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UKRAINE WAR REFUGEES IN LABOUR MARKET. EVIDENCE FROM NORTH-EAST POLAND

| Abstract

- ▶ *Goal* – the aim of the article is to identify and assess the labour activity of war refugees from Ukraine.
- ▶ *Research methodology* – the assessment was based on interviews conducted with working Ukrainian citizens who arrived in four North-East regions of Poland, which are also part of the eastern border of the European Union. Interviews with refugees were conducted using an author's questionnaire written in Ukrainian.
- ▶ *Score/results* – on the basis of the collected empirical material, it can be concluded that the refugees are people of working age and well educated, which made it easier for them to find jobs, albeit inadequate for their learned professions. Most of them make a living from the salaries they receive. Thus, they can be considered entrepreneurial and resourceful
- ▶ *Originality/value* – many studies have focused on analysing the impact of forced migration on the labour market in host countries, indicating its both positive and negative effects. At the same time, there is a shortage of scientific studies resulting from empirical research relating to the employment situation of Ukrainian immigrants

arriving in the country after February 2022. The issue of the labour market participation of Ukraine war migrants in Poland is still a relatively new research area, which requires systematic research and in-depth analysis in order to design the most effective measures.

| **Keywords:** Ukraine war refugees, North-East Poland, labour market, job satisfaction.

1. Introduction

The armed conflict in Ukraine, which has been ongoing since 2014, is an issue that is not easy to interpret. On February 24, 2022 Russia further escalated the Russian-Ukrainian war and launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This large-scale offensive caused the largest refugee crisis since World War II, displacing some 7.9 million Ukrainians [Eurostat]. Most of them went to the neighbouring countries (e.g., Poland, Slovakia), as well as to the Baltic States, Germany and the Czech Republic. Of these countries, Poland was the most common destination due to its closeness and special Polish-Ukrainian relations. Geographically, Poland is Ukraine's gateway to Europe. Economically, Poland is also one of the most developed neighbouring countries [Wrona, 2019]. In addition, there are cultural and ethnic similarities between Ukraine and Poland. Therefore, Poland has naturally become a popular destination for labour migrants and now war refugees [Pham et al., 2023: 1317].

Many studies have focused on analysing the impact of forced migration on the labour market in host countries, which has both positive and negative effects [see: Braun, Mahmoud, 2014; Peters, 2017; Black et al., 2022; Brucker et al.]. At the same time, there is a shortage of scientific studies resulting from empirical research relating to the employment situation of Ukrainian immigrants arriving in the country after February 2022. The issue of the labour market participation of Ukraine war migrants in Poland is still a relatively new research area, which requires systematic research.

According to the Border Guard, since the beginning of the war, 15 244 million refugees have crossed the Polish border, of whom 13 527 million have returned to their country [Straż Graniczna]. The arrival in Poland of such a large group of refugees from Ukraine has become an extremely important challenge, but also an opportunity for the Polish labour market. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, since August 2022, more than 6.3 million Ukrainian

refugees have settled in various European countries [Flash Appeal..., 2022]. However, which direction refugees choose, depends on their ability to find work, family or friendship ties (50% and 47% respectively, according to a report by the European Asylum Agency [Szymańska, 2023]).

According to I. Chmielewska-Kalicińska et al. [2023], people who have flown into Poland since 24 February 2022 have mostly been forced to move to the territory of Poland. Undoubtedly, the current migration is forced by the ongoing war in the country and is diametrically opposed to the labour migration prior to the war, when free choice and lack of coercion constituted a different situation – significantly different from having to flee one’s homeland; which is undoubtedly a difficult situation both legally, socially, professionally, livelihood-wise and emotionally. Firstly, in May 2014, Poland introduced a uniform temporary residence/work permit for Ukrainians, causing a large outflow of Ukrainian workers to Poland. Secondly, in June 2017, the European Council and the European Parliament decided to abolish visa requirements for Ukrainians wishing to enter Poland [Wrona, 2019]. Thirdly, since January 2008, seasonal workers from Ukraine have been able to work in certain agricultural and hotel services in Poland without restrictions, and the process of obtaining a work permit has been simplified [Brunarska et al., 2016]. Thanks to these policy changes, some of 1.35 million Ukrainians were working in Poland before the Russian invasion in 2022 [Duszczuk, Kaczmarczyk, 2022: 164–165], and the number of Ukrainian migrants in Poland increased after that point. People from Ukraine who have obtained the status of a war refugee may benefit from a wide range of services provided by labour market institutions [Łojko et al., 2022].

