza  orcid.org/0000-0003-4498-1798

Malmö University, Malmö, Sweden

REFERENCES

EUROSTAT. 2022. *Asylum applicants by type of applicant, citizenship, age and sex, annual aggregate data (rounded)*. Available at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR_ASYAPPCTZA__custom_3276965/default/table?lang=en [Last accessed 30 August 2022].

- Muhonen, T.** 2022. *Ukrainasta pakenevat ovat aivan eri asia kuin Lähi-idästä tulevat "elintasoirtolaiset", sanoo perussuomalaisten Riikka Purra, Helsingin Sanomat*, 2 April 2022. Available at <https://www.hs.fi/politiikka/art-2000008700536.html> [Last accessed 30 August 2022].
- Rohvedder, M.** 2022. Åkesson om ukrainska flyktingarna: Ska återvända så fort som möjligt. *Aftonbladet*, 26 June [online access at <https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/samhalle/a/qWMVko/jimmie-akesson-om-krigsflyktingarna-fran-ukraina-vi-ska-inte-integrera-de-har-manniskorna> last accessed 30 August 2022].
- UNHCR.** 2022. *Operational data portal*. Ukraine Refugee Situation. Available at <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine> [Last accessed 29 August 2022].

Näre et al.
Nordic Journal of Migration Research
 DOI: 10.33134/njmr.620

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Näre, L, Abdelhady, D and Irastorza, N. 2022. What Can We Learn from the Reception of Ukrainian Refugees? *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 12(3), pp. 255–258. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.620>

Submitted: 05 September 2022

Accepted: 05 September 2022

Published: 27 September 2022

COPYRIGHT:

© 2022 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons NonCommercial-NoDerivatives Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0), which permits unrestricted distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited, the material is not used for commercial purposes and is not altered in any way. See <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.

Nordic Journal of Migration Research is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Helsinki University Press.