Between Control and Contradiction: The V4 in the Age of the EU Migration Pact and Labour Shortages

A Policy Paper on Effective and Rights-Respecting Migration in Central Europe

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Abstract

This policy paper examines the contradictions in the migration strategies of the Visegrád Four (V4) countries, where governments simultaneously prioritise irregular migration control while relying on legal labour migration. Although the region has been experiencing relatively low levels of irregular border crossings in the current period, migration remains framed through securitised and politicised narratives. This framing has co-evolved with institutional settings that tend to deprioritise integration and long-term inclusion, reinforcing short-term and reactive approaches to migration governance. The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum and instruments such as the EU Blue Card and Talent Partnerships offer new opportunities for more balanced management, yet V4 engagement with these mechanisms remains selective and inconsistent.

Drawing on data from Frontex, EMN, and Eurostat, as well as recent academic and policy literature, the paper calls for expanding transparent legal pathways, strengthening long-term integration (particularly for Ukrainian refugees), and rebalancing migration narratives to support effective and rights-based governance.

1. Introduction and Context

Since the 2015 migration crisis, the Visegrád Four (V4) countries Poland, Hungary, Czechia, and Slovakia have adopted highly securitized migration narratives that emphasize control, sovereignty, and protection of national identity. Although the V4 countries have largely remained on the periphery of migratory pressures faced by frontline or destination EU Member States, migration remains a strategically employed issue in domestic politics. Political elites frequently invoke it during election campaigns and EU-level negotiations, despite the region experiencing negligible asylum inflows. This narrative of exceptional threat often conflicts with the region's growing reliance on legal labour migration from third countries due to shrinking work-age populations, structural labour shortages, and uncompetitive wages in key sectors such as construction, logistics, and healthcare.

In navigating acute labour market shortages, V4 states have been for several years quietly engaged in large-scale labour migration from predominantly from Eastern Europe, South Caucasus, Western Balkans, Central, South and South-East Asia. However, little institutional effort has been made to communicate these realities to the public, reinforcing a disconnect between policy practice and public perception. The arrival of over four million Ukrainian refugees into the EU with approximately one third settling in the Visegrád countries exposed this contradiction further, particularly as Poland and Czechia absorbed most arrivals in the region (Eurostat, 2025). While initial reception was framed in humanitarian terms, long-term integration strategies have lagged behind. National systems remain fragmented, with key gaps in housing, language acquisition, skills recognition, and pathways to residency.

The securitisation of migration in the V4 region is no longer the exclusive domain of far right or populist movements. Increasingly, conservative, centrist, and even liberal parties have adopted restrictive rhetoric, policy framing, and enforcement-oriented agendas. This shift has also shaped EU-level frameworks, most notably the 2024 Pact on Migration and Asylum, which embeds a security-first approach centred on deterrence, surveillance, and accelerated returns. Framed as a pragmatic compromise, the Pact institutionalises mechanisms of control at the expense of rights-based protections, reflecting broader European trends where humanitarian safeguards are gradually hollowed out in favour of border management and containment (Učakar, 2025; Grześkowiak, 2024).

The opposition from V4 governments, particularly Poland and Hungary, is largely rhetorical and framed in sovereignty terms even though many elements of the Pact align with their existing enforcement preferences. This strategy risks marginalising smaller states like Slovakia and Hungary, which face demographic decline and labour shortages. By mirroring security-centric EU rhetoric without fully leveraging legal migration tools, these states may miss vital opportunities for sustainable growth. Beyond that, such an approach undermines the fundamental rights of incoming migrants, including access to asylum, family reunification, and long-term legal certainty thereby weakening both the humanitarian foundation and institutional legitimacy of the EU's migration framework.

This paper examines these structural contradictions and policy gaps in V4 migration governance, focusing specifically on the disconnect between securitised political narratives and the region's economic dependence on third-country labour migration.

The analysis proceeds through three interconnected dimensions: first, a critical assessment of how security-first framing has shaped both domestic migration policies and V4 engagement with EU-level mechanisms; second, an evaluation of the institutional consequences of this framing, particularly the underdevelopment of integration infrastructure despite significant inflows of Ukrainian refugees and labour migrants; and third, an exploration of emerging opportunities within the EU legal migration framework, including the EU Blue Card, Talent Partnerships, and solidarity mechanisms and the extent to which V4 countries are positioned to leverage or resist these tools.