War refugees from Ukraine assimilate well in the Polish labour market. Nevertheless, the mismatch between job offers and their professional qualifications remains a problem [Flash Appeal..., 2022; *Voice of Ukrainians...*, 2022]. Research conducted by J. Gromadzki and P. Lewandowski [2023] shows that the employment rate of refugees is relatively high, especially given the challenges of childcare and language barriers. However, most of the refugees work in inadequate professions. Similar results were obtained by D. MacDonald [2019].

The main aim of the research is to identify and assess the labour market activity of refugees from Ukraine arriving in North-East Poland. The choice of the research area is a deliberate procedure, since these regions are on the front line of receiving war migrants from Ukraine, and at the same time they constitute the north-east part of the EU border.

2. Research methodology

In the context of the main aim of the study, the following specific objectives were set:

1. diagnosis of Ukrainian labour market activity;
2. identification of determinants of immigrants' labour activity;
3. outlining recommendations addressed to labour market institutions, business entities and business environment institutions.

The research area was covered in the North-East Poland consisting of 4 regions: Warmińsko-Mazurskie (W-M), Podlaskie (PL), Lubelskie (L), Podkarpackie (PK) (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Geographical coverage of the study area



Notes: W-M – Warmińsko-Mazurskie, PL – Podlaskie, L – Lubelskie, PK – Podkarpackie
 Source: the authors' own work.

The authors of the research used literature studies and descriptive statistics. In the first part, an extensive review of literature (desk research) focusing on the labour market during the war time was conducted to identify determinants of migrant labour force participation in four selected regions of North-East Poland. The information cited in the literature was selected to be included in the questionnaire.

In the second part of the research, a questionnaire was developed to collect quantitative data. A survey was conducted among 200 war refugees from Ukraine. In order to better understand the needs of the target group of the war refugees, there is a necessity to develop an adequate and comprehensive questionnaire for them. The questionnaire comprised 28 questions (11 questions on the professional activity and job satisfaction, 9 questions to bring socio-economic situation of the refugees and 8 questions regarding the background information on the general characteristics of the war refugees). The content validity of questionnaire items was evaluated by 3 scientific experts. Subsequently, a pilot test was conducted to assess how well the research instrument works. To increase the variety of respondents, the questionnaire was translated into Ukrainian.

Data from the respondents were collected in parallel using a mixed-mode approach: mainly CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interview) and CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview) techniques and in isolated cases CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview). Respondents were recruited by field interviewers in the vicinity of workplaces employing Ukrainian citizens and their places of residence. Using the CAPI technique, the interviewer asked questions during a “face-to-face” meeting with the respondent, while the Computer Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) was conducted using an electronic survey. Information was posted on aid portals dedicated to refugees from Ukraine in the four regions accepted for the study. During interviews with the first recruited respondents, they were asked to provide telephone contacts to their colleagues in a similar situation (snow-ball method).

Fifty surveys were conducted in each analyzed region. This assumption was realized with slight deviations (Table 1). Respondents were categorized, among others, by gender, age and occupation, and business entities in which respondents work – by type of business, form of ownership, industry and size expressed in number of employees. The survey was conducted in June/July 2023.

Table 1. Number of filled questionnaires in regions

Region	Country	Number of filled questionnaires	Percentage
W-M		50	25.0
PL		46	23.0
L	Poland	47	23.5
PK		57	28.5
Total		200	100

Source: the authors' survey.

3. The results

3.1. Demographic characteristics

Ukraine war refugees are mainly women (75.5% of the total respondents). Among all the respondents, 98,5% are of working age. The vast majority of respondents have completed secondary and higher education (response rate of 21.0% and 52.5%, respectively), including one person who holds a doctorate, but did not disclose in which field of science. The largest number of people with higher education were surveyed in the PK region (61.4%) (table 2).

