

UKRAINIAN FORCED MIGRANTS' INTEGRATION IN EUROPEAN LABOUR MARKET: GERMAN VS POLISH CASE

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Abstract. The tsunami of forced migration caused by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 poses a significant challenge to the socio-economic systems of host European countries, in particular Germany and Poland, which are the two main destination countries for displaced Ukrainians. Despite relatively similar statistics on the number and demographic structure of Ukrainian forced immigrants, the two countries differ significantly in terms of the level of labour market integration of refugees, which is a key factor determining their social integration and economic outcomes. The purpose of this paper is to study the peculiarities and common features of the integration of Ukrainian forced migrants in the labour markets of Germany and Poland, taking into account the pre-war experience of these countries in attracting Ukrainian economic migrants. *Methodology.* The study is a comparative analysis of the pre-war and forced migration trajectories of the two countries based on data from the German and Polish statistical services and Eurostat in 2010–2022. *Results.* The article discusses the redistribution of the main demographic characteristics in the profile of Ukrainian migrants in the post-war period, which led to an increase in the share of women with higher education in the demographic structure of migrants. These demographic differences, coupled with the peculiarities of European labour markets, have affected the employment prospects of Ukrainian refugees in European countries of destination. The pre-war experience of temporary labour migration from Ukraine and social ties between refugees and members of the diaspora were recognised as factors that facilitated the integration of Ukrainian refugees. The analysis showed that in addition to the geographical and cultural proximity between Ukraine and Poland, the circular labour migration model that dominated relations between Ukraine and Poland contributed to the rapid integration of Ukrainian refugees into the labour market after the outbreak of full-scale war. The lack of German language skills is the most common reason for the lower participation of Ukrainians in the German labour market compared to the Polish one. In Germany, favourable labour market conditions combined with integration policies facilitate access to the labour market for Ukrainian refugees in the long term. *Practical implications.* By examining the previous circular seasonal migration of Ukrainians over the past decade and their labour market integration in specific destination countries after the outbreak of war, this paper provides a broader perspective for the study of the transition from forced to permanent migration. *Value/Originality.* Given the global growth of both seasonal labour migrants and forms of movement, the key findings of the study provide a better understanding of these changing categories of mobility and their implications.

Keywords: Ukraine, Poland, Germany, migration, labour market, refugees, circular migration.

JEL Classification: F22, J11, O15

1. Introduction

In February 2022, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine plunged the country into a migration shock, both external and internal. The wave of displacement was unprecedented in scale and timing. In addition to numerous internal displacements, more than 5.5 million Ukrainians registered for temporary protection or similar national protection schemes in the European Union (UNHCR 2024). As of March

2024, the two main countries of destination for displaced Ukrainians are Germany, with 1.1 million registered refugees, and Poland, home to over 0.95 million Ukrainian refugees (UNHCR 2024).

Since the beginning of the Russia's invasion of Ukraine, 65 per cent of refugees of working age in Poland have found jobs (OECD 2023). No other country in history has been able to employ such a large number of refugees, given that women with children

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make up the majority of this group. By comparison, in Germany, approximately one-fifth of refugees from Ukraine have found work (EWL Migration Platform 2023). Despite relatively similar statistics on the number and demographic structure of Ukrainian forced immigrants, the two countries differ significantly in terms of the level of integration of refugees in the labour market.

Górny (2017), Górny and Kaczmarczyk (2019) analysed the temporal patterns and specificities of labour market participation of Ukrainian migrants to Poland over the last two decades. In their study of the labour market trajectories of Ukrainian migrants to Poland in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014, Górny and van der Zwan (2024) highlighted that the war context contributed to the increase in the permanence of Ukrainian migration. Kubiciel-Lodzińska, Golebiowska, Pachocka and Dąbrowska (2023), analysing two groups of pre-war and internally displaced Ukrainian migrants after the full-scale war, focus on their differences in terms of gender, age, employment situation and recommend solutions to facilitate refugees' participation in the labour market. Brücker et al. (2023) describe the demographic, educational, linguistic, professional and social characteristics of the first wave of Ukrainian refugees in Germany.

