Vocational Opportunities and Integration for Refugee Community Empowerment

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1. Executive Summary

This interim report has been developed within the framework of the VOICE project (Vocational Opportunities and Integration for Refugee Community Empowerment). It draws on a desk-research review and stakeholder analysis concerning the situation of Ukrainian refugees in Poland, with particular attention to their labour market participation and the needs related to skills upgrading and competence development essential for social and labour market integration. The assessment enabled the identification of key challenges and opportunities linked to the integration of Ukrainian refugees in Poland. Special emphasis was placed on the issue of matching existing competences with the demands of the national labour market. The analysis also encompassed stakeholder mapping at national, regional, and local levels, focusing on employment initiatives, training needs, upskilling and reskilling requirements, as well as barriers to employment and social inclusion.

According to both UNHCR data and records from the PESEL registration system for Ukrainian refugees (status "UKR"), the number of refugees in Poland at the end of 2024 exceeded 960,000. Women constitute as much as 76% of this population, largely due to mobilisation restrictions for men in Ukraine. More than one-third of the refugee population are children—around 380,000 individuals under the age of 18.

The employment rate of refugees in Poland is the highest among OECD countries, reaching 65%, whereas in several other European countries employment rates remain substantially lower: United Kingdom (61%), Sweden (56%), Lithuania (53%), and the Czech Republic (51%). The lowest rates are observed in Germany (18%), Switzerland (19%), and Italy (19%). The comparatively high employment rate in Poland can be attributed to the significant number of Ukrainians who had been working in the country prior to Russia's invasion in 2022. This earlier migrant community facilitated refugee access to jobs, accommodation, and organisational support, thereby easing their adjustment. Most refugees are employed in manual labour, tourism and hospitality, manufacturing, logistics, IT, and construction. The highest-paid refugees (and pre-war migrants) tend to work in the IT and transport sectors.

The needs assessment clearly highlights several priority areas requiring intervention and support for Ukrainian refugees in relation to labour market integration: Polish language acquisition, vocational training aligned with labour market demand, recognition of qualifications, and digital competences. As in many other EU countries hosting Ukrainian refugees, Poland also records relatively high educational attainment within this population. A significant proportion possess tertiary education, yet often accept jobs below their formal qualifications. This skills mismatch is especially visible in sectors such as hospitality, construction, domestic services, and agriculture.

Language barriers constitute a critical obstacle to both social integration and labour market entry, as well as to interactions with public administration. Limited proficiency in Polish creates

significant difficulties not only in accessing employment, but also in participating in vocational training and upskilling pathways. The inability to fully understand training content reduces motivation for intensive learning and discourages individuals from pursuing higher-paid jobs commensurate with their qualifications, reinforcing employment in lower-paid, elementary occupations. Refugees are relatively more likely to work below their qualifications than pre-war economic migrants (46% vs. 32%). Polish language proficiency is therefore essential: the employment rate for refugees who speak Polish is 82%, compared to just 50% among those without language skills.
Refugees also face obstacles in the recognition of qualifications, which often forces them to work below their formal level of competence or in the informal economy. The absence of efficient and standardised procedures for the validation of foreign qualifications leads to unequal access to training and employment. Limited Polish language skills combined with the lack of recognition of professional credentials generate further cumulative challenges—emotional strain during the adaptation and integration process, low wages, unequal treatment, and disproportionate workloads in the labour market.

Although Ukrainian war refugees demonstrate digital skills and actively use social media, their engagement with e-government services remains limited. Research by SWPS University indicates that refugees encounter difficulties in navigating public administration websites, understanding official documents, and managing formal procedures, despite being adept Internet users. The most pronounced challenges are observed among women. Limited knowledge of local legal regulations, combined with language barriers and childcare responsibilities, significantly constrain their access to attractive employment opportunities, vocational training, and upskilling. Complex procedures for qualification recognition and diploma nostrification further exacerbate these problems.

It is evident that the VOICE project directly addresses these challenges. The preparation of a modular, multilingual training model that integrates digital competences, entrepreneurship, and employability offers substantial support for Ukrainian refugees. This is particularly relevant for refugee women, who, in addition to facing multiple structural barriers, also have limited time for educational engagement. A key strength of the proposed model lies in combining language learning with vocational development and upskilling, delivered through online modalities. Moreover, the training content will be tailored to cultural and linguistic specificities and will incorporate a gender-sensitive perspective.

Given the scale of refugee presence in Poland—particularly women from Ukraine—the VOICE project and its anticipated outputs are highly relevant and much needed. They can significantly facilitate the socio-economic integration of Ukrainian refugees and effectively address the identified challenges. The project constitutes an instrument capable of bridging gaps in language, digital, and entrepreneurial competences, aligning training modules with Poland's socio-economic realities. Considering the demographic profile of refugees in Poland, VOICE also offers strong potential for scalability, substantially enhancing employability, self-reliance, and social integration of Ukrainian refugees.

2. National Context Overview

The situation of migrants and refugees from Ukraine in Poland is complex and heterogeneous. Two distinct groups of Ukrainians currently reside in the country. The first group consists of labour migrants who arrived in Poland prior to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, that is, before 24 February 2022. Their numbers increased steadily between 2014 and 2021, reaching approximately 1.35 million individuals. The main drivers of this migration were economic factors, such as the pursuit of employment, better-paid jobs, and opportunities for education. This group is characterised by a relatively high level of Polish language proficiency (reported by 58% of respondents), a low unemployment rate, and a moderate feminisation ratio (40–54%). These migrants are well-acquainted with the Polish labour market, possess relevant professional experience, and demonstrate a high degree of social integration. They are familiar with local labour market dynamics and are largely embedded in the surrounding social environment. The second group comprises war refugees from Ukraine who arrived in Poland after 24 February 2022, fleeing the escalation of armed conflict. Poland is among the countries hosting the largest number of Ukrainian war refugees. Since the outbreak of the full-scale war, more than 3.8 million individuals have crossed the Polish–Ukrainian border. In the initial phase of displacement, approximately 1.5 million remained in Poland, benefitting from temporary protection. This figure represents nearly one-third of all persons fleeing Russian aggression to European countries. According to data from the Polish Office for Foreigners, nearly 1 million Ukrainians continued to reside in Poland as of the end of February 2023. Within the European Union, the countries receiving the largest numbers of Ukrainians under temporary protection are Germany (over 1.2 million), Poland (around 1.0 million), and the Czech Republic (approximately 360,000).

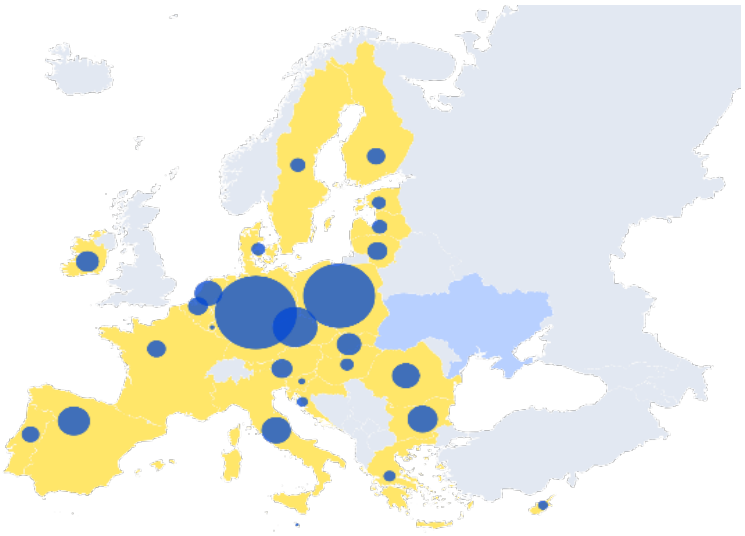

Figure 1. *Refugees in the European Union countries in 2024.*

Table 1. Comparison of Ukrainian Groups in Poland

Category	Labour migrants (2014–2021)	War refugees (after 24.02.2022)
Population size	Approx. 1.35 million	Approx. 1.0 million in Poland (3.8 million crossed the border)
Period of arrival	2014–2021 (before the invasion on 24.02.2022)	After 24.02.2022 (post-escalation of the war)
Reasons for migration	Economic (employment, better earnings, education)	Flight from armed conflict
Polish language proficiency	58% declare knowledge of Polish	Low proficiency, major barrier to integration
Gender structure	40–54% women	76% women, 1/3 are children
Social integration	High level of social and labour market integration	Lower integration, reliant on institutional support
Labour market situation	Low unemployment, employment matching qualifications	65% employment rate (often below qualifications)
Legal status	Labour migrant status	Refugee status with temporary protection