Engineers and economists are the most represented among the respondents (16 and 15 respectively). There are also 8 teachers (of humanities, mathematics and economics, Ukrainian language and literature). The occupations given in each of the 4 surveyed regions included: a teacher, an economist, a lawyer, an engineer and a cook. One person working as a medical representative nostrified his diploma and obtained a master's degree in biotechnology, and two people acquired the profession of a medical caregiver already in Poland. It should be emphasized that the presented analysis of the respondents' professions is not complete, as nearly half of the respondents did not specify their learned profession. Fifteen percent of the respondents said they left their country for the war period, and 152 could not specify their return to their homeland. Among other responses, 7 people said they wanted to stay in Poland forever.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Demographic characteristics		Total		Region							
				W-M		PL		L		PK	
		NoR*	%	NoR	%	NoR	%	NoR	%	NoR	%
Gender	female	151	75,5	33	66,0	37	80,4	37	78,7	44	77,2
	male	49	24,5	17	34,0	9	19,6	10	21,3	13	22,8
Age	18-44	129	64,5	28	56	31	67,4	34	72,3	36	63,2
	45-60/65	68	34,0	20	40	15	32,6	13	27,7	20	35,1
	60+/65+	3	1,5	2	4	0	0,0	0	0,0	1	1,8
Education	elementary	22	11,0	5	10,0	5	10,9	4	8,5	8	14,0
	technical	31	15,5	8	16,0	9	19,6	8	17,0	6	10,5
	secondary	42	21,0	16	32,0	6	13,0	12	25,5	8	14,0
	university degree	105	52,5	21	42,0	26	56,5	23	48,9	35	61,4
Profession	engineer	16	8,0	4	8,0	3	6,5	4	8,5	5	8,8
	economist	15	7,5	1	2,0	4	8,7	3	6,5	7	12,3
	teacher	8	4,0	2	4,0	1	2,1	2	4,2	3	5,3
	lawyer	6	3,0	1	2,0	1	2,1	2	4,2	2	3,5
	other	61	30,5	20	40,0	17	37,0	11	23,4	13	22,8
	no answer	94	47,0	22	44,0	20	43,6	25	53,2	27	47,3
Duration of stay	wartime	31	15,5	6	12,0	5	10,9	10	21,3	10	17,5
	in shortest	5	2,5	1	2,0	1	2,2	2	4,3	1	1,8
	don't know	152	76,0	40	80,0	36	78,3	33	70,2	43	75,4
	other	12	6,0	3	6,0	4	8,7	2	4,3	3	5,3

* number of respondents

Source: the authors' survey.

3.2. Ukrainian' labour market activity

Most of the surveyed people (67.0%) were working professionally before fleeing to Poland, where they began a new stage of professional work. They were employed mainly as salesmen, in housekeeping, as simple workers and as industrial workers (33, 25, 24 and 20 people, respectively). University degree graduates constituted the vast majority of the respondents. In addition, 14 people described their job position as medium technical staff, 13 people each worked as clerks, machinery operator and in “teaching professions” (mainly as aid assistants in the education of Ukrainian children). A detailed list of the performed jobs (professions) is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Labour activity of the respondents

Labour activity	Number of respondents	Percentage
PROFESSION		
specialist	12	6,0
agricultural work	4	2,0
salesman	33	16,5
medium technical staff	14	7,0
clerk	13	6,5
industrial worker	20	10,0
worker in construction	7	3,5
craftsman	1	0,5
machinery operator	13	6,5
driver	1	0,5
straightforward work	24	12,0
medical profession	2	1,0
teacher	13	6,5
housekeeping	25	12,5
others	18	9,0

Labour activity	Number of respondents	Percentage
LEGAL BASIS OF THE PERFORMED WORK		
work agreement	31	15,5
commission agreement	21	10,5
employment contract	105	52,5
work illegally	43	21,5
NATURE OF THE PERFORMED WORK		
permanent job	82	41,0
work through an Employment Agency	31	15,5
seasonal work	38	19,0
odd job	19	9,5
employment contract for a trial period	25	12,5
other	5	2,5
FORMS OF JOB SEARCH ACTIVITY*		
training	47	23,5
following up on press announcements	148	74,0
personal visits to companies	39	19,5
sending CV	75	37,5
asking friends	97	48,5
registration at the labour office	52	26,0

* the respondents could choose more than 1 answer

Source: the authors' survey.

