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**A Comparative Analysis of Labour Market Integration  
of Ukrainian Forced Migrants in the Czech Republic and  
Poland**

Master's thesis

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Year of the defence: 2024

## **Declaration**

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on April 30, 2024

Aysu Melis GÜNDÜZ

## References

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## **Abstract**

The main aim of this master's thesis is to carry out a comparative evaluation of the labour market integration of Ukrainian forced migrants in both the Czech Republic and Poland. This study uses Ager and Strang's (2004, 2008, 2010) theoretical and conceptual framework on migrant integration to examine the critical elements of the research subject. Six in-depth interviews with Ukrainian forced migrants in the Czech Republic and Poland were conducted for this analysis. To supplement the data, sixteen participants who reside in Poland and the Czech Republic completed questionnaires in Ukrainian. The findings show that Ukrainian migrants mainly work in precarious conditions. This tendency is primarily due to language barriers and unstable, low-wage job prospects in their host countries. Migrants' skills and job opportunities differ significantly, indicating a mismatch. This study provides valuable insights into the labour market integration experiences of Ukrainian forced migrants in the Czech Republic and Poland by synthesising interview narratives and questionnaire data. It sheds light on potential areas for policy intervention and support mechanisms.

## **Keywords**

Forced migrants, Ukraine, labour market integration, Poland, the Czech Republic, labour market policies.

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*I dedicate this thesis to all those who have left their homelands in quest of a safe home.*

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## Table of Contents

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....  | <b>I</b>   |
| <b>LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES</b> .....   | <b>III</b> |
| <b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b> .....  | <b>IV</b>  |
| <b>1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....  | <b>1</b>   |
| 1.1 EU's Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) and Financial Aid for Ukrainian Forced Migrants .....         | 3          |
| 1.2 Research Problem.....   | 6          |
| 1.2.1 <i>The Case of the Czech Republic</i> .....   | 7          |
| 1.2.2 <i>The Case of Poland</i> .....   | 9          |
| 1.3 Research Objectives and Questions .....   | 11         |
| 1.4 Structure of the Thesis.....  | 13         |
| <b>2. THE STATE OF THE ART: AN OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT SITUATION IN POLAND AND THE CZECH REPUBLIC</b> ..... | <b>14</b>  |
| 2.1 The Czech Republic's Migration Approach and the Current Situation of Ukrainian Forced Migrants .....    | 14         |
| 2.1.1 <i>The Czech Republic's Migration Approach</i> .....  | 14         |
| 2.1.2 <i>Ukrainian Labour Migrants in the Czech Republic</i> .....  | 17         |
| 2.1.3 <i>Current Situation of Forced Ukrainian Migrants in the Czech Republic</i> .....                     | 18         |
| 2.2 Poland's Migration Approach and the Current Situation of Ukrainian Forced Migrants .....                | 20         |
| 2.2.1 <i>Poland's Migration Approach</i> .....  | 20         |
| 2.2.2 <i>Ukrainian Labour Migrants in Poland</i> .....  | 21         |
| 2.2.3 <i>Current Situation of Ukrainian Forced Migrants in Poland</i> .....                                 | 22         |
| <b>3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ON MIGRANT INTEGRATION</b> .....   | <b>24</b>  |
| <b>3.1 THEORETICAL CONCEPTS OF THE STUDY</b> .....  | <b>24</b>  |
| <b>3.2 AGER AND STRANG'S CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ON MIGRANT INTEGRATION</b> .....                              | <b>26</b>  |
| <b>4. METHODOLOGY</b> .....   | <b>29</b>  |
| <b>4.1 A QUALITATIVE COMPARATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN</b> .....  | <b>29</b>  |
| 4.1.1 <i>Study Population</i> .....   | 31         |
| 4.2 Research Methods .....  | 31         |
| 4.3 Data Collection Methods.....  | 32         |
| 4.3.1 <i>Study Population</i> .....   | 33         |
| 4.3.2 <i>Sampling Technique</i> .....   | 33         |

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 4.3.3 <i>Processing and Analysing Data</i> .....   | 34        |
| <b>4.4 OPERATIONALIZATION</b> .....  | <b>34</b> |
| 4.5 Limitations and Ethical Considerations .....   | 35        |
| 4.5.1 <i>Limitations of the Study</i> .....  | 35        |
| 4.5.2 <i>Ethical Considerations</i> .....  | 36        |
| <b>5. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS</b> .....  | <b>36</b> |
| <b>5.1 LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION PROGRAMMES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC UNDER LEX UKRAINE</b> .....                      | <b>37</b> |
| <b>5.2 LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION PROGRAMMES IN POLAND UNDER THE LAW ON ASSISTANCE TO CITIZENS OF UKRAINE</b> ..... | <b>40</b> |
| <b>5.3 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS AND QUESTIONNAIRES</b> .....                              | <b>43</b> |
| <b>6. DISCUSSION</b> .....   | <b>63</b> |
| <b>7. CONCLUSION</b> .....   | <b>68</b> |
| <b>LIST OF REFERENCES</b> .....  | <b>70</b> |
| <b>LIST OF APPENDICES</b> .....  | <b>80</b> |
| <b>APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW SCRIPT (TEXT)</b> .....   | <b>80</b> |
| <b>APPENDIX II: QUESTIONNAIRE SCRIPT (TEXT IN UKRAINIAN)</b> .....   | <b>82</b> |



## **List of Tables and Figures**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| TABLE 1 - Employment and income of Ukrainian refugees in Czechia.....   | 7  |
| FIGURE 1 – Czech language skills among adults.....  | 8  |
| FIGURE 2 - Ukrainian forced migrants ready to study Polish language.....  | 10 |
| FIGURE 3 - Long-term plans of survey respondents by country.....  | 23 |
| FIGURE 4 - A Conceptual Framework Defining Core Domains of Integration.....   | 27 |
| FIGURE 5 – The number of Ukrainian forced migrants in the Czech Republic who have received humanitarian benefits..... | 39 |
| TABLE 2 – Demographic data on Czechia interviewees.....   | 44 |
| TABLE 3 - Demographic data on Czechia survey respondents.....   | 45 |
| TABLE 4 - Demographic data on interviewee based in Poland.....  | 46 |
| TABLE 5 - Demographic data on Poland survey respondents.....  | 46 |

## **List of Abbreviations**

**BTP** - Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection

**CCS** - Comparative Case Study

**CEAS** - Common European Asylum System

**CSO** - Civil Society Organisations

**EC** - European Commission

**ECRE** - European Council on Refugees and Exiles

**EP** - European Parliament

**ERDF** – European Regional Development Fund

**ESF** – the European Social Fund

**EU** - European Union

**FEAD** – the Fund for the European Aid to the Most Deprived

**ILO** - International Labour Office

**IOM** - International Organization for Migration

**MI** - Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic

**MoLSA** – Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic

**NGO** - Non-Governmental Organisation

**OCHA** - The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**OECD** - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

**TCNs** - Third-Country Nationals

**TPD** - Temporary Protection Directive

**UNHCR** - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

## 1. Introduction

A severe humanitarian crisis has occurred both in Ukraine and its neighbouring countries with the Russian aggression that started on 24 February 2022 (Lee et al., 2023). The war in Ukraine is ongoing, with uncertainty surrounding its conclusion. It has caused Europe's largest refugee crisis since WWII (Bathke, 2023), and many Ukrainians have been forced to escape their homes and communities to find stability and safety because of the war. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports that approximately 299 million people worldwide require humanitarian assistance and protection as of 2024 (Global Humanitarian Overview, 2024). Considering the most recent UN data, Ukraine's total population is around 37.6 million<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, There are 6,471,600 refugees from Ukraine recorded globally because of the war in Ukraine (UNHCR, 2023).

According to the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE, 2022), a total of over 7.5 million individuals, predominantly women, children, and the elderly, given that most Ukrainian men are not allowed to leave Ukraine, went to other European countries after the war started. Out of this number, more than 1.5 million forced migrants moved to Poland, Czechia, Romania, Slovakia, and Hungary.

Based on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) data, 5.9 million forced migrants from Ukraine are recorded in Europe (UNHCR, 2024).<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the official numbers indicate that as of 19 April 2024, the number of Ukrainian forced migrants who applied for asylum, temporary protection or a similar national protection scheme to date in the Czech Republic is 599.355, while Poland has 1.640.510 individuals (UNHCR, 2023). Furthermore, the statistics indicate that these numbers are higher than Ukrainian forced migrants recorded in the country as of date (UNHCR, 2023).

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations. (2024). World Population Prospects. Retrieved April 19, 2024, from <https://population.un.org/wpp/>

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR. (2024, April 19). Operational data portal. Retrieved April 19, 2024, from <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>.

The factors influencing migrants' choice of host country generally depend on how well those countries are equipped to handle the influx of labour they represent. This nexus highlights the critical role that labour market integration plays in the lives of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in modern society. Similarly, experts argue that participation in the labour market is a foundation for long-term societal integration and a keystone for the fiscal contributions migrants make to the host society (Konle-Seidl & Bolits, 2016).

Labour market integration programs also include larger systems of labour market governance and unemployment assistance. These broader systems are divided into several focus areas: economic integration, skills and education, anti-discrimination and inclusion, recognition of foreign qualifications, social safety nets, etc. (UNHCR, n.d.).

There are numerous examples of different labour market policies and programmes towards migrant and refugee inclusion in the job markets. Apart from the national governments and the EU, which often have a significant influence on integration initiatives, studies (Siviş, 2021; Mencutek & Nashwan, 2021; Jelínková et al., 2023) have shown that institutions such as the municipalities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and policy actors outside of the government are essential to initiate and facilitate the integration of migrants and refugees into the labour markets of host countries through various programmes. Nevertheless, these labour market policies are of national interest, and the role of the EU is only advisory and supportive. Moreover, the existing literature on migrant integration has not considered the significance of the local context and its connection to the outcomes of national-level policies (De Coninck & Solano, 2023).

It is essential to acknowledge that historically, the number of asylum applications submitted and approved in Poland and the Czech Republic has been relatively low compared to other Member States in the European Union (EU). While neither country is typically regarded as an asylum destination, both countries possess cultural similarities with Ukrainian culture. Moreover, they have historically welcomed Ukrainian migrants, particularly for labour-related reasons, and currently host a substantial population of Ukrainian forced migrants, as mentioned above.

According to the Andrews et al. (2023) study, labour migration patterns before the war notably influenced the current migration flows in Poland and the Czech Republic. This might explain why the Ukrainian forced migrants chose Poland and the Czech Republic as their host societies.

Since Poland and the Czech Republic have the highest number of Ukrainian forced migrants, the development of distinct strategies to facilitate their integration into their labour markets is required under the EU's Temporary Protection Directive (TPD). Furthermore, effectively integrating a large influx of forced migrants into their labour markets presents a significant challenge for these host countries. Thus, the selection of these countries for a comparative case study has been based on these critical factors.

According to the UN, a refugee is a person residing outside his or her country of nationality who is unable or unwilling to return due to a "well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a political, social group, or political opinion" as part of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (UN General Assembly, 1951, p. 152). However, based on the 2001/55/EC Directive, the European Commission has activated the TPD to temporarily protect those fleeing the war in Ukraine, in other words, beneficiaries of temporary protection (BTP). (EC, 2022). Since this legal framework applies to Ukrainians seeking protection in the EU, throughout the research, the terms "forced migrant" and "BTP" are used interchangeably instead of "refugee" to reflect better the legal and political context within the scope of this study.

### **1.1 EU's Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) and Financial Aid for Ukrainian Forced Migrants**

This section briefly overviews the main mechanisms for Ukrainian forced migrants at the EU level, focusing mainly on the TPD and the financial help that the EU has provided to Ukrainian forced migrants.

The EU has taken swift and unprecedented measures, including activating the TPD and facilitating access to EU funds to assist those fleeing Ukraine since late February 2022.

TPD is part of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), along with four other vital directives: the Reception Conditions Directive, the Procedures Directive, the Qualification Directive, and the Dublin Convention. These directives have created a set of shared principles and minimal requirements for granting asylum across all EU states.

The TPD was initially proposed for displaced individuals due to the disintegration of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the 1990s (EC, n.d.-a). It was enacted by the European Union Council in 2001. Its primary purpose was to establish basic requirements for providing temporary protection during a “mass influx of displaced persons from third countries” who could not return to their country of origin and to distribute the responsibilities evenly among the Member States (The Publications Office of the EU, 2001, p. 2). Therefore, the TPD was initially designed for displaced people seeking protection within Europe and consists of a mechanism for cooperative effort among EU states.

The Commission proposed activating the temporary protection mechanism based on the 2001/55/EC Directive to provide temporary protection to those fleeing the war in Ukraine, and the European Council implemented it on 2 March 2022<sup>3</sup> for Ukrainians (EC, 2022). It was invoked for the first time for Ukrainian forced migrants since its implementation by the EU (EC, 2022).

It is a critical mechanism since it provides displaced individuals the same rights as European citizens within the Member States. These rights include but are not limited to, a residency permit, right to employment, access to housing, social welfare, and medical assistance (EC, n.d.-b). Furthermore, the Directive allows anyone who lawfully resided in Ukraine before February 24th “to seek refuge, work, study, and access social welfare in an EU country of their choice without formally requesting asylum” (EC, n.d.-b, p. 11).

The initial grant of temporary protection was for one year, and it has recently been extended until 4 March 2024. According to the situation in Ukraine, it has the potential to

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<sup>3</sup> EUR-Lex - 52022PC0091 - EN - EUR-Lex. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52022PC0091&qid=1646384923837>

be prolonged for an additional year, that is, until March 2025<sup>4</sup>. Several Member States, particularly the European Parliament (EP), will hold elections in June 2024. This will decrease the speed of decision-making at the EU level and may extend beyond the expiration date of the TPD (Prokop et al., 2023).