Given the relevance and the lack of previous research on this topic, this article attempts to clarify the reasons for the significant differences between the speed and other aspects of integration of Ukrainian refugees in Germany and Poland, which are the most important destination countries in the EU after the Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The article aims to study the peculiarities and common features of integration of Ukrainian forced migrants in the labour markets of Germany and Poland, taking into account the pre-war experience of these countries in attracting Ukrainian migrants.

2. Demographic Characteristics of Forced Ukrainian Migrants

Compared to previous migration waves in the EU, the large-scale migration of Ukrainians to European countries that began in 2022 has a number of peculiarities. First of all, it is worth starting with the demographic characteristics of Ukrainian migrants. A comparative table showing the redistribution of key demographic characteristics in the profile of Ukrainian migrants before and after the war shows differentiations.

According to UNHCR data presented in Table 1, 86 per cent of Ukrainian forced migrants are women with children, and 13 per cent are elderly (60 years and older). Men aged 18-60 are currently prohibited from leaving the war-torn country due to restrictions

imposed by the Ukrainian government. This situation is in stark contrast to the migration inflows to Europe from Ukraine until 2022, which were characterised by a male dominance in the gender structure.

Table 1 shows that most migrants have completed tertiary education (around 70% with a bachelor's degree or higher). For refugees in Germany, this indicator reaches the level of 73%. On average, Ukrainian women have a higher level of education than men with a university degree. On the contrary, the "average" pre-war Ukrainian migrant in the EU was a young man with a low level of education.

According to UNHCR data (2024), the skills and work experience of refugees are diverse. They include education (16%), trade (12%) and work in various services where Ukrainians were employed or self-employed before leaving Ukraine. The current economic activity of the newcomers reaches the indicator of employment or self-employment abroad of 28%. This index is higher in Ukraine's neighbouring countries. Among employed or self-employed migrants, the share of personal work in the host country is 82%, while 15% work remotely for an employer in Ukraine.

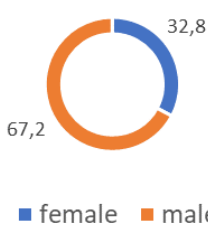
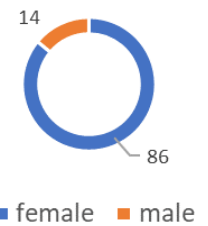
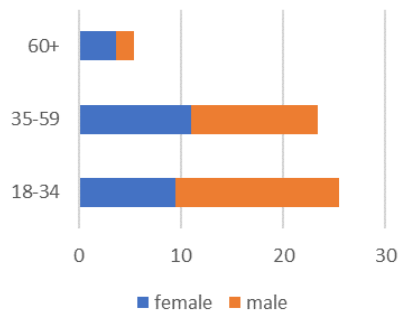
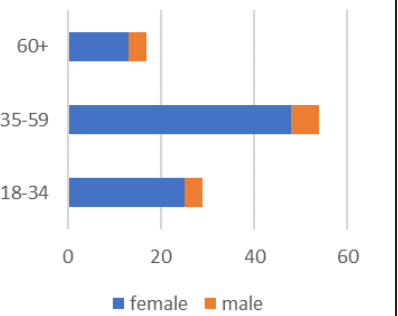
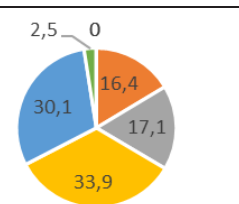
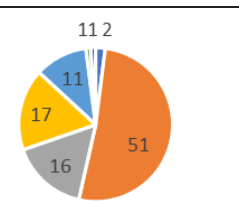
The peculiarities of the profile of Ukrainian forced migrants affect their prospects for integration in the labour markets of host countries.

Advantages of Ukrainian refugees' integration into the European labour market:

- Over 70% of Ukrainians have a university degree. Highly educated migrants have better prospects on the labour market in terms of finding a job that matches their qualifications or earning higher wages. They are considered to be more flexible in terms of learning a new profession or taking a job that does not match their qualifications. In addition, compared to less educated refugees, they are more likely to master the language of the host country;
- prior to the refugee crisis in 2022, Ukrainians became one of the leading groups of temporary labour migrants in a number of European countries. Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Germany, and Italy dominated the list of countries receiving Ukrainian temporary labour migrants. In particular, Poland has experienced a real boom in the number of Ukrainian temporary labour migrants in recent years. In 2017, their number reached more than 90% of the total of 1.12 million people. They mostly filled vacancies in agriculture, construction and industry (OECD, 2019). Overcoming the language barrier, knowledge of the basics of the labour market, numerous social contacts, and prospects for local education create better conditions for Ukrainians to find work abroad;
- integration policy measures. In response to the outbreak of Russian military aggression in Ukraine and the first massive influx of refugees to European