More than half of the working refugees were employed on the basis of an employment contract (52.5%) (Table 3). This form of work was dominant in large enterprises and such contracts were concluded most often with people with vocational education (58.1%). The larger the enterprise, the higher the percentage was of those employed in the form of an employment contract (from 47.8%

in micro entities to 73.9% in large entities). There was a similar relationship between employment in this form and the level of education, i.e. the higher the level of completed education, the higher the percentage of employment (31.8% – primary education, 47.6% – secondary education, 57.7% – higher education). The largest number of refugees were employed in L region (63.8%), and the smallest in W-M region (42.0%).

One in five refugees performed work illegally. This form of employment dominated in micro entities (19.6%) and decreased with the size of the enterprise. In small enterprises, 16.3% of refugees work illegally, and in medium-sized enterprises – 7.7%. None of those employed in large enterprises worked outside the formal system of employee records. The largest numbers of refugees were employed in this form in the W-M region (30.0%). The respondents also performed work in the form of work agreement and commission agreement.

Less than a half (41.0%) of Ukraine war refugees were permanently employed (Table 3). There were similar correlations as in the legal basis of employment. The highest number of those in permanent job was for refugees with vocational education (48.4%), and that the number of the employed in this capacity increased with the level of education (from 22.7% with primary education to 42.3% with higher education). There was also a similar relationship between permanent job and the size of the enterprise – as the size of the enterprise increased, the percentage of permanent employees increased (from 37.0% in micro entities to 69.6% in large entities).

The main impediment to efficient work performance was language problems (52.5%). One in five respondents indicated the incompatibility of their work with their learned profession, and one in ten, the negative attitude of co-workers, limited trust of the immediate manager and cultural differences (11.0%; 10.5% and 10.5%, respectively). Individuals mentioned: “intimidation, where I work, collision between work schedules and raising young children, upcoming school vacations, low pay for hard work, limited trust in the manager, very hard physical work, and commuting very early in the morning due to such working hours”.

Almost 40% of the employed refugees (38,5%) were looking for new employment – mainly, these were workers with a university degree and jobs incompatible with their learned profession (Table 3). The largest number of seekers (57 people) followed advertisements in local media and on websites dedicated to refugees.

3.3. Determinants of refugees' labour activity

One of the determinants of refugees taking up and continuing to work in Poland is the level of job satisfaction. It can be concluded that 45.0% of the respondents are satisfied with their jobs. Men were more satisfied (59.2%) especially those employed in microenterprises (56.6%) operating in the W-M and PL regions (52.0% and 50.0%, respectively). The least satisfied with their work were identified among those employed in large enterprises (34.8%). Nearly one in four respondents stated that they were not satisfied (24.0%), and less than one in three could not determine the degree of their satisfaction (Table 4).

Table 4. Job satisfaction

Are you satisfied with your work?	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	30	15
Rather yes	60	30
Hard to say	62	31
Rather no	28	14
No	20	10
SOURCES OF JOB SATISFACTION*		
Low burden of additional duties	40	20
Interesting job	33	16.5
Career opportunities	19	9.5
Good relations with co-workers	68	34
Good relations with superiors	45	22.5
Satisfactory pay	64	32
Good working conditions	47	23.5

* the respondents could choose more than 1 answer (*)

Source: the authors' survey.

The respondents identified the sources of job satisfaction. The highest ratings were given to good relations with co-workers (34.0%) and to satisfactory

pay (32.0%). Those with a high school education are most satisfied with the amount of salary they receive (42.9%). What is more, men are more satisfied than working women (42.9% and 28.5%, respectively). Those with primary education rated low their relation with their superiors.

Job satisfaction has significantly increased by the opportunity for professional development. Only 9.1% of respondents described it as good. The lowest ratings were given to professional development opportunities. Only 9.5% of respondents confirmed participation in professional training. Those employed in entities operating in the L and PK regions were the most critical in this regard (6.4% and 3.5% participating in training, respectively), as well as those with primary and secondary education (9.1% and 3.2%, respectively). A low percentage of working refugees in professional development were reported by those employed, regardless of the size of their enterprises.

Table 5. Employee characteristics valued by Polish employers*

Characteristics	Number of respondents**	Percentage
Hardworking	131	65,5
Esperience	29	14,5
Quick adaptation	58	29,0
Loyalty	14	7,0
Modesty	35	17,5
Hard to say	41	20,5

* according to the Ukraine war refugees

** the respondents could choose more than 1 answer

Source: the authors' survey.

