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Socio-economic Factors Shaping the Integration of Ukrainian Refugees into the Polish Society

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Abstract The Russian-Ukrainian war has resulted in a considerable increase in the number of Ukrainian refugees in Poland. This has had a significant impact on the socio-economic situation of both the refugees and the host country. This study examines the socio-economic factors that shape the integration of Ukrainian refugees into the Polish society. The research identifies key challenges faced by Ukrainian refugees in Poland, as identified in a survey conducted between August 2022 and January 2023 with 73 respondents. These include language barriers, difficulties in accessing employment, and housing issues. The findings indicate that the majority of refugees are middle-aged women with higher education degrees, yet they encounter difficulties with regard to financial stability and adaptation in Poland. The study concludes that effective integration policies must address these socio-economic challenges in order to facilitate better adaptation and potential long-term settlement of Ukrainian refugees in Poland.

Keywords Ukraine, refugee, Russian-Ukrainian war, Poland, socioeconomic factor

Abstrakt Wojna rosyjsko-ukraińska spowodowała znaczny wzrost liczby ukraińskich uchodźców w Polsce. Miało to znaczący wpływ na sytuację społeczno-ekonomiczną zarówno uchodźców, jak i kraju przyjmującego. Niniejsze badanie analizuje czynniki społeczno-ekonomiczne, które kształtują integrację ukraińskich uchodźców z polskim społeczeństwem. Badanie identyfikuje kluczowe wyzwania stojące przed ukraińskimi uchodźcami w Polsce, zidentyfikowane w ankiecie przeprowadzonej między sierpniem 2022 r. a styczniem 2023 r. z udziałem 73 respondentów. Obejmują one bariery językowe, trudności w dostępie do zatrudnienia i kwestie mieszkaniowe. Wyniki wskazują, że większość uchodźców to kobiety w średnim wieku z wyższym wykształceniem, które jednak napotykają trudności w zakresie stabilności finansowej i adaptacji w Polsce. W badaniu stwierdzono, że skuteczna polityka integracyjna musi uwzględniać te wyzwania społeczno-ekonomiczne, aby ułatwić lepszą adaptację i potencjalne długoterminowe osiedlenie się ukraińskich uchodźców w Polsce.

Słowa kluczowe Ukraina, uchodźcy, wojna rosyjsko-ukraińska, Polska, czynnik społeczno-ekonomiczny

Introduction

International migration is one of the major demographic trends shaping the world, influencing the age structure and spatial distribution of the population, as well as its size, and bringing challenges and opportunities.¹ “Population growth, population ageing, urbanization and international migration are four major demographic trends shaping our world. Changes in the size, age structure and spatial distribution of populations bring both challenges and opportunities” - stated in the World Population Prospects 2024 report, which includes the estimates and projections of the global population published by the United Nations since 1951.² For the first time, the current revision of the World Population Prospects presents probabilistic projections of future trends in international migration.

The war in Ukraine, which began in the Crimea region and two eastern regions (Donetsk and Luhansk) in 2014, has impacted Ukrainian society, influencing people’s opinions of Russia both macro- and micro-level. Military operations and the Russian invasion have also influenced the process of forced migration from the eastern regions and Crimea to areas under government control. Prior to 24 February 2022, Ukraine had a significant number of internally displaced persons. The Ukrainian government estimated that there were around 4.9 million internally displaced people in 2022, 2.5 million of whom could not return due to damaged homes or settlements located in areas experiencing active military operations.³

The nature of the war in the first weeks of the full-scale invasion led to mass migration abroad. Poland became the main destination for Ukrainian refugees in the first few weeks, due to Russia’s destruction of civilian infrastructure and widespread violence against Ukrainian civilians in the occupied territories.⁴

The tendency of the war in the first weeks of the full-scale invasion led to mass migration abroad. Poland became the main hub for Ukrainian refugees who fled Ukraine for safety reasons due to Russia’s destruction of civilian infrastructure and massive violence against Ukrainian civilians in the occupied territories.⁵

As of October 25, 2022, the number of refugees from Ukraine registered for temporary protection in Europe was 4 million 426.75 thousand. Thus, since the end of September, the number has increased by almost 243 thousand. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported this.

¹ UN 2024.

² UN 2024.

³ CMU 2022; MSP 2023.

⁴ OHCHR 2022.

⁵ OHCHR 2022.

The largest number of Ukrainian citizens with the status of temporary protection in Poland is 1 million 469.03 thousand.⁶

This article aims to highlight the socio-economic factors influencing Ukrainian refugees who have been forced to flee their homes due to the Russian invasion, and who are facing obstacles to integration during the initial settling-in period in Poland.

The main aim of the research is to identify the possibilities or potential of rural and small-town communities to include refugees from Ukraine in local social and economic life. We define the existing situation – i.e. the influx of refugees into urban municipalities, – as a crisis situation. Local self-government communities (municipalities) are complex socio-economic and political structures in which the basic needs of the inhabitants in their territories are met.

