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GENERAL ARTICLE (PEER REVIEWED)

Ukrainian Labour Migration to Europe During the War: A Review of Current Realities

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Abstract

International migration plays an important role in shaping the global economy, serving as both a source of financial resources for countries and a means of balancing demographic and labour disparities across nations. Labour migration, in particular, is integral to the redistribution of labour and capital, influenced by varying levels of economic development, natural resource availability, and technological progress. While globalisation has facilitated the movement of people and strengthened international cooperation, migration patterns are significantly affected by military conflicts. The ongoing war in Ukraine has intensified these dynamics, prompting a significant outflow of Ukrainian labour to Europe. This review explores the economic, social, and demographic impacts of this migration, analysing its effects on host countries and the complex challenges it poses for Ukraine, particularly regarding demographic stability and post-war reconstruction.

Keywords

Labour Migration; Migration Policy; Migration Crisis; Refugees; Employment; War

International migration significantly shapes the global economy by providing financial resources to countries and addressing demographic and labour disparities across nations. Labour migration, in particular, facilitates the redistribution of labour and capital, influenced by differences in economic development, natural resources, and technological progress. While globalisation has eased the movement of people and strengthened international cooperation, migration patterns are also profoundly affected by military conflicts. The ongoing war in Ukraine has intensified these dynamics, leading to a substantial outflow of Ukrainian labour to Europe. This migration impacts the economies of host countries and poses complex challenges for Ukraine, especially regarding demographic stability and post-war reconstruction.

Historically, wartime labour migration has had profound effects. During World War II, millions fled their homes, with the United States accepting over 200,000 refugees from Europe and Asia—the largest influx of labour migrants to the US at that time (Costa 2020). Similarly, the war in Ukraine has caused nearly 7.5 million Ukrainian citizens to seek safety abroad between 24 February and 13 June 2022 ([Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2022](#)). Although about 1.3 million Ukrainians have since returned home, as of summer 2024, approximately six million refugees remain worldwide. This mass displacement presents significant challenges for both receiving countries and Ukraine, particularly concerning future repatriation and socioeconomic reconstruction. Simplified residence regimes offered to Ukrainians in the EU, US, and Canada—including temporary protection status, expedited work permits, and access to social services—provide immediate relief but may also encourage long-term settlement abroad, potentially delaying Ukraine's recovery efforts. Therefore, there is an urgent need to develop projects that facilitate the successful return of Ukrainians. Such initiatives would benefit Ukrainian society by addressing labour shortages and aiding reconstruction, while also alleviating pressures on host countries, such as housing shortages and labour market saturation.

The study of labour migration during wartime is particularly relevant in the current global context. The mass exodus of Ukrainians due to Russian aggression necessitates a thorough analysis informed by existing research. Without this understanding, it will be challenging to develop effective strategies and public policies to address the complex socioeconomic and political consequences of this migration. Examining Ukrainian labour migration to European countries is vital not only for grasping its immediate impact but also for devising strategies to protect Ukrainians' economic independence, safeguard their rights, and enhance political cooperation between nations. Moreover, this research contributes to humanitarian and social initiatives supporting migrants and internally displaced persons within Ukraine. This article explores the challenges Ukrainian migrants face and potential scenarios for their return, synthesising existing research to inform strategies that address these complex issues.

Purpose and Scope of the Literature Review

This review compiles and synthesises a broad spectrum of academic research, reports, and media analyses on Ukrainian labour migration during the ongoing conflict, focusing on the potential return of migrants to Ukraine. The unprecedented scale and rapid pace of migration triggered by the war have profoundly impacted Ukraine, its neighbours, and the broader European Union (EU). Understanding these implications, especially in the context of encouraging and facilitating migrants' return, requires a comprehensive, multidisciplinary analysis encompassing economics, sociology, political science, and international relations.

The conflict has created a fluid situation where migrants' needs and challenges, along with host countries' responses, are constantly evolving. By synthesising findings from diverse sources, this review offers insights into how this migration is reshaping Ukraine and host countries, affecting labour markets, demographic patterns, and the integration of migrants into new social environments. Central to this analysis is determining how to create conditions that enable and encourage Ukrainian migrants to return, contributing

to Ukraine's post-war reconstruction and economic recovery. To achieve this, the review categorises the literature into key themes: economic implications, demographic shifts, and social integration, allowing for focused analysis. The insights derived have practical implications for policymakers, international organisations, and NGOs involved in migration issues, particularly in developing strategies that support the return and reintegration of Ukrainian migrants.

Understanding Labour Migration in the Context of Military Conflict

Migration processes play a critical role in shaping social, cultural, political, and economic relationships both within and across borders. These processes are driven by a variety of factors, including displacement due to conflict, the search for resettlement opportunities, and the pursuit of better economic conditions. A defining characteristic of migration is the movement across administrative boundaries, which can occur either within a country (internal migration) or across national borders (external migration). External migration, which involves crossing state borders, is often referred to as international migration, while internal migration is confined to movements within a single country's borders ([Bondarchuk 2016](#)).

In recent decades, Europe has witnessed the arrival of millions of migrants, driven by a complex mix of voluntary and forced circumstances. While regulated migration can contribute positively to the development of host countries by filling labour market gaps and enriching cultural diversity, forced migration—often a result of conflict or persecution—tends to generate significant socioeconomic tensions ([Popovchenko 2022](#)). The distinction between different types of migrants is crucial in understanding these dynamics. According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), a 'migrant' is typically defined as someone who moves voluntarily, driven by personal convenience and without external coercion ([Yavorovych 2021](#)). In contrast, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines refugees as individuals who are compelled to flee their homes due to serious threats to their lives or freedoms. However, the UNHCR also acknowledges that the lines between refugees and other migrants can blur, particularly when people are forced to migrate in response to life-threatening situations, which may not fit neatly into traditional definitions of economic or social migration ([Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2022](#)).