Employee characteristics valued by employers are also an important component of job satisfaction (Table 5). According to the majority of employees from Ukraine (65.5%), Polish employers value in them, above all, hardworking. At the same time, they believe that their loyalty to their employer is valued the lowest. Individuals also mentioned other qualities that are not actually attributes, but rather their perception as “cheap labour, workers who can be paid less, and those who will agree to work jobs rejected by Polish employees”.

4. Conclusions and implications

The war caused by Russia in Ukraine has led to the largest refugee crisis in Europe since the Second World War. It is unclear whether the war will escalate and how long it will last. Nevertheless, it is necessary to introduce a comprehensive strategy to manage the situation, mitigate threats and use the potential opportunities. A key area that has been identified in this research is the labour market. The research conducted on labour activity corresponds with other surveys conducted among the Ukraine war refugees [see: OECD 2022; OECD 2023; FRA 2022; Brucker et al., 2023; Mrugała et al., 2022; Ociepa-Kicińska et al., 2022].

The empirical material collected in the research made it possible to formulate the main conclusions. Refugees with higher education have the most favourable situation on the labour market in selected regions of Poland. It is expressed in the conclusion of an employment contract having the character of a permanent job. The survey noted directly proportional relationships between:

- the size of the enterprise and the legal form of employment (employment contract);
- the size of the enterprise and the nature of the work performed (permanent job);
- the level of education and the legal form of employment (employment contract);
- the level of education and the nature of the performed work (permanent job).

The diagnosed situation is assessed positively for both employees and employers. For the former, it gives a greater chance of permanent and longer employment, and for the latter, because an employment contract and permanent work can have a greater impact on motivation to work more effectively.

Among the refugees there are those working illegally. An inversely proportional relationship was noted between the size of the enterprise and the number of employees without an employment contract. The practice of hiring without a written employment contract is viewed negatively, as it is a form of depriving the employee of his salary.

The main impediments to the smooth performance of work by refugees are language problems and the incompatibility of the work performed with the learned profession. The diagnosed condition is not favourable for both employers and employees – for employers because the productivity of employees is lower,

and for employees because it can demotivate them to perform their assigned tasks more efficiently.

The Ukraine war refugees are enterprising people, as they take up work to earn the salary for it is their main source of livelihood. The survey shows that the refugees want to improve their language skills and professional skills, and they are looking for jobs more relevant to their learned profession.

Based on the results of the study a few recommendations for labour market in Poland were designed:

1. employment practices in the form of a permanent job are the most employee-friendly, as they provide relatively stable employment and thus increase motivation to work. Therefore, it is recommended that they should be used as widely as possible by employers;
2. in order to eliminate employment in the form of undeclared work, employers are encouraged to act in accordance with the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Another recommendation should be to increase employers' control over the legal forms of employing foreigners and to show employers and employees the adverse consequences of undeclared work;
3. launching Polish language courses by employers and at their expense, as well as in-service training courses, is crucial to the effectiveness of the work provided by the refugees to Polish employers;
4. Polish employers should increase the employment of the refugees adequate to their learned profession, which should result in increased employee productivity and job satisfaction.

It is necessary for the Polish regional authorities to develop certain policy measures and strategies in public and private sectors of labour market. Improved accessibility to work, clarity of legal regulations regarding the employment of war refugees, access to language courses, as well as training to improve professional skills, educating employers about hiring Ukrainian refugees, are just a few important issues that should be taken into account if Polish regions want to create effective labour market policies aimed at hiring Ukrainian workers. That may be a good practice for other European regions wishing to open up to Ukraine war refugees.

It is disclaimed that, despite efforts, this study does not exhaust all aspects of the issue. Therefore, the obtained results should be interpreted taking into account the specificity of the described assumptions and ranges. Considering that

the conducted study included a sample of 4 regions of the North-East Poland, this limits the generalizations that can be drawn from its results. At the same time, it should be emphasized that the presentation of a profile of an Ukraine war refugee – his/her opinions on the labour market activity in Poland, is an important contribution to future research, not only conducted in more regions, but also extended to other countries. The most interesting research questions in the context of the further development of the labour market are: Which European regions will attract the most refugees looking for work and why? How will the demand and supply of labour change in the context of the influx of refugees from Ukraine? Do social programs supporting refugees from Ukraine affect the employment they undertake? These are the questions we are going to try to answer in the near future.

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