Second, since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, the EP and the European Council have agreed on legislative changes to support its financial response to the displacement, focusing on cohesion policy and Home Affairs funds such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), and the Fund for the European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD)<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, these changes allowed easier access to unused resources from the 2014-2020 budget cycle (ECRE, 2022).

By June 2022, 248 million euros were identified, with over 150 million disbursed to support the Member States of Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Czechia, and Romania through those unspent Home Affairs funds and the Border Monitoring and Visa Instrument Emergency Assistance channels (ECRE, 2022). Accordingly, these Member States can use them for ongoing projects, and they can improve their existing plans to include actions in the areas of “employment, education, social inclusion, health, childcare, and basic material assistance” (ECRE, 2022, p. 3). Furthermore, these unused funds include the EP’s “Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund”, set up for 2021-2027 and totals EUR 9.88 billion (EC, n.d.-c).

Recently, the EC agreed on a financial support package for Ukraine totalling €50 billion, known as the Ukraine Facility (EC, n.d.-c). Finally, these funds are intended to meet Ukraine's immediate needs and recovery and modernise the country's path to EU membership while Ukraine continues to defend itself against Russian aggression.

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<sup>4</sup> *How the EU helps refugees from Ukraine.* (n.d.). Consilium. Retrieved from <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-migration-policy/refugee-inflow-from-ukraine/#right>

<sup>5</sup> Council of the EU. (2022, 13 October). *Council gives the final go-ahead to further flexibility in the use of cohesion policy funds in response to Russia's war in Ukraine.* Press Release. Retrieved from <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/10/13/council-gives-the-final-go-ahead-to-further-flexibility-in-the-use-of-cohesion-policy-funds-in-response-to-russia-s-war-in-ukraine/>

## 1.2 Research Problem

The main research problem of the study revolves around the initial outlook of Ukrainian forced migrants being integrated successfully into the labour markets of Poland and the Czech Republic. Although at first glance, Ukrainian forced migrants seem to be alleviating the shortages in the labour markets of Poland and the Czech Republic with the activation of the TPD, multiple aspects of the labour market inclusion challenges have been identified through the investigation of the research topic via desk research. The following provides a basic outline of the current issues.

One might argue that there is cultural proximity between the countries, and previous labour migration patterns result in social networks between Ukraine and Poland and Ukraine and the Czech Republic, which all together facilitate a successful integration. However, the reality is marked by various obstacles that impede their integration into respective labour markets. This issue is characterised by multiple dimensions, centring on the challenges of the integration of Ukrainian forced migrants into the labour markets of Poland and the Czech Republic following the activation of the TPD that granted work permits to Ukrainians after the war in these countries.

First and foremost, a significant barrier to the full integration of Ukrainian forced migrants into the labour markets of Poland and Czechia is the substantial influx of migrants since late February 2022, which is deepened by the lack of coherent and structured integration policies, particularly in terms of employment services and opportunities within both countries.

Most forced migrants consisted of women and children as a result of Ukraine's imposition of travel restrictions on males aged 18 to 60, with only a few exceptions. Most of these women are between the ages of 15 and 64, corresponding to the working population (SIMI Bez Vrásek, n.d.).

Another aspect of the research problem is that the Ukrainian forced migrants' applications for professional occupations are hindered mainly by language barriers at first glance (Úřad Práce, 2023). Accordingly, "refugees are exposed to more threats to their lives" when they lack proficiency in the local language (Vlasenko, 2023, p. 1). Furthermore, the data from



several Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries indicate that language barriers are among the most common obstacles Ukrainians face (Vlasenko, 2023).

### 1.2.1 The Case of the Czech Republic

The table below illustrates that Ukrainian forced migrants in the Czech Republic encounter significant obstacles in obtaining formal employment, while underemployment and informality hinder their access to social protection.

#### **/ Employment and income**

| Goals                 | Areas to address    | Status | Detail  |
|-----------------------|---------------------|--------|---|
| Employment and income | Work                | ✓      | 56% work in the Czech Republic  |
|                       | Salary              | ✗      | Average earnings only around 150 CZK net/hour   |
|                       | Poverty             | ⊙      | 66% income poverty (with benefits)  |
|                       | Social support      | ✓      | Humanitarian benefits and housing support have so far limited the extent and level of poverty |
| Type of work          | Skills utilisation  | ✗      | 2/3 work below their qualifications   |
|                       | Language skills     | ⊙      | 1/3 can communicate in everyday situations  |
|                       | Employment security | ⊙      | About 1/3 in unstable jobs  |

[Table 1]. Employment and income of Ukrainian refugees in Czechia. Adapted from Prokop et al. (2023, p. 4).

These findings indicate that although humanitarian aid and housing assistance have somewhat reduced the severity and extent of poverty among these individuals, 66% of them are employed in jobs that do not align with their qualifications, 33% have unstable employment, and only 33% can communicate in everyday situations in the Czech Republic (Prokop et al., 2023). In addition, it has been found that restrictive laws and limited economic inclusion frequently force those migrants to work in low-paying informal jobs (UNHCR, 2023; Prokop et al., 2023).

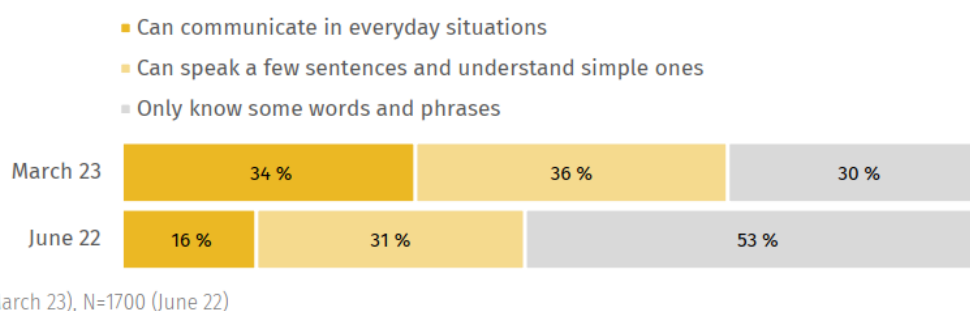
In May 2022, the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic (MI) announced that more than 350,000 Ukrainian forced migrants had received protection from Prague, and the Úřad

práce<sup>6</sup> released statistics indicating that more than 50,000 people had started working at the time (Ciobanu & Gosling, 2022). Additionally, national statistics from May 2022 have indicated that most Ukrainians working in the Czech Republic are involved in physically demanding, low-skilled jobs such as machine operation or other manual labour roles (Ruschka, 2022; Prokop et al., 2023).

Unlike previous labour migration patterns, Ukrainian forced migrants, predominantly women, did not relocate to the Czech Republic to work in domestic service, cleaning services, factory work, or low-wage labour in less valued industries (SIMI Bez Vrásek, n.d.). However, the ongoing situation in Ukraine has forced many individuals to give up their skilled and specialised jobs in which they have gained years of experience in their home country (SIMI Bez Vrásek, n.d.).

Nevertheless, 94,383 Ukrainian workers were officially registered in the Czech Republic as of February 2023, which indicates the possibility that a considerable number of forced migrants work in the shadow economy. This suggests that the sudden arrival of Ukrainian forced migrants has increased informal sector employment in the Czech Republic. Thus, it remains significant to investigate the Ukrainian forced migrants working in the shadow economy in the Czech Republic.

**/ Chart: Czech language skills among adults**



[Figure 1]. Chart: Czech language skills among adults. Adapted from Prokop et al. (2023, p. 9).

Additional research has identified the language barrier as a significant factor in this topic (Prokop et al., 2023; UNHCR, 2023). The figure above illustrates that Ukrainian forced

<sup>6</sup> The Labour Office in the Czech Republic

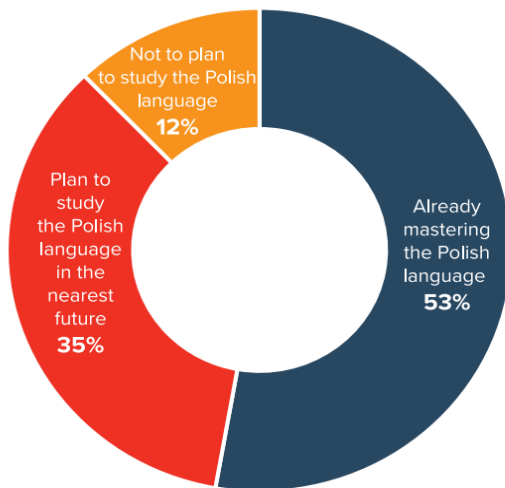
migrants lack professional proficiency in the Czech language, although there appears to be an upward trend in their fluency, reaching 34% by March 2023.

In addition to the language barrier, forced migrants encounter various difficulties in the Czech Republic, including the lack of access to preschool care for children, The increasing precarisation of work, intricate procedures for validating qualifications, and the need for retraining, the risk of exploitation, particularly in the realms of sexual or labour exploitation (Úřad Práce, 2023; SIMI Bez Vrásek, n.d.; Prokop et al., 2023). Thus, Ukrainian forced migrants are constantly tackling difficulties accessing the labour market due to many issues.

### *1.2.2 The Case of Poland*

Historically, most Ukrainian migrants have been employed in the secondary sector of the Polish labour market, similar to the Czech Republic (Brunarska et al., 2016). Moreover, based on the data from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP, 2014, as cited in Brunarska et al., 2016), in 2014, work permit holders were primarily employed in private households, construction, transport, retail, and wholesale trade. The prolonged and uncertain administrative procedures in Poland have forced highly skilled Ukrainian migrants to accept inferior employment conditions reluctantly. Furthermore, this indicated challenges of having their qualifications unrecognised, which hinders their ability to find employment that matches their skills and forces them to accept lower wages (IOM, 2008).

The Polish Ministry of Family and Social Policy reported just over 200,000 Ukrainian workers in June 2022 (Ministerstwo Rodziny, 2022). Based on this data, only one in five Ukrainian forced migrants works formally in Poland, which might suggest a path dependency as this pattern continues. Furthermore, nearly half of Ukrainian forced migrants are employed in unskilled labour. The remaining 18% work in offices or other specialised fields, 14% produce goods for industry or crafts, 11% work in sales and services, and 10% operate machines (Tilles, 2022). Thus, many forced migrants seem to work in the shadow economy, mirroring the situation in the Czech Republic (Úřad Práce, 2023).



[Figure 2]. Pie chart of Ukrainian forced migrants ready to study Polish language. Adapted from ТЫДЮК (2024).

Regarding language proficiency, 45% of Ukrainians in Poland face a language barrier, which restricts them from accessing social services (Vlasenko, 2023). The pie chart above illustrates the number of Ukrainian forced migrants who are ready to study the Polish language in Poland. Accordingly, 53% of the survey respondents have achieved proficiency in the language, suggesting that a significant proportion of the Ukrainian forced migrants is actively engaged in Polish language acquisition. However, a subgroup of Ukrainian forced migrants who are unwilling to learn the language soon may face difficulties, which can hinder their ability to secure employment due to the language barrier.

Several other factors may impede Ukrainian forced migrants' integration into the labour markets of Poland. One issue that may arise for female migrants is care responsibilities, such as childcare. Women are likely to encounter obstacles to their inclusion and participation in the labour market because this migration from Ukraine is "overwhelmingly female," according to research by Andrews et al. (2023, p. 1). Since women frequently migrate with children, finding suitable childcare and school placement is crucial to allowing them to participate in the workforce at their destination. Furthermore, these female migrants have "higher-than-average" levels of education when compared to other refugee groups and the Ukrainian general population (OECD, n.d., p. 1).

Furthermore, the surveys revealed important patterns within demographic groups. Single mothers exhibited a greater will to go back to Ukraine. Not surprisingly, individuals who

were already employed were more inclined to contemplate remaining in Poland than those still seeking employment (Prokop et al., 2023). This desire to relocate back to Ukraine has also been demonstrated to be a factor in forced migrants' reluctance to apply for temporary protection programs and to be required to stay in host societies in Poland and Germany (Andrews et al., 2023).

In conclusion, the significance of this study lies in understanding and comparing the integration of Ukrainian forced migrants into the labour markets of Poland and Czechia. Preparatory research identified some problems and their consequences, such as barriers to formal employment that lead to informal work, a mismatch between skills and employment, language barriers, and care responsibilities that limit labour market participation. However, the analysis chapter delves deeper into identifying the underlying causes, potential shortcomings, and areas for improvement in integrating Ukrainian forced migrants into the labour markets of Poland and the Czech Republic.

### **1.3 Research Objectives and Questions**

This section briefly explains the research objectives and poses the research questions of this study.

This research explores the existing labour market programmes and support mechanisms regulated by law packages and policies in Poland and the Czech Republic to facilitate Ukrainian forced migrants' successful integration into their labour markets. Several measures facilitate access to employment, such as language courses, wage subsidies, various employment incentives, job matching and placement assistance, vocational training programs, career counselling, etc., offered by the government and non-governmental actors. These mechanisms in both countries are analysed from the perspective of the framework on migrant integration developed by Ager and Strang (2004, 2008, 2010) and through the conceptual framework on integration and labour market integration.