Drawing on empirical data from Frontex, the European Migration Network (EMN), and Eurostat, alongside recent academic literature and policy documents, the paper argues that the persistence of securitised narratives not only undermines effective migration management but also weakens the rights-based foundations of both national and EU asylum and integration systems. This strategy risks marginalising smaller states like Slovakia and Hungary, which face demographic decline and labour shortages. By mirroring security-centric EU rhetoric without fully leveraging legal migration tools, these states may miss vital opportunities for sustainable growth. Beyond that, such an approach undermines the fundamental rights of incoming migrants, including access to asylum, family reunification, and long-term legal certainty, thereby weakening both the humanitarian foundation and institutional legitimacy of the EU's migration framework. The analysis concludes with policy recommendations aimed at expanding transparent legal pathways, strengthening integration frameworks, and rebalancing public discourse to align migration governance with demographic realities and fundamental rights obligations.

2. The Pact on Migration and Asylum and V4 Compliance

The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, adopted in May 2024 and set to apply from July 2026, represents the most significant reform of EU asylum and border management in decades. Its aim is to replace the uneven Dublin-centred system with a harmonised, solidarity-based framework. The Pact introduces several binding measures: mandatory border screening of all irregular arrivals, accelerated asylum and return procedures, a solidarity mechanism obliging states to contribute through relocations or financial/operational support, and a new crisis management regulation allowing temporary derogations in times of mass arrivals. A reformed Eurodac system will further expand biometric data collection and enforcement (European Commission, 2024a).

The solidarity mechanism is formally “flexible”: Member States may choose to contribute either by relocating asylum seekers, by providing financial contributions, or by offering operational support. Yet this flexibility is not absolute. Article 44(4) of the Asylum and Migration Management Regulation specifies that if voluntary pledges of relocations are insufficient, the Commission shall designate Member States required to fill the gap (European Union 2024). This means that complete refusal of relocations, as insisted by V4 governments since 2015, will no longer be possible once the Pact enters into force (European Commission, 2024a).

The core of V4 resistance is therefore not directed at the Pact as a whole, but specifically at the solidarity mechanism. The core of V4 resistance is therefore not directed at the Pact as a whole, but specifically at the solidarity mechanism. Other measures introduced by the Pact including stricter border screening under the Screening Regulation, (European Union, 2024a) accelerated return procedures under the Asylum Procedure Regulation, (European Union, 2024b) and the expanded Eurodac database under the revised Eurodac Regulation (European Union, 2024c) are broadly consistent with their security-driven

agendas. The real compliance dilemma arises from the obligation to share responsibility for asylum seekers. Ironically, the Pact could benefit the V4, which currently receive less than 2% of all EU asylum claims, by granting them access to EU support when migration pressures rise at their own borders (as during the Poland–Belarus crisis). Despite rhetorical opposition, Czechia and Slovakia have begun aligning technically with the Pact, recognising its inevitability, whereas Poland and Hungary remain publicly defiant, clinging to narratives of sovereignty even as legal obligations approach.[1]

2.2 Commission Assessment (November 2025): V4 Classifications and Implications

On November 12, 2025, the European Commission published its first European Annual Asylum and Migration Report under the new Pact framework, establishing the basis for the inaugural Annual Solidarity Pool and officially classifying Member States according to their migratory situation (European Commission, 2025). This assessment has direct implications for the V4 countries.
Poland and Czechia were both designated as facing a 'significant migratory situation' based on cumulative migratory pressures over the past five years (July 2020–June 2025). Since the beginning of Russia's war against Ukraine in 2022, both countries have hosted among the highest numbers of temporary protection beneficiaries in the Union relative to their GDP and population. As of September 2025, Poland hosted 1,008,885 Ukrainian refugees (27.6 per 1,000 population), while Czechia hosted 389,310 (35.7 per 1,000 population, the highest rate in the EU). These sustained integration challenges, combined with Poland's exposure to weaponized migration at its border with Belarus, have placed substantial strain on national asylum, reception, and border management systems.

This classification grants Poland and Czechia the right to request full or partial deductions from their solidarity contributions under Article 44 of the Asylum and Migration Management Regulation. Such deductions, however, require approval by the Council and must be justified annually. Importantly, this is not an automatic exemption: it is a mechanism for temporary relief contingent on demonstrable pressure.