Source: own study based on available statistical data and research results

The unprecedented inflow of refugees into Poland brought the issue of socio-economic integration of Ukrainians to the forefront of public policy and government initiatives. The legal framework regulating the stay and employment of Ukrainian nationals and their family members, who arrived in Poland due to the war, is defined by the Act of 12 March 2022 on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine in Connection with the Armed Conflict on the Territory of that State.

The Act establishes specific provisions for the legalisation of stay for Ukrainian nationals who entered the territory of the Republic of Poland as a result of the war, as well as for Ukrainian nationals holding a Pole's Card who arrived with their immediate families due to the conflict. It also regulates key issues such as the employment of Ukrainians residing legally in Poland, the creation of the Assistance Fund for Citizens of Ukraine, matters relating to education, childcare, and youth support, as well as assistance delivered by voivodes, local governments, and other entities. Under this legislation, Ukrainian citizens became entitled to a range of social benefits.

Article 31, for instance, granted a one-off allowance of 300 PLN per person. Additionally, Ukrainians could benefit from up to 120 days of free accommodation provided by voivodes. Until the amendment of 1 July 2024, private households could also be used for this purpose. In such cases, hosts were entitled to a daily reimbursement of 40 PLN per accommodated refugee. Following the amendment, this provision was discontinued, and accommodation support is now limited to Collective Accommodation Facilities that meet statutory requirements, namely housing at least 10 individuals or being owned by local government or managed by public finance sector entities.

The Act covers several key areas of support:

- Family benefits (Family 500+ programme, now 800+): available to refugees caring for a child under the age of 18.
- Accommodation: free of charge for up to 120 days; initially also in private households, later restricted to designated facilities.
- Assistance Fund for Citizens of Ukraine.
- Education: access for children and youth, including enrolment in Polish schools, Polish language courses, and facilitated access to higher education.
- Aid from voivodes and local governments: covering accommodation, food, clothing, hygiene products, and other necessities.
- Social benefits: including a one-off payment of 300 PLN.
- Employment provisions: Ukrainians could be employed without a work permit, provided employers registered the employment with the labour office.

The regulations came into effect on 12 March 2022, allowing all Ukrainians arriving after 24 February to register in a dedicated system—PESEL-UKR. Registration granted temporary protection status and legalised their stay, with validity extended in line with the ongoing war. Compared to other non-EU migrants, the PESEL-UKR status ensured simplified access to the Polish labour market, public healthcare, social transfers, as well as targeted financial and in-kind assistance. Registration was accessible in all municipal offices across Poland, enabling the rapid enrolment of newly arrived refugees. By the end of June 2022, 1.2 million individuals had registered, a figure that rose to 1.4 million by October 2022 and 1.9 million by January 2025. Not all registrants remained in Poland—many continued onward to other EU countries or returned to Ukraine. Nevertheless, nearly half of all registrations occurred within the first eight weeks after the invasion. Since late 2022, the number of registered refugees has stabilised at around 1 million, reflecting the actual population of Ukrainian refugees residing in Poland.

Family benefits, especially the “Family 800+” programme, have provided crucial support. Estimates from the state-owned development bank – Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego (BGK) suggest that the total cost of this programme for Ukrainians amounted to approximately 2.8 billion PLN. Around 440,000 benefits were granted in 2022–2023, while by June 2024 more than 2 million Ukrainians had benefitted from state co-financing of accommodation and meals.

Educational data reveal that most Ukrainian parents enrolled their children in Polish schools soon after arrival. By March 2022, approximately 120,000 Ukrainian pupils had entered the Polish school system. This number increased after September 2024, when school attendance became compulsory for all Ukrainian children aged 7–17, with the exception of the final year, where Ukrainian online education was permitted. At the turn of 2024–2025, PESEL-UKR records listed around 270,000 children aged 7–17, but only 152,000 were enrolled in Polish schools—resulting in a relatively low enrolment rate of 56%. This raises serious concerns about the educational and social development of refugee children.

The governmental measures introduced under the Act on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine facilitated rapid access to the labour market, education, and childcare, and encouraged Polish language learning. Acquiring skills required by the Polish economy has allowed war migrants to better utilise their potential.

According to PESEL-UKR records, nearly 993,000 Ukrainian refugees were residing in Poland at the end of 2024. This population differs significantly from pre-war migrants: 76% are women (a reflection of mobilisation restrictions in Ukraine), and over one-third are children—approximately 380,000 individuals under the age of 18. Language barriers remain the most significant challenge, although the proportion of refugees reporting good command of Polish increased from 12% in 2022 to 28% in 2024. Many chose Poland due to its geographical proximity and cultural similarity, factors that also facilitated labour market entry.
The gender structure analysis of the Ukrainian migrant and refugee population in 2024 reveals a clear predominance of women (67%). This trend was evident both among pre-war labour migrants (54%) and among war refugees (76%). The pattern has persisted since 2022, when a significant influx of women refugees was observed, underscoring the dominant role of women in both labour and forced migration from Ukraine to Poland.

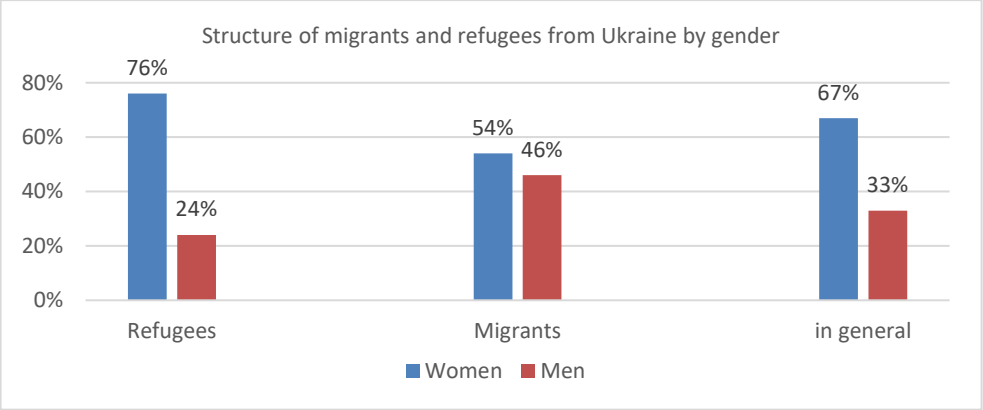

Figure 2. *Structure of migrants and refugees from Ukraine by gender*

Adult Ukrainian refugees are relatively well educated, which in principle enhances their potential in the labour market. According to research conducted by the National Bank of Poland (NBP), the majority of Ukrainian migrants in Poland hold tertiary education (approximately 50%), 35% have completed secondary education, and only 15% possess primary education. The distribution of educational attainment varies across age groups. Among those aged 18–26, the share of individuals with higher education is lower (26%) compared to the overall average for the refugee population. This may be explained by the fact that many in this age group had not yet reached the stage of completing higher education before turning 26. Overall, most respondents hold either secondary or higher education qualifications.

