

From Bottlenecks to Solutions: A Simulation-Based Approach to Examining the Efficiency of Hungary's Temporary Protection Procedures for Ukrainian Refugees

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ABSTRACT

The rise in the number of individuals seeking asylum has attracted significant political, policy, and public attention over the past two decades (Lee et al., 2023; Pepinsky et al., 2024; Tarkhanova & Pyrogovala, 2024). Since 2015, European governments have been grappling with the largest refugee crisis since World War II, with over 1 million first-time asylum seekers applying for international protection in the EU in 2023—a 20% increase compared to 2022. Hungary registered 33,060 Ukrainian refugees out of the 4.2 million seeking protection in the European Union, presenting a critical challenge that necessitates immediate capacity expansion by Hungarian authorities. This increase occurs against a backdrop of Hungary's historically restrictive asylum policies, which have included reinforced border controls and expedited processing of claims, resulting in a significant drop in asylum applications from other countries. The urgency of this topic is underscored by previous studies that identify a substantial gap in understanding the bottlenecks and difficulties within the asylum process, particularly as it relates to the economic integration of refugees.

Regulating the status of Ukrainian refugees within the EU is also a crucial issue due to the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), activated on March 4, 2022, which provides temporary protection for three years, expiring in March 2025.

This research aims to fill this gap by investigating the operational management of the asylum and temporary protection procedures in Hungary, focusing on how these affect the integration of Ukrainian refugees. Despite Hungary's well-defined legal framework, reports indicate (Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 2024) persistent challenges, including procedural delays, interpreter quality issues, and privacy concerns, which hinder effective communication and prolong uncertainty for asylum seekers.

Hungary serves as an interesting case within the EU framework due to its dual policy approach—deterrent during the asylum procedure and inclusive for those granted leave to remain (Pepinsky et al., 2024). This research seeks to answer critical questions regarding the bottlenecks and inefficiencies in the current asylum process and its relationship to the subsequent economic integration of refugees. By investigating these dynamics, the study will offer practical recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders, contributing to a more responsive and equitable asylum system that aligns with Hungary's obligations under international law and enhances the socio-economic contributions of refugees.