Table 1

Redistribution of characteristics in the profile of Ukrainian migrants before and after the war

Characteristics	Before the war	After the war
Gender	 <p>67,2 32,8</p> <p>■ female ■ male</p>	 <p>14 86</p> <p>■ female ■ male</p>
Age	 <p>60+ 35-59 18-34</p> <p>0 10 20 30</p> <p>■ female ■ male</p>	 <p>60+ 35-59 18-34</p> <p>0 20 40 60</p> <p>■ female ■ male</p>
Education level	 <p>2,5 0 30,1 16,4 17,1 33,9</p> <p>■ Post university ■ Master ■ Bachelor ■ Vocational ■ Secondary ■ Primary ■ No education</p>	 <p>11 11,2 17 51 16</p> <p>■ Post university ■ Master ■ Bachelor ■ Vocational ■ Secondary ■ Primary ■ No education</p>

Source: author's development based on data from UNHCR (2024), State Statistics Service of Ukraine

countries, the European Commission introduced the Temporary Protection Directive. The Directive grants temporary residence permits to Ukrainian refugees for a period of at least one year with the possibility of extension for two years. People who receive a residence permit have direct access to the labour market and social services of the host country. Many countries have also taken unprecedented measures at the state level to support Ukrainians affected by the military conflict, such as subsidies paid to employers for migrants, tax reduction programmes, and encouragement of entrepreneurship or self-employment among refugees;

– large Ukrainian diaspora in the European Union. In 2022, Ukrainians became the third largest group of third-country nationals in the EU (Eurostat), with 1.35 million people. Many refugees came abroad to visit their relatives and friends who helped them

find housing and work. Social ties are a major factor influencing the distribution of refugee migrants;

– structural labour shortages in some European countries caused by demographic trends. This gives Ukrainian refugees the opportunity to facilitate employment in countries with favourable labour market conditions and even a shortage of workers in certain sectors of the economy.

3. Problems of Ukrainian Refugees' Integration in European Labour Market

Ukrainian forced migrants face a wide range of barriers to the labour market that are common to most European host countries:

– Language problems. Currently, 65 per cent of Ukrainian refugees who are not employed in the labour market cite lack of knowledge of the local

language as a major obstacle to finding employment in host countries. This can be explained by the forced nature of their migration and insufficient preparation for life in another country. Not knowing the local language may prevent the use of previously acquired qualifications;

- difficulties with recognition of education and professional skills. This problem, which Ukrainian refugees rank as the second most important, can be divided into sub-levels, including the inability to provide documents confirming the level of education and qualifications, the need for their translation and the lengthy procedure for their recognition. In addition, the Ukrainian labour market is not fully integrated into the European labour market. Different work experience can be a disadvantage when entering the local labour market in the host country. In addition, markets often tend to devalue foreign qualifications, which reduces employment, leads to overqualification and lowers wages (Bonfanti and Xenogiani 2014);

- physical and mental health problems caused by trauma, disability or psychological distress;

- lack of knowledge about the labour market of the host country. Limited or absent social contacts, lack of understanding of recruitment channels and practices reduces the chances of Ukrainian migrants being employed in the short term compared to local workers or previously integrated migrants;

- high competition on the labour market. In many European countries, the inflow of migrants is extremely high, forcing Ukrainian refugees to compete with each other, other migrant groups and local workers for a place on the local labour market. The concentration of refugees in certain regions is another factor that increases labour market supply in the host country;

- lack of childcare services. Given the fact that women with children make up the majority of Ukrainian forced migrants, limited childcare services at the national and regional levels may be an obstacle to refugees' access to the labour market. At the same time, older relatives accompanying women with children can provide childcare, thus encouraging Ukrainians of working age to enter the labour market. They are most likely to look for part-time jobs with fewer night and weekend shifts.

Having summarised the commonalities in the profile of Ukrainian forced migrants and their integration prospects in all European countries, it is worth highlighting the differences in their integration into labour markets in the two largest recipient countries. These countries have different experiences of attracting Ukrainian migrants in the pre-war period.