Labour migration involves individuals moving to improve their living standards through better employment opportunities, often without changing their permanent place of residence. This form of migration, which can be an initial step toward permanent settlement, is part of a broader concept known as migration mobility. Unlike other forms of migration, labour migration is characterised by a constant connection between migrants and their families, both personally and economically ([Andreyko 2019](#)). In the twentieth century, two world wars in Europe were the primary drivers of significant labour migration. The immense casualties and widespread devastation of World War II, in particular, created a dire need for additional labour in European countries. Despite suffering heavy losses, these nations had greater potential to rebuild and achieve high living standards compared to many colonial regions globally ([Dorn & Zweimüller 2021](#)).

Consequently, large waves of migrants from Southern Europe, North Africa, and Southeast Asia moved to Northern and Central Europe. The early twenty-first century saw a similar pattern, as conflicts in the Middle East—such as those in Iraq, Libya, and Syria—spurred new waves of migrants seeking safety and better opportunities in Europe ([Szymanska 2017](#)).

Modern migration studies classify migration using several criteria, with voluntariness and motivation being key factors. Forced displacement, typically caused by hostilities and immediate threats to life and health, is characterised by chaos, high intensity, complex regulation, and numerous humanitarian challenges. Unlike voluntary, planned migration, forced migration often arises suddenly in response to new threats and requires immediate action (Costa 2020). Forced migration often results from military and political upheaval,

religious or ethnic persecution, and violence against individuals or their families. Today, with ongoing conflicts, particularly in the Middle East and Ukraine, significant numbers of refugees are seeking asylum, especially within the European Union (EU) ([Karpachova 2021](#)). It is important to note that individuals displaced by armed conflict experience heightened psychological stress due to both their recent traumatic experiences and the challenges of adjusting to unfamiliar living conditions. They often lose their material possessions, social status, and sense of security, even if their lives are not directly threatened in their new country. The absence of information about the well-being and whereabouts of family members can further exacerbate their distress. This vulnerability frequently makes forced migrants targets for criminal schemes and violence ([Gnatenko et al. 2021](#)).

Several distinct features of cross-border movement during wartime are apparent. Individuals with close ties in other countries often seek to reunite with their relatives whenever possible, leveraging existing connections for support and stability ([Kelley et al. 2020](#)). Additionally, those with higher social status and greater resources are generally better protected during their transit, as they can more easily navigate the challenges of displacement ([Ivashchenko 2021](#)). Local diasporas also play a critical role in providing humanitarian assistance to newcomers, offering essential support in the form of housing, food, and legal aid. A notable trend in forced migration is that internally displaced persons (IDPs) often remain within their home region, with neighbouring countries becoming key centres of refuge. These host countries take on the responsibility of meeting the basic needs of refugees, such as housing, food, medical care, and education ([Ivashchenko 2021](#)). For example, in the aftermath of the Syrian war, the majority of displaced individuals stayed within the Middle East, relocating to neighbouring countries like Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq. Turkey, in particular, has hosted millions of Syrian refugees, establishing itself as a major hub for those seeking refuge ([Zhvaniya 2015](#)). The experiences of voluntary and forced migrants differ not only in terms of motivation but also in how they are perceived by destination countries. Voluntary migrants typically undergo a formal process, obtaining the necessary permits and proving their right to reside in a particular country according to national laws. In contrast, refugees are assessed under different criteria, especially in European countries where there is a strong public consensus on the moral obligation to assist civilians fleeing life-threatening situations ([Lutsenko 2019](#)).

Refugees must navigate several steps to obtain legal permission to stay in a host country, and this process is far from straightforward. Refugee status is not automatically granted, and in many cases, individuals are unfortunately denied this status despite facing genuine threats. The process of distinguishing between economic migrants and refugees is particularly complex, as it involves assessing a range of factors that are not always clear-cut. This complexity arises because migration is often driven by a combination of economic, social, political, and environmental factors, making it difficult to categorise individuals definitively. For instance, a person fleeing political instability may also be motivated by the pursuit of better economic opportunities. Similarly, those displaced by climate change may not fit neatly into traditional refugee definitions, yet they still require protection and assistance. The legal and administrative procedures for determining refugee status vary significantly across countries, leading to inconsistencies and blurred distinctions between economic migrants and refugees. This overlapping nature of migration motives highlights the need for more nuanced and flexible approaches to immigration policy and refugee protection. As migration patterns evolve, especially in the context of global challenges like climate change and political unrest, it becomes increasingly important for policies to adapt in ways that account for these complexities and ensure that those in need of protection receive it ([Howard 2020](#)).

The nature of transnational migration during armed conflicts introduces significant challenges across the political, social, and economic spheres of recipient countries. Refugees require resettlement, medical care, and basic humanitarian support, all of which impose financial burdens that can undermine political stability ([Howard 2020](#)). Moreover, a significant portion of internally displaced persons (IDPs) may remain in their host countries permanently, necessitating the development of long-term adaptation programmes

and investment in resources. Without effective management, these pressures can lead to internal crises and the rise of anti-migration movements. This dynamic has played a crucial role in events such as the UK's withdrawal from the EU and the surge of far-right sentiment in several European countries ([Ehamd 2023](#)). Similarly, in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, former President Donald Trump capitalised on anti-immigrant rhetoric to secure electoral victory. To build a stable consensus between the state and society, it is essential to shift from ad hoc solutions to the development of long-term strategies ([Xu et al. 2019](#)).