Ager and Strang (2004) pointed out key elements to perceptions of what constitutes “successful” integration in their studies, such as foundations, facilitators, social connection,

markers, and means (p. 166). As reflected in the immigrant integration policy in the EU, “employment is a key part of the integration process and is central to the participation of immigrants”, which falls within the category of the markers and means of integration of Ager and Strang’s (2004, 2008, 2010) framework (Council of the European Union, 2004, p. 17). Furthermore, language and cultural knowledge are thought to facilitate integration (Council of the European Union, 2024). Finally, “rights and citizenship as an important incentive for integration” are the foundation for integration (Ager & Strang, 2008; Council of the European Union, 2024, p. 22). Thus, the analysis is conducted by employing this framework on migrant integration, formulated by Ager and Strang.

The first research question of this study is, "What kind of labour market programmes are currently implemented for Ukrainian forced migrants in Poland and the Czech Republic?". The second and main research question is: “What are the underlying factors hindering the integration of Ukrainian forced migrants into the labour markets of Poland and the Czech Republic?” The third question is: “How do the barriers to labour market integration experienced by Ukrainian forced migrants in Poland and the Czech Republic impact their employment status, income levels, and overall socio-economic well-being?” If possible, the additional aim of the thesis is to formulate policy recommendations based on the findings to enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of government support for labour market integration among Ukrainian forced migrants in Poland and the Czech Republic.

The research questions are addressed using the following methodology. The study utilises the following qualitative research methods to implement the qualitative comparative research design: critical content analysis of political and legal documents and semi-structured, in-depth interviews and surveys with Ukrainian forced migrants living in Poland and the Czech Republic.

Throughout the thesis, drawing upon both critical content analysis and analysis of the data derived from interviews with six Ukrainian forced migrants and sixteen survey respondents, an in-depth analysis is conducted to answer the study's research questions. Critical content analysis involves examining official statements, publications by EU institutions, policy documents from various sources, briefs, and notes, as well as government data obtained from the Czech and Polish Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Family and Social Policy.

Afterwards, the findings from interviews and surveys are presented to provide further details on the experiences of Ukrainian forced migrants. Consequently, the research aims to fill the gap in recent data on Ukrainian forced migrants' experiences and contribute to the existing literature by identifying the underlying factors that hinder the integration of Ukrainian forced migrants into the labour markets of Poland and the Czech Republic. Furthermore, it seeks to highlight the effects of these factors on Ukrainian forced migrants within the labour markets of these countries from a comparative perspective.

#### **1.4 Structure of the Thesis**

The structure of the thesis is as follows. After the introduction chapter, the author presents a historical overview of the current situation in Poland and the Czech Republic, focusing on the migration governance approaches of each country. Later, the primary conceptual framework of the study, which incorporates concepts related to labour market integration and Ager and Strang's (2004, 2008, 2010) framework on migrant integration, is introduced. The methodology chapter comprehensively explains the research design, methods, and the detailed data collection and analysis process used in the study. Ultimately, the analysis chapter is divided into sub-chapters specific to each country. The country-specific sub-chapters analyse the various methods of integrating Ukrainian forced migrants into the labour market starting from February 2022. Last, the author thoroughly examines the experiences of Ukrainians and the corresponding mechanisms for integrating them into the labour market in both countries. The primary findings of the study, in which the author addresses the research questions, are elaborated upon in the discussion and conclusion sections.

## **2. The State of the Art: An Overview of the Current Situation in Poland and the Czech Republic**

This section provides a detailed account of the historical context of migration governance in the Czech Republic and Poland. It also examines the current state of labour market integration for Ukrainian forced migrants in both countries.

### **2.1 The Czech Republic's Migration Approach and the Current Situation of Ukrainian Forced Migrants**

This chapter discusses the migration approach and the situation of Ukrainian forced migrants in the Czech Republic.

#### *2.1.1 The Czech Republic's Migration Approach*

The Czech Republic's migration policy was relatively liberal in the 1990s and early 2000s. During the accession negotiations, the synchronisation with EU regulations and the harmonisation of Czech legislation with EU laws triggered a new wave of migration policy-making that is more significant than before (Strielkowski et al., 2016).

Consequently, practices and regulations toward immigration and integration policies have tightened since the mid-2010s (Stojarová, 2019, as cited in Bureš & Stojanov, 2022).

The legislation regulating foreigner migration was governed by Act No. 326/1999 Coll., "on the Residence of Foreign Nationals in the Territory of the Czech Republic" (*Act No. 326/1999 Coll.*, 2009) and Act No. 325/1999 Coll., "On Asylum" (*325/1999 coll. act on asylum*, 1999).

In 1999, the government agreed on the Principles of Foreigners' Integration in Czechia, followed a year later by the Conception of Foreigners' Integration. The latter defined the state's concrete steps to integrate immigrants (Drbohlav & Janurová, 2019). With the amendment of the Conception of Foreigners' Integration in 2006, Czechia made a clear shift toward the civic integration model (Drbohlav & Janurová, 2019). Furthermore, the



state identified four integration priority areas: “knowledge of the Czech language, economic self-sufficiency, cultural awareness of the Czech environment, and interactions between foreign residents and Czech society” (Drbohlav & Janurová, 2019, p. 4). Nevertheless, the most visible impact of this practice was obligatory Czech language tests, which became a requirement for permanent residence in 2009 (Drbohlav & Janurová, 2019).

The adoption of the Foreigners Act in 2000 was a crucial milestone in MI's efforts to “strengthen its powers and increase its control over migration” (Kušniráková & Čížinský, 2011, p. 503, as cited in Bureš and Stojanov, 2022). Furthermore, a 2019 amendment to the Foreigners Act explicitly stated MI's Department of Asylum and Migration Policy's pivotal role in the design and implementation of immigration and integration policy.

In practice, however, since the early 2000s, decision-making authority has been gradually centralised within the MI's Department of Asylum and Migration Policy (Bureš & Stojanov, 2022; Strielkowski et al., 2016). Formally, the integration of migrants is at the regional and local levels, with municipalities and counties playing critical roles in integration policy. The MI established regional centres to promote third-country national integration in 2009 (Strielkowski et al., 2016). The centres were partly funded by the European Fund for the Integration of Non-EU Migrants from 2009 to 2015 and the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund from 2015 onwards (Strielkowski et al., 2016).

In the Czech Republic, there has been a lack of a comprehensive national migration strategy in previous years despite significant efforts. Nevertheless, like many other countries, the Czech Republic has adopted an official political discourse prioritising highly skilled immigrants, even though their labour markets usually require both highly skilled and low-skilled immigrants (Stojanov et al., 2021).

The Czechia Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs oversees labour market policies, including those relating to the employment of foreigners, people seeking international protection, and refugees (Strielkowski et al., 2016). Migration policy is relatively decentralised, with four government ministries (Interior, Foreign Affairs, Labor and Social

Affairs, and Trade and Industry) and fourteen regional Refugee Facilities Administrations playing key roles (Stojanov et al., 2021).

Migration is divided into four categories in Czechia, which are not all equally beneficial, nor do they have the exact economic, political, and social costs: labour immigration, secondary immigration (family reunifications), forced migration (asylum seekers and refugees), and irregular migration (Bureš & Stojanov, 2022; Strielkowski et al., 2016). However, as in most immigration-receiving countries, temporary labour immigration is prioritised, both in the formal migration strategy and through proactive immigration programs targeting qualified workers from specific countries, such as Fast Track, Welcome Package, Regime Ukraine and Regime Other States -which attract highly qualified employees from Ukraine, Mongolia, the Philippines, and Serbia-, albeit with no prospects for permanent settlement (MI, 2020, as cited in Bureš & Stojanov, 2022; Stojanov et al., 2021).

Policymakers significantly refined migration policies from 1996 to 2006 to make them more active and systematic. Refining them was a response to rising unemployment and the harmonisation of national and EU legislation (Drbohlav & Janurová, 2019). Moreover, according to Janurová and Drbohlav (2019), this is the result of "a strong demand for both skilled and unskilled labour that is not being met through the domestic labour force" due to "specific features of Czech society," including "a mismatch between labour market needs and the professions of Czech graduates and trainees who leave universities or apprenticeship training; limited geographic mobility; rigid rules hindering flexible employment; and widespread undeclared work." (p. 1).

According to Stojanov et al. (2021), three key features are identified in Czech migration policymaking. These are "orientation on temporary labour migration, perception of migration as a threat, and lack of a coherent and systematic conceptual approach" (Stojanov et al., 2021, p. 1).

Drbohlav (2011) emphasised that the Czech migration policy leaned towards an assimilation strategy during the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He enunciated that a shift occurred in the migration governance from multiculturalism to a "civic integration" model

(Stojanov et al., 2021, p. 4). Drbohlav (2011) claimed that MI successfully developed a highly centralised management model for migration and integration policy. However, Drbohlav and Janurová (2019) found that human capital is frequently undervalued, with tertiary-education migrants arriving with higher education levels than required for work in the Czech labour market.

### *2.1.2 Ukrainian Labour Migrants in the Czech Republic*

Ukrainians have traditionally constituted the majority of Third-Country Nationals (TCNs) in the labour market of the Czech Republic (Mishchuk & Grishnova, 2015, as cited in Yilmaz, 2023; ČSÚ, n.d.). Underemployment affects 45 per cent of Ukrainian workers and 21 per cent of migrant workers with a tertiary education (Drbohlav & Janurová, 2019). Moreover, labour migrants supplement rather than compete with Czech workers, who are less willing to work in low-wage, unskilled jobs (mainly "3D" dirty, dangerous, and demeaning jobs) (Drbohlav & Janurová, 2019, p. 7). Furthermore, companies in the Czech Republic typically hire foreign workers through recruitment agencies or other intermediaries, frequently resulting in migrants being exploited in terms of fees and working conditions (Drbohlav & Janurová, 2019).

Thereby, Strielkowski et al. (2016) discovered that the Czech Republic cannot be regarded as an excellent example of market integration of international protection applicants and refugees. Accordingly, the country is not appealing to asylum seekers and refugees. If they end up in the country, they mostly use it as a bridge (or an international springboard) to neighbouring Germany (Strielkowski et al., 2016).

As Fedyuk and Kindler (2016) indicate, Ukrainian migration is "highly feminised" in some cases, and an examination of these migration streams based on gender provides a significant perspective on a more extensive debate of precariousness and gendering of work in the EU (p. 2). Similarly, Ukrainian migrant women in the Czech Republic frequently encounter numerous challenges, both in their personal lives and within the system. The Czech labour market presents various challenges, including obstacles to integration, the increasing instability of work, the intricate procedures for recognising

qualifications and providing retraining, and the difficulties in balancing work and caregiving responsibilities.

The "Migrant Integration Policy Index" (MIPEX) is frequently used to measure levels of integration and labour market inclusion (Niessen et al., 2010, as cited in Drbohlav & Janurová, 2019). MIPEX is a tool for measuring and comparing various levels of integration concerning several migration policy areas, such as labour market mobility and access to long-term residence, among others. According to the recent MIPEX results, the Czech Republic is ranked 27th out of 56 countries regarding migrant integration policies (Solano & Huddleston, 2020). Furthermore, labour market mobility for migrants was *halfway favourable*: Migrant workers may become trapped in low-wage, precarious jobs because, while they have opportunities to work, they face barriers to receiving support and targeted training to advance their skills and careers (Solano & Huddleston, 2020).

### *2.1.3 Current Situation of Forced Ukrainian Migrants in the Czech Republic*

MI issued long-term visas to Ukrainian migrants from February 24th to March 21st, 2022 (Ministerstvo Vnitřní České Republiky, n.d.). However, as of March 22nd, 2022, Ukrainian migrants have been granted temporary protection through long-term visas. Thus, temporary protection status applies to all Ukrainians, including those with prior visas under Lex Ukraine (Migrace Online, n.d.).

Jarmila Marešová, a migration expert from the CZSO's labour force, migration, and equal opportunities department, pointed out that the share of Ukrainian citizens reached almost six-tenths of the total number of foreigners in the Czech Republic at the end of 2022 (ČSÚ, n.d.). Moreover, the highest number of Ukrainian workers was in the manufacturing industry at the end of 2022, namely 75.133 employees (ČSÚ, n.d.).

PAQ Research has conducted a study on the integration of Ukrainian migrants who arrived in the Czech Republic between February and November 2022 and applied for humanitarian assistance through the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic (MoLSA) (Prokop et al., 2023). The study findings indicate that many migrants are

employed, albeit frequently in low-skilled and precarious jobs, and often “below their qualifications” (Prokop et al., 2023, p. 3).

According to another research, most Ukrainian forced migrants in the Czech Republic have completed higher education (Yilmaz, 2023). Nevertheless, lack of or insufficient proficiency in the Czech language has often resulted in temporary and precarious jobs for Ukrainian forced migrants (SIMI Bez Vrásek, n.d.). Moreover, especially for women, for personal reasons (such as childcare, trauma from the war, etc.), they often do not even show interest in more mentally demanding work, especially if it requires a certain level of language that is still unfamiliar to them (SIMI Bez Vrásek, n.d.).

Compared to the foreign population, the employment rate of Ukrainians is comparatively higher, with a particular emphasis on administrative positions, support activities, and the construction sector. Similarly to their compatriots who are already registered in the country, Ukrainian forced migrants are likely to initially seek employment in the same industry (Ruschka, 2022). Furthermore, most Ukrainian nationals work as auxiliary and unskilled workers (Ruschka, 2022). However, above average compared to all foreigners, they are also employed as machine and equipment operators or assemblers, classified as ISCO-8 (Český Statistický Úřad, 2023).

According to a study's findings, municipalities in the Czech Republic are dealing with the Ukrainian refugee crisis on their own “without the benefit of well-developed stakeholder collaborations” (Jelínková et al., 2023, p. 369). This explains the widespread involvement of non-profits and NGOs in the Czech Republic on the issue of international migration, including the labour market integration of forced migrants.