In terms of labour market participation, Ukrainian migrants are employed more frequently on average than Polish citizens. Survey data from 2024 (NBP) indicate that the average employment

rate among adult Ukrainians residing in Poland was 78%. However, a clear difference emerges between “pre-war” economic migrants and war refugees. Among the former, the employment rate exceeded 90%, whereas among refugees it stood at 68%. This suggests that refugees are significantly less likely to engage in employment than economic migrants who arrived prior to 2022.

Employment stability further differentiates these groups. Approximately 81% of earlier economic migrants held permanent jobs, compared to only about 65% of refugees. Around 17% of refugees reported working only on a temporary or casual basis. Employment remains the primary source of livelihood for Ukrainians in Poland. Income from Ukraine and Polish social transfers (most notably the Family 800+ programme) serve mainly as supplementary sources of support.

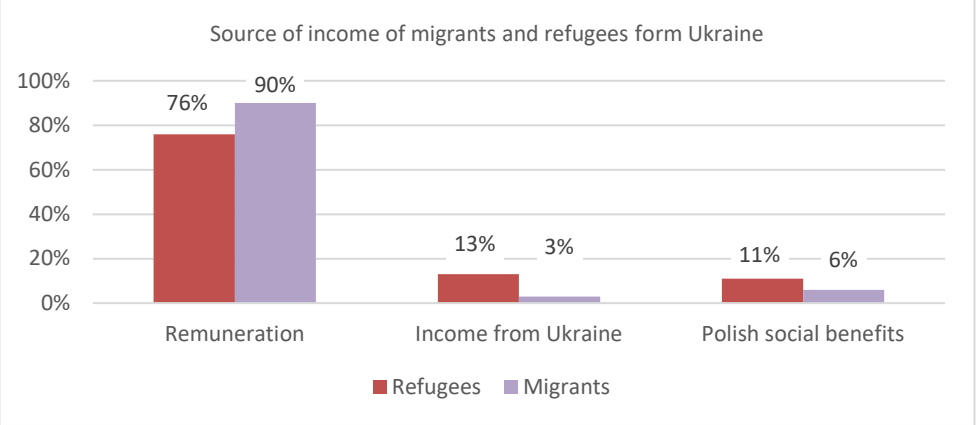

Figure3. *Source of income of migrants and refugees form Ukraine*

The circumstances of the war in Ukraine have meant that the overwhelming majority of those arriving in Poland since 2022 have been women and children. Family responsibilities, particularly childcare, strongly influence refugees’ labour market preferences. Survey data show that 42% of refugees with children in Poland reported a desire to work part-time or to find employment that would allow them to reconcile professional activity with domestic and care responsibilities. Nevertheless, the vast majority of employment was provided on a full-time basis (40 hours per week), as reflected also in median values. The limited flexibility of employment arrangements is further evidenced by the relatively small proportion of part-time workers: only 4% among pre-war migrants and 10–12% among refugees.

Differences also persist in the types of jobs held by refugees compared to pre-war migrants, as well as in the polarisation of employment among refugees. While refugees are, on average, relatively well educated, they arrived in Poland under forced circumstances, often with qualifications that did not match labour market demand. Consequently, a relatively small share of refugees (16%) are employed in positions that enable the use of higher education, compared to 13% among earlier migrants, while a majority (51%) are engaged in elementary occupations. By contrast, pre-war migrants tended to have lower average educational attainment but were

better oriented within the Polish labour market and often possessed skills more in demand (e.g., drivers, construction workers). As a result, 46% of pre-war migrants reported being employed in jobs that utilised their qualifications (compared to 31% of refugees), while only 37% were employed in elementary, low-skilled occupations.

3. Methodology

The methodology adopted for the preparation of this national report on the situation of Ukrainian refugees in Poland, within the framework of the VOICE project, was based on a structured and critical review of existing literature and secondary sources. A wide range of official and verified materials were considered, including recent policy reports, official databases, and academic and institutional studies focusing on the socio-economic integration of Ukrainian refugees.

Priority was given to publications issued by European and international organisations such as the European Commission, UNHCR, OECD, and the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), as well as national institutions including: Statistics Office Poland (GUS), the Office for Foreigners, the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, the Ministry of National Education, the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland, the Parliament of the Republic of Poland, the Border Guard, the Ministry of Interior and Administration, the National Bank of Poland, the Polish Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego (BGK), the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PARP), labour offices, and various public and local administration bodies. In addition, data and analyses from leading research institutions such as the Polish Economic Institute, the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS), SWPS University, the University of Economics, as well as non-governmental organisations and platforms (e.g. Mercy Corps, NGO.pl) and a variety of national think tanks were included.

Migration research, including studies on Ukrainian migrants, has been conducted in Poland for many years by governmental and academic institutions. However, for the purposes of this desk-research analysis, the focus was narrowed to war refugees from Ukraine, with particular emphasis placed on sources published after 2022 or in the most recent years. This approach ensured that the report is based on current data and contextual information, thereby enhancing the practical relevance of its findings. The logic of source use followed standard procedures in the preparation of such documents: starting from general statistics and official data, and moving towards more detailed analyses of specific issues based on national research studies that meet methodological standards and allow for valid generalisations. Sectoral publications and thematic reports were taken into account when they were grounded in representative studies or drew upon official datasets.

Stakeholders were identified through mapping of institutions and non-governmental organisations actively engaged in refugee support, vocational training, and socio-professional integration into the labour market. Engagement with these stakeholders occurred through the analysis of public records, published interviews, stakeholder platforms, and secondary

analyses of prior consultations and initiatives aimed at gathering relevant information and data. As a result, the report includes references to existing initiatives and the perspectives of practitioners working directly with the target group. As this research was designed as a desk-research exercise, the identification of stakeholders and good practices was based on mapping actors and their achievements in successfully implementing refugee-focused policies and EU- or nationally-funded programmes and projects.

The report concentrates on key thematic areas defined by the VOICE project: employment, digital entrepreneurship, and upskilling. Within these domains, special attention was given to materials providing empirical data, qualitative insights into refugee experiences, and evaluations of integration initiatives. Keywords guiding the desk research included: *"Ukrainian refugees Poland employment"*, *"Ukrainian refugee integration Poland"*, *"digital upskilling migrants Poland"*, *"ESF+ refugee projects Poland"*, and *"vocational training for Ukrainian displaced persons"*. To ensure methodological consistency, data relevance, and contextual validity, the scope was limited to publications issued after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in 2022 or within the last five years. This approach ensured that the analysis remained aligned with current developments within the Ukrainian refugee population in Poland, particularly in relation to their labour market situation and integration processes.

4. Key Findings

In 2024, the employment rate among the overall population of Ukrainian migrants in Poland increased from 76% to 78%, a change driven primarily by the slightly higher employment rate of those who had arrived in Poland as refugees since 2022. It is worth noting, however, that among pre-war migrants the trend was similar to that observed among Polish citizens – a slight decline in the employment rate compared to 2023.

A key barrier to integration remains the limited proficiency in the Polish language. Nevertheless, between 2022 and 2024 the share of individuals declaring good command of Polish rose from 12% to 28%. According to available data, the employment rate in this group amounts to around 65%, while the overall labour force participation rate fluctuates between 70% and 80%. For comparison, in the general Polish population, the labour force participation rate stands at 58.6%, and the employment rate at 56.9%. Particularly high indicators are recorded among labour migrants who had arrived before 2022 – it is estimated that as many as 96–99% are economically active, and 91–93% are employed.