Deported and illegally deported citizens are also considered IDPs. Deportees are those expelled from a country through legal processes, while illegally deported individuals are expelled without following legal procedures, such as without a court decision or the right to appeal. The escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian war since February 2022 has led to a significant increase in such deportations. Due to ongoing hostilities and the lack of control over occupied cities, it is difficult to estimate the exact number of people forcibly deported to the Russian Federation. According to the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Russian occupation forces have been deporting Ukrainians to camps under the guise of 'evacuation,' with the intent of relocating them to remote, economically depressed regions of Russia ([Draper 2022](#)). Forced migration resulting from war is characterised by high levels of irregularity, challenges in determining legal status, and the unique emotional and psychological states of migrants, which make them vulnerable to potential crimes. Internally displaced Ukrainians in the EU face similar challenges. Given the persistence and intensification of armed conflicts, greater attention must be paid to the protection of IDPs. Their vulnerability raises numerous issues related to overcoming humanitarian crises, legal regulation, and successful adaptation ([Filipchuk et al. 2022](#)).

Labour Migration of Ukrainians Driven by the War

As an integral participant in both the global and European community, Ukraine faces the responsibility of shaping its domestic and foreign migration policies to address the current crisis. Historically positioned at the geographical centre of Europe and a crossroads for trade routes and migration flows, Ukraine has now become a significant source of outward migration due to the ongoing war. The scale and intensity of migration resulting from Russian aggression demand particular attention, as the war has fundamentally altered migration dynamics in the country.

The primary driver of this forced migration is the military conflict, though it was preceded by various underlying factors such as political, socio-demographic, economic, and ethnolinguistic issues. The migration wave of 2022–2023 differs substantially from previous economic migration patterns. While earlier migrations were largely driven by economic motives, the current exodus stems from the immediate need for safety and survival. Ukrainian citizens are fleeing to protect themselves and their families from military threats, with many refugees leaving regions under direct attack or occupation. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 11.4 million Ukrainians were displaced in just the first six weeks of the Russian-Ukrainian war ([Mishchuk & Oliynyk 2022](#)). Additionally, there have been numerous reports of illegal deportations of Ukrainian citizens to Russia. As of September 2022, the UNHCR estimated that 2.9 million people, including 9,400 Ukrainian children, had been forcibly relocated to the Russian Federation. Dmytro Gerasymchuk, Advisor to the President of Ukraine on Children's Rights and Child Rehabilitation, reported that by June 2022, 234,000 Ukrainian children had been taken to Russia, Belarus, and certain districts of Donetsk and Luhansk ([Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2022](#)).

These figures highlight the severe displacement crisis facing Ukraine, with children being particularly vulnerable to illegal deportations. The forced relocation of Ukrainian citizens raises significant concerns about human rights violations and breaches of international law. It underscores the urgent need for accountability mechanisms and stronger protection for those impacted by the conflict. The scale of these

forced migrations not only exemplifies the immediate humanitarian crisis but also signals long-term challenges for both Ukraine and the international community in addressing the consequences of this war.

Consequences of Ukrainian Labour Migration for Ukraine

The Ukrainian state, alongside the international community, faces the urgent task of rebuilding its national economy. One of the most pressing challenges is addressing the large-scale emigration resulting from the war, particularly the mass exodus of forced migrants to the EU. The question of how to encourage the return of Ukrainian citizens who fled the conflict is critical, as it directly impacts national security, including economic security. The central issue is who will contribute to rebuilding the country after the war. The prospects for regional migration are currently influenced by numerous factors, and there is considerable uncertainty regarding a return to pre-2022 or pre-pandemic migration patterns. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine, which shows signs of becoming a protracted struggle, threatens not only the economic stability of millions but also the potential for temporarily displaced Ukrainians to return home in the near future. As a result, large-scale displacement is likely to remain a defining feature of the region for years to come. This situation requires displaced Ukrainians, their host countries in the EU, and the Ukrainian government to adapt temporary measures into longer-term solutions. The devastating consequences of this displacement are already evident and are likely to become even more pronounced in the future.

Beyond the physical occupation of territory, Russia's primary goal has been the systematic destruction of Ukrainian national identity, culture, language, and history. The acts of terrorism and genocide committed against the Ukrainian people, including mass killings, torture, rape, and deportations to Russia, have forced millions to flee their homes ([Liubchenko et al. 2019](#)). Russia's strategy also includes indoctrinating children and youth through forced education and the imposition of Russian curricula and textbooks ([Yaroshenko, Lutsenko & Vapnyarchuk 2021](#)). For eight years, during the occupation of Crimea, Sevastopol, and parts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, the aggressor has systematically sought to eradicate Ukrainian national identity and militarise the youth through both formal and informal education systems. These actions constitute not only a violation of cultural and national rights but also a breach of international law.

The decline in the number of working-age people due to migration will severely impact Ukraine's budget revenues. The reduction in consumer numbers will lead to a shortfall in value-added tax and excise taxes, further straining the budget. As the domestic market shrinks due to the loss of consumers, it becomes less attractive for investment. Foreign investors often consider population size and demographic trends when making decisions, and Ukraine's declining population—already ranking 180th globally in terms of birth rate—exacerbates this issue ([Khrystova & Uvarova 2022](#)). Moreover, the migration of women and children poses a significant risk of creating a demographic crisis and intellectual impoverishment in the future. The European Union has granted Ukrainian internally displaced persons (IDPs) the right to live and work in all 27 EU countries for three years, along with access to social benefits, healthcare, and education. Among the Ukrainian women who have left, a majority—about 60–70%—hold higher education degrees, making them competitive in the labour market and improving their chances of adapting to their host countries ([Dinkelman et al. 2024](#)). However, this has also led to a brain drain, particularly in sectors like IT, which have been major contributors to Ukraine's export revenues. The displacement of a significant portion of Ukraine's skilled workforce presents challenges for the country's recovery and economic development. This loss of talent hampers efforts to rebuild industries, potentially causing delays in projects and reducing productivity. The economic repercussions extend to decreased consumer spending, which affects local businesses, and lower tax revenues, which strain government resources needed for essential services and reconstruction ([Pashkov et al. 2019](#)).