Historically, regional integration centres have been an essential component of the overall integration system, providing migrants with social and legal counselling, interpretation services, and language and sociocultural courses, among other things (Drbohlav & Janurová, 2019). Currently, 38 organisations in the Czech Republic represent diverse entities, such as People in Need and the Multicultural Centre Prague (Jelínková et al., 2023).

There has been a decline in state support since July 2023, indicating that the situation is likely to worsen (Šafářová, 2023). The main obstacle to obtaining a higher-quality job remains the knowledge of the Czech language and the lack of access to preschool care for children (Šafářová, 2023).

## **2.2 Poland's Migration Approach and the Current Situation of Ukrainian Forced Migrants**

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the migration approach and the situation of Ukrainian forced migrants in Poland.

### *2.2.1 Poland's Migration Approach*

Between the mid-1990s and Poland's full accession to the Schengen area in 2007, the Schengen rationale played a critical role in shaping the legislation and practices of Polish migration governance. Adopting the EU *acquis* has changed the approach to border and migration management while largely ignoring the social needs and integration of labour migrants (Weinar, 2006, as cited in Jaroszewicz & Grzymiski, 2021).

Poland has followed EU laws and regulations in the Area of Freedom, Security, and Justice, such as the CEAS (Kowalczyk, 2014, as cited in Follis, 2019), while taking a *laissez-faire* approach to Ukrainian labour migrants. The number of new arrivals since 2014 is estimated at more than one million, putting Poland first in the EU in issuing new residence permits to TCNs (Brunarska, 2020, as cited in Jaroszewicz & Grzymiski, 2021). In other words, Poland has been a primary destination for short-term, seasonal workers at the global level, according to OECD (2023).

In Poland, migration governance is managed by the state rather than by non-governmental actors. Accordingly, a government agency established in 1997 administers refugee status and protection. However, Poland's Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) regulate services such as “legal aid, language training, job counselling, housing assistance, advocacy, and

public education” (Follis, 2019, p. 4). Moreover, some integration programmes, such as job counselling, language training, and so on, still fall under the competence of Poland's local authorities, which depends on the local structure (Follis, 2019). Furthermore, NGOs have facilitated migration through EU integration funds and other sources, such as the Batory Foundation (Follis, 2019).

The Ministry of Family and Social Policy's Department of Social Assistance and Integration oversees integration-related matters in Poland nationally (EC, 2024). The Prime Minister's Office also established the Department of Social Integration in 2022, which is responsible for supporting the implementation of policies targeted at the social integration of foreigners and Polish citizens, along with coordinating the efforts of public administration institutions, NGOs, and entrepreneurs.

According to the recent MIPEX results, Poland is ranked 40th out of 56 countries regarding migrant integration policies (Solano & Huddleston, 2020). Furthermore, labour market mobility for migrants was *slightly favourable*: Migrant workers who are TCNs can increasingly find jobs and start businesses, but without targeted support or the same general support and benefits as Polish citizens to improve their skills and careers (Solano & Huddleston, 2020).

### *2.2.2 Ukrainian Labour Migrants in Poland*

To begin with, it is critical to highlight the ongoing social and economic ties between Poland and Ukraine. It is also worth noting that the border between Poland and Ukraine is one of the longest in the Schengen area. Historically, Poland has been one of the most homogeneous EU Member States, with Ukrainians accounting for most incoming foreigners (Brunarska, 2020, as cited in Jaroszewicz & Grzymiski, 2021). Furthermore, there has been a social phenomenon known as the “Ukrainisation” of labour migration in Poland (Górny & Kindler, 2016, as cited in Jaroszewicz & Grzymiski, 2021, p. 265).

After 2014, migration from Ukraine to Poland increased mainly due to the outbreak of armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine and the subsequent economic downturn in Ukraine,

accompanied by growing labour shortages in Poland (Jaroszewicz & Grzymiski, 2021). As a result, many Ukrainian migrants chose Poland as a destination for short-term labour migration because of the low travel costs and the ability to maintain family ties. Furthermore, pre-existing migration networks in Poland and, most importantly, language similarity played a vital role in this process (Górny & Kindler, 2016; Drbohlav & Jaroszewicz, 2016; Brunarska, 2020, as cited in Jaroszewicz & Grzymiski, 2021). Consequently, Ukrainian migrants have supplemented the Polish workforce in various industries, including “construction, agriculture, and temporary services” (Jaroszewicz & Grzymiski, 2021, p. 266).

According to Follis (2019), immigration in Poland became a problem only after PiS's anti-refugee rhetoric pushed it to the forefront of political debate. Furthermore, although Poland has been granting short-term work permits rather liberally for labour migration, migrants have more difficulty obtaining residence permits and legalising their stay in Poland (Górny et al., 2018; Brunarska, 2020, as cited in Jaroszewicz & Grzymiski, 2021).

The main problem that Poland's ignorance caused has been the admission of labour migrants, the majority of whom were citizens of Ukraine (Jaroszewicz & Grzymiski, 2021). Moreover, the Labour Inspection Service, the primary organisation for identifying unofficial employment and violations of foreign workers' rights, was understaffed and underfunded (Jaroszewicz & Grzymiski, 2021). As a result, it has been unable to effectively oversee the terms of formal contracts, social insurance, and respectable working conditions provided by Polish companies that employed Ukrainians (Górny et al., 2018, as cited in Jaroszewicz & Grzymiski, 2021).

### *2.2.3 Current Situation of Ukrainian Forced Migrants in Poland*

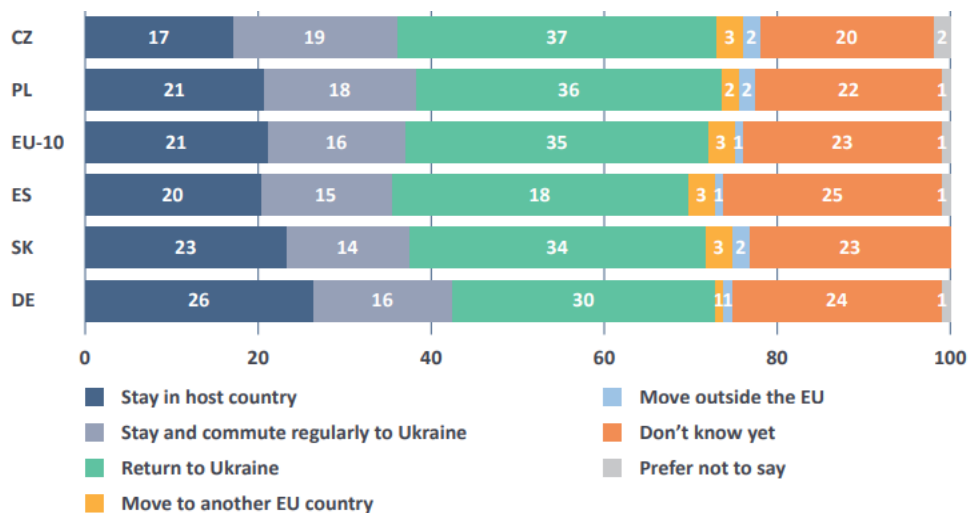
There are currently around 1.5 million estimated forced migrants from Ukraine living in Poland (Deloitte, 2022). Because of the size and complexity of the displacement in Poland, its experience has been exceptional. Nevertheless, Poland has never had to cope with many foreigners who cannot speak Polish (Deloitte, 2022). Thus, the government has had to deal with a wide range of issues, including legislative changes to allow for the integration of



Ukrainians, crisis management and rapid scale-up, mobilisation and coordination of a “whole-of-society” response, and adapting its responses to changing needs (Lee et al., 2023, p. 43).

The Polish government enacted specific legislation, namely the Act of 12 March 2022, concerning aid to Ukrainian citizens in light of the armed conflict in Ukraine, through which provisions are made for the provision of assistance to Ukrainian forced migrants in several areas such as “legal stay, financial and non-financial assistance to meet the basic needs, access to the labour market, access to health care for 18 months, access to schools and preschool care for refugee children” (Deloitte, 2022, p. 5)

Most Ukrainian forced migrants lack proficiency in the Polish language, which employers consider the main problem in hiring refugees from Ukraine (Deloitte, 2022). Consequently, it remains essential to establish a support initiative that enables immigrants to acquire proficiency in the Polish language. Deloitte’s (2022, p. 5) initial study has also revealed that “61% of refugees have a university education, but they often encounter problems with obtaining accreditation and diploma recognition”.



[Figure 3]. Long-term plans of survey respondents by country. Adapted from Prokop et al. (2023, p. 8).

Based on the figure above, it can be observed that 21% of Ukrainian forced migrants currently living in Poland express a desire to permanently remain in Poland, while 18% express a preference for staying in Poland but commuting regularly to Ukraine. Most of

them (36%) expressed a desire to visit Ukraine. Comparable ratios were also observed with Czech Republic data.

### **3. Conceptual Framework on Migrant Integration**

This chapter thoroughly explains the conceptual framework employed in the study. First, a detailed explanation of the concepts of labour market integration used throughout the research is presented. Later, Ager and Strang's (2004, 2008, 2010) conceptual framework on migrant integration is posed, explicitly focusing on the case of Ukrainian forced migrants and their labour market integration.

#### **3.1 Theoretical Concepts of the Study**

The concepts employed throughout the thesis, such as integration, labour market integration, and precariat, are defined in this chapter. The study uses these concepts to examine the labour market integration of Ukrainian forced migrants, which is operationalised into measures such as government help for language courses, recognition of foreign qualifications and diplomas, access to information channels for employment search, employment assistance and courses for skills development under Lex Ukraine in the Czech Republic and the Act of March 12, 2022, on assistance to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of this state in Poland.

Integration of migrants and refugees is one of the most complex challenges of the twenty-first century. There is currently no cohesive international policy addressing refugee and migrant integration into host communities. Integration represents a sustained investment in human capital, with the goal being both parties' inclusion and active involvement (Council of Europe, n.d.). This entails providing all members of society with opportunities to engage in social, cultural, and political life, fostering a sense of unity (Council of Europe, n.d.).

According to Ferguson (2008, as cited in Antoniuk, 2020, p. 35), it is “a process of building values, relations and institutions that enable all people to participate in the social, economic and political life based on equal rights and opportunities, justice and dignity.” Thus, in the context of this study, the integration of Ukrainian forced migrants implies that they have the means and tools to participate in Polish and Czech social, economic, and political life. Moreover, integration does not necessarily indicate permanent residency. It denotes the entitlements and responsibilities of refugees, asylum seekers, and host communities in transit or destination countries.

Labour market integration is essential for migrant integration into their host society (Reitz, 2002). According to Antoniuk (2020), employment provides a means of generating income, achieving economic independence, and possibly advancement; thus, it is a crucial factor in promoting integration. Within the context of this research, the concept of labour market integration refers to the relationship Ukrainian forced migrants have with crucial aspects such as economic integration, skills and education, anti-discrimination and inclusion, recognition of foreign qualifications, social safety nets, etc. (UNHCR, n. d.). Consequently, labour market integration is measured by reviewing programs encompassing vocational counselling, training courses, job placement assistance, wage subsidies, and employment incentives.

The last concept employed throughout the thesis is the precariat and precarious work. Vosko (2010) has proposed an extensive framework for precarious employment. She defines precarious employment as uncertain work, low income, and limited social benefits. According to her perspective, this kind of employment is “shaped by the relationship between employment status, a form of employment (temporary or permanent; part-time or full-time), and dimensions of labour market insecurity, as well as social context and social location” (Vosko, 2010, p. 2). Moreover, individuals who have been forcibly displaced and refugees in general are particularly susceptible to precarious employment. Their challenges include job insecurity, inadequate wages, insufficient social protections, restricted access to stable employment opportunities, and bureaucratic marginalisation and social exclusion (Bulakh, 2020).

This study employs precarious employment to examine different facets of labour market integration for Ukrainian forced migrants. Unlike citizens who shape the central political community, displaced individuals frequently find themselves “in the margins of the state”, facing economic instability and social vulnerability (Bulakh, 2020, p. 471).

### **3.2 Ager and Strang’s Conceptual Framework on Migrant Integration**

When conducting research on integration policies, it is crucial to consider all categories of immigrants, including refugees and individuals seeking asylum. In order to fill the gap in existing research on forced migrants and integration policies, it is necessary to examine a theoretical framework encompassing both immigrants and refugees. The framework on migrant integration developed by Ager and Strang is specifically designed to comprehend refugee integration based on indicators while exploring if an operational definition of the concept for “successful” integration is possible (Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 167).

According to Ager and Strang (2008), integrating refugees poses complex challenges that require diverse solutions. Furthermore, it was pointed out that there is no single theory, model, or definition for integrating immigrants and refugees, and the concept is still very controversial (Castles et al., as cited in Ager & Strang, 2010). However, Ager and Strang (2008), in their article *Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework*, proposed key domains of integration to establish a systematic relation between these normative concepts of integration in resettlement settings.

According to Ager and Strang (2010), the integration process, regardless of its nature, begins from the moment of arrival in a new country. In other words, the intentions and aspirations of refugees have a substantial impact on the process, regardless of their official status in the host country (Ager & Strang, 2010). Hence, it is crucial to understand the reasons behind Ukrainian forced migrants opting for Poland or the Czech Republic and the specific factors that have influenced their decisions.

Ager and Strang (2008) proposed that various aspects of integration, such as social, economic, and cultural dimensions, are connected to the core domains of integration: foundations, facilitators, social connection, markers and means. According to Ager and Strang (2008), critical aspects of integration within these four themes are: “achievement and access across the sectors of employment, housing, education and health; assumptions and practice regarding citizenship and rights; processes of social connection within and between groups within the community; and structural barriers to such connection related to language, culture and the local environment” (p. 166). The chart below illustrates the conceptualisation of Ager and Strang (2008).