4. Polish Case

Since the outbreak of the full-scale military conflict in Ukraine, Poland has become the main recipient country for Ukrainian refugees, with around 1 million refugees in need of temporary protection registered as of March 2024 (UNHCR 2024). The geographical and cultural proximity of the two countries, as well as the trend of labour migration of Ukrainians that has been ongoing over the past decade, played a decisive role in this issue.

Ukrainian labour migrants are an urgent need on the Polish labour market for several reasons. First, they help to fill the demographic gap caused by the decline in the working-age population as a result of massive Polish emigration to Western Europe after Poland's accession to the EU in 2004. Second, Ukrainians tend to perform low-skilled work under temporary contracts that do not provide for social security payments in Poland. The demographic decline in the number of Poles of working age, coupled with the growing number of pensioners, is a threatening trend for the Polish pension system. The circulation of labour migrants from Ukraine could help to increase social contributions to pension funds that do not claim future pensions.

The number of immigrants in Poland increased from around 100,000 in 2011 to over two million in 2019 (Statistics Poland). According to the European Bureau of Statistics (Eurostat), Poland has become a leader among European countries in issuing new residence permits. In 2021, around 1 million first-time residence permits were issued, of which 83% were granted to Ukrainians as the main beneficiaries (Eurostat). The data on diversified reasons confirm previous findings on the predominantly labour-based nature of Ukrainian immigration, with 82% of all residence permits issued for employment purposes (Eurostat).

Ukrainians contributed to the radical shift in the scale of migration to Poland, from predominantly a country of origin to a host country. This was due to an interplay of factors operating on two sides of the process (Górny and Kaczmarczyk, 2019; Górny, 2017). On the one hand, the outbreak of the Russian military conflict in 2014 and the socio-economic transformations in Ukraine created the large migration potential. On the other hand, the rapid development of the Polish economy led to a growing demand for relatively cheap labour. A simplified procedure for migrants to enter the labour market also contributed to a significant increase in labour migration to Poland.

Russia's aggression has changed the reasons for Ukrainian migration to Poland, but has not radically affected the desire of Ukrainians to find employment in the Polish market.

In addition to the desire of Ukrainian refugees to work, the large flow of refugees from Ukraine was facilitated by the mechanism of "temporary protection", which allowed newcomers to work legally immediately, rather than waiting in refugee camps without the right to work. Half of the refugees from Ukraine in Poland found accommodation with the help of an employer. Together with the ability to use Ukrainian at work, this factor distinguished Poland from other recipient countries and helped them quickly adapt to the workplace.

The high dynamics of integration of Ukrainians in the Polish labour market creates preconditions for the transition from forced to permanent migration.

5. Germany Case

Germany has become one of the most popular destination countries attracting migration flows, with one in four residents having a migration background. This group includes those who were not German citizens by birth, as well as those with at least one parent who is a foreigner, a naturalised German citizen, a German citizen by adoption or a late migrant.

This country has the most powerful economy in Europe and provides financial benefits and social support to newcomers, which is a powerful incentive for both forced and intended migrants. The contribution of migrants to the German labour market is a way to overcome negative demographic trends and is one of the drivers of the German economy's growth.

In 2021, Romania, Poland and Bulgaria, all members of the European Union, were among the top three countries with the highest number of immigrants in Germany. Overall, almost two-thirds

of German residents with a migration background come from European countries. Germany's popularity as a destination country for EU citizens is due to its economic strength and the simplified procedure for moving within the EU borders, which does not require visas or residence permits for the purpose of finding work, study or permanent residence. Germany remains an attractive destination for migrants from EU and non-EU countries, including asylum seekers.

During the period under study (Figure 1), there were two peaks caused by forced migration processes. In 2015, at the height of the European refugee crisis, almost 1 million refugees fled to Germany, mainly from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. The Federal Statistical Office (Destatis) reports that in 2021, the total number of people living in Germany after fleeing, being expelled or seeking international protection was 3.3 million. Due to Russia's military aggression in Ukraine, Germany experienced another wave of forced migration, which reached more than 1 million Ukrainian refugees in 2022.