Drawing on the experience of previous migration waves to Europe, it is likely that there will be a demand for Ukrainian migrants who possess relevant professional qualifications, up-to-date knowledge of

information and communication technologies, and proficiency in at least two foreign languages (English and the language of their host country). Migrants who pursue education abroad with the potential for future employment will have advantages, while others may face a decline in professional status and significant challenges in securing legal employment. It is essential for future migrants to have prior knowledge of the labour market and the cultural and historical context of their destination country to facilitate smoother adaptation to their new environment. The failure to repatriate forced refugees could cost Ukraine's economy an estimated \$113 billion in GDP over the next decade. According to the Centre for Economic Recovery, up to 4.7 million Ukrainians have fled the country since Russia's full-scale invasion began, with approximately 1.5 million of them being of working age ([Economic Truth 2023b](#)). These realities highlight the significant long-term challenges Ukraine faces in reversing the effects of mass migration and rebuilding its economy, society, and national identity.

The Impact of Ukrainian Migrants on the European Union

Migration is increasingly viewed as a strategic tool for long-term growth within the European Union (EU). Analyses have consistently shown that migration delivers significant economic benefits, primarily to host countries ([Bondarchuk 2016](#)). The EU currently faces a growing shortage of skilled labour, exacerbated by unfavourable demographic trends. Against this backdrop, the massive influx of Ukrainian citizens into the EU raises important questions about whether these migrants can help mitigate the EU's labour shortage. Ukrainian emigration to the EU is accompanied by adequate social protection and legal support, ensuring their rights to settlement, work, and education. Ukrainian migrants, many of whom are working-age women, have been quick to exercise these rights. However, as the war continues, further emigration from Ukraine is likely, though the intensity and direction of this migration will depend on various factors.

Ukrainian migrants, however, should be viewed not as a burden, but as an asset to EU economies. The relatively high quality of human capital in Ukraine, even under extreme conditions, underscores the country's competitiveness ([Ehamd 2023](#)). Ukraine, through its migrants, is not just a recipient of international macro-financial assistance but also a contributor to the international (and particularly European) labour market. In the context of global competition for quality labour and human capital, Ukrainian migrants represent a valuable resource. Human capital is arguably the most critical asset for any country, and Ukrainian migrants bring significant contributions to their host nations. As Ukrainian migrants began to integrate into their new environments, many found employment, which bolstered the production of goods and services and heightened competition in local labour markets. For instance, in June 2022, 350,000 Ukrainians were registered as job seekers in Germany, and by October, one in ten had secured employment ([Ludolph 2023](#)). Ukrainian migrants under temporary protection have gained access to EU labour markets, facilitating their social integration. In Poland, Ukrainian refugees have paid €2 billion in taxes since the onset of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, a sum three times greater than what the country has spent on assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) ([Saguin & Shivakoti 2023](#)).

In response to the anticipated new wave of migration in autumn 2022, Poland prepared an additional 100,000 places in reception centres and identified around 4,000 job vacancies for Ukrainians, quadrupling the number available in spring 2022 ([GAZETA.PL 2022](#)). Additionally, 9% of Ukrainian temporary protection seekers in Europe have maintained remote work in Ukraine as their primary source of income. Overall, approximately 24% of Ukrainian refugees in host countries hold either permanent (12%) or temporary (12%) jobs ([Channel 24 2022](#)). The contributions of Ukrainian migrants are projected to have long-term positive effects on the economies of their host countries. By 2026, the output of goods and services in Estonia, Poland, and the Czech Republic is expected to be 2.2-2.3% higher than in a scenario without migration, with Germany seeing a 0.6-0.65% increase ([Pogarska et al. 2023](#)). The impact on public finances will also be favourable in the long run, as stronger GDP growth leads to higher tax revenues. In

some countries, Ukrainian migrants have already offset the costs of refugee support programs through their tax contributions. For example, in Poland, the taxes paid by Ukrainian refugees amounted to USD 2.4 billion, surpassing the government's expenditure on refugee assistance, excluding additional costs related to education and healthcare ([Economic Truth 2023a](#)). These trends underscore the significant economic benefits that Ukrainian migrants bring to the EU, reinforcing the importance of supportive policies that facilitate their integration and contribution to host economies.

Current Needs of Ukrainian Migrants

The urgency of refugees' needs evolves over time, reflecting different priorities as forced migrants move through various stages of their journey. Initially, in the immediate aftermath of the full-scale war, millions of Ukrainians were compelled to flee simultaneously, seeking safety for themselves and their families. During this first stage, the relocation process was perilous, with many people, including children, losing their lives or sustaining injuries while escaping conflict zones. The stress and hardship of this journey often exacerbated chronic illnesses among the displaced population, necessitating urgent medical attention upon arrival. Refugees from frontline areas frequently had to leave under emergency conditions, often without adequate food, water, money, clothing, or essential documents. While some Ukrainians managed to reach safety quickly, secure temporary accommodation, and continue working remotely, the majority faced immediate and pressing needs, such as ensuring safety, securing food and shelter, and obtaining emergency medical care ([Yaroshenko et al. 2022](#)).

As migrants moved into the second stage of their displacement, their focus shifted toward adapting to their new environments. This adaptation phase involved securing more permanent housing, obtaining material support for the short term, accessing necessary medical care and medications, arranging schooling for children—often remotely—and recovering or acquiring essential documents. Migrants began seeking more comfortable or affordable housing options, considering relocations to other regions or countries, familiarising themselves with the legal requirements for staying in their host country, and exploring opportunities for financial assistance from governments and NGOs. Additionally, they sought any available employment or temporary income sources to support themselves during this uncertain period (Shen et al. 2021).