Poland was additionally classified as 'at risk of migratory pressure,' alongside eleven other Member States including Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, France, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, and Finland. This designation reflects Poland's ongoing exposure to hybrid threats at the Belarusian border, where Russia and Belarus continue attempts to weaponize migration. In response, Poland has established a buffer zone and temporarily restricted the right to apply for international protection at its border, except for vulnerable groups. Member States classified as 'at risk' receive priority access to the

[1] Slovakia in early 2024 adopted a new National Strategy on Asylum and Migration, which explicitly references the Pact and aligns national priorities with forthcoming EU rules. Czechia, while continuing to reject mandatory solidarity at the political level, has likewise initiated technical consultations to align its asylum and screening procedures with the Pact's requirements, building on its relatively developed asylum infrastructure.

EU Migration Support Toolbox, including operational and financial assistance, though they remain bound by solidarity obligations unless their situation deteriorates further.

Slovakia and Hungary, by contrast, were not assigned any formal classification in the Commission's assessment. While both countries host temporary protection beneficiaries and have voiced strong opposition to the Pact's solidarity mechanism, their migratory indicators did not meet the thresholds for designation as being under pressure or facing significant migratory situations during the reporting period (July 2024–June 2025).

Critically, the Commission's report also noted that Hungary and Poland have failed to submit their National Implementation Plans for the Pact, a legal obligation under EU law. Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk have both publicly stated their refusal to participate in relocation schemes or provide financial compensation. Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico has similarly pledged non-compliance. All three governments, alongside Czechia, have reportedly discussed launching a joint legal challenge against the EU over the migration pact, framing their opposition in terms of sovereignty and subsidiarity (Euronews, 2025).

However, as the Pact's mandatory provisions will enter into force in June 2026, continued non-compliance risks triggering infringement procedures under Article 258 TFEU, potentially leading to financial penalties imposed by the Court of Justice of the European Union. The Commission has signaled that it will assess Member State compliance with responsibility and solidarity rules by July and October 2026, with particular attention to cooperation on transfers and reception conditions.

From a strategic perspective, the Commission's classifications present both opportunities and risks for the V4. Poland and Czechia's recognition as facing significant migratory situations validates their claims of disproportionate burden-sharing and opens access to EU financial and operational support. Yet their continued rhetorical defiance particularly on relocation undermines their capacity to leverage these mechanisms effectively. Slovakia and Hungary, meanwhile, risk marginalizing themselves by opposing a framework that largely aligns with their enforcement preferences while offering pathways to address their demographic and labour market needs.

3 Irregular Migration Pressure: Myth vs. Data

3.1 Irregular entries

According to most recent Frontex data (October 2025) the number of irregular entries to the EU dropped by 22% in the first 9 months of 2025 (Frontex, 2025b). Frontex's *Annual Risks Analysis 2025/2026* highlights that while irregular migration remains an EU-wide concern, the V4 countries are not under structural irregular pressure (Frontex 2025c). The figures for 2025 thus confirm the continuation of a downward trend that began in 2024:

In Slovakia, since the beginning of 2024, only 44 cases of irregular transition migration have been recorded in Slovak territory, representing a 99.9% decrease compared to 2023 (Neumann 2025). Comparably, in Czechia the numbers of illegal transitions fell by almost 64% (Ministerstvo vnitra ČR 2024).In Poland, irregular border activity has also diminished significantly, though the situation remains volatile due to ongoing attempts at weaponization of migration by Russia and Belarus. According to the Commission's November 2025 assessment, between July 2024 and June 2025, there were 1,421 illegal border crossings from Belarus, of which 82% (approximately 1,165) were directed toward Poland. This represents a substantial decrease from peak levels in 2021–2022. Poland has responded by establishing a buffer zone along its border with Belarus and temporarily limiting the right to apply for international protection at that border, except for vulnerable groups. However, the Commission noted that further attempts by Russia and Belarus to weaponize migration could place additional strain on Poland's border protection systems, potentially leading to disproportionate obligations in the future. The Hungarian case mirrors the broader downward trajectory across the Visegrád region, applying strengthened border infrastructure and enforcement. The irregular transition migration there has at the Serbian Hungarian border dropped from over 107,000 in 2022

to 86,334 in 2023 and further collapsed to just 4,584 in 2024 a reduction of more than 95% within two years.