Unemployment, however, is an indicator where war refugees perform significantly worse, both compared to labour migrants and Polish citizens. In their case, the unemployment rate ranges between 22% and 26%, which contrasts sharply with the level observed among pre-war migrants (around 5%) and the Polish population (2.9% - BAEL GUS). Such a substantial disparity between high labour market activity (up to 80%) and actual employment illustrates the existence of significant structural barriers in the Polish labour market.

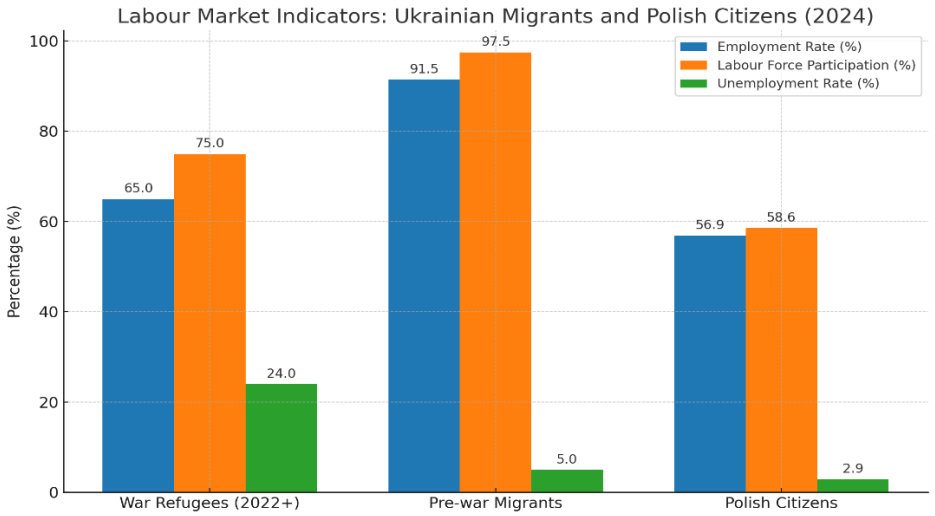

Figure 4. *Labour market employment rate of migrants, refuges and Polish citizens.*

Since 2022, the majority of Ukrainians in Poland have been employed in the hotel and catering industry (29%), the service sector (18%), as well as in the field of care for the elderly and the sick.

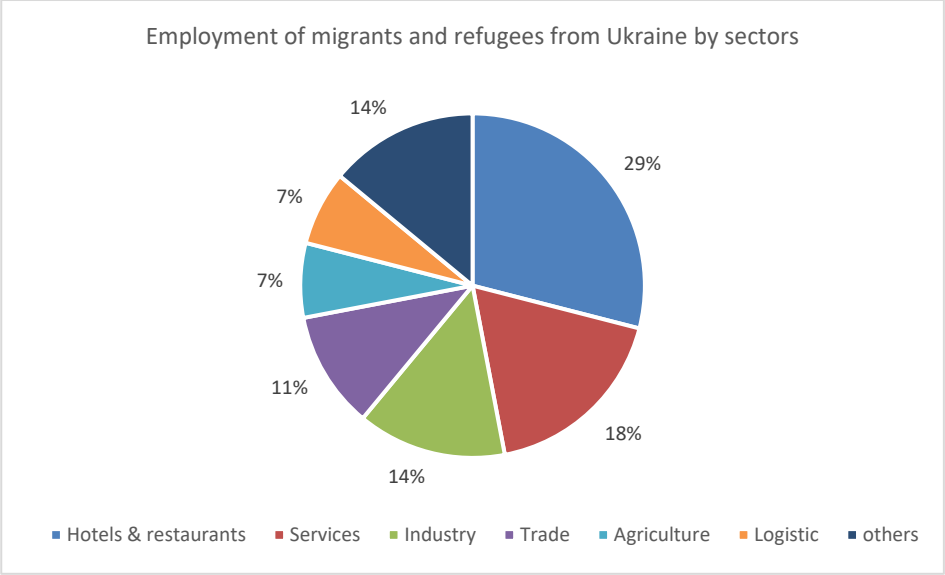

Figure 5. *Employment of migrants and refugees from Ukraine by sectors*

One of the most active employers of Ukrainian migrants and refugees in Poland are large grocery retail chains, which not only offer jobs but also provide additional support such as Polish language courses, childcare, assistance in finding housing, and transportation to the workplace. The Polish labour market also offers employment opportunities in e-commerce, logistics, security services, and cleaning companies. Currently, over 1,500 vacancies are available for medical personnel. Healthcare companies provide Ukrainian professionals with

support in learning Polish and familiarising themselves with sector-specific work standards. Recommendations aimed at simplifying the procedures for the recognition of refugees' diplomas and professional qualifications are of critical importance. This is particularly relevant for doctors, teachers, and educators—groups whose qualifications can meet the needs of Ukrainian migrants for medical and educational services in their native language.

Labour market analyses indicate that between 25% and 30% of companies in Poland are ready to employ Ukrainians. Research by the Polish Economic Institute shows that willingness to employ Ukrainian refugees varies by sector. Specifically, 31% of firms in the industrial, construction, and services sectors declared openness to hiring Ukrainians, compared with only 16% of companies in the retail trade sector.

Similar results were obtained in a study conducted by Randstad/Pollster. According to their report, 25% of Polish companies expressed interest in hiring Ukrainian refugees. Nearly one in four companies is willing to create additional jobs for this purpose, while another 10% would make available existing vacancies. Large companies are the most likely to declare readiness to employ Ukrainian refugees, with almost half of such firms coming from the restaurant and hospitality industries, manufacturing, and construction.

Approximately 60% of surveyed companies stated they would offer Ukrainians low-skilled positions requiring manual labour, while others were open only to qualified workers. Around 10% of firms indicated readiness to hire Ukrainian engineers and specialists in other professional fields. Employers in IT, financial services, and insurance sectors also declared an interest in creating opportunities for Ukrainian workers.

It is important to underline that despite the expressed willingness to hire Ukrainian refugees, many companies face significant challenges in practice. The most frequently cited barriers include the language barrier, administrative obstacles, and a lack of prior experience in employing foreign workers. Stakeholders note that administrative barriers could be mitigated through improved cooperation between businesses and public administration, thus facilitating smoother labour market integration for Ukrainian refugees.

At the European level, in 2022 the European Commission approved a revised version of the Operational Programme "Knowledge, Education, Development" (PO WER), funded by the European Social Fund. The amendments responded directly to the consequences of the war in Ukraine. Key changes included extending support under Axis I ("Labour market open to all") and Axis III ("Higher education for the economy and development") to persons granted temporary protection.
These initiatives aimed to connect refugees' skills and professional aspirations—which often did not match the needs of Polish employers—with actual labour market demand. In the initial stages, a relatively high proportion of refugees took up employment below their qualifications. This was particularly the case among teachers, IT professionals, office workers, and managers, many of whom entered low-paid occupations less attractive to Poles.

Identified Gaps

The primary challenge faced by Ukrainian refugees in Poland is their limited proficiency in the Polish language. Language skills are one of the key determinants of effective integration, as confirmed by both quantitative and qualitative studies conducted in Poland. In this context, linguistic competence is fundamental—not only as a tool enabling access to employment or participation in vocational training but also as a condition for navigating everyday life, using public services and healthcare, and building social relations. According to the evaluation of the first edition of the of the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, which launched the programme "Together We Can Do More – First Edition of the Activation Programme for Foreigners for 2022–2023.", the most common problems faced by Ukrainian citizens on the Polish labour market (based on survey results) included: Language barrier; Recognition of professional qualifications; Employment below qualifications; Discrimination and exploitation at work; Mismatch between refugees' qualifications and the needs of the Polish labour market; Combining work with childcare, particularly in the case of single mothers. Accordingly, the areas where support for foreigners in Poland is most needed (based on survey results) are: learning Polish (including advanced and sector-specific language), professional activation (individualized approach, trainings, internships), soft-skills training, as well as motivation and psychological support.