As the likelihood of long-term residence in the host country increased, migrants entered the third stage, where the challenge of integration became the focus. During this phase, they faced the complex tasks of learning the host country's language, finding stable employment that provided a subsistence-level income, and securing regular access to necessary services such as medical care, psychological support, and education. Ensuring that their children received a full education, acquiring qualifications to meet host country standards, and pursuing higher or vocational education became critical concerns. Additionally, finding opportunities for children's extracurricular activities, gaining access to quality leisure and recreational services, and ensuring the protection of children's rights were vital as migrants worked to establish a new life in their host countries. Understanding these three stages—relocation, adaptation, and integration—highlights the importance of providing targeted support throughout the different phases of the migration journey, ensuring that both immediate and long-term challenges are effectively addressed.

Ukrainian refugees present a diverse set of circumstances and needs, reflecting their varied backgrounds and experiences. Broadly, they can be categorised into three distinct groups, each facing unique challenges. The first group consists of reunited families, where women, often accompanied by children, have joined their husbands or partners who were already employed in Poland before the conflict. These women have generally integrated swiftly into Polish society, securing jobs and enrolling their children in local schools under the Polish curriculum. This group has largely assimilated into their new environment, requiring minimal additional support for integration. The second group presents more complex challenges. It includes

mothers with children who had no prior connections to Poland. These women, separated from their families and burdened with concerns about the safety of their relatives remaining in Ukraine, often suffer from significant stress and may require psychological support. Only about half of the women in this group have found employment, highlighting a critical issue for the Polish authorities: the need to encourage greater participation of these refugees in the labour market and reduce their reliance on government assistance ([Ludolph 2023](#)). Addressing the psychological and economic needs of this group is essential for their successful integration. The third group is in the most precarious position. These are the refugees who frequently move between countries, unable to find stability. After spending a short period in Poland, they often return to Ukraine or move on to other European countries, such as Germany or the Netherlands, in search of better job opportunities. This group is the most difficult to integrate, as their constant movement prevents them from establishing roots in any one place. The lack of responsibility taken by any single country for their inclusion exacerbates their vulnerability. Since the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion and the resulting mass exodus, the majority of Ukrainian refugees find themselves at a critical juncture—the third stage of the migration process—where the challenges of integration and the prospect of long-term residence in a new society must be addressed comprehensively.

Access to medical services has been a significant concern for Ukrainian labour migrants, particularly those who worked abroad illegally before the war. Many of these migrants, especially those employed in construction—a common sector for male Ukrainian labourers—lacked health insurance, making them especially vulnerable. However, the onset of the war and the subsequent displacement of millions of Ukrainians have led to new legal protections and entitlements in the European Union (EU). The EU's provision of temporary protection status to Ukrainian refugees has ensured that they receive essential services, including the right to residence, medical care, education, access to the labour market, and housing. In Poland, for example, legislation designed to assist Ukrainian citizens grants them free access to medical care through the support of the National Health Fund, provided they have obtained PESEL status (the Polish social security number). This system guarantees that Ukrainian refugees can access necessary healthcare without the burden of out-of-pocket expenses. However, the situation is more challenging for Ukrainian refugees in post-Soviet countries outside the EU, such as Georgia and Moldova, where access to medical services is more limited and less comprehensive ([Vilchyk 2022](#)). For refugee children from Ukraine residing in EU countries, medical care is generally accessible on the same terms as it is for local children. This equitable treatment ensures that even when neither parent is employed and unable to pay mandatory insurance premiums, their children are still entitled to full medical services. This includes dental care and prescription medicines, all of which are provided free of charge when prescribed by a doctor ([Vilchyk 2022](#)). The provision of these services is crucial in maintaining the health and well-being of Ukrainian refugee children, ensuring they receive the care they need despite the upheaval and challenges they face in their displaced lives.

The education of children has become a critical issue amidst the mass displacement caused by the war. Before the conflict, children of labour migrants typically remained in Ukraine, attending school in their local communities. However, with the outbreak of war, approximately one-third of the displaced population has been children, prompting an urgent need to ensure their protection and continued education. According to UNICEF, by mid-2022, over 2 million Ukrainian refugee children had fled abroad, highlighting the scale of the educational disruption they face ([Verkhovna Rada Commissioner for Children's Rights 2022](#)). The European Union, where the majority of these children have sought refuge, provides a robust system of free schooling that is accessible to all children, regardless of their nationality, background, or the circumstances of their displacement. In many EU countries, Ukrainian children are not only given the right to attend public schools but are also provided with social assistance, such as free meals and help in acquiring necessary school supplies.

Education in these host countries is primarily delivered in the local language. However, in some instances, particularly in Latvia, Lithuania, and Georgia, there are schools offering instruction in Ukrainian or Russian to accommodate the linguistic needs of Ukrainian children. In response to the influx of Ukrainian students, some schools have even established special classes where instruction is provided in Ukrainian, though these are relatively rare and usually located in larger cities. Ukrainian children are generally placed in classes corresponding to their age group, where the medium of instruction is the local language. To support their integration, teachers and students who speak English or, in some cases, Russian, assist with translating educational materials. Additionally, many children are enrolled in ‘adaptation classes,’ which are specifically designed to focus on intensive language acquisition during their first year. In these classes, students spend the first semester learning the local language for up to 25 hours a week. In the second semester, other subjects are gradually introduced alongside continued language instruction. By the end of the year, these children are expected to have acquired sufficient language skills to join regular classes with their peers and successfully pass state exams. This approach, while effective in language acquisition, often means that children may miss a year of their standard educational programme, highlighting the challenges of balancing educational continuity with the need for language proficiency.