3.2 **Irregular presence**

Table 1: Irregular Border-Crossings by Route — January to September 2025

Route	September 2025	Jan–Sep 2025	Change Jan–Sep 2024/Jan-Sep 2025
Central Mediterranean	8 046	50 850	**+2 %**
Eastern Mediterranean	4 997	37 178	**–22 %**
Western Mediterranean	2 524	14 388	**+28 %**
Western Balkan	1 110	9 071	**–47 %**
Eastern Land Border	1 101	8 714	**–36 %**
Western African	734	12 879	**–58 %**
Exits towards the UK	7 910	54 291	**+14 %**

Source: Frontex 2025b

While irregular border crossings represent one visible route of unauthorised migration, another major pathway into irregularity is the loss of legal status**,** for example, where individuals remain in a country after their visa or residence permit expires (EPRS 2025).

Eurostat data show that the number of third-country nationals found to be illegally present in the EU declined by 27.4 % between 2023 and 2024 (Eurostat, 2025b). All four Visegrád countries recorded sharper reductions, with Slovakia (−94.5 %) and Hungary (−77.8 %) showing the steepest declines, while Poland (−2.5 %) and Czechia (−16.3 %) remained at comparatively low levels. Together, the V4 accounted for less than 6 % of all detections in the EU. These findings confirm that irregular residence migration within Central Europe remains limited and continues to fall.

4. Legal Migration and Labour Market Dynamics

Table 2: Number of foreign workers vs real or number estimated labour shortages

Country	Foreign Workers (2025)	Labour Shortage (estimated/actual)
Poland	1.13 million (Ukrainians, Belarusians, Georgians, Indians, Filipinos)	1.6 mil by 2026 (construction, logistics, care)[2]
Czechia	Over 1 million (Ukrainians, Mongolians, Moldovans)	300,000 (in 2025) (IT, healthcare, transport, industry)
Hungary	110,000 (Vietnamese, Serbians, Filipinos)	65,000 (in 2024) (agriculture, construction, manufacturing)
Slovakia	127,000 (Ukrainians, Serbians, Vietnamese)	121,000 (2025) (industry, construction, automotive, logistics)

Source: national labour market data

If irregular migration pressures remain modest and localised, the reality of the V4 economies is a growing reliance on legal labour migration. The table below shows that the true structural challenge in the V4 is not irregular migration, but insufficient legal migration and weak integration systems. At the same time, it is important to note that not all vacancies can be filled through migration alone. Many positions require specific qualifications, certifications, or local language proficiency that take time to acquire. Still, migration can be part of a long-term solution for countries like Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, and Hungary all of which are projected to lose tens of thousands of workers annually due to demographic decline, population ageing, and early retirement trends. In this context, structured and skills-sensitive migration policies, accompanied by robust integration frameworks, are essential for economic resilience. All four countries operate significant legal migration schemes that quietly sustain their economies. These pathways combine

[2] Polski Instytut Ekonomiczny. 2025. "MIK w czerwcu: Lekkie pogorszenie nastrojów wśród przedsiębiorców." Warsaw. Accessed December 6, 2025.

EU frameworks (Blue Card, Single Permit, Seasonal Workers Directive, Talent Partnerships, Temporary Protection Directive) with national schemes tailored to domestic needs:

Poland hosts the largest population of long-term third-country nationals in the V4, primarily from Ukraine, but also increasingly from Belarus, Georgia, India, and the Philippines. As of 2025, approximately 1.2 million migrants hold residence permits for work, humanitarian, or family reasons (excluding Temporary Protection). Poland issues the second-highest number of EU Blue Cards in the EU — over 7,400 in 2023. While its recruitment system is highly developed and recently digitalised (June 2025 reform), there is no national integration strategy, and migrant support remains fragmented across regions. Access to language training, skills recognition, or upskilling pathways is uneven and mostly left to employers or local governments (European Commission, 2025c).

Czechia operates a mature and diversified system for long-term labour migration, centred around the Employee Card and a robust EU Blue Card scheme. The Blue Card is accessible without labour market tests and has a 3-year validity, attracting high-skilled professionals in technology, engineering, and healthcare. Czechia also runs Talent Partnerships (e.g. Georgia, Moldova) and a Digital Nomad visa. The country has an official integration framework the "Concept of Integration of Foreigners – In Mutual Respect", regularly updated and implemented through the 14 Regional Integration Centres (KICs)**.** However, underfunding and decentralisation weaken its effectiveness (Jelínková, et.al, 2025).