For Ukrainian refugees residing in Poland, the language barrier is one of the most frequently identified obstacles to social and professional integration. According to research conducted by the National Bank of Poland in 2022, only 12% of respondents (refugees) declared good knowledge of Polish. By 2024, this share increased to 28%, showing some progress but still reflecting a significant deficit in linguistic competence within this population. By comparison, among economic migrants who arrived in Poland before the outbreak of the war, the declared knowledge of Polish was as high as 58%. This difference stems both from the different nature of migration and the fact that earlier migrants had more time to learn the language, with their migration typically being voluntary and better planned.

Language proficiency is directly linked to the employment activity of refugees. OECD data (2023) indicate that the employment rate among those declaring good knowledge of Polish is 82%, whereas it drops to 50% among those who do not speak the language. These results confirm the findings of the Polish Economic Institute, which highlight that the lack of language skills limits access to employment consistent with qualifications and pushes refugees into simple, low-paid jobs that require little communication, such as manual labour, production, or auxiliary services. As a result, many highly educated individuals accept employment far below their skill level.

The language barrier also has a qualitative dimension, shaping the overall experience of refugees in Poland. In the labour market, lack of language skills generates insecurity about communication, discouraging refugees from applying for positions requiring direct customer interaction or employment in administration and education. In education and vocational

training, difficulties in understanding course materials result in lower motivation to participate in training, limiting opportunities for reskilling and upskilling. Similar mechanisms apply to accessing public services, where dealing with offices, healthcare, or filling out basic forms presents significant challenges. Qualitative research by SWPS University (2023) confirms that linguistic limitations hinder access to social participation, with refugees less likely to join local initiatives, build relationships with Poles, and more often experiencing social isolation.

Gender disparities are evident in this context. Women, who make up 76% of the refugee population in Poland (PESEL-UKR, 2024), face additional barriers due to household and caregiving responsibilities. This significantly reduces their time available for language courses. Many publicly funded or NGO-run courses are not adapted to their needs—they are often held during working hours and rarely provide childcare support. As a consequence, women participate less in training and progress more slowly in learning Polish, which exacerbates their exclusion from the labour market and limits access to activation programmes. Thus, the language barrier not only constrains individuals but also deepens gender inequalities in the integration process.

To address these challenges, Poland has launched several initiatives to support Polish language learning. These include intensive courses run by public administration and local authorities, EU-funded programmes (e.g., the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund – AMIF), as well as NGO-led initiatives such as those organised by Caritas and the Ocalenie Foundation. Despite the variety of available programmes, evaluation studies conducted by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy (2023) demonstrate limited effectiveness. Courses are often too short, not tailored to the professional profiles of refugees (e.g., lack of sector-specific modules), and unevenly distributed regionally—more accessible in large cities, scarce in smaller towns. Moreover, very few programmes integrate childcare provision, which is a decisive factor for women's participation.

Another critical issue is the mismatch between professional qualifications and labour market demand. While not new, this challenge is particularly pronounced among war refugees who arrived after 2022. It results from the sudden nature of migration, lack of preparation for relocation, and structural differences between the Ukrainian and Polish economies and education systems.

Quantitative data show that Ukrainian refugees are relatively well educated. However, labour market realities reveal a significant gap between qualifications and actual employment. According to NBP data (2024), only 16% of refugees are employed in jobs matching their education, while as many as 51% work in simple, low-skilled occupations. Earlier economic migrants perform somewhat better, benefitting from longer adaptation periods and better knowledge of Polish labour market mechanisms.

This qualification mismatch is particularly severe in professions previously held by Ukrainians in their home country—such as teachers, doctors, lawyers, and engineers—where regulatory

barriers in Poland prevent direct entry. Consequently, individuals with formal degrees and professional experience are often forced into low-paid jobs in hospitality, logistics, agriculture, care services, or manual labour. OECD (2023) highlights that occupational structure differences between refugees and Polish nationals contribute to lower employment stability and higher turnover among Ukrainian workers.

Qualitative analyses by the Polish Economic Institute (2023) further emphasise that the mismatch does not only stem from structural differences but also from systemic shortcomings in recognising refugees' potential. Mechanisms for fast validation and recognition of diplomas are lacking, and available vocational training is poorly aligned with educational levels or work experience. Highly qualified individuals—particularly women—are disproportionately channelled into care work and other low-paid sectors, driven by formal barriers, cultural stereotypes, and family responsibilities.

This leads to the phenomenon of *deskilling*—the devaluation of competencies caused by working below one's qualification level. Deskilling has both individual and societal consequences. At the individual level, it reduces job satisfaction, motivation, and career development opportunities. At the societal level, it wastes human capital and deprives the economy of potential benefits, especially in sectors with acute shortages such as healthcare, IT, and education.

Gender disparities are again evident. NBP (2024) reports that 72% of refugee women are employed in low-skilled jobs, despite over half holding higher education degrees. Women are overrepresented in domestic care, cleaning, hospitality, and retail—sectors characterised by low pay, insecurity, and limited career progression. Combined with language and caregiving barriers, this reinforces labour market inequalities.

The problem of skill mismatch also has a regional dimension. Studies by Statistics Poland (GUS) and the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy (2023) indicate that refugees utilise their qualifications more effectively in large metropolitan areas (Warsaw, Kraków, Wrocław, Poznań), where demand for high-skilled jobs and support infrastructure is greater. In smaller towns and rural areas, refugees more often take low-skilled jobs, with limited access to activation programmes.

Digital competences constitute another critical factor. As Poland undergoes accelerated digital transformation, deficits in digital skills among refugees represent a serious barrier. NBP (2023) found that over 40% of refugees struggle with basic IT tools, while 25% cannot independently use e-learning platforms or online recruitment systems. These gaps limit access to better-paying jobs, online training, and career development. The situation is particularly acute for older women, who often come from low-digitalisation sectors in Ukraine (e.g., childcare, agriculture). Research by SWPS University and the Cracow University of Economics indicates that this group faces higher risks of digital exclusion, reinforced by caregiving obligations that restrict their ability to join training. Furthermore, lack of knowledge of Polish or English digital terminology

exacerbates the challenge. PAN (2023) qualitative research highlights language as a barrier to acquiring digital competences, even among those with basic technical skills.

The formal recognition of diplomas and qualifications is another pressing challenge. Although Poland has adopted legal measures facilitating refugees' employment, the absence of streamlined procedures for diploma recognition remains a major constraint. This issue is especially relevant for women in regulated professions such as teaching, nursing, and medicine. Many refugees, despite holding higher education degrees, cannot practice in their field due to lengthy and costly recognition processes. CASE (2023) data show that nearly half (49.5%) of refugees rate available information and opportunities regarding diploma recognition as weak or moderate, with only 18% describing them as very good. Almost half experienced difficulties in the recognition process, and many abandoned it due to complexity and delays.

The consequences for the labour market are significant: refugees are exposed to deskilling, lower wages, and higher turnover. GUS (2024) confirms that many still work in unskilled jobs despite holding university degrees. For those without formal documentation—often left behind in wartime conditions—Polish procedures focused on official certificates render real competences invisible in recruitment processes.

Finally, the recognition process itself involves language and cultural barriers. Requirements for certified translations into Polish impose additional financial burdens, often unaffordable in precarious economic circumstances. The lack of institutional support and information in Ukrainian leads to confusion and discouragement.

Language and Digital Literacy Barriers

One of the key barriers to the integration of Ukrainian refugees in Poland remains their limited proficiency in the Polish language. Research conducted by the Central Statistical Office (2023) and analyses of the Polish Economic Institute indicate that between 2022 and 2024 the share of refugees declaring a good command of Polish increased from approximately 12% to 28%. This progress is significant, yet it still means that more than two-thirds of refugees experience difficulties in fluent communication, which restricts their access to employment, training, and public services. Numerous studies and expert opinions confirm that language barriers are the most frequently cited obstacle by Polish employers when it comes to hiring refugees.