**A Conceptual Framework Defining Core Domains of Integration**



[Figure 4]. A Conceptual Framework Defining Core Domains of Integration- Adapted from Ager & Strang (2008, p. 170).

In the context of forced migration, the right to employment, education, and access to social welfare and housing are explicitly mentioned as social rights within the category of markers and means (Ager & Strang, 2008; Council of Europe, 1997). This study focuses on employment and labour market mobility as a measure of Ukrainian forced migrants’ integration rather than the abovementioned components. Employment has consistently been recognised as a significant factor that impacts various relevant matters, such as fostering economic autonomy, “planning for the future, meeting members of the host society, providing an opportunity to develop language skills, restoring self-esteem and encouraging self-reliance” (Africa Educational Trust 1998; Bloch, 1999; Tomlinson and Egan 2002, as cited in Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 170).

Second, the social connection domain is related to social bridges, bonds, and links within the context of their framework. This subject area is closely related to social interactions with local communities that show “friendliness” and those that indicate a higher level of engagement with the local population (Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 180). As a result, social links were closely linked to a sense of safety and security. They were most strongly correlated with positive evaluations of "quality of life" among refugees, indicating that they can be critical in generating long-term social and economic benefits for a community, thereby improving employment prospects (Woolcock, 1998, as cited in Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 180).

Third, language proficiency, cultural familiarity, personal safety, and social stability are recognised as factors that promote integration. This is particularly relevant in the context of labour market integration, as it is closely linked to participation in the public arena. Therefore, proficiency in language and understanding of culture are key factors that demonstrate successful integration.

Considering both employment and broader aspects of their integration in the public domain, including four domains within Ager and Strang’s (2004, 2008, 2010) framework, there are both challenges and opportunities to integrate these groups into the labour market. According to Ager and Strang (2008), many well-educated refugees face challenges in recognising their qualifications. Furthermore, underemployment, which means they are working in jobs that do not require the same level of skills or qualifications that they possess, is a well-known issue (Africa Educational Trust 1998, as cited in Ager & Strang, 2008). This highlights the significance of community programs and the need for effective integration policies.

According to Muus (1997, as cited in Ager & Strang, 2008), refugees tend to have higher education levels than other groups of immigrants. Nevertheless, a significant obstacle to obtaining employment is the lack of acknowledgement of qualifications and past work experience. Furthermore, even if they can provide such evidence, employers may not acknowledge or accept them as valid credentials (ECRE, 1999b, as cited in Ager & Strang, 2008). The following chapter provides a comprehensive review of the methodology.

## **4. Methodology**

This section offers a thorough explanation of the methodology used in this study. The study employs a qualitative comparative case study design. It utilises qualitative research methods to examine the challenges faced by Ukrainian forced migrants in the labour markets of the Czech Republic and Poland.

### **4.1 A Qualitative Comparative Research Design**

In order to address the research questions systematically, a qualitative comparative research design was chosen for this study. Furthermore, comparative migration research involves systematically analysing a limited number of cases.

First, a critical content analysis of the labour market programmes is done by reviewing the laws and regulations governing Ukrainian forced migrants in the Czech Republic and Poland. This review is based on English translations of relevant government reports, statistics, and official English documents. If English translations are unavailable or cannot be accessed, analyses rely mainly on secondary literature on the laws, usually published by the UNHCR, International Labour Office (ILO), think tank reports or the EU institutions.

Second, data is gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews with seven key informants and 16 surveys filled by Ukrainian forced migrants in Poland and the Czech Republic with temporary residency status under the TPD. This means a mixed-method approach was applied. The author had to change the research approach primarily due to a lack of Ukrainian language proficiency. It was not possible to contact informants in Poland or locate forced migrants who speak English in general. Furthermore, to find informants, increase sample size, and reduce research bias, this mixed-method approach was used, combining questionnaires and interview data.

“Meaningful, complex structures, institutions, collectives, and event configurations” are conceptualised and theorised as “cases” within comparative research (Ragin, 1997, as cited in Bloemraad, 2013, p. 28). Furthermore, a case is examined using various methodologies:

a case study researcher typically employs multiple techniques for gathering and analysing data, and questions rather than methods drive the research. The reason for choosing this design is to compare the Polish and Czech cases with identical research matters. In this respect, these share similar characteristics but differ in different themes and practices of labour market integration.

Therefore, this study aims to comprehensively evaluate and analyse these cases by highlighting their similarities and differences. This rationale underpins the selection of the research design. Lastly, to be able to compare the countries, the implementation of “Lex Ukraine”<sup>7</sup> and “the act amending the law on assistance to citizens of Ukraine in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of that country”<sup>8</sup> will be analysed in depth by critically reviewing OECD, ILO, International Organization for Migration (IOM), UNHCR, PAQ Research and European Central Bank data, along with official government sources such as Ministerstwo Rodziny I Polityki Społecznej<sup>9</sup> and Ministerstvo Vnitra České Republiky<sup>10</sup> data.

According to Esser and Vliegthart (2017), comparative analysis enables us to understand one's society by contrasting its familiar structures and routines with the understanding of those of other systems. Moreover, it examines how structures, cultures, processes, norms, or institutions influence outcomes by combining and intersecting causal mechanisms (Bloemraad, 2013). Therefore, the research design allows for examining Polish and Czech labour market integration mechanisms within a close cultural context.

The design enables evaluating the scope and significance of specific phenomena, all contributing to the development of universally applicable theories, which means generalisation. In other words, it keeps scholars from overgeneralising based on their own, often idiosyncratic, experiences, and it calls into question claims of ethnocentrism or naive

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<sup>7</sup> *EUR-Lex - 52022PC0091 - EN - EUR-Lex.* (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52022PC0091&qid=1646384923837>

<sup>8</sup> Amendment to the law on assistance to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of the country - Office for Foreigners - Gov.pl website. (n.d.). Office for Foreigners. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.pl/web/udsc-en/the-law-on-assistance-to-ukrainian-citizens-in-connection-with-the-armed-conflict-on-the-territory-of-the-country-has-entered-into-force>

<sup>9</sup> The Ministry of the Family and Social Policy in Poland

<sup>10</sup> The Ministry of the interior of the Czech Republic



universalism, meaning relativisation (Esser & Vliegenthart, 2017). The comparison also gives you access to a wide range of alternative options and problem solutions that can help you or “reveal a way out of similar dilemmas at home”, meaning providing “alternatives” (Esser & Vliegenthart, 2017, p. 2). Thus, comparing the two countries provides a contextual explanation, as it enables one to take a close look at the contextual factors and specific developments, characteristics, and integration experiences within the national spheres of the two countries.

#### *4.1.1 Study Population*

The selection of the two cases is based primarily on recent developments, as respective countries have the highest number of Ukrainian forced migrants in Central and Eastern Europe following the war. In addition, before the current situation, there were preexisting networks and labour migration patterns between Ukraine and Poland and between Ukraine and the Czech Republic. However, reality is characterised by various obstacles that impede their integration into these job markets.

A thorough examination of the research topic through desk research has uncovered numerous problems related to labour market integration. These challenges encompass language barriers despite cultural similarities, the lack of comprehensive and well-structured programs for labour market integration due to these countries not traditionally being asylum countries, and the caregiving responsibilities of female migrants, which impede their integration into the labour market.

## **4.2 Research Methods**

Data for the study was collected using qualitative research methods through in-depth semi-structured interviews in English with a total of seven key informants and sixteen questionnaires, which contain both open-ended and close-ended survey questions in Ukrainian, filled by Ukrainian forced migrants currently residing in Poland and the Czech

Republic with temporary residency under the TPD. Moreover, this study's research strategy is a comparative case study (CCS).

The secondary data comprise political and legal documents such as government reports and statistics, ILO data, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) data, EU resources, government statistics and think tank reports. In other words, analysis of labour market integration is done using qualitative methods to gather primary and secondary data on Ukrainian displacement and integration policies that followed the war. After understanding the broader context, secondary data analysis is narrowed down to explore the key legal and social challenges facing Ukrainian forced migrants.

These research methods enable a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing integration outcomes and the policy implications for Ukrainian forced migrants. This is accomplished by incorporating qualitative research methods into a comparative case study design and analysing primary data from interviews and questionnaires and secondary data from political and legal documents. As a result, these factors justify the decision to use these research methods.

### **4.3 Data Collection Methods**

In this study, critical document review and country-specific informant data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and surveys conducted in both Ukrainian and English languages. To collect data for this thesis, the researcher made multiple posts on different expats and Ukrainian Facebook groups based in the Czech Republic and Poland, as well as on LinkedIn and their personal social media accounts, to recruit participants for the study. Two out of six interviews were conducted face-to-face. In contrast, the remaining participants not located in Prague were interviewed remotely through Facebook Messenger, Instagram video calls, and WhatsApp video calls. The duration of each interview was approximately 40-50 minutes. All the interviews were conducted in English. The author obtained the participants' consent verbally before conducting the interviews, and no audio or video recordings were made. Instead, the author took written notes during the interviews.

#### *4.3.1 Study Population*

The study population for this research comprises Ukrainian forced migrants who relocated to the Czech Republic and Poland after February 24th, 2022. All participants in this study fall within the age range of 18-54 years. To be eligible for participation in the study, individuals were required to meet specific criteria, such as being a Ukrainian citizen with the TPD status, being at least 18 years of age, and having relocated to the Czech Republic or Poland after the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2022.

#### *4.3.2 Sampling Technique*

The author of this study is not fluent in Ukrainian and does not have a Ukrainian background, despite having some friends in Ukraine. Thus, the sampling technique used for interviews and questionnaires in this study is snowball sampling. Browne (2005) defines snowball sampling as a method that leverages respondents' social networks to reach populations that are difficult to access and sensitive. Audemard (2020) also notes that snowball sampling is a method that uses “sociometric questions” (p. 2) to sample and examine the direct social environment of informants. In addition, the procedure of including survey or interview participants whom informants have identified can be repeated multiple times (Audemard, 2020).

Information from the individuals and their relationships are the two statistical populations gathered by this method (Coleman, 1958, as cited in Audemard, 2020). Furthermore, a criterion is considered while asking informants for their social networks and possible future informants for the research when searching for interview and questionnaire respondents. In this study, the criteria for this selection included having TPD status, being a citizen of Ukraine, being at least 18 years old, and having moved to the Czech Republic or Poland after February 24th, 2022.

### *4.3.3 Processing and Analysing Data*

The interviews were conducted in English, and the data from these interviews were collected for analysis through notetaking. Furthermore, the data collected from the questionnaires, transcribed in Ukrainian, were later translated into English with the assistance of a Ukrainian friend and the online translation tool “DeepL” and subjected to further analysis.

Thematic analysis is used for the interview data. It involves identifying themes and patterns in the data, which are then interpreted to gain insights into the research questions. In other words, it is “a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6). Thus, the data analysis process included iterations of transcript analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes. The key terms were then organised into broader themes to investigate the research questions.

## **4.4 Operationalization**

This chapter elaborates on the study's operationalisation, defining how abstract concepts or variables will be measured or observed. The concept of labour market integration, with the help of the conceptual framework on integration developed by Ager and Strang (2004, 2008, 2010), along with the concepts of integration, labour market integration and precariat, can be operationalised and measured by various elements that ensure equal access to employment, such as ensuring the legal right to work, recognition and validation of diplomas among other qualifications, access to information for employment assistance, access to education and vocational skills training, and language courses, access to cultural orientation programs, and connecting forced migrants with job opportunities through job matching services, among others.

Throughout the analysis, these operational measures serve as the basis for identifying key challenges and areas requiring improvement in the labour market integration of Ukrainian migrants in the Czech Republic and Poland.

## **4.5 Limitations and Ethical Considerations**

The following sections address the limitations and the ethical considerations of the study.

### *4.5.1 Limitations of the Study*

Initially, the study was conducted with a relatively limited number of participants, which does not allow for the generalizability of the findings to the larger population of Ukrainian forced migrants residing in the Czech Republic and Poland. Furthermore, there may be inherent biases explicitly associated with the interview data due to using snowball sampling as the sampling technique. The participants were selected through a network of English-speaking informants. The selection process was not purposive, and the informants were chosen randomly. Furthermore, out of the six individuals who participated in the interviews, only one was male. Also, out of the sixteen survey respondents, only one was a male living in Poland. This might suggest the existence of an additional gender-related bias.

Given the reliance on secondary data sources for the analysis, it is imperative to acknowledge that potential limitations and issues may arise due to the lack of first-hand interactions with the forced migrants. The data collection methods employed in this study, such as in-person interviews and Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook video calls, may have introduced bias due to their restriction to individuals with access to these technologies and their willingness to partake. In addition, the subject's sensitivity could play a role in limited data collection. Thus, the reliability and quality of the data used depend on the secondary source and, thus, are questionable. Also, the sample size for the interviews delimits the generalizability of the outcomes of the in-depth semi-structured interviews.

In addition, Ukrainian questionnaires were prepared using a translation service to supplement the interview data because it was difficult to find English-speaking Ukrainians for the interviews. Thus, due to the inability to reach out to Ukrainians, particularly those who live in Poland and do not speak English, questionnaires in Ukrainian were created and distributed via social media channels. Last, the author could not collect data in these

countries at the same rate; because she lives in Prague, she was able to reach out to Ukrainians in Prague rather than those in Poland.