Slovakia has liberalised its labour migration system, particularly after the 2024 amendment to the Foreigners Act**,** easing permit procedures and exempting critical sectors from labour market testing. Around 120,000 third-country nationals are employed in Slovakia in 2025, mainly in logistics, manufacturing, and healthcare**.** Nonetheless, uptake of the EU Blue Card remains minimal (only 52 issued in 2023), and most migrants still enter through Temporary Protection. Integration support is minimal and fragmented, with no comprehensive national strategy. Migrants face structural barriers in accessing language training, housing, and skills recognition, and few transition to permanent residence or long-term employment stability (European Commission, 2025c).

Hungary structures its migration policy primarily through the Guest Worker Scheme, which is limited in scope: permits are employer-bound, short-term (up to 2 years), and exclude family reunification and access to protected professions (Gurcan Partners 2024). Hungary issued just 17 EU Blue Cards in 2023 (Eurostat 2024d) and has not joined any Talent Partnerships (EMN 2024). Integration remains absent from national policy: no strategy exists, and public services do not support migrant inclusion beyond basic job matching (EC 2025e; Springer 2018). Rights for third-country nationals are tightly controlled, and discourse remains largely exclusionary.

4.1 Migrants' unemployment and overqualification

Across the European Union, a persistent challenge in migrant integration is the significantly higher unemployment rate among third-country nationals compared to citizens. According to the latest Eurostat data (2023–2024), the average unemployment rate among non-EU citizens across the EU is approximately 13.4%**,** compared to 6.1% among EU nationals a gap of over 7 percentage points (Eurostat, 2024). This reflects structural inequalities, barriers to access, credential mismatches, and limited mobility in host labour markets.

However, two V4 countries Czechia and Hungary represent notable outliers in this trend.[3] In Czechia, the unemployment rate for non-EU nationals stands at around 3.2%**,** only marginally above the 2.5% rate for Czech citizens. Similarly, in Hungary, the difference is negligible: 4.0% for non-EU citizens compared to 3.8% for nationals (ibid.) This near parity suggests relatively efficient labour market insertion for migrants, likely driven by high demand in sectors such as IT, construction, automotive, and logistics

However, this statistical convergence should not be misinterpreted as evidence of full integration**.** In both countries, low unemployment among migrants often reflects employer-driven migration schemes, where foreign workers arrive with pre-arranged contracts notably through Hungary's Guest Worker Scheme and Czechia's Employee Card system. These schemes minimize joblessness by design but do not necessarily offer upward mobility or long-term inclusion (Münich et al., 2014).

Despite growing demand for foreign labour across the V4, structural barriers continue to limit the effective utilisation of migrant skills. According to Eurostat data (2024), 46.3% of tertiary-educated non-EU migrants in Poland are employed in jobs that do not require higher education. In Czechia, the overqualification rate for non-EU citizens stands at approximately 54.1%**,** compared to 11.1% among Czech nationals, revealing a clear gap in employment quality (Eurostat, 2024). This persistent skills underutilization represents a multidimensional policy failure. At the individual level, overqualification translates into lower earnings, reduced job satisfaction, and limited career progression, trapping educated migrants in precarious employment despite possessing qualifications that should command higher wages and better working conditions. At the macroeconomic level, it constitutes a significant waste of human capital**:** when tertiary-educated migrants work in low-skilled positions, their potential contributions to productivity, innovation, and economic growth remain untapped (OECD, 2025).

[3] Data from Slovakia and Poland were not available

4.2 Ukrainian Refugees: Integration without Infrastructure?

In stark contrast, the largest and most sustained movement into the V4 has been the arrival of Ukrainian refugees since the full-scale Russian invasion in February 2022. According to Frontex (2024), more than 4 million border crossings from Ukraine into the EU occurred in the first year alone, with Poland absorbing over 60% of the flows. Unlike irregular crossings, these arrivals were overwhelmingly legal, facilitated by the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD)**,** which granted Ukrainians immediate residence rights, access to labour markets, and basic social services.

Initial reception, particularly in Poland and Slovakia was swift and generous, but long-term integration has lagged. Housing strategies are fragmented, access to structured language training is limited, and recognition of Ukrainian qualifications remains inconsistent. Employment rates are relatively high compared to other refugee groups, yet many remain underemployed or working informally, especially women concentrated in care and domestic work. Elderly refugees and vulnerable households face additional barriers to stable inclusion. Czechia has piloted more systematic programs, while Slovakia and Hungary struggle with institutional capacity. However, the temporary nature of their legal status remains a structural impediment to full integration: without pathways to permanent residence, beneficiaries face ongoing uncertainty that discourages investment in long-term skills development, professional credentialing, and community ties, despite their demonstrated contributions to V4 labour markets and economies.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Visegrád Four face a structural contradiction: their economies depend on foreign labour while their policies remain anchored in deterrence and control. Over 1.5 million displaced Ukrainians and tens of thousands of third-country workers sustain V4 labour markets, yet integration remains fragmented, pathways to permanence unclear, and human capital systematically underutilized.