However, knowledge of the Polish language alone does not guarantee full labour market integration. Even individuals who have achieved a higher level of proficiency encounter challenges stemming from cultural differences in workplace communication, as well as from the limited experience of Polish institutions and companies in employing foreign workers. Language courses available for refugees—whether financed by the European Social Fund Plus (FERS) or other schemes—tend to focus on general Polish, too rarely offering sector-specific modules tailored to the needs of the labour market. Projects implemented in 2022–2023 by

FRSE ("School for All") and regional programmes within FERS have demonstrated that the most effective interventions combine language instruction with practical, sectoral vocabulary (e.g. in medicine, construction, or hospitality) and elements of cultural orientation.
The gender dimension is particularly important in this context. Women—who account for around 67% of the refugee population—face additional barriers linked to caregiving responsibilities, which often limit their ability to attend in-person courses. The OECD (2023) report on refugee integration in Poland highlights that the lack of flexible language-learning formats (e.g. online classes, weekend sessions) leads to educational exclusion for part of this group, which in turn directly translates into lower employment rates among refugee women.
Overlaying the language issue are constraints related to digital competences. While many refugees are well educated, there are clear disparities between younger and older groups, as well as between those from urban centres and those arriving from rural areas. Research carried out by institutions such as SWPS University and Cracow University of Economics has shown that a large proportion of Ukrainian refugees in Poland—particularly older individuals—report difficulties in using digital tools in Polish, with some struggling to operate even basic electronic services such as ePUAP, online registration systems for public offices, or online banking.
Limited digital literacy further complicates refugees' position on the labour market. The inability to navigate Polish-language recruitment portals, e-learning platforms, or electronic healthcare systems constrains their occupational mobility. From the perspective of public institutions and NGOs implementing activation projects (e.g. Caritas, Fundacja Ocalenie, Association for Legal Intervention), there is a clear emphasis on the need to integrate basic digital skills into both language and vocational training programmes.

It is also important to note that digital barriers have particular significance for refugee women. Women with caregiving duties report difficulties with using e-services and digital platforms more frequently than men, due to a lack of time for training, limited access to computer equipment, and language-related obstacles. This creates a risk of dual exclusion—both linguistic and digital—that undermines their prospects for integration into the labour market.
In conclusion, the analysis of language and digital barriers demonstrates that the integration of Ukrainian refugees in Poland requires an integrated approach. Standalone language courses or computer trainings are insufficient. It is necessary to design coherent support pathways that combine language learning, digital competences, and vocational qualifications. Only such comprehensive interventions can adequately address the real needs of refugees while at the same time responding to the expectations of the Polish labour market.

Benchmarking with Labor Market Needs

The Polish labour market demonstrates a relatively high demand for workforce across several key sectors, and Ukrainian refugees constitute an important potential resource to address these shortages. However, the integration of this group into the labour market requires a careful alignment of their existing skills with the needs of employers.

One of the most actively recruiting employers in Poland are retail grocery chains, which not only offer employment opportunities to migrants from Ukraine but also provide them with additional

support. This includes assistance in learning the Polish language, childcare provision, help in securing housing, and transportation to the workplace. These complementary measures reduce the barriers to employment and create a more inclusive environment for newcomers.

The Polish market also offers significant employment opportunities in e-commerce, logistics, security services, and cleaning services. In addition, there are currently more than 1,500 vacancies for medical personnel. Healthcare institutions actively support Ukrainian workers by providing language training and introducing them to professional standards and procedures specific to Poland. Recommendations to simplify the procedures for diploma recognition and validation of refugees' professional qualifications are particularly crucial in this context. They are especially relevant for doctors, teachers, and educators, who could not only fill critical shortages in the Polish labour market but also address the needs of Ukrainian migrants for education and healthcare in their native language.

Analyses reveal that between 25% and 30% of Polish firms are ready to employ Ukrainian refugees. A study conducted by the Polish Economic Institute indicated that the willingness to hire Ukrainian refugees strongly depends on the economic sector. Approximately 31% of companies in the industrial, construction, and service sectors expressed readiness to employ Ukrainians, whereas only 16% of companies in the trade sector considered such a possibility.

Similar findings emerged from research carried out by Randstad/Pollster, which indicated that 25% of Polish companies expressed interest in hiring Ukrainian refugees. Nearly one-quarter of employers were prepared to create additional jobs for this purpose, and a further 10% intended to offer existing vacancies. Large companies were particularly likely to declare readiness to employ refugees, with nearly half of these firms representing the hospitality and catering industry, manufacturing, and construction.

At the same time, approximately 60% of surveyed companies declared that they would be willing to employ Ukrainians in physical jobs not requiring formal qualifications. A smaller proportion of companies were prepared to hire qualified specialists, including 10% of firms considering employing Ukrainian engineers and professionals from other fields. Companies from the IT, financial, and insurance sectors also expressed openness to employing Ukrainians, although to a lesser extent.

Despite the relatively high willingness to hire, many companies highlight barriers that hinder the process of employing Ukrainian refugees. The most significant challenge is the language barrier, followed by administrative difficulties and a lack of experience in working with foreign employees. Importantly, however, administrative barriers could be reduced or removed through stronger cooperation between the business sector and public administration.

From a benchmarking perspective, there is a visible mismatch between what the Polish labour market currently offers and the actual resources Ukrainian refugees bring with them. On the one hand, employers need staff for low-skilled, labour-intensive jobs in retail, logistics, or cleaning

services – which refugees are able and willing to take up. On the other hand, the refugee population includes a substantial proportion of highly qualified professionals, such as teachers, doctors, and engineers, who are unable to work in their professions due to barriers related to diploma recognition and language skills. This mismatch leads to the phenomenon of deskilling, where individuals with high qualifications are forced into low-wage jobs.

Addressing these challenges requires a dual approach:

- Short-term measures should focus on facilitating access to employment through language courses, childcare provision, and simplified administrative procedures.
- Long-term strategies must concentrate on diploma recognition, professional requalification, and targeted upskilling in digital and sector-specific skills, enabling refugees to utilise their full potential within the Polish economy.

Only through such coordinated efforts can the available human capital be effectively matched with the real demands of the Polish labour market, ensuring both economic growth and successful social integration of Ukrainian refugees.

Benchmarking: Skills of Ukrainian Refugees vs. Needs of the Polish Labour Market

Area	Skills of Ukrainian Refugees	Needs of Polish Employers	Gaps / Mismatches	Possible Solutions
Polish language	Majority – low proficiency (2024: only 28% declare good command); some know basics	Employees communicative in Polish, especially in services, sales, administration, education, healthcare	Language barrier limits access to customer-facing and skilled professions	Intensive sector-specific language courses (medical, technical), online courses + childcare support for women
Education and qualifications	High formal education – 52% with higher education, many in regulated professions (teachers, doctors, lawyers, engineers)	Shortages in: healthcare, education, IT, engineering, long-term care, transport, construction	Lack of fast diploma recognition and skills validation → deskilling and underemployment	Simplified recognition, validation of non-formal skills, traineeships with certification
Work experience	Many with background in education, administration, caregiving, IT, trade, production	Polish economy needs practitioners in technical, industrial, care, transport, and IT sectors	Often undocumented experience, difficult to formally prove skills	Skills validation systems (portfolio, practical exams), workplace mentoring
Digital skills	Polarised: some (youth, IT workers) → high level; majority → deficits (40% struggle with basic tools; only 8% with advanced skills)	Increasing demand for digital skills across all sectors, esp. e-commerce, online services, administration, logistics	Lack of ability to use digital tools (online recruitment, e-learning platforms)	Combined language + digital courses, practical programmes (e-administration, e-health), digital tutoring for women 40+
Flexibility and mobility	Willingness to take up physical and temporary jobs, esp. at early stage; mobility limited (childcare, transport in smaller towns)	Employers expect flexible staff, ready for relocation and shift work	Women with children limited in mobility; men often working below qualifications	Support in on-line training and e-learning, flexible schedules
Foreign languages (English, others)	Some refugees speak English, esp. youth and IT / service sector workers	Employers expect multilingual staff in international services, BPO, IT	Language skills often insufficient for global sectors	Sector-specific English courses, support for BPO/SSC career entry