According to official figures, more than 155,000 Ukrainians live permanently in Germany (Federal Statistical Office of Germany). This figure does not include those who have already received German citizenship and those living on short-term tourist visas. In 2021, the German authorities granted permanent residence status to 9235 citizens of Ukraine (Federal Statistical Office of Germany). This number has increased significantly compared to the average of previous years, but overall, Ukraine is not among the top 20 countries of origin in terms of the number of immigrants in Germany. The outbreak of a full-scale war in Ukraine dramatically changed the situation, with Ukrainians quickly becoming one of the largest migrant groups in

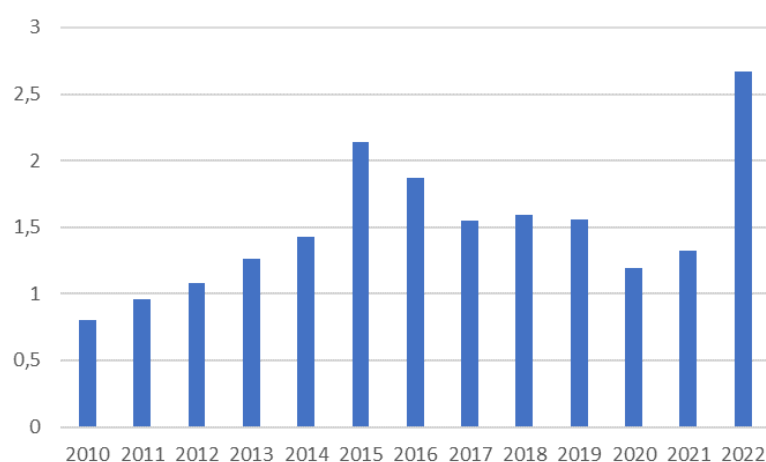


Figure 1. Number of immigrants in Germany, million people

Source: Federal Statistical Office of Germany

Germany. Although Germany does not border Ukraine, the country has more registered refugees and more applications for temporary protection than any other European country that shares a border with Ukraine.

In response to the mass displacement from Ukraine, the European Commission activated the Temporary Protection Directive, which provides temporary protection to people fleeing armed conflict, including temporary residence permits, emergency health care, housing, social services and education. A residence permit for war refugees in Germany is granted under § 24 of the Residence Act (§ 24 AufenthG) as permission to stay on humanitarian grounds without an asylum procedure. It provides a legal framework for the integration of refugees into the German labour market through access to language training and other integration measures.

According to the Federal Statistical Office of Germany, the unemployment rate of foreigners in Germany was 13.4 % in 2022, while the overall unemployment rate was 3 %. Recently arrived immigrants are 7 % more likely to be unemployed than natives with similar characteristics (Beyer, 2016). Facilitating migrants' access to the labour market of the host country is important for a mutually beneficial solution to the refugee crisis.

In Germany, language courses play a key role in the integration process of refugees (EWL 2023). Ukrainian refugees most frequently identified learning German, followed by finding a job, as the most important area of need (Brücker et al., 2023). At the same time, a long-term integration process initiated by German policymakers aims to address the needs of Ukrainian refugees and provide a basis for permanent migration.

6. Conclusions

The article identifies the reasons for the different speeds of integration of Ukrainian forced migrants into the labour market in Germany and Poland, taking into account the pre-war experience of these countries in attracting Ukrainian migrants.

Over the last decade, Poland has experienced a labour migration boom, driven by rapid economic growth and simplified employment procedures. Well-developed transport routes, migrant networks, cultural and linguistic proximity have also contributed to the inflow of migrants to Poland. Ukrainians have become the dominant group among labour migrants, mostly represented by circular labour migrants. The outbreak of a full-scale war in Ukraine caused a shift from circular to forced migration. The high dynamics of Ukrainians' integration into the Polish labour market creates preconditions for the transition from forced to permanent migration.

In Germany, the lack of German language skills is the most common reason for the lower labour market participation of Ukrainian forced migrants compared to Poland. At the same time, favourable labour market conditions combined with integration policy measures facilitate access to the labour market for Ukrainian refugees in the long term.

Long-term estimates of the labour market integration of forced migrants caused by Russia's military aggression in Ukraine remain largely uncertain. They may be influenced by the duration of the military conflict, additional inflows of refugees from Ukraine, the number of irregular migrants returning to their country of origin, the pace and direction of secondary mobility, government policy on refugee integration and distribution by territory, the economic situation in the host country, etc.

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