Therefore, in order to realise the set objective, it is necessary to recognise: what are (and how are) the residents' attitudes towards the refugees changing under the influence of national narratives and local experiences; the attitude of the local municipality and related institutions towards refugees and the possibility to include them in the social and economic life of the municipality. At the same time, the aim of our study is to find out the needs and basic difficulties of migrants from Ukraine to small towns and villages.

Two research questions were formulated:

1. Firstly, what was the main barrier for the Ukrainian refugees in the first period of their forced migration to Poland due to the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine?
2. Secondly, what changes were found in the intentions of the Ukrainian refugees after a couple of years of forced migration to Poland following 24 February 2022?

Since we are investigating a phenomenon of a scale and scope previously unknown, we analysed primary and secondary data based on the concept of grounded theory. The use of this methodological approach allowed us to conduct analyses and modify (especially the interview questionnaire) the research procedure as the study progressed.

The article is divided into three sections. The first section is a literature review focusing on the social and economic challenges faced by the Ukrainian refugees. The second section presents our own findings, which either support or contradict previous research into factors affecting the refugee adaptation, using the Ukrainian refugees in Poland as an example. The third section discusses the current situation of the Ukrainian refugees in Poland and assesses their intentions to stay or return.

⁶ UN 2022.

Literature review

The size of national populations grows or declines as a result of the balance between three demographic components: fertility, mortality, and international migration. Additionally, the age structure of a population, which is shaped by past trends in these three variables, can be a significant factor in population change. This fourth component is referred to as population momentum. The population growth of recent decades is reflected in today's youthful age structure, which is projected to account for 79 per cent of the total increase in the global population by 2054 — equivalent to around 1.4 billion people.⁷

Poland belongs to the group of countries that have reached their population peak by 2024. As of 1 January 2023, Poland's population was 38.814 million. Between 2024 and 2054, the population of the country is projected to reach 31.918 million. Over the next few decades, the population is likely to decrease to 19,430 thousand by 2100.⁸ Understanding population trends is crucial for achieving a sustainable future.

In light of the demographic crisis in many European countries, it is logical to address the shortage of labour resources through policies that encourage successful socio-economic integration and assimilation. This will help to reduce pressure on the social system and avoid a depopulation crisis. Therefore, refugees are becoming increasingly important because they are seen as a means of achieving effective and progressive development.⁹

Immigrants face several dimensions of political, social, economic and cultural obstacles in terms of immigration policy.¹⁰ In this context, integration refers to the process by which refugees adapt to life in their destination country. This process involves overcoming the initial challenges such as finding accommodation, securing employment, and learning the local language.¹¹

In 2022, the Ukrainian refugees in Poland faced problems such as finding a job, poor language skills, a lack of livelihood and obstacles to accessing healthcare.¹² Comparing changes in barriers for the Ukrainian refugees in 2022 and 2023, it was found that a growing number of people needed social benefits, were seeking jobs and were having their diplomas from Ukraine and other documents of professional qualifications recognised in 2023. In 2022, the main

⁷ United Nations 2024.

⁸ United Nations 2024.

⁹ Hnatiuk 2025

¹⁰ Goodman 2010.

¹¹ Mijić et al.

¹² Kindler, Górny, Jaźwińska 2023.

noted problems included: learning Polish, accessing healthcare and seeking employment alongside accommodation.¹³

Ties with acquaintances and relatives were crucial for the forced migrants from Ukraine settling in particular regions.¹⁴ The Ukrainian diaspora network was a driving factor in migrants seeking jobs and accommodation.

Previous studies have shown that Ukrainian male economic migrants tend to work in service and physical roles, while Ukrainian female economic migrants tend to work in service and healthcare roles as unskilled or semi-skilled personnel.¹⁵

The age structure of forced migrants was generally of women of working age in 2022: 74% of the total number of female forced migrants were aged 25–54. In terms of gender, 72% of forced migrants were female.¹⁶ Ukrainian refugees have taken up work in sectors such as industrial processing, transport and storage, agriculture, and accommodation and catering.¹⁷ At the same time, differences were noted between the economic and forced migrants in terms of their job intentions: the economic migrants were employed in the agricultural, construction and domestic service sectors, while the forced migrants were employed in industrial processing and hospitality and catering.¹⁸

Another aspect of migration to specific regions is the spatial approach of the refugees. The intention of refugees to migrate to specific regions correlates with a higher density of their ethnic group than in regions without local communities of refugees from the same ethnic group.¹⁹

The social and cultural features of the refugees and displaced persons from Ukraine operate at both the macro and individual levels.²⁰ While the macro-level influence on the refugees' behaviour to migrate from Ukraine is characterised by the push factor of the Russian-Ukrainian war, individual behaviour is related to the decision to stay in Ukraine or to migrate due to safety or economic obstacles, or the decision to stay with a male family member in Ukraine due to exit restrictions.²¹

The majority of refugees arrived in a specific region due to “social bonds” with friends and acquaintances who had already lived there. A case study of Israel showed that accommodation is a significant factor in refugees' intention to stay long-term in a host country.²² A recent 2022 study demonstrated differences

¹³ Górny 2023.