Last, the study exclusively examined Ukrainian forced migrants who relocated to Poland and the Czech Republic after the 24<sup>th</sup> of February, thereby potentially lacking representativeness for other migrant cohorts. Another limitation is that the study was conducted within a defined temporal and contextual scope, potentially restricting the generalizability of the results to other periods or geographic areas. Finally, the study primarily examined government-provided assistance to analyse the experiences of migrants, which may not comprehensively contain the various forms of support accessible to migrants through community and civil society organisations.

#### *4.5.2 Ethical Considerations*

Ethical considerations were carefully considered throughout this research project to ensure the study was conducted ethically. Before they participated in the study, all participants verbally obtained informed consent. This involved communicating the study's objective, the techniques used to collect data, and their rights as participants, including their prerogative to withdraw from the study at any given moment. Strict confidentiality was upheld during the entire research process. Identifying information was changed on the transcripts during data transcription and analysis.

## **5. Analysis and Findings**

This section presents the findings of the study. It addresses the main research question and sub-questions by presenting the labour market programmes in respective countries and later analysing the interview and questionnaire data using country-specific sub-sections. Finally, a comparative summary highlights the key differences and similarities regarding the main problems hindering labour market integration.

## **5.1 Labour Market Integration Programmes in the Czech Republic Under Lex Ukraine**

The package of three government bills related to the armed conflict on the territory of Ukraine and the influx of displaced persons from Ukraine, commonly known as "Lex Ukraine," was officially enacted into law on 17 March 2022 in the Czech Republic (EC, n.d.-b). It aims to simplify the registration procedure for migrants fleeing war and encompasses measures to improve their access to health insurance, social security, education, and the labour market. Additionally, it grants humanitarian and solidarity allowances to migrants and their hosts based in Czechia.

The strategy under Lex Ukraine involves a multifaceted approach comprising three phases (UNHCR, 2024). The initial stage prioritised the protection and welfare of the individuals, while the later phase emphasised fulfilling their requirements, including education, employment, housing, and healthcare (UNHCR, 2024). The third phase entailed executing measures in 13 key domains to incorporate long-term refugees (UNHCR, 2024).

Lex Ukraine comprised meaningful employment and social security measures (at that time) such as;

- Ukrainian forced migrants who hold temporary protection are insured by public health insurance from entry into the Czech Republic.
- They are granted entry into the labour market, and individuals with temporary protection status are eligible for unemployment benefits.
- The Czech Social Security Administration maintains a registry of employed individuals with temporary protection. The employer is legally obligated to report the introduction of BTP into the workplace and any other modifications to this registry.
- Upon request from the regional branch of the Labour Office, the employer is required to confirm the applicant's income, as well as the income of any other individuals mentioned in the benefits application.
- Every forced migrant from Ukraine receives a standardised humanitarian stipend of CZK 5,000.
- A solidarity household allowance has been introduced. Moreover, if individuals migrating from Ukraine are experiencing unfavourable socioeconomic

circumstances, they will receive all social assistance free of charge.

- Migrants who arrived after February 2022 were also provided with language courses and other humanitarian assistance (Migrace Online, n.d.; EC, n.d.-b).
- Support such as childcare services in the form of childcare in a playgroup has also been amended. Schooling is also established to place children with compulsory school attendance in kindergartens and primary schools, which is important for allowing parents to work outside their homes.

Lex Ukraine is subject to annual renewal, with the current renewal being referred to as the "fifth amendment"<sup>11</sup>. This amendment has brought a humanitarian benefit that helps with housing costs, but the apartment must be registered<sup>12</sup>. Furthermore, one significant change brought about by this amendment was the reduction of humanitarian aid based on proof of financial resources and ability to work. Based on this, Ukrainian forced migrants continued to receive humanitarian aid after July 1, 2023. Beginning with the first month, the amount will be calculated based on the cost of living for the first 150 days (5 months). If the recipient of the humanitarian benefit could not provide financial resources but was able to work, the amount was reduced to the subsistence minimum.

The Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Marian Jurečka, stated that the goal is to encourage Ukrainian refugees to seek employment instead of relying solely on government assistance. Vulnerable groups will be exempt from stricter rules<sup>13</sup>.

“Lex Ukraine VI” has recently been modified for certain elements (Association for Integration and Migration, n.d.). These changes came into effect on January 1, 2024. Accordingly, it has been mutually decided to extend the temporary protection and visas until 31.3.2025. Furthermore, this change has resulted in a twofold increase in the allowable housing expenses for individuals who are at risk. This entails an increase in the

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<sup>11</sup> Czech Republic: Fifth amendment to “Lex Ukraine” law package. (2024, August 18). European Website on Integration. Retrieved from [https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/library-document/czech-republic-fifth-amendment-lex-ukraine-law-package\\_en](https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/library-document/czech-republic-fifth-amendment-lex-ukraine-law-package_en)

<sup>12</sup> Lex Ukrajina 5: Změny v pomoci uprchlíkům z Ukrajiny. (n.d.). [Changes in assistance to refugees from Ukraine]. Retrieved from <https://www.cizinci.cz/-/lex-ukrajina-5-zmeny-v-pomoci-uprchlikum-z-ukrajiny#:~:text=2023%20se%20v%20r%C3%A1mci%20novely,zohled%C5%88ovat%20se%20i%20dal%C5%A1%C3%AD%20p%C5%99%C3%ADjmy.>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

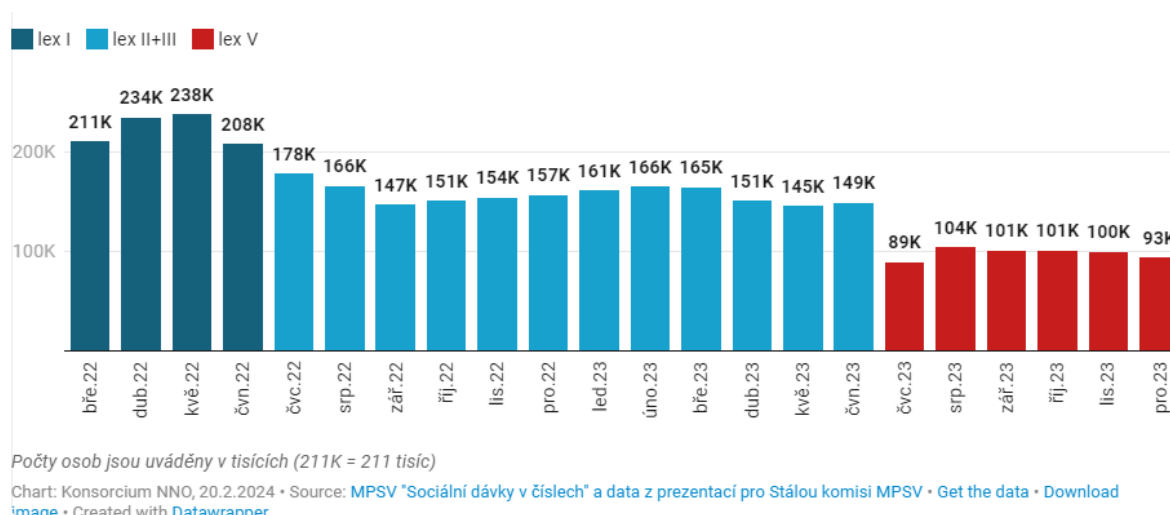


monthly cost for apartments from CZK 3,000 to CZK 6,000 per person. The last amendment also introduces the provision of free nostrification for Ukrainian education documents (Association for Integration and Migration, n.d.). Only Ukrainians who have acquired temporary protection within the past 12 months are not required to pay fees.

Despite the measures that Lex Ukraine has introduced, the Czech Republic had already existing mechanisms such as;

- External sources for finding a job include the EURES network and Czech websites, such as expats.cz, along with private employment agencies<sup>14</sup>.
- The recognition of foreign qualifications has always been required for certain professions, which are regulated and need to be recognised by the respective authority in Czechia.
- Unemployment benefits: Job seekers are eligible for unemployment benefits if they can demonstrate a minimum of 12 months of employment within the past 24 months, which is applicable for Ukrainians in the Czech Republic.

Last, the following bar chart illustrates the number of Ukrainian forced migrants in the Czech Republic who have received humanitarian benefits.



[Figure 5]. The number of Ukrainian forced migrants in the Czech Republic who have received humanitarian benefits. from Konsorcium. (n.d.).

<sup>14</sup> Living and Working Conditions. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.uradprace.cz/web/en/living-and-working-conditions#k02>

The chart displays the months on the x-axis and the number of people, given in thousands, on the y-axis (211K = 211 thousand). The chart demonstrates a decline in humanitarian benefits, particularly under current legislation. The month of July in 2023 had the lowest observed benefit. According to the most recent data from December 2023, a humanitarian benefit of 93,000 CZK has been provided to BTP.

## **5.2 Labour Market Integration Programmes in Poland Under the Law on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine**

Similar to the Czech Republic, Poland has agreed on the amendment to the law on assistance to citizens of Ukraine, in other words, special law (Wieczorek, 2022) and implemented the TPD for Ukrainian forced migrants based on the Act on granting protection to foreigners (Ministerstwo Rodziny, n.d.).

President Andrzej Duda signed the amendment on 7 March 2022 (Babická, 2022). Accordingly, the provisions apply to Ukrainian nationals fleeing after February 24, 2022, their non-Ukrainian spouses, and Ukrainian citizens with Polish Card (Karta Polaka) who have arrived in Poland (Skuzza, 2022). Furthermore, starting from 1 April 2023, individuals who are beneficiaries of special temporary protection can apply for a temporary residence permit specifically for their employment in a simplified manner (Asylum Information Database Poland, 2022). Nevertheless, acquiring a temporary residence permit entails forfeiting temporary protection in Poland, as stipulated in Article 2(3)(1)(c) of the Special Law (Asylum Information Database Poland, 2022). However, under the Special Law, Ukrainian citizens who leave Poland for over a month lose their right to legal residence in Poland.

The amendment made the labour market more flexible by providing more opportunities, such as Polish language courses, and entitlement to certain social benefits and subsidies to reduce the fee for the child's stay in the nursery or similar institutions (Ministerstwo Rodziny, n.d.). The amendment also includes solutions such as;

- The new law made it possible to work in Poland without a work permit. The

employer was only required to report this information to the employment office 14 days after the Ukrainian citizen began employment.

- Citizens of Ukraine whose stay is recognised as legal under the Special Law obtained PESEL numbers upon application (Wieczorek, 2022).
- Citizens of Ukraine could register as unemployed and receive services from unemployment offices, such as job placement, vocational counselling, and various vocational courses (Skuzza, 2022).
- Ukrainian citizens had the same rights as Polish citizens regarding running a business. However, if their stay in Poland were no longer legal, they would lose their status as sole traders.
- A monetary allowance of PLN 40 for accommodation and meals was provided.
- Individuals who provided accommodation and alimentionation to Ukrainian citizens were granted a cash benefit based on an agreement concluded with the municipal authority.
- Benefits included a one-time cash benefit for food, clothing, hygiene products and aid from the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived.
- Free psychological assistance was provided.
- Ukrainian citizens qualified as doctors, dentists, nurses, or midwives were permitted to work in Poland if they fulfilled the requirements specified in the Specustawa, which regulates the practice of these professions (Wieczorek, 2022).
- A special temporary protection beneficiary with a PESEL number could receive a one-time financial allowance of PLN 300.248.

In addition, individuals who have been granted special temporary protection, possess a PESEL number and are residing in Poland with children had the right to:

- Family benefits, as outlined in the 2003 Law on family benefits.
- A financial allowance of PLN 500+ was provided for every Ukrainian child under 18 years old with a PESEL number. This allowance was given every month. This service was exclusively available online and inaccessible to Ukrainian parents of children who are not Ukrainian citizens.
- An initial allowance of PLN 300 was provided at the start of the school year as a "good start" allowance (Asylum Information Database Poland, 2022).

In addition, individuals who are beneficiaries of special temporary protection and have a PESEL number are eligible to use the overall social welfare system. As a result, they can receive financial and non-financial benefits per the 2004 Law on Social Assistance (Asylum Information Database Poland, 2022).

Moreover, the Association for Legal Intervention created a portal in Ukrainian, English, and Polish to answer questions about the law for temporary protection beneficiaries and those fleeing the war in Ukraine (Asylum Information Database Poland, 2022). Also, NGOs published leaflets and brochures with information for those fleeing the war in Ukraine, including unaccompanied minors; financial allowances for Ukrainian nationals who arrived in Poland on or after February 24, 2022; and financial allowances for individuals with disabilities, including those with 'PESEL UKR' (Asylum Information Database Poland, 2022).

The former Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy Marlena Malag pointed out in one of her speeches:

*"Since the beginning of the armed conflict in Ukraine, the Ministry of Family and Social Policy has implemented several legislative solutions to make it easier for Ukrainian citizens to take up employment in Poland. Today, we can see that these people function very well in our labour market. The employment of Ukrainian citizens is a benefit for employees, employers and the economy as a whole."* (Ministerstwo Rodziny, n.d.).

Based on a separate study, Ukrainian women who arrived in Poland after February 24, 2022, reported that the main difficulties they faced in entering the job market, especially in starting a business, were primarily due to their limited understanding of the Polish language and the need to arrange childcare while working (Asylum Information Database Poland, 2022). Nevertheless, they generally perceived greater assistance from Polish authorities rather than encountering obstacles.