Source: own study based on statistical data and research results available

Overview of Available Training Offers

In Poland, there exists a relatively broad range of training and upskilling opportunities for refugees from Ukraine. These are both government and European Union initiatives, designed specifically to address the needs of Ukrainian citizens arriving after 2022. Immediately after the outbreak of Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine, savings from the European Social Fund for 2014–2020 were redirected to support refugees, and changes were introduced in regional operational programmes to launch actions in favour of Ukrainian refugees. An extended catalogue of beneficiaries of programmes financed by the European Social Fund was adopted, including persons who arrived from Ukraine as a result of the escalation of the armed conflict. Refugees from Ukraine were able to participate in projects and receive support in all areas covered by the POWER Operational Programme as well as regional operational programmes. A large number of projects in the fields of social inclusion, labour market, professional activation, and education were implemented.

On March 8, 2022, the CARE mechanism (Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe) was introduced, enabling the use of already ongoing EU-funded projects as well as unspent European Funds to support refugees from Ukraine—for example, using resources from REACT-EU in 2022 (originally intended to combat the effects of the pandemic). Within these initiatives, Ukrainians received financing for trainings, courses, and professional internships. Support in job search, intervention work schemes, and one-time grants for starting a business were carried out under the CARE mechanism by County Labour Offices.

A systemic solution was the project "Chance – New Opportunities for Adults" implemented by the Foundation for the Development of the Education System, which provides educational support for adults with low levels of basic skills. Programme was extended and reoriented towards refugees, incorporating a component for persons under temporary protection. The service model included diagnostic assessments, tailored educational pathways (language, digital, and social competences), and skills validation. Approximately 3,000 refugees were supported, with NGOs and educational institutions serving as the main implementers.

A broad range of educational support was and still is offered under the initiative of the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, which launched the programme "Together We Can Do More – First Edition of the Activation Programme for Foreigners for 2022–2023.". The main aim of the Programme was professional activation as well as social integration and activity of foreigners legally residing in Poland—with particular attention given to foreigners evacuated from war-affected areas of Ukraine. Among the most frequently indicated areas of assistance by service providers were: social integration, language training, psychological support, job-search assistance, and vocational training. The main target group consisted of women and children from Ukraine.

Although not as extensive as in other mainstream programmes, training offers were also directed to Ukrainians under the European Economic Area (EEA) Financial Mechanism and the

Norwegian Financial Mechanism (NMF). Within these funds, initiatives were undertaken to support and activate refugees from Ukraine. Projects implemented under the ACTIVECITIZENS-NATIONAL and EDUCATION calls included language and vocational trainings as well as entrepreneurship development.

In the framework of current UE Financial Perspective national component is implemented through the European Funds for Social Development 2021–2027 (FERS) as well as 16 regional operational programs (one in each voivodeship). The Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy (MFiPR) is responsible for the overall management of FERS. Implementation is carried out by intermediary institutions such as the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PARP), the Educational Research Institute (IBE), the Foundation for the Development of the Education System (FRSE), as well as voivodeship-level Marshal Offices. The program documentation explicitly highlights that ESF+ is designed to support the integration of third-country nationals, including Ukrainian refugees, through measures aimed at labour market activation, education, and skills development.

Within the framework of FERS and regional programs, funding is provided for a wide spectrum of interventions, including: Polish language courses (including sector-specific modules), career counselling and job placement services, vocational training, internships, skills validation, and activities promoting the social and labour market integration of women and individuals with childcare responsibilities. The FERS Priority Description directly anticipates support for Ukrainian citizens, including language training, the development of educational tools and methodologies, mobility and activation measures. Implementers include labour offices, local governments, universities, and non-governmental organizations selected through competitive calls.

A second key source of funding is the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) 2021–2027, managed at the national level by the Ministry of Interior and Administration (MSWiA). AMIF finances, among others, Migrant Integration Centres (CICs), counselling and information services, direct support for refugees, as well as projects implemented by local governments and NGOs. At the national level, access to training and activation measures is also provided by the public employment services (voivodeship and county labour offices), funded from the Labor Fund, including the National Training Fund (KFS) – a mechanism co-financing lifelong learning for employees and employers (including foreign nationals legally employed in Poland). The Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policy (MRiPS) publishes annual priorities and guidelines for the KFS, while county labour offices finance training for employees indicated by firms. Labor Offices also deliver vocational training, internships, training vouchers, and stipends for jobseekers, including Ukrainian citizens with legal residence and work status. This instrument has often been used to introduce Ukrainian workers to Polish workplace standards and requirements, especially in the services, logistics, manufacturing, and healthcare sectors.

The Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PARP) implements instruments targeted at entrepreneurship and SMEs. The PARP Academy provides free online courses, including

Ukrainian-language versions (e.g., *"How to Start Your Own Business?"*), thereby supporting pathways to micro-entrepreneurship and self-employment for refugees. PARP also operates an information hotline in Ukrainian, sectoral projects (e.g., *"Competences for Sectors"* under ESF+), and initiatives facilitating B2B contacts with Ukrainian companies. These actions are carried out directly by PARP as well as partners such as development service providers and training institutions.
The Integrated Qualifications System (ZSK), coordinated by the Educational Research Institute (IBE), is another relevant instrument, focusing on validation and certification of skills. The ZSK enables formal recognition of competences acquired outside the school system (including abroad) by linking validated qualifications to levels of the Polish Qualifications Framework (PRK) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). In practice, this shortens the pathway to employment or advancement on the Polish labor market, especially in professions that do not require full diploma nostrification. ESF+/FERS projects co-finance the development of ZSK and the dissemination of validation mechanisms.

In addition, education and VET system measures complement the adult-focused interventions. Broader policies of the Ministry of Education and Science (MEiN) include the program "School for All", offering intercultural assistants, teacher training, and well-being measures, as well as additional funding for schools with Ukrainian pupils. This creates a linguistic and competency base for young people transitioning into VET and the labour market. At the level of post-secondary schools and continuing education centres, local governments and educational institutions have launched language and vocational courses, partly co-financed by ESF+.

Evaluation and analysis of these initiatives demonstrate that support is most effective when combining multiple components: language learning, digital skills, vocational training, job placement services, and childcare support (particularly for women). Programs and educational projects are generally delivered through implementing institutions – typically VET operators and NGOs – under the supervision of public bodies responsible for the respective programs at national and regional levels. Despite noticeable efforts to adapt training offers to the needs of Ukrainian refugees in Poland, there is still a visible shortfall in the consistent inclusion of soft skills, digital entrepreneurship, and individualized job-matching. Available programs remain dispersed, uneven in quality, and not always sufficiently connected with the real requirements of the labour market or with the professional experience of refugees. As a result, although the support system provides a relatively broad range of courses and initiatives, not all of them genuinely support the pathway towards durable integration and access to stable, qualified employment.

Stakeholder Input

In Poland, as in other countries hosting Ukrainian refugees, the perspectives of stakeholders – public administration, non-governmental organizations, public employment services, training institutions, and academia – point to recurring challenges associated with the integration and employability of this group. The key issues remain the language barrier and the recognition and adaptation of professional qualifications to the needs of the Polish labour market.