¹⁴ Kindler, Szulecka 2022.

¹⁵ Kindler, Górny, Jaźwińska 2023.

¹⁶ Kindler, Górny, Jaźwińska 2023.

¹⁷ Kindler, Górny, Jaźwińska 2023.

¹⁸ Górny, van der Zwan 2024.

¹⁹ Hagstrom, Pereira 2023.

²⁰ Karimi, Byelikova 2023.

²¹ Karimi, Beylikova 2023.

²² Birger, Tarshish, Nouman 2024.

between economic migrants and Ukrainian refugees: the majority of refugees (40%) were waiting for positive changes in the war in Ukraine to enable them to return home, while at the same time, a significant proportion (41%) were prepared to stay in Poland long term, despite economic migrants declaring that they intended to stay there for several years.²³

The social and cultural conditions for refugees in a specific country depend on the local society's perception of migrants, including the socio-demographic profile of the locals and their attitude towards government migration policy.²⁴

The economic adaptation of refugees is tied to job seeking. In 2022, a large proportion of refugees were looking for work, and by the end of the year, more than half of Ukrainian refugees had found employment in sectors involving physical or simple tasks.²⁵

Changes in legal status and provisions for the forced migrants from Ukraine influenced the growing number of migrants in the first few months of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. These support instruments were related to social benefits, access to the labour market, education and healthcare, and a period of permanent residence in Poland for the forced migrants.²⁶

Evidently, the Ukrainian refugees in Poland face multifaceted integration challenges relating to employment access, language barriers, navigating the healthcare system, and credential recognition. Social networks and diaspora connections are crucial for successful settlement. The predominantly working-age female demographic arriving as forced migrants presents both opportunities and challenges for Poland's ageing population, particularly given the country's projected population decline from 38.8 million in 2023 to 31.9 million by 2054. Although initial integration obstacles remain significant, literature suggests that the Ukrainian refugees could be a valuable demographic and economic resource, helping to address Poland's labour shortages and population decline, provided effective integration policies support their long-term socio-economic adaptation.

Methodology of the study.

This study took a quantitative approach, analysing structured questionnaires completed by 73 Ukrainian refugees who had migrated to Poland following Russia's large-scale invasion on 24 February 2022. To ensure an adequate settlement experience, all participants had lived in Poland for at least three months at the

²³ Shelest-Szumilas, Woźniak 2024.

²⁴ Afonso, Negash, Wolff 2024.

²⁵ Duszczyk et al. 2023.

²⁶ Matuszczyk et al. 2023.

time of data collection. The respondents were recruited using a snowball sampling methodology that leveraged social networks and connections within the Ukrainian refugee communities across various Polish cities and voivodships.

Targeted outreach via Facebook groups created specifically for the Ukrainians residing in Poland was used to facilitate participant recruitment, as well as established local networks with the Ukrainian refugee populations in different regions. The surveys were conducted in Ukrainian to ensure the linguistic comfort and cultural sensitivity, thereby enhancing data quality and participant engagement. Data were collected using the Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) method, with the questionnaires being distributed electronically via survey links sent to consenting participants.

The research instrument consisted of a structured questionnaire containing seven closed questions and one open question, enabling respondents to identify social or economic challenges that were not covered by the standardized items.

The goal of the survey was to explore the adaptation process of the forced refugees in Poland after the full-scale Russian invasion on 24 February 2022. The questionnaire included 7 questions and 1 question with an open answer in which a respondent could indicate additional problems in terms of social or economic characteristics.²⁷

Starting with a basic demographic profiling approach, the survey gathered data on the respondents' gender, age groups ranging from under 18 to over 65, and their present Polish location (urban, rural). The education background was analysed across six levels to provide understanding of the refugee population's human capital profile.

The participants were asked to reflect back on their financial situation in Ukraine prior to the invasion using a scale ranging from inadequate funds for basic food needs to the ability to afford most products and services in order to set a starting point socio-economic background. This pre-migration financial assessment helps to compare with the post-arrival financial situation and adaptation results.

The survey inquired about the length of stay in Poland (ranging from less than one month to five months or more) and current living situation to explore both the temporal and spatial aspects of the refugee experience. Reflecting the several sources of support available to the refugees, housing circumstances were divided into four groups: state-funded hostels or rooms, self-funded short-term housing, independently rented flats, and free housing given by Polish people.

The questionnaire looked at integration obstacles via a multiple-choice question that highlighted six main areas of concern: language hurdles, housing

²⁷ Appendix 1.

problems, problems in job finding, access to healthcare issues, availability of educational institutions for youngsters, and overall adaptation difficulties in new environmental circumstances, which were central to the study objectives. The quantitative study of the most frequent challenges faced by the Ukrainian refugees is made possible by this methodical classification.