Some refugee children continue their education through online Ukrainian schools, a practice permitted under the laws of European countries. However, local authorities generally advocate for enrolling these children in traditional face-to-face education within local schools. This approach is driven by the belief that attending school in person facilitates better integration into the new environment, helps children develop confidence, and ensures they are visible and accounted for within the community, which enhances their overall safety. Regular school attendance is crucial for the socialisation of children, enabling them to interact with peers, form friendships, and participate in a structured social setting, all of which are essential for their psychological well-being and normal social development (Yaroshenko, Melnychuk, Moroz, et al. 2021). Schools often employ full-time psychologists who are available to provide emotional support and address any cases where a child might be at risk of psychological, physical, or sexual abuse. These psychologists work closely with social services, ensuring that children receive the necessary care and intervention if needed. Despite the advantages of in-person schooling, there are various reasons why some children might not attend. For example, some families opt for online education through Ukrainian schools because they intend to return to Ukraine soon and prefer to avoid the stress of integrating into a new school system. Additionally, some older teenagers might remain in online education or avoid school altogether because they are responsible for caring for younger siblings while their parents work. Nevertheless, such cases are exceptions rather than the norm, and most children are encouraged to participate in the local education system to the fullest extent possible.

Information and legal support have played a crucial role in helping Ukrainian refugees navigate their displacement. Ukrainians have a well-established culture of using the global network and various digital applications, which provide them with access to essential information and communication tools. These resources, including popular messaging apps, have enabled refugees to quickly gather vital information about their current situations, such as local conditions, evacuation alerts, routes, gathering points, relocation procedures, and available assistance. The availability of digital documents through the Diia app has further streamlined processes like identification and border crossing, simplifying many logistical challenges that refugees face. In the European Union, Ukrainian refugees can access information about opportunities and assistance through a variety of channels. Information is widely available online, from government agencies, NGOs, and volunteer organisations working directly with Ukrainian communities. The transparency of the assistance mechanisms and the availability of multiple platforms for obtaining advice and clarifications have made it easier for refugees to receive the support they need. Beyond official government websites, thematic websites, social networks, group chats, messenger channels, and YouTube have become invaluable resources. These platforms allow migrants to share their experiences, offer practical advice, and provide guidance on

accessing services, preparing documents, and finding assistance. A notable example is the ‘Ukrainians in Poland’ portal, the most popular online resource for Ukrainian refugees in Poland. While created by Polish experts, the content is largely contributed by Ukrainian migrants themselves. This portal offers a wealth of practical information, such as how to obtain a Polish driving licence, find dental care, understand the assistance available from international organisations, and navigate Polish legal procedures. The collaborative nature of this portal has made it an indispensable tool for Ukrainian refugees seeking to adapt to life in Poland.

Despite the wide availability of information resources, many Ukrainian citizens abroad continue to require additional information support, particularly legal counselling. Socially vulnerable groups, in particular, face significant challenges in accessing administrative services, applying for assistance, and dealing with discrimination. A common issue among displaced persons is the lack of passports, which complicates their relocation to the European Union, where assistance programmes tend to be more robust. As the war continues and Ukrainian refugees spend more time abroad, the nature of their informational needs evolves. Initially, the focus was on obtaining immediate shelter and material assistance, but as their stay extends, the need for legal advice and support has become more prominent. Refugees are increasingly seeking guidance on issues related to long-term integration into their host countries, including economic activities. In Poland, for example, many Ukrainians turn to NGOs for help with a range of legal and bureaucratic matters, including:

- Legalisation of their stay, which often involves obtaining a temporary residence permit.
- Registration of vehicles they have purchased while in Poland.
- Establishing a business, whether as a private entrepreneur or through other forms of entrepreneurial activity.
- Obtaining tax residency status, which becomes relevant for many after spending six months or more in Poland.

These evolving needs underscore the importance of continued and adaptive support systems that can address the changing circumstances of Ukrainian refugees as they navigate long-term residency and integration in their host countries.

Ukrainian migrants face significant employment challenges, many of which are bureaucratic in nature and require targeted assistance from Ukrainian authorities, particularly in the provision of administrative and legal services. For instance, Ukrainians in the UK seeking employment in schools or kindergartens often encounter difficulties in obtaining the necessary documentation, such as a certificate of no criminal record. The British justice system lacks records for Ukrainian refugees, and obtaining equivalent Ukrainian certificates has become increasingly challenging due to the ongoing war ([Ehamd 2023](#)). Securing employment is crucial for the successful integration of migrants into a new social environment, as it provides economic independence, a stable income, and the means to secure housing and other necessities. A substantial number of Ukrainian refugees, particularly women, have shown remarkable resilience by quickly finding employment, thereby contributing to the economies of their host countries. By March 2023, over one million Ukrainian refugees, out of approximately four million registered in the EU (including one-third who are children), had gained employment in various EU countries ([Unian 2023](#)).

The rapid adaptation of Ukrainians to new conditions is remarkable. In February 2023, Polish Minister of Family and Social Policy Marlena Maląg reported that since the beginning of the war, approximately 900,000 Ukrainian refugees had secured employment in Poland ([MonitorInfo 2023](#)). Considering that about 1.5 million refugees from Ukraine, including around 500,000 children, have been granted temporary protection in Poland, this statistic suggests that nearly all working-age Ukrainian refugees who expressed a desire to work in Poland have successfully found jobs ([Davigora 2023](#)). A survey conducted among Polish

employers revealed that the vast majority (80%) had hired Ukrainian citizens. Most employers (66%) reported that their Ukrainian employees quickly adapted to the new working conditions and encountered few challenges in acclimatising. Only 7% of employers noted that Ukrainians faced minor difficulties, and a mere 2% indicated significant challenges with adaptation (Pohorila 2022). Similarly, in August 2022, the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported that four out of ten Ukrainian refugees in the UK had already found employment. The employment rate among Ukrainian refugees increased from 9% in April 2022 to 42% by early August. Additionally, 37% of respondents felt financially secure enough to sustain themselves for the next three months, compared to 26% in April ([Saguin & Shivakoti 2023](#)). This data reflects the successful integration of Ukrainians into Western societies. However, a consequence of this successful integration is the growing number of refugees who wish to remain in their host countries either permanently or for an extended period after the war. As more time passes, the inclination of migrants to return to Ukraine diminishes. Moreover, some researchers have noted that certain countries bordering Ukraine may be showing interest in encouraging the immigration of Ukrainians and fostering their long-term settlement (Pohorila 2022).