Given one of the most serious barriers to rapid labour market entry in Poland – namely, the knowledge of the Polish language and the alignment of professional qualifications with available job opportunities – several important initiatives have been launched to mitigate these obstacles. One example is the activity of the Polish Centre for International Aid (PCPM), which implemented the *"Cash for Work"* program aimed at preparing and employing Ukrainian women as school assistants. Thanks to this program, 850 assistants were successfully employed.
With the aim of supporting the educational development and integration of Ukrainian migrants in Poland, the *"University of Warsaw for Ukraine"* initiative continues to be implemented. Within this framework, Ukrainians are offered free courses enabling them to:

- learn Polish and other foreign languages,
- acquire essential digital and computer skills,
- prepare to plan their career path in Poland,
- gain the necessary vocational skills.

In addition, the project organizers provide support for adaptation through entrepreneurship workshops, legal assistance seminars, webinars for tutors and trainers working with Ukrainian children, as well as psychological counseling and workshops for Ukrainian migrants.

Another important initiative supporting the integration of Ukrainians into the Polish labour market is led by the Polish-Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce, which, under the social campaign *"Partnership and Employment"*, launched the project *"Spread Your Wings. Help Yourself and Others – Free Support for Ukrainian Women Working in the Medical Sector."* The program offers professional assistance to Ukrainian citizens with medical education (nurses, midwives, paramedics) residing in Poland. Comprehensive support for women with medical qualifications includes intensive courses in Polish medical language, assistance in preparing CVs, legal support in obtaining professional licensing, visits to medical institutions to familiarize participants with the Polish healthcare system, and meetings with potential employers. Participants not only complete professional training but also gain insight into the specifics of the Polish healthcare system. Through these training programs and support from Polish employers, Ukrainian citizens can acquire new qualifications, enabling them to work in their profession and strengthen the labour market, particularly in key sectors of the Polish economy.

Since the Polish labour market continues to demonstrate interest in employing Ukrainian migrants, it is necessary to further develop and implement strategies for their integration into the national economy. In this context, efforts aimed at developing language skills and upgrading or adapting vocational qualifications – including digital skills – are essential and desirable.

Public employment services (regional and local labour offices) report that Ukrainian refugees show high motivation to enter the labour market; however, the main barriers remain insufficient language proficiency in professional contexts and incomplete alignment of qualifications. Another challenge is the recognition of Ukrainian diplomas and qualifications, particularly in regulated professions, which significantly restricts access to employment in healthcare, education, or engineering.

Non-governmental organizations such as Fundacja Ocalenie, Caritas Polska, and the Association for Legal Intervention emphasize the need to combine language courses with practical vocational training and social support. The most effective activation models include integrated pathways that combine:

- language learning,
- vocational courses,
- psychological support,
- legal counselling and assistance with residency legalization,
- access to childcare services (for mothers with children).

Research by Office of Statistics Poland (GUS) and analyses by the Polish Economic Institute indicate that although the percentage of refugees declaring good Polish language skills has been increasing, more than two-thirds of individuals still struggle with communication barriers, limiting their access to employment and training. Equally significant are deficits in digital skills. While younger refugees often demonstrate high levels of digital literacy, older individuals face serious difficulties using Polish e-administration platforms, online registration systems, or digital banking. Institutions such as the Educational Research Institute stress that integrating digital modules into language and vocational courses is an effective solution that increases the likelihood of sustainable labour market integration.

Another recurring issue identified by stakeholders is the fragmentation of support systems – the lack of coherence between public services (employment offices, schools, state institutions) and the initiatives of NGOs and the private sector. This division makes it difficult to deliver comprehensive activation pathways. Findings from reports and studies (UNHCR, OECD, FRSE) underline the necessity of implementing integrated models that combine language training, skills validation, and practical vocational courses tailored to real labour market demands.

The Polish labour market remains interested in employing Ukrainian migrants, particularly in sectors suffering from labour shortages (healthcare, education, logistics, and services). However, systematic improvements to integration strategies are necessary. These must include the development of language skills, adaptation of professional qualifications, and strengthening of digital competencies. Only an approach that combines these elements will ensure fuller integration of refugees while meeting both their needs and the expectations of the Polish economy.

5. Recommendations

As already demonstrated in the analysis, the vast majority of war migrants are women, many of whom care for children, lack knowledge of the host country's language, and in part also digital skills. Therefore, despite the declared access to the labour market in host countries, employment opportunities for this group remain relatively limited. The Polish labour market, however, is particularly attractive for Ukrainian refugees. This is confirmed by statistical data concerning the structure and conditions of employment of Ukrainian immigrants. The

geographical and cultural proximity of Ukraine and Poland, the presence of an established diaspora, and the legal framework of temporary protection all contribute to an increased participation of war migrants in the Polish workforce.

Facilitating access to the labour market and supporting professional activation of refugees—through active labour market policies and the removal of barriers to employment—will not only enhance their contribution to the Polish economy but also improve their living standards. To effectively address the integration challenges faced by Ukrainian war refugees in Poland and to bridge the gaps in employability, digital entrepreneurship, and soft skills development, a set of targeted, practical measures must be implemented.

Forced migrants—especially war refugees—face a range of labour market challenges that are more pronounced and persistent compared to other groups of migrants, particularly when compared with pre-war economic migrants. Refugees who were entrepreneurial in their country of origin are more likely to adapt successfully to the new environment, while others may require significant support in acquiring new skills, learning the language, or securing stable employment. Support measures, particularly those focused on acquiring vocational and language competences, will continue to play a crucial role in overcoming behavioural and structural barriers to labour market participation.
In summary, it is important that:

- Training programmes should be designed with full consideration of the social and cultural context of refugees and tested in cooperation with refugees, employers, and labour market institutions. Only in this way can they be aligned with the specific socio-economic profiles and professional backgrounds of Ukrainian refugees. The process should account for contextual learning objectives, adapted language levels, and modular training structures enabling flexible participation, especially for those combining employment with caregiving duties.
- One of the key elements should be the integration of Polish language learning with vocational training pathways. Such an approach not only raises overall language proficiency but also builds job-related vocabulary and practical workplace communication skills.
- Digital competences should be developed as a cross-cutting element of the entire training and upskilling cycle. This component should be embedded in education programmes, with practical applications forming a core part of the curriculum. Creating user-friendly, multilingual e-learning environments is particularly important.
- Special attention must be paid to gender barriers—women make up the majority of the refugee population, and their access to digital tools is often limited by caregiving responsibilities, lack of confidence, or previous limited educational experience. Therefore, training should be designed in a women-friendly format, including childcare options and flexible learning schedules.
- Incubation programmes should be expanded for refugees interested in starting their own businesses. These programmes should provide practical training, mentoring, and access to micro-financing.

- Soft skills must be embedded in every training module. Key areas include intercultural communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and emotional resilience. Developing these competences supports not only employability but also long-term social integration.
- Validation and recognition of qualifications must be improved. This should include broader use of the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR) and professional competence testing in both Ukrainian and Polish. Such measures would allow refugees to access employment consistent with their real experience and education.
- Coordination and partnerships are essential. Integration requires stronger cooperation between labour market institutions, NGOs, local governments, and educational institutions. Shared service databases, coherent referral pathways, and cross-sector dialogue platforms would help avoid duplication of efforts and ensure continuity of support.

Implementing these measures should result in:

- better utilisation of the full potential of refugees and more effective contributions to the local economy,
- smoother integration of refugees into Polish society and improvement of their living standards,
- an increase in the number of highly qualified specialists available for long-term employment.

Effective educational tools adapted to the needs of refugees can facilitate access to employment that matches their qualifications and professional experience, while also supporting faster and more sustainable social integration.

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