One question assessing whether Polish wages adequately pay for the fundamental necessities measured economic integration; the response choices spanned from total sufficiency to total insufficiency. This indicator sheds light on the financial stability of the refugee group.

An open-ended question provided the respondents the opportunity to offer additional recommendations or suggestions not captured in the structured items, ensuring comprehensive data collection on refugee experiences and policy implications.

Ethical considerations were prioritised throughout the data collection process, with participants receiving explicit assurance that no personal identifying information would be collected, stored, or presented in the study findings. This anonymisation protocol was communicated through preliminary instructions accompanying the survey, ensuring participant confidentiality and compliance with research ethics standards.

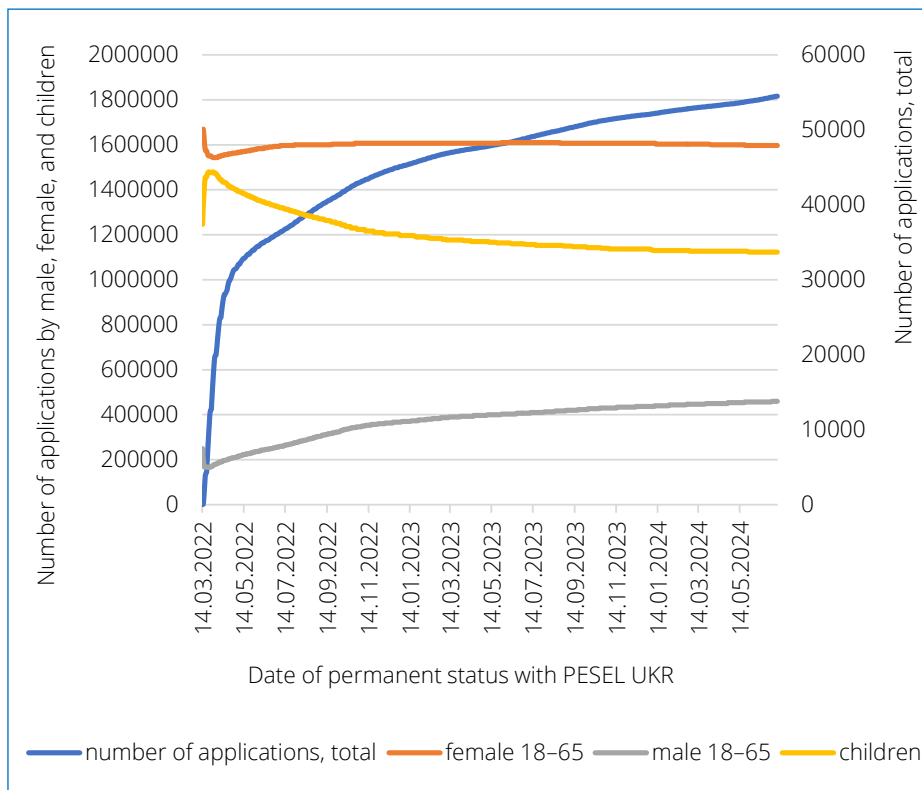
Findings and discussion

This section presents our empirical findings that both corroborate and extend previous research on push-pull factors affecting refugee integration, specifically examining the case of the Ukrainian refugees in Poland. Our research hypothesis, grounded in existing literature, posited that forced migrants from Ukraine encounter multidimensional integration barriers that significantly impact their settlement decisions and long-term adaptation prospects, such as language barriers, accommodation challenges, and employment difficulties as primary integration hurdles.

On 24 February 2022, a special law, the “Act on Assistance for Ukrainian Citizens”, outlined the legal status of Ukrainian refugees in Poland.²⁸ Figure 1 shows the number of applications with PESEL UKR accumulated from 2022 to the present day. The number of applications with PESEL UKR grew rapidly between March and June 2022, and then continued to increase. By 2024, Ukrainian refugees had received more than 1.8 million PESEL UKR. By gender, most of the refugees were working-age Ukrainian women (18–65 years old).

²⁸ Ustawa 2022.

Figure 1. The number of Ukrainians with PESEL UKR, 2022–2024



Source: Ministry of Digital Affairs of Poland, 2024; Otwarte Dane, 2024.

This gender-based structure was a factor in our study, which aimed to highlight the intentions of refugees in general. To understand the main obstacles, we studied the refugees with a sociodemographic profile broken down by gender, previous place of residence, age structure and education (Table 1). This summarises the sociodemographic characteristics of 73 respondents. Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the interviewees. The participants were 68 women and 5 men aged between 18 and 77. The majority of the respondents were female (93%) and had an urban background (90.4%). The age distribution indicates that most respondents are aged 35–44 (57.5%). Around half of the interviewees were married with children. In terms of education, a significant proportion hold a Master's degree (38.4%).

