

Book Review

Technology and forced migration Ukrainian migrants in Central and Eastern Europe

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Technology and Forced Migration – Ukrainian Migrants in Central and Eastern Europe is a timely and highly relevant edited volume that examines the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the migration trajectories, decision-making processes, and integration experiences of Ukrainian forced migrants in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). With a particular focus on the Visegrad Four (V4) countries of Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, the book makes an important contribution to the growing literature on digital migration, forced displacement, and migration governance by situating these debates in a region that has been underexplored in both migration studies and science and technology studies.

Historically, CEE countries have functioned primarily as countries of emigration rather than immigration. Prior to the collapse of communist regimes in 1989, outward migration from the region was largely driven by economic hardship and political repression. While the wars in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s generated refugee movements within Central and Eastern Europe, these dynamics did not fundamentally transform the region's migration regimes. A more significant shift occurred after EU accession, when free movement enabled large-scale labor migration from the V4 countries to Western Europe. Since 2004, an estimated three million citizens from the V4 states have emigrated westward, reinforcing the perception of the region as a source rather than a destination of migration (Eurostat 2026).

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Until very recently, the Visegrad countries were not significant destinations for international migrants. Before 2022, foreign-born populations accounted for only around 1 to 6 percent of the total population across the region, reflecting relatively homogeneous societies with limited experience of large-scale immigration. This was clearly visible during the 2015 European migration crisis, when the vast majority of asylum seekers entering Hungary did not remain in the country but continued onward to Western Europe (Tétényi et al. 2019). As documented in this book, Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 led to the displacement of approximately 1.5 million Ukrainians, while the full-scale invasion launched in 2022 forced around 12 million people to flee their homes. These developments compelled the V4 countries to rapidly construct institutional frameworks, administrative procedures, and service delivery systems capable of managing an unprecedented mass influx of displaced persons, despite their limited prior experience with migrant reception and integration.

The book adopts an explicitly interdisciplinary approach, drawing on insights from migration studies, sociology, economics, and science and technology studies. This theoretical pluralism is matched by methodological diversity. The chapters rely primarily on qualitative research methods, including semi-structured interviews with forced migrants, focus groups, expert interviews, and panel discussions. Importantly, the book employs a broad and inclusive understanding of ICTs. These range from hardware such as smartphones and tablets to communication tools like SMS, email, and social media platforms; from mobile applications that provide information and support routines to internet-based services, including official websites and digital public platforms. This expansive conceptualization allows the authors to capture the embeddedness of digital technologies in everyday life and migration practices.

The first chapter establishes the conceptual foundation by examining the reciprocal relationship between migration and digital technologies. It argues that ICTs have become democratized and normalized, no longer associated with elite status but deeply embedded in everyday social existence. As a result, migrants are less socially uprooted than in earlier periods and remain continuously connected to pre-migration networks across borders. The chapter identifies three key areas where ICTs intersect with migration: the use of digital technologies for monitoring migrants and managing migration flows; the role of ICTs in providing information relevant to migration decisions and trajectories; and the use of digital tools to support integration and social inclusion. The chapter also highlights inequalities in digital skills and access, shaped by socio-economic background, regional disparities, and infrastructural limitations.

The second chapter shifts to a micro-level perspective, examining how Ukrainian forced migrants used ICTs during their decision-making process. Drawing on interview data, it shows that migration decisions were often made abruptly,

triggered by immediate security threats rather than long-term planning. In such contexts of extreme uncertainty and imperfect information, migrants relied heavily on smartphones and social networks to obtain real-time information. Notably, the interviewees tended to have relatively high levels of digital literacy, tertiary education, and middle- or upper-middle-class backgrounds, challenging stereotypical assumptions about forced migrants as digitally marginalized.

Chapters three and four turn to the roles of the private and public sectors. Chapter three analyses the measures adopted by mobile network operators to maintain and enhance connectivity for Ukrainian forced migrants. Telecommunications companies provided mobile phones, SIM cards, and affordable or free tariff plans, including roaming options and low-cost calls between the EU and Ukraine, as part of their corporate social responsibility initiatives. Within Ukraine, domestic operators played a crucial role in sustaining connectivity for civilians and the military alike, supported by regulatory interventions such as the release of additional 3G and 4G frequency bands and the introduction of national roaming. At the same time, the chapter critically notes that these measures were largely voluntary, resulting in uneven implementation and raising questions about their long-term financial sustainability.


Chapter four turns to the role of the public sector, focusing on the provision of timely, accurate, and trustworthy information to migrants. It assesses Ukrainian forced migrants' attitudes toward state-provided information and evaluates the effectiveness of ICTs in migration management. The findings indicate that, similar to earlier experiences among Syrian refugees, Ukrainian refugees tend to place greater trust in information obtained through their own social networks than in information disseminated by government agencies. The chapter also documents the diverse ways in which V4 countries populated official websites with refugee-related content and highlights innovative practices, such as the digital issuance of official documents in Poland.

Chapter five examines integration support provided by a wide range of actors, including national governments, municipalities, NGOs, UN organizations, faith-based organizations, and private companies. It situates these efforts within broader historical, economic, and cultural contexts that shape societal attitudes toward migrants, ranging from hospitality to hostility. The chapter demonstrates how ICTs were used to coordinate actions, disseminate information, and deliver services, often under conditions of limited resources. Digital platforms, social media groups, and online communication tools played a central role in enabling rapid and flexible responses, while the chapter also provides a country-by-country overview of the digitalization of state responses to Ukrainian forced migrants.

The final chapters shift the focus to EU-level migration governance and the increasing use of advanced technologies. They examine the growing reliance on

AI-based systems for passport verification, border control, asylum applications, and residence permit processing, alongside the deployment of surveillance drones and electronically monitored border infrastructure. Poland serves as a key case study illustrating these developments. Importantly, the analysis does not adopt a technocratic perspective but critically engages with the potential drawbacks of such technologies, including the risk of embedded and imported biases, lack of transparency, and accountability challenges.

The book concludes by emphasizing the need for coordinated governance frameworks that align regulation, innovation, and ethical considerations. It offers policy recommendations for public authorities, focusing on digital literacy programs, the development of multilingual digital platforms, robust data protection, and the continued role of NGOs and civil society organizations. Overall, the book provides a nuanced and empirically rich account of how digital technologies shape forced migration in the CEE region. It will be of interest to scholars of migration and digital governance, as well as policymakers and practitioners engaged in refugee reception, integration, and migration management.

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