### **5.3 Comparative Analysis and Findings from Interviews and Questionnaires**

In the analysis section of this study, the main goal is to identify various themes that emerged from the data gathered and analyse comparatively the underlying factors that might hinder the labour market integration of Ukrainians in respective countries. The first step is to divide the data from interviews and questionnaires into digestible themes. These are created as follows:

- 1. Reason for choosing the country**
- 2. Language Fluency and Czech/Polish Language Courses**
- 3. Recognition of Education and Previous Qualifications**
- 4. Access to Information Regarding Employment and Employment Services**
- 5. Employment Assistance and Courses for Skills Development**
- 6. Employment Status and Overall Socio-Economic Well-Being**

Regarding i) interview informants and ii) questionnaire respondents, the following tables were created by the author to provide a better understanding of their demographics in the Czech Republic and Poland.

*The Czech Republic:*

| Name       | Age | Gender | Place of Residence | Education Level   | Occupation                          | Language Fluency  |
|------------|-----|--------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| Anna       | 28  | Female | Prague             | High School       | Recruiter                           | Ukrainian, Russian, English (C1), Czech (B1), German (A1)               |
| Daryna     | 22  | Female | Prague             | Bachelor's Degree | Graphic Designer                    | Ukrainian, Russian, English (C1)  |
| Ganna      | 25  | Female | Prague             | Master's Degree   | Business Analyst in IT at a Bank    | Ukrainian, Russian, English (C1), Czech (A2)                            |
| Oleksandra | 24  | Female | Prague             | High School       | Data Scientist/Currently Unemployed | Ukrainian, Russian, English (C1), Czech (A2), German (A2), Chinese (A1) |
| Vitomir    | 21  | Male   | Prague             | High School       | Student/Music Teacher               | Ukrainian, Russian, English (C1), Czech (C1), German (A2)               |

[Table 2]. Demographic data on interviewees based in the Czech Republic and created by the author.

| Respondent No. | Age   | Place of Residence in the Czechia | Education Level   | Occupation                           | Language Fluency                                 |
|----------------|-------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1              | 18-24 | Prague                            | Bachelor's Degree | Business development representative  | Ukrainian, English, Russian, Spanish, Czech (B1) |
| 2              | 35-44 | Did not specify                   | Master's Degree   | Architect                            | Ukrainian, English, Russian, Czech (B1)          |
| 3              | 25-34 | Beroun                            | Bachelor's Degree | Employed (not specified)             | Ukrainian, Russian, English (A1), Czech (B1)     |
| 4              | 45-54 | Beroun                            | Master's Degree   | Unemployed                           | Ukrainian, Russian, English, Czech (B1)          |
| 5              | 25-34 | Prague                            | Master's Degree   | Employed remote work (not specified) | Ukrainian, Russian, Czech (A1)                   |
| 6              | 25-34 | Prague                            | Master's Degree   | Architect                            | Ukrainian, Czech (C1), English                   |
| 7              | 18-24 | Prague                            | Master's Degree   | Maid in a Hotel                      | Ukrainian, German, Czech (A1)                    |
| 8              | 35-44 | Vysocina                          | Master's Degree   | Unemployed                           | Ukrainian, Czech (B1)                            |
| 9              | 18-24 | Prague                            | High School       | Waitress/Student                     | Ukrainian, Russian, English (C1), Czech (C1)     |
| 10             | 25-34 | Beroun                            | Master's Degree   | Doctor under supervision             | Ukrainian, Russian, English (A2), Czech (B1)     |

[Table 3]. Demographic data on survey respondents (all female) based in the Czech Republic and created by the author.

*Poland:*

| Name   | Age | Place of Residence in Poland | Education Level | Occupation          | Language Fluency                              |
|--------|-----|------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|---|
| Ivanna | 25  | Warsaw                       | Master's Degree | Operational Manager | Ukrainian, Russian, English (A2), Polish (A2) |

[Table 4]. Demographic data on female interviewee based in Poland and created by the author.

| Respondent No. | Age   | Gender | Place of Residence | Education Level             | Occupation                            | Language Fluency   |
|----------------|-------|--------|--------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1              | 35-44 | Female | Malbork            | Master's Degree             | Senior Compliance officer             | English, Polish (C1), Ukrainian, Russian                 |
| 2              | 45-54 | Female | Krakow             | Master's Degree             | Caregiver in Kindergarten             | Ukrainian, Polish (C1)                                   |
| 3              | 35-44 | Female | Krakow             | Master's Degree             | Cleaner                               | Ukrainian, Russian, Polish (B1)                          |
| 4              | 35-44 | Male   | Krakow             | Vocational Higher Education | An entrepreneur                       | Ukrainian, Russian, Polish (B1)                          |
| 5              | 35-44 | Female | Warsaw             | Master's Degree             | Worker (not specified)                | Ukrainian, Russian, Polish (B1)                          |
| 6              | 35-44 | Female | Krakow             | Master's Degree             | PR director of a charity organisation | Ukrainian, Russian, Polish (B1), English and some German |

[Table 5]. Demographic data on survey respondents based in Poland and created by the author.



## 1. Reason for choosing the country

For this theme, the objective was to understand the fundamental motivations and determinants that impacted migrants' decisions to choose their respective countries. According to Ager and Strang (2010), the integration process starts as soon as a migrant arrives in a new country, regardless of the specific type of migration. Nevertheless, the intentions and aspirations of refugees have a substantial influence on the process, irrespective of their formal status in the country where they seek refuge (Ager & Strang, 2010). Thus, this reasoning is considered part of the analysis and was the underlying reason for inquiring about why they chose a particular country to relocate to.

The interviews included an open-ended question such as "How did you decide where to go when you left Ukraine? Why did you choose the Czech Republic/Poland?". Also, a question about their decision was included in the questionnaires that required an open-ended response. It is noteworthy that both in the Czech Republic and Poland, migrants' networks and previous experiences had a substantial impact on the decision-making process.

### *The Czech Republic*

4 out of 5 interviewees indicated they had a family member or a friend currently living and working in the Czech Republic. These individuals were also the primary source of information regarding finding accommodation and information for registration in the Labour Office. They introduced them to state assistance programs to help them with the registration process and other types of support. For respondents, having this information was important:

*"I have got friends here who can help. That is the main reason, and I also speak and understand Czech. I also had some prior experience, having previously lived here for a short period."* (Anna, 28)

*"My friend was living in Prague and told me about her positive experiences here; it was a decision on the go. First, we arrived in Poland by car with my mother. However, Poland is problematic because it is very close to Ukraine, and most of the war refugees have chosen*

*to live there to be near Ukraine. That is why it is overcrowded there. I decided to move to Prague for all these reasons.” (Oleksandra, 24)*

Another reason for moving was defined as finding an opportunity in the form of a study program or a job, and two interview respondents chose Prague for this reason, one of them being Vitomir:

*“In 2018, when I was 15, I travelled to the Czech Republic for a choir competition. I wanted to pursue a music career, and the music scene in this area aroused my interest, so I decided to relocate here to attend FAMU.” (Vitomir, 21)*

As for the questionnaire respondents, 6 out of 10 people moved to the Czech Republic because they had friends or relatives here, similar to the interviewees. Furthermore, one survey respondent chose Prague partly because they were offered a job as an expat or a study opportunity there. In sum, for both interview and questionnaire respondents, several factors contributed to the selection of the country, such as its proximity to Ukraine, its familiarity with the Czech Republic and its culture through its networks, the presence of established social networks, a thriving job market for expatriates, and the availability of study opportunities.

*Poland:*

First, the only informant found in Poland, Ivanna (25), stands out as an exceptional case due to her status as a highly educated professional holding an MBA degree in a prominent position and currently pursuing her PhD. Furthermore, it is essential to note that the perspective of a single informant does not encompass the experiences of all Ukrainian forced migrants living in Poland.

The reason for choosing Poland for Ivanna is to advance her master's degree studies, which is based in Słupsk, Poland. Therefore, her university in Poland provided her with support throughout this process. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, she was already engaged in remote studying. Later, upon completing her degree, she relocated to Warsaw, where she

resides and is actively pursuing a doctoral degree. Thus, like Vitomir and one interview respondent in the Czech Republic, she moved mainly due to an opportunity.

For the questionnaire respondents, three out of six said they had a relative in Poland. Other responses include;

*“My wife knew Polish, and they had previously visited Krakow as tourists”;*  
*“Recommendation of friends”, and “We left Ukraine to treat our mother's disease, and it was the easiest and quickest way to find a program for Ukrainian cancer patients in Krakow”.*

As a result, networks and cultural proximity are among the most important factors for Ukrainians when choosing Poland and the Czech Republic as destination countries.

## **2. Language Fluency and Czech/Polish Language Courses**

Evaluating the accessibility of free and paid local language courses is crucial for integration in general and labour market integration in particular. As Ager and Strang (2008) point out, language's important role in finding job prospects and social connections between groups within the community and structural barriers to such connections related to language might hinder integration into the labour market. Moreover, it is recognised as the initial significant step towards a successful integration process that impacts migrants' capacity to navigate, communicate, and enable public services in the host country (Ager & Strang, 2004, 2008, 2010; Prokop et al., 2023). During the interviews and for the questionnaires, three questions were asked related to language fluency and availability of the Czech and Polish language courses.

### *The Czech Republic*

In addition, all the informants have professional English skills. Among the interviewees, one speaks Czech at the A2 level and the other at B1 proficiency. However, because four out of five informants work in positions that require them to speak English as their primary language, their Czech proficiency has no impact on their current job status.

In addition, three interviewees were enrolled in language courses offered by NGOs, Charles University, or the Prague Integration Centre, as the Czech government, in collaboration with NGOs and some universities, provided Czech language courses to forced migrants from Ukraine. The courses were delivered either online for individuals in remote locations throughout the Czech Republic or in-person, with most classes held in larger cities such as Prague and Brno.

One of the informants, Anna (28), who speaks English and Czech (around B1), discussed the importance of language in finding job opportunities:

*“I was quite scared to work here because I heard many problematic issues like the language issue. They will not employ you if you do not speak perfect Czech at the C1 level. I heard these things, but finding a job in English was quite easy. My sister is currently struggling to find a job as a copywriter. She speaks English almost at the native level, but employers go for the natives. Finding a job in a Czech firm is difficult because she speaks only a bit of Czech.” (Anna, 28)*

Furthermore, Oleksandra (24), who speaks Czech at the A2 level, stated that she completed a Czech language course at Univerzita Karlova, which offered free courses to Ukrainians. However, with 30 students in the class, she found it inefficient. Regarding her access to information about unemployment, she also highlighted the problem of a lack of language proficiency using the following words:

*“The problem with the renewal process of my unemployment benefit is that they do not explain things very clearly. You go to Ukrainians in Prague Facebook groups to access information on things like this because ministries have info on their website, but all are in Czech. Also, if you do not speak Czech, ministry employees get angry with you, and you must book a Ukrainian volunteer translator in advance. I did not do it, and I struggled in this process.” (Oleksandra, 24)*

Oleksandra also mentioned that her mother's lack of Czech language made it difficult to find work:

*“She had a coffee roastery in Ukraine and had worked her entire life for her own business, and now she has to work as a cleaner in the Czech Republic. She already knows how to*

*manage a business but could not find a job matching her skills due to the language barrier.” (Oleksandra, 24)*

Moreover, Oleksandra has received monthly unemployment benefits from the office for 3000 CZK. However, currently, the unemployment service needs renewal, and she is delaying it mainly due to the language barrier:

*“I need more help to be registered to this office. There are some bugs because all the information regarding this service is in Czech (...). They (employees in the Labour office of Prague) do not speak English, and you must speak Czech with them. If you do not, they act like you are lower than them”. (Oleksandra, 24).*

It is apparent from this example that language is important not only for finding work but also for accessing government unemployment services. Last, two interviewees in the Czech Republic expressed dissatisfaction with the language courses provided by the government and the university.

According to the questionnaire results, six out of ten people in Prague can speak and understand English. Furthermore, four out of ten people can speak and understand Czech. The questionnaire included a question about government job searches, language courses, and skill development assistance. As a result, one respondent stated that she only took an English language course sponsored by TipSport, while another stated that she took a Czech language course through the Ministry of Labour.

*Poland:*

Ivanna had not previously enrolled in any Polish language courses. She earned her MBA in English in Poland and now works in an environment where English is the primary language of communication. As a result, she only needed Polish knowledge for local interactions, and she recently decided to enrol in an online course independent of any language courses provided by the government or an organisation. Currently, she understands Polish well, but expressing herself is difficult. Her professor recommended the language course, which was free for all foreign students and was not funded by the government.

Questionnaire results have shown that 2 out of 6 people in Poland can speak and understand English. Moreover, 5 out of 6 respondents from Poland said they could speak and read Polish. Regarding their Polish language level, four have an intermediate level of Polish (they can understand the main points of clear standard speech). At the same time, the two speak Polish at a professional level. Also, according to the questionnaire results, only one out of six respondents in Poland took a Polish course from the integration centre.

The efficiency and accessibility of language courses in the Czech Republic will remain prominent in future steps. It is seen as an obstacle that hinders access to different opportunities there. Furthermore, in the Czech Republic, the bureaucratic process for applying for unemployment benefits is complex to understand, as Oleksandra highlighted that bureaucratic processes are uncomfortable to handle without knowing the Czech language. Thus, the data suggests that Ukrainian forced migrants can speak the local language at a higher level than those in the Czech Republic, which could be due to the proximity between Ukrainian and Polish, where the resemblance is more remarkable.

### **3. Recognition of Education and Previous Qualifications**

This theme is about improving the process of recognising professional qualifications, which is closely related to migrants' integration into the labour market. According to Ager and Strang (2008), many well-educated refugees struggle to recognise their qualifications, which impedes their integration into society and the local labour market.

#### *The Czech Republic*

The data gathered from interviews reveals, in general, that no concerns have been raised regarding the nostrification process in the Czech Republic. Overall, the participants expressed their reluctance towards these procedures primarily due to the lack of requirements from the employer, their limited understanding of the Czech language, and insufficient information.