From the standpoint of the migration policy, the functioning of the economy and social policy towards migrants, it is important to assess the standard of living of the members of both groups in order to adjust the forces and resources to

manage this issue. The study allows us to determine both the subjective standard of living of the migrants from Ukraine (in terms of past experience, current situation and future forecasts), and to determine further actions that migrants should take – plans to stay in Poland or return to Ukraine, or move to another place.

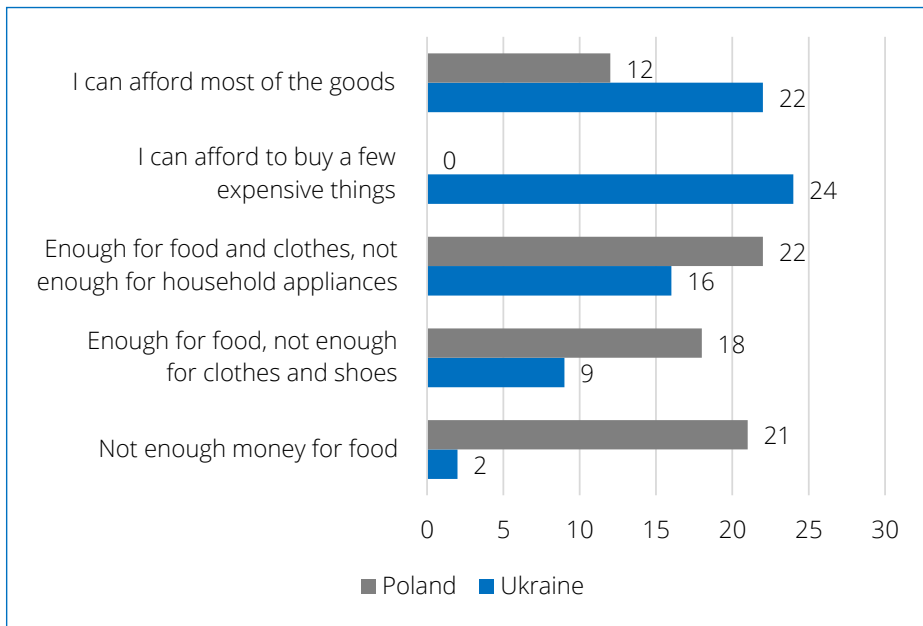
Table 1. The sociodemographic profile of the respondents (n = 73)

Characteristics	Number of respondents	% of respondents
<i>Gender:</i>		
Female	68	93
Male	5	7
<i>Previous place of residence:</i>		
Urban settlement	66	90.4
Village	7	9.6
<i>Age:</i>		
18–25	3	4.1
26–34	19	26.1
35–44	42	57.5
45–54	7	9.6
55–64 and above	2	2.7
<i>Education:</i>		
Upper-secondary or secondary schools	4	5.5
Tertiary education (colleges)	14	19.2
Bachelor level	8	10.9
Master level	29	38.4
PhD level	19	26

Source: the author's own elaboration

Figure 2 illustrates the financial situation of the Ukrainian refugees both before and after their forced migration to Poland (comparing the number of respondents before and after they came to Poland). Prior to migration, the majority could afford food and clothing, but struggled to purchase household appliances. In Poland, more refugees report having enough money for food, yet they still face financial challenges. This was a multiple-choice question, meaning respondents could choose more than one answer.

Figure 2. Self-assessment of the Ukrainian refugees before their forced migration to Poland and their own financial situation in Poland* (number of respondents)



*multiple-choice question

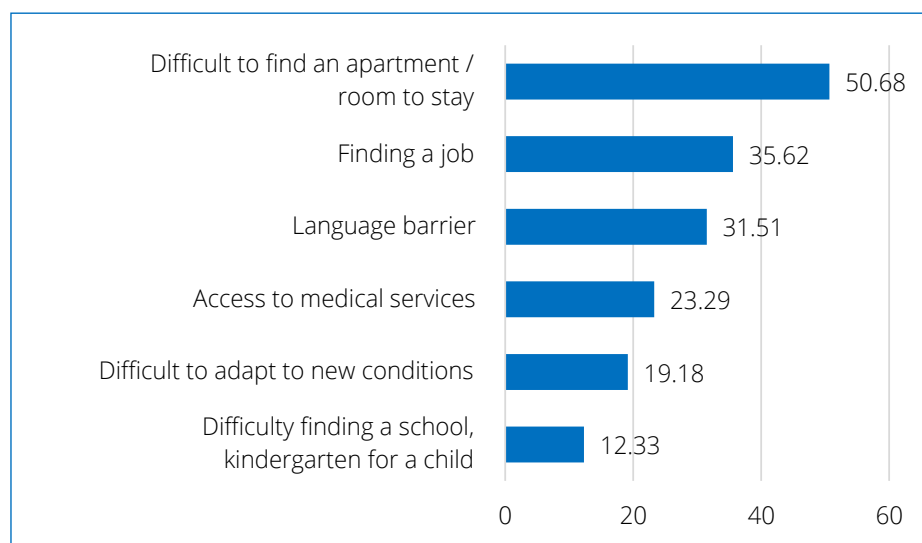
Source: the author's own elaboration.