This policy paper has documented three dimensions of this dysfunction: 1) Security-first framing has not prevented mobility but shaped it in ways that undermine both state interests and migrant rights, 2) Institutional architecture reflects deep ambivalence: temporary protection provides labour access without permanence, integration support remains under-resourced, and bureaucratic barriers waste imported human capital, 3) EU-level instruments remain underutilized even as governments cite sovereignty to resist common frameworks.

The policy recommendations constitute an integrated response: expand legal pathways, invest in integration infrastructure, address credential barriers, transition temporary protection to permanent residence, leverage EU funding strategically, and reframe public narratives. Together, these measures recognize that migration governance is not about

preventing movement but managing it in ways aligned with economic and demographic needs.

The required shift is fundamentally political. V4 governments must accept that migration cannot be controlled through restriction alone—states do not fully determine who comes, and migrants exercise agency in settlement choices. Effective policy means prioritizing retention and integration of those already present rather than pursuing illusory total control. This requires clear pathways to permanent residence for third-country nationals demonstrating sustained employment, community ties, and language acquisition. Stable legal status is the foundation for successful integration and demographic sustainability.

Recommendations for V4 Policymakers: Towards Coherent, Effective, and Rights-Based Migration Governance

1. Expand and Institutionalize Transparent Legal Pathways

V4 countries should broaden the use of legal migration instruments both national and EU-level to meet their labour market needs in a transparent, predictable, and rights-respecting manner. This includes increased participation in the EU Blue Card scheme, Talent Partnerships, and the emerging EU Talent Pool. National permit systems should be streamlined to reduce bureaucratic barriers, and recruitment programmes should be evaluated annually for their effectiveness, equity, and alignment with demographic trends.

2. Invest in the Integration of People Already Present

Integration must no longer be viewed as a temporary or optional add-on. The over one and a half millions of displaced Ukrainians residing across the V4, alongside tens of thousands of third-country nationals already working in V4 economies, require structured, long-term integration pathways. Investments should prioritize language training, recognition of qualifications, access to affordable housing, and support for gender-sensitive employment. Special attention must be given to ensuring that integration efforts are inclusive of women, families, and vulnerable populations.

3.Address migrant overqualification

Labour market policies must prioritize credential recognition, upskilling support, and tailored career counselling to address these barriers.
This requires fast-track evaluation procedures with legal time limits, competency-based assessment that accepts partial qualifications, bridge programs combining targeted training with workplace placements in regulated professions, and multilingual career advisors offering individualized skills mapping and ongoing support through recognition

and retraining processes**.** Without such interventions, V4 countries will continue to underutilize imported human capital while perpetuating structural inequality.

4.Transition from Emergency Response to Sustainable Inclusion

While the Temporary Protection Directive has provided immediate relief and access to labour markets for Ukrainian refugees, the next policy step must focus on transitioning beneficiaries from temporary protection to long-term residence. National frameworks should offer pathways to permanent residency for those contributing to V4 societies and economies. Legal certainty fosters economic productivity, social cohesion, and individual dignity.

5. Leverage EU Instruments More Strategically

EU-level instruments such as the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and operational cooperation with Frontex offer underutilized opportunities for strengthening national migration systems. V4 countries should ensure that these resources are deployed not only for surveillance and control but also for asylum system reform, reception capacity building, and integration programming. This requires establishing clear earmarking requirements in national AMIF programs that allocate minimum percentages to integration measures, coupled with transparent reporting mechanisms that track expenditure across border management versus reception and integration categories. Rights-compliant border management must be paired with adequate oversight and transparency mechanisms.

6. Strengthen Cooperation with Third Countries on Labour Mobility

Effective migration governance also requires external dimension coordination. V4 countries should expand bilateral labour mobility agreements, particularly in sectors experiencing structural shortages such as construction, logistics, care work, and IT. These agreements should be framed not merely as economic tools but as part of development cooperation, ensuring that partner countries also benefit from circular migration, skills training, and ethical recruitment standards.

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