According to a survey conducted by the EWL Migration Platform and the Centre for East European Studies at the University of Warsaw in March 2023, nearly half (45%) of Ukrainian refugees planned to stay in Poland for at least a year or several years after the end of the war. This marks a significant increase from March 2022, when only 31% expressed this intention. Additionally, 6% of respondents expressed a clear decision not to return to Ukraine at all, while only a third (32%) of those surveyed planned to return home as soon as possible. A notable 16% of respondents were undecided about their future plans, indicating the uncertainty many face ([Majumdar 2023](#)). The substantial percentage of refugees planning to stay in Poland longer can be attributed to the effective efforts of Polish society and employers, as well as central and local authorities, who have successfully provided for the basic needs of Ukrainian refugees, adapted legislation, and facilitated their professional integration. According to a survey conducted by the international company Gremi Personal, the number of Ukrainian refugees intending to stay in Poland after the war has doubled over the past six months—from 17% in October 2022 to 38% in March 2023. Many refugees, particularly those from Eastern and Southern Ukraine, have nowhere to return as their homes have been destroyed by Russian forces. Others have already adapted to life in Poland, securing employment and enrolling their children in Polish schools ([Business 2023](#)).

However, when analysing these survey results, it is important to consider that refugees may not always fully grasp the range of variables that will influence their future decisions. The discomfort of being away from home and in unfamiliar conditions may either diminish or intensify over time, depending on the policies of the host countries. Ukrainian migrants in Europe, the United States, and Canada are often received more warmly and sincerely than those from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Some researchers attribute this to a variety of positive factors, including Ukrainians' high levels of education, good manners, natural tolerance, proficiency in foreign languages, strong work ethic, openness to communication, and willingness to share their skills, whether professional, culinary, or domestic.

European governments and businesses have a vested interest in Ukrainian citizens remaining in their host countries, as their integration has already provided a significant boost to local economies. Ukrainians have become active contributors to the European labour market, paying taxes and filling essential roles. For instance, since the onset of the full-scale war, Ukrainians in Poland have paid approximately 10 billion zlotys (around \$2.4 billion) in taxes, a figure that far exceeds the amount of aid provided to them by the government, according to the Centre for Migration Research at the University of Warsaw. It is important to note that the demand for Ukrainian labour among European employers remains robust. Certain industries are still ready to absorb hundreds of thousands of new workers from Ukraine. Ukrainian women, in particular, have helped to meet the labour demands in the service and manufacturing sectors. However, Poland's transport and construction industries are facing significant staffing shortages, as these sectors

typically require male workers. The Polish Association of Employers in the Construction Industry reports that the number of Ukrainian workers in construction has decreased by two-thirds during the war years, with only 127,000 employed in 2022. Additionally, Poland is facing a shortfall of about 150,000 professional drivers, leading to operational challenges in the transport and logistics sector ([Filipchuk et al. 2022](#)). Looking ahead, Ukraine will face stiff competition from European employers for its labour force once the war ends. Although the peak of military-driven migration may have passed, the risk of further emigration remains. A new wave of potential migrants is emerging among the younger generation. According to a survey by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, if the war continues indefinitely, only 42.9% of Ukrainians envision a future for their children and grandchildren in Ukraine ([KMIS 2022](#)). This statistic suggests not only the potential for a sustained outflow of Ukrainian citizens but also the possibility of a profound impact on Ukraine's future population and economic stability. However, the existing literature reveals several significant gaps that require attention to fully comprehend the complexities of this migration crisis and to formulate effective responses.

Firstly, while current research provides insights into the initial and intermediate stages of refugee integration, there is a notable absence of longitudinal studies tracking the long-term outcomes of Ukrainian refugees in host countries. Understanding how integration policies evolve over time and assessing their effectiveness in addressing the unique needs of this population is crucial. Such studies would shed light on the trajectories of refugees' social and economic integration, informing the development of more responsive and sustainable policies. Secondly, there is a need for deeper exploration of the psychological and socio-economic impacts of prolonged displacement on Ukrainian refugees. Extended stays in host countries can significantly affect individuals' identities, cultural retention, and decisions regarding returning home or permanently settling abroad. A thorough understanding of these factors is essential for policymakers and support organizations aiming to facilitate successful integration or eventual repatriation. Furthermore, the role of host country policies in shaping the integration experiences and well-being of Ukrainian refugees warrants more extensive examination. Comparative studies across different countries could provide valuable insights into best practices and areas needing improvement, thereby enhancing policy effectiveness and refugee outcomes. Additionally, there is a gap in understanding the long-term educational outcomes for Ukrainian refugee children, particularly those who have had to adapt to new school systems and languages. Research focused on their educational trajectories could inform support strategies to ensure these children achieve their full potential, mitigating risks of educational disruption and social marginalization. Moreover, while existing literature touches on the economic contributions of Ukrainian refugees, more detailed analyses are needed regarding the specific challenges they face in various sectors of the labour market. This includes examining barriers to entry, recognition of qualifications, and the long-term economic impact on both the refugees and host countries. Such research would be instrumental in developing policies that facilitate labour market integration and maximize economic benefits. Lastly, given that a significant portion of the Ukrainian population is considering emigration if the conflict continues, it is imperative to focus research efforts on predicting and preparing for potential future migration trends. Understanding the factors influencing individuals' decisions to leave or stay, as well as identifying potential destinations for future waves of migrants, will be crucial for effective planning and response. Addressing these gaps is essential for developing a comprehensive understanding of the Ukrainian migration crisis and will ensure that the responses from host countries, NGOs, and international organizations are both effective and sustainable in the long term.