The adaptation process encountered problems in the social and economic dimensions. Figure 3 illustrates the primary challenges experienced by the Ukrainian refugees in Poland. Our empirical findings reveal a clear hierarchy of integration challenges faced by the Ukrainian refugees in Poland, with housing security emerging as the most pressing concern. As illustrated in the data, finding appropriate accommodation represents the primary obstacle for 37 respondents (50.7% of the sample), significantly exceeding all other reported difficulties.

Employment-related challenges constitute the second most significant barrier, affecting 26 respondents (35.6% of the sample). The prominence of job-seeking challenges validates our research hypothesis that forced migrants encounter complex employment obstacles due to the credential recognition issues, language requirements, and the need for flexible working arrangements.

General adaptation difficulties were reported by 14 respondents (19.2%), while challenges in securing educational institutions for children affected 9 respondents (12.3%). These represent important, yet less prevalent, concerns. The lower frequency of issues regarding educational access may reflect the demographic composition of our sample or the success of policy interventions in this area.

Figure 3. Key problems were faced by Ukrainian refugees in Poland* (%)

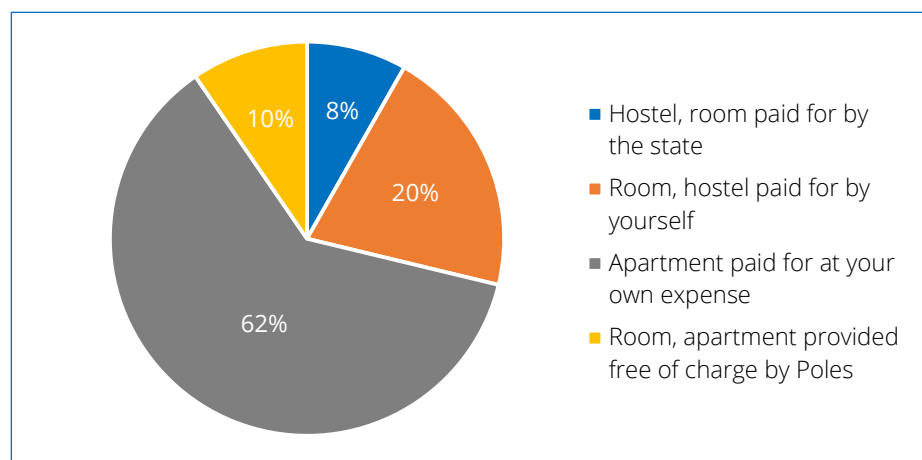


*multiple-choice question

Source: the authors' own elaboration.

Figure 4 shows the types of accommodation rented by the Ukrainian refugees in Poland. The majority (45%) pay for their own apartments, while 15% stay in hostels and 7% receive free accommodation from Poles.

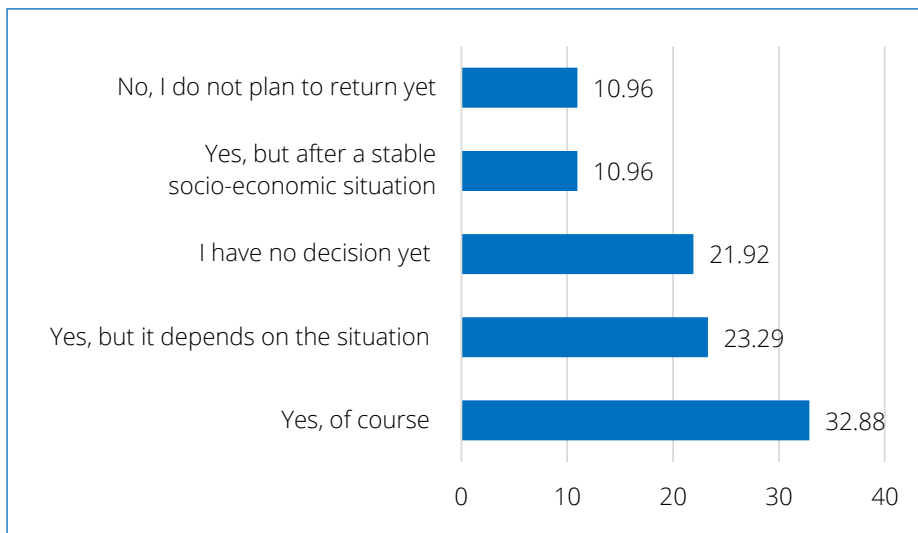
Figure 4. Rented housing by the Ukrainian refugees in Poland



Source: the authors' own elaboration

Another aspect a further discussion on the current situation in Poland with the Ukrainian refugees, and an assessment of their intentions to stay or to return to Ukraine (see Figure 5). A substantial proportion (24%) intend to return, while 8% are undecided and 8% would return if socio-economic conditions improved.