Recommendations. Addressing the Challenges of Ukrainian Migration Post-Conflict

The nature of external migration from Ukraine has undergone transformation between the pre-war and wartime periods, marked by significant shifts in the underlying reasons, circumstances, and socio-

demographic profiles of those migrating. Consequently, Ukraine's migration policy must be dramatically redefined to align with these new realities. In the past, the primary objective was to create conditions that encouraged male migrant workers to return to Ukraine, where their families remained. Now, however, the 'family anchor' has shifted abroad, as many wives and children have relocated to other countries.

The complexities of migration policy have therefore increased substantially. There is an urgent need to develop and implement new strategies that address the current realities and risks, with an emphasis on incentivizing the return of migrants. Housing and employment emerge as the primary factors that could encourage migrants to return to Ukraine. Particular focus should be given to individuals from the southern and eastern regions who lived in occupied territories and whose homes have been destroyed ([Mishchuk & Oliynyk 2022](#)). To address the housing crisis, the government could consider a combination of approaches, including the construction of new housing with public funds, the use of targeted grants from international partners, and the acquisition of existing properties on the secondary market. However, there is some scepticism regarding the effectiveness of compensating Ukrainians for damaged or destroyed property, especially given the challenges faced by pre-war labour migrants, many of whom worked illegally and lacked social protections, such as health insurance and access to medical services. These issues placed them at risk of deportation. In contrast, the military migrants of 2022–2023 have been met with more favourable conditions in recipient countries, particularly in the European Union and other Western nations, where their basic needs have been addressed, and integration processes have begun. Today, the majority of Ukrainian migrants are navigating the challenges of long-term integration into their host societies ([Dinkelman et al. 2024](#)).

The return of millions of migrants will require a coordinated effort by the Ukrainian state, addressing issues ranging from security to social services. Housing policy must be a priority, as many Ukrainians left the country because their homes were destroyed. While the state may not need to construct housing directly, it should introduce effective tools and programs to facilitate homeownership. For example, the government has initiated the eOselya program, which offers preferential loans for home purchases at a 3% annual interest rate for up to 20 years ([Economic Truth 2023b](#)). Given that many forced migrants left Ukraine with children, it is crucial to ensure that these children maintain a connection to their homeland. The development of distance learning programs or parallel individual study options following the Ukrainian curriculum will allow children to choose between continuing their education in a foreign country or returning to a Ukrainian university.

Employment opportunities are another critical factor in encouraging migrants to return. While a labour shortage post-war may naturally lead to wage increases, the government will need to support employment through measures such as reducing payroll taxes or offering other incentives to employers. Historical precedents from other countries recovering from conflict, such as Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Colombia, demonstrate the importance of comprehensive approaches to ensuring the employment of returning migrants. These approaches have included stimulating the economy, reducing payroll tax burdens, providing financial support for entrepreneurship, and investing in infrastructure to create jobs ([Saguin & Shivakoti 2023](#)). Ukraine would benefit from considering the successful strategies employed by these nations. Moreover, the government should actively support the revival of business activities by deregulating and simplifying the business environment, thereby enabling former refugees to quickly establish their businesses. This includes improving connectivity and access to credit.

Despite the best efforts of the Ukrainian government, it is important to acknowledge that not all Ukrainians who have relocated abroad will return. Some refugees have already established themselves in new countries and may be reluctant to start over again in Ukraine. For this reason, Ukraine must also consider how to attract migrants to contribute to the Ukrainian economy. This will require not only economic reforms but also fostering a culture of tolerance among Ukrainians, a lesson that can be learned from the European Union.

Conclusion

Labour migration, broadly defined as the movement of individuals seeking to improve their living standards through better employment opportunities without altering their permanent residence, takes on a complex and challenging dimension in the context of war. Forced migration, driven by conflict, is characterised by the negative motivations of those fleeing, the prevalence of illegality, difficulties in establishing legal status, and the unique emotional and psychological vulnerabilities of the migrants involved. These factors make individuals particularly susceptible to exploitation and crime. As armed conflicts persist and intensify, there is an urgent need to enhance protections for internally displaced persons (IDPs). Addressing their vulnerability involves tackling the root causes of their displacement while also navigating the humanitarian, legal, and adaptive challenges they face. For Ukraine and the international community, the restoration of the national economy is an immediate and pressing issue, one that hinges on replenishing the working population and facilitating the return of forced migrants. The war has led to a significant loss of human capital and has threatened the preservation of national identity, posing severe risks to both the economic and national security of Ukraine. The demographic crisis and the exodus of intellectual talent through mass emigration must be addressed with focused efforts to adapt returning migrants to new conditions and foster an environment conducive to their successful reintegration.

The analysis highlights that migration is becoming a vital tool for long-term growth within the European Union, offering substantial economic benefits, particularly for host countries. Ukrainian migrants, far from being a burden, are emerging as valuable assets for EU economies by enhancing production and competition in local labour markets. The successful integration of these migrants into the economic and social structures of host countries is crucial. Ukrainian migrants hold the potential to serve as significant contributors to the international labour market, benefiting their host countries and playing a key role in global economic dynamics.

The patterns of external migration from Ukraine before and during the war differ significantly in terms of motivations, conditions, and socio-demographic profiles. These new realities necessitate a fundamental rethinking of Ukraine's migration policy. It is essential to develop and implement strategies that facilitate the return of migrants and support their reintegration. Key priorities should include providing adequate housing, promoting employment opportunities, and ensuring access to education for children. The development of comprehensive programs and tools to support the return and reintegration of migrants will be crucial for Ukraine's future economic and social development. Their contributions could prove instrumental in the country's recovery and long-term growth.

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