Figure 5. The Ukrainian refugees' intention to return to Ukraine



Source: the authors' own elaboration.

The respondents we interviewed belonged to the first wave of refugees to flee Ukraine, and this group may be more selective. Additionally, the refugees in our study arrived at a time when host countries offered extensive support. However, this support has become more limited over time.

The data indicate that 32.88% of the respondents express firm return intentions, which is the largest single category, testifying to a strong sense of belonging to their homeland in this first generation of the refugees.

Nevertheless, the majority of the respondents (67.12%) have conditional, uncertain or negative intentions to return, suggesting that long-term integration and displacement experiences in Poland influence settlement decisions in the long term. Specifically, 23.29% expressed situational dependence, indicating a pragmatic approach to decision-making that considers various factors such as security conditions, economic opportunities, and family circumstances in both countries.

The large number of the undecided respondents (21.92%) reflects the psychological and practical complexity of return decisions in the context of the ongoing conflict. This uncertainty may be due to the timing of our research, as respondents were still processing the trauma of recent displacement while already facing the challenges of the early integration in Poland.

Interestingly, the same proportion of respondents (10.96%) express conditional return intentions based on socio-economic stability, as well as explicit non-return intentions. These findings contradict our earlier conclusion that 24% intend to return, as the statistics report 32.88% with firm return intentions, as well as additional conditional categories that could potentially increase the level of returns.

Discussion

Deloitte (2023) presented the results of a survey of the refugees' intentions regarding their future plans. 48% of Ukrainians wanted to return to Ukraine and 22% wanted to stay in Poland. The situation with regard to the war (e.g. the time period and frontline activities) primarily influenced their future plans.

The IOM UN (2023) study revealed similar intentions among Ukrainian refugees. 52% of them planned to stay in their current location in Poland. However, gender differences were observed, with more male refugees intending to move to another country: 16% compared to 11% of female refugees. The intention to move to another country has increased the number of refugees. For example, in 2023, Poland had 974 thousand refugees, while Germany had 1.096 million.²⁹

The UNHCR (2024) reported 953 thousand active Ukrainian refugee registrations in May 2024, totalling 1.775 million. By gender, 38% of refugees were aged 18–59, compared to 17% of male refugees in the same age group. However, there were higher proportions of females aged 5–17 (7%) than males (8%). By region, the highest number of Ukrainian refugees are currently located in five voivodships: Mazowieckie (205 thousand), Dolnośląskie (110 thousand), Śląskie (95 thousand), Wielkopolskie (87 thousand) and Małopolskie (85 thousand).

When comparing the socio-economic conditions in Poland and Germany, it was observed that refugees adapted and integrated into local communities and the workplace more quickly, and became involved in cultural events. However,

²⁹ IOM UN 2023.

in Germany, the majority of them integrated by studying the language, which was the starting point for creating local networks.³⁰

The situation regarding job positions looks different: 41% of the Ukrainian refugees in Poland have found work, compared to 31% in Germany. The refugees cited language barriers and insufficient social benefits as influencing their decision to seek employment.³¹

We are witnessing an unprecedented situation in the post-war European history in terms of such a large number of people arriving in another country in such a short period. As this is a new, multidimensional phenomenon, changing dynamically over time, it needs to be recognised as soon as possible.

The majority of Ukrainians who left for Poland in connection with the war hope that their stay in Poland will last no longer than a year. This is evidenced by the results of a survey conducted by the National Bank of Poland (Narodowy Bank Polski). The refugees were asked, in particular, whether they plan to return to Ukraine, what their level of education is, and how well they knew Poland before coming here. For more than 50% of refugees, coming to Poland became a completely new experience.³²

Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the related migration crisis pose a challenge for public policy in providing support both to Ukrainians arriving in Poland and to Polish public institutions and society assisting refugees. The vast majority of them reside in large cities and suburban areas, which generates an increased burden on the local technical and social infrastructure (including education and health services) of the metropolis.

According to researchers of the Polish Economic Institute (PEI), there is a clear trend towards the concentration of Ukrainians in the largest cities and their surroundings. Ukrainian refugees in the capital and neighboring counties received the most PESEL numbers – 184,000. If we consider the receipt of Polish identification numbers by Ukrainians by city, the figures will look like this: Warsaw – 120 thousand; Wrocław – 45 thousand; Krakow – 32 thousand; Poznań – 31 thousand.

According to the results of the Unia Metropolii Polskich study, the number of Ukrainians in Poland in March amounted to almost 3.2 million people. In April, it increased to 3.85 million, and in May it fell slightly, reaching almost 3.4 million. Analysts found out that refugees most often chose big cities as their place of refuge. The largest share of immigrants was recorded in Rzeszów – 39% of Ukrainians compared to all residents of the city, in Gdansk

³⁰ Zymin et al. 2023.

³¹ Zymin et al. 2023.

³² Ukrainian refugees 2022.

and Wrocław – 28% each, in Katowice – 24%. A huge refugee wave is an unusual event, there is no previous data to refer to, which also makes it necessary to conduct observations.³³

According to the research, migrants bring more to the budget in taxes than the cost of aid, health insurance, etc. The action planned by us is aimed at building instruments of effective integration policy. Therefore, it is important to collect and systematize knowledge on resources, processes and mechanisms for migration policy, serving the integration of the refugees into local communities. Creating conditions that allow the potential of newcomers to be used in rural areas and small towns will bring climatic, social and economic benefits.

Conclusions

Our study examined the decision-making process and integration of the refugees, an area that has attracted increasing academic interest in the context of contemporary forced displacement crises. Specifically, our study aimed to shed light on the integration processes that have received less attention among refugees in general, and the Ukrainian refugees in particular. It focused on the complex interplay between push-pull factors, settlement challenges, and return intentions during the initial phases of displacement. Since we are investigating a phenomenon of a scale and scope previously unknown, we analysed primary and secondary data based on the concept of grounded theory. The use of this methodological approach allowed us to conduct analyses and modify (especially the interview questionnaire) the research procedure as the study progressed.

Recall bias may affect the respondents' recollections of their pre-migration circumstances, initial challenges and evolving settlement preferences over time. Additionally, while the snowball sampling method is effective for accessing hard-to-reach populations, it may have introduced selection bias by overrepresenting refugees with the social networks and digital literacy skills necessary to participate in the online Ukrainian community groups.

The temporal limitations of our research design present another methodological consideration, as our data captures refugee experiences during a specific 3–5-month window following initial arrival. This timeframe may not adequately reflect longer-term integration trajectories or the evolution of return intentions as refugees establish deeper roots in the Polish society or as conditions in Ukraine continue to change.

³³ Urban hospitality 2022.

Previous studies³⁴ have identified social and economic obstacles for the Ukrainian refugees. The main barriers are learning the Polish language and finding the best job position. The adaptation process relates to the place of accommodation and the matching of previous job skills to the current job position in Poland. In the survey's open questions, the Ukrainian refugees highlighted problems with the adaptation of children to the Polish education system and their integration into local communities. The family structure of the refugees presented an additional problem in finding a job with flexible hours due to childcare responsibilities and the fact that there is only one adult in the family. One possible solution would be to provide kindergartens with extended opening hours or flexible working hours for female refugees with children.

The refugees' intentions to return to Ukraine depend on the situation on the frontline and the possibility of energy cuts in winter. These factors create barriers for families when planning for the near future. The extended period that Ukrainian refugees can stay in the EU and Poland may influence their intentions to return due to fears about social and economic conditions, such as finding a new job in Ukraine, the danger of Russian missile attacks on Ukrainian settlements, and better living conditions in the EU and Poland. The study presented in the article showed that the main social obstacles are knowing the Polish language in order to obtain a better job position and finding accommodation to rent for a longer period, which is related to family income.

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³⁴ Duszczczyk et al. 2023; Kindler et al. 2023.

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Appendix 1: Survey Questionnaire

Problems of Ukrainian Refugees After Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

Gender

- Female
- Male

Place of temporary residence in Poland

- City
- Rural area

Age

- Under 18 years
- 18–25
- 26–34
- 35–44
- 45–54
- 55–64
- Over 65

Education

- Primary
- Vocational/technical college
- Secondary
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Higher education (academic degree)

1. Assessment of your material situation before February 24, 2022

- Not enough money for food
- Enough for food, not enough for clothing and shoes
- Enough for food and clothing, not enough for household appliances
- Can afford to buy several expensive items
- Can afford most goods and services

2. Duration of stay in Poland

- Less than a month
- 1–2 months
- 3–4 months
- 5 months or more

3. Place of accommodation in Poland

- Hostel, room paid for by the state
- Room, hostel paid for at own expense
- Apartment paid for at own expense
- Room, apartment provided free of charge by Poles

4. What problems have you encountered while staying in Poland?

- Language barrier
- Difficulty finding an apartment/room for accommodation
- Job searching

- Access to medical services
- Difficulty finding school, kindergarten for child
- Difficulty adapting to new conditions

5. Is the salary in Poland sufficient for basic services?

- Yes, completely
- Yes, but not for all services
- Not enough for a significant part of services
- No, not enough

6. Do you plan to return to Ukraine after the war ends?

- Yes, definitely
- Yes, but it depends on the situation
- Yes, but after a stable socio-economic situation
- No, I don't plan to yet
- I don't have a decision yet

7. What are the most important needs during your stay in Poland?

- Find work
- Material assistance (clothing, shoes, food)
- Long-term housing rental
- Medical assistance
- Language courses
- Institutions for children (school, kindergarten)
- Temporary accommodation
- Social-psychological needs

8. Your suggestions/recommendations [Open response field]

- Thank you for completing the questionnaire!