Daryna (22), currently working as a graphic designer at an IT company, did not undergo the recognition process, as she acquired the skills she is using for her current job through

self-study, utilising online sources and courses. Another informant, Anna (28), mentioned that she had no problems with the nostrification of her previous High School diploma.

Ganna (25) did not get her diploma recognised, as her current employer only required her to present her diplomas for an MSc in Computer Science and a BSc in System Analysis. However, regarding another interview question related to issues that other individuals from Ukraine face in general, she responded in the following manner:

*"My boyfriend's mother and father-in-law work in a factory, which is difficult because they have night shifts five days a week. His father-in-law is currently looking for another job. However, finding a job in his area is impossible because he needs to nostrificate his Engineering diploma, which is more difficult than other types of diplomas."* (Ganna, 25)

Concerning the questionnaire data for the Czech Republic, four respondents did not undergo the nostrification of their previous diplomas or qualifications, whereas six respondents did. Moreover, one of the participants explicitly mentioned that she had undergone the procedure of having her medical degree acknowledged.

Therefore, only one interviewee reported an issue regarding the recognition of an engineering degree. Overall, they encountered no obstacles to their work.

### *Poland*

Ivanna did not undergo the process of recognition for her previous qualifications or diplomas, as her international company does not mandate such a procedure.

One of the survey respondents based in Poland said that her diploma does not need recognition, and she has an international certificate that can help her teach English. Another respondent said she is trying to get this recognition but has not elaborated. Additionally, one respondent said he had undergone this procedure but found it too expensive at about 6000 PLN. Three respondents did not go through the process.

Moreover, one respondent said ‘inBase’<sup>15</sup> helped her nostrificate her diploma. However, she mentioned that due to the type of visa, nostrification is restricted (Survey Respondent, Female, 35-44, Employed, master’s degree). The author could not go into further detail because this was a survey response, a limitation of the survey data collection method.

To sum up, data show that language barriers, type of visa, and migrants’ reluctance to the process with competing priorities all hinder further education and qualification recognition both in the Czech Republic and Poland.

#### **4. Access to Information Regarding Employment and Employment Services**

This category pertains to the government's provision of access to employment and information, tools, and technical knowledge on subjects such as career planning, job search, and labour market assistance, an important part of Ukrainian labour market integration. According to Ager and Strang’s framework (2004, 2008, 2010), this category falls under markers and means. Furthermore, the social rights of employment, education, and access to social welfare and housing are specifically identified as markers and means within this context (Ager & Strang, 2008; Council of Europe, 1997).

##### *The Czech Republic*

Accordingly, Daryna (22) searched online for employment information, as did most of the informants in the Czech Republic. She stated that finding a job depends on your resources and knowledge, and after three months of looking, she found one job that matched her qualifications. She has been working for this company for 11 months, after previously working as a Bolt Delivery courier for two months and interning at another graphic design firm. When asked who provided information about her current job, she stated that she used online sources such as LinkedIn and did not seek any government assistance in finding a job.

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<sup>15</sup> inBase Technologies is a company (<https://inbase.cz/>), it might be the company that this respondent is employed.



As for Anna (28), she was able to find jobs on LinkedIn and was contacted by her connections there. She stated that because she had experience and knew how to reach out to people, she was able to find an opportunity.

Ganna (25) mentioned that because she is an experienced and qualified employee, she has had no legal issues accessing employment information or finding a job. The company where she currently works contacted her through LinkedIn; it was the first company with which she interviewed and was hired. She also mentioned that Telegram chats for Ukrainians are very useful, and any changes to the system can be tracked here via the Ukrainian network. Regarding accommodation, employment, labour services, and so on, she stated that "she just googles for information". She mentioned:

*"My boyfriend's classmate was very helpful because he had been working here for the past 4-5 years, and we had many questions about this information. Also, we are people who do not require much assistance, and it is better for people who need it. For us, the network of friends is enough and useful." (Ganna, 25)*

Vitomir also mentioned that he used his network of musician friends and other social connections to find teaching music jobs in Prague. However, there was a period of manual, precarious work during which he worked as a waiter, painted walls, and so on. He found these jobs on a local Czech website called "www.hudebka.cz."

It is crucial to note that Anna, Ganna, and Daryna are all proficient in English and use it as their main language for work in Prague. Hence, these instances may suggest an alternate reality compared to individuals who are not proficient in English. Lastly, according to informants' data, migrants did not depend on the government or government-provided information. Instead, they relied on their network of Czech and expat friends and online sources such as job portals like LinkedIn. They also sought information from Ukrainian friends and relatives who have already lived in the country.

Oleksandra's experience marks a different aspect of employment services: unemployment benefits. Oleksandra described the complex process of receiving unemployment benefits from the Labour Office of Prague:

*"We went to this horrible place, where you say I am unemployed, give me money. (...) We had to go there four times before we could receive this benefit. My friend once woke up at 2 a.m. and arrived there at 4 a.m., with 100 other people already waiting in the queue. The place opens at 8 a.m.!" (Oleksandra, 24).*

Oleksandra also stated that in the first few months after the war began, they encountered problems with information flow regarding employment services and registration in general in Prague. When asked in detail, she responded:

*"Information was changing quickly, and instructions were changing even before we arrived at the local office. For example, even though it said Prague 4 online, we had to go to Prague 10. Also, there were some procedural changes because they communicated in a delayed manner, saying you must bring a specific document from that day forward." (Oleksandra, 24).*

Oleksandra also heard that people have trouble finding work for Ukrainians on websites like jobs.cz. She suggested that there should be better services for Ukrainians to find jobs; cleaning jobs appeared when she applied a filter specific to Ukraine. Last, for Oleksandra, LGBT+ Komunitní centrum was a big help in finding accommodation and helping her with government registration.

Regarding the questionnaire results, half of the respondents stated they discovered their employment opportunities online in the Czech Republic. More precisely, one participant discovered it on LinkedIn, another secured a job via the "Integration Centre," and another through the "Help Centre." At the same time, one individual found employment on the government's official website (the specific name is not provided). Ultimately, two participants discovered employment opportunities by leveraging their social connections. Last, when asked if they know where to turn for help with housing, jobs, labour offices, etc., seven respondents said yes, two said no, and one said, "I do not know, but I can find it if necessary."

## *Poland*

Similar to those in the Czech Republic, Ivanna is searching for employment information online. She uses social media and LinkedIn to obtain information when necessary. She mentioned her university professors, who were very helpful in finding a place to stay and sharing general information about life in Poland. Furthermore, she attempted to find a Polish company on local job boards such as pracuj.pl, but she was already in contact with the CEO of her current job through LinkedIn, which is how she found her current job. As a result, she found her connections and professors to be the most helpful during this process.

Regarding the most relevant sources on employment and employment services, she relies on the 'Ukrainians in Warsaw' Facebook group, some local Polish chats, and official government websites. For Ukrainian forced migrants entering the country for the first time, the process is as follows:

*"They receive a small info card at the border of Poland, where they find information on what to do after arrival, regarding PESEL number application, insurance, and so on, where they receive temporary protection status."*

Ivanna's University also established an information centre that serves not only Ukrainians under temporary protection in Poland but also elderly migrants who had lived before the war. Ivanna also mentioned an orientation day at the university where newly arrived students are informed about their rights under this specific status and how they can help other Ukrainians, among other topics. Thus, Ivanna witnessed assistance from her university following the war.

As for respondents in Poland, 3 out of 6 found their current jobs online. Specifically, one found it on 'indeed.com', and another mentioned:

*"After losing my job in Ukraine (after the full-scale invasion, I was in Krakow, I worked online for another seven months, then Kyiv officials decided that I, as a director, could not work remotely) I was registered as unemployed (to the Labor Office in Poland) and they did not help me at all. I was looking for a job using all available resources."* (Survey respondent, female, employed, in the age range of 35-44)

Among the answers, consultations in the centres of entrepreneurs and recommendations of friends were also mentioned. Also, when asked if they know where to turn to get help regarding accommodation, job, labour office, etc., 5 out of 6 respondents answered yes, while one said no.

The data show that access to employment and employment information in the Czech Republic and Poland is a complex interplay of personal connections, government assistance, and NGO support. Overall, social capital plays a vital role in obtaining employment information.

### **5. Employment Assistance and Courses for Skills Development**

Employment assistance and vocational courses for skill development are essential for individuals who want to meet the job market demands. As a result, they should target unemployed and potentially underqualified individuals. These services are critical components of labour market integration processes.

#### *The Czech Republic*

Oleksandra (24) is currently training through self-study as a data scientist. She did not enrol in any government course for skills development. Similarly, Daryna, Ganna, Anna, and Vitomir acquired the skills she uses for her current job through self-study, as mentioned before. They did not attend any courses or training prior to starting their employment.

As for the questionnaire respondents, one person received a course from the Ministry of Labour in the Czech Republic but did not specify the course.

#### *Poland*

Ivanna also did not receive any assistance from the government related to job search/language courses/skills development, and so on. However, she received financial

assistance in the early months. She also mentioned some government assistance for her friend's case. The government provided a lawyer for her friend to resolve a dispute with her bank at no cost, as is standard policy.

Moreover, Ivanna's uncle worked as a lawyer in Ukraine; she talked about his case as: *"He applied to a school in Poland to complete a 1–2-year course to obtain a law degree. Furthermore, municipalities in Poland offer these vocational courses, which cover a wide range of specialities, but it takes a long time; during this time, as a Ukrainian under TPD, you can apply for a residency card. The municipality's course name is Szkoły Policealne (depending on the program, some are free, especially under TPD status, but others require payment--some discounts up to 50%--and nowadays, all Ukrainians must pay the total amount). They also provide a lot of information in Ukrainian- if Ukrainians need employment information, they can also find it with their assistance."* (Ivanna, 25)

As for the questionnaire respondents, three out of six received a course. Furthermore, one received a language course from the integration centre (as mentioned before). In contrast, the two others received courses from NGOs (one received a course on caregiving at *Szkoły Policealne*, while another took a 4–5-day course on entrepreneurship in Poland related to legislation, accounting, and taxes topics).

Thus, only a few questionnaire respondents received vocational training from the government, whereas none of the interviewees did. In addition, only one person, Oleksandra (24), received unemployment benefits but is currently experiencing difficulties with them.

## **6. Employment Status and Overall Socio-Economic Well-Being**

The last category relates to participants' overall socio-economic well-being and employment status. Before the war, most Ukrainian workers in the Czech Republic worked in the secondary sector, and both data from interviews and questionnaires prove this is an ongoing pattern among migrants who arrived after February 24th. Although the interviewees work mostly as white-collar workers, they share the experiences of their community that have proven this.

### *The Czech Republic*

Anna enjoys her current job and the company she works for and feels financially secure. However, she shared some of the experiences she has witnessed.

*"I know many cleaners who work for Airbnb, most of whom are Ukrainian women. There are also some businesses in Ukraine that have opened here, such as selling frozen Slavic food: Gastro Oma." (Anna, 28)*

Daryna also enjoys her job in general. However, she emphasised the difficulty of finding an office job in Prague. She went through several rounds of interviews for her current position, which she believes was due to the competitive nature of the job and the large number of other graphic designers competing for the position.

On the other hand, Ganna believes she is an experienced and qualified employee, which is why she has had no legal or social problems in his current job. However, in her social life, she occasionally hears rumours about Ukrainians and anger at Ukrainians by Czechs. Also, she hears stories from other Ukrainian migrants about problems with their jobs due to a lack of Czech proficiency. She is pleased with her current position and considers herself fortunate compared to other Ukrainians. However, her boyfriend's father works in a factory with an international workforce, where non-Czech employees work harder, and there are few Czech employees in this precarious position. It is mostly Ukrainians and Slovaks.

Vitomir also asked, "What do you think can be improved regarding employment for Ukrainian forced migrants?":

*"One thing I heard is that Ukrainians are treated as workhorses- somebody who will take any job you throw at them. More work for less money, such as housekeeping. We need better integration policies for all ages because older ages cannot speak English, for example, and because of that, they take bad jobs." (Vitomir, 21)*

Oleksandra worked as a bartender and later learned data science through self-study while receiving unemployment benefits. She is dissatisfied financially, having been looking for a

stable job in Europe for the past four months. She stated that the job market is oversaturated, resulting in low response rates:

*“The problem with Prague is that it is a small digital hub with no influence in the digital world. Microsoft and Deloitte are here, but no other major IT service providers exist. Also, there is discrimination here, where they prefer Czechs for more intellectual positions and refuse to allow more jobs in English as a working language.” (Oleksandra, 24)*

The occupations of questionnaire respondents in the Czech Republic vary from working as a business development representative in the sales and marketing department to working as a waitress. Furthermore, one respondent stated that her overall impression was positive. She believes that anyone can find a skilled job regardless of English proficiency. However, international companies are increasingly laying off employees, making it difficult to find work.

Regarding problems, two people stated that low pay is a concern, and Ukrainians' work is evaluated based on lower salaries and more responsibilities. Furthermore, two people expressed overall satisfaction. Last but not least, regarding discrimination or bias in the workplace, four respondents said they had experienced it, while six stated they had not, and one said, “My friends had faced discrimination, but I have not”.

Regarding their satisfaction with their current job, two respondents were unsatisfied/insecure, and seven were somewhat satisfied.

### *Poland*

Ivanna has worked remotely as an operational manager for an IT company headquartered in the Netherlands for the past two years. This journey commenced with an internship. In addition, she is recently pursuing a PhD in Computer Science. She holds an official contract based in Poland. When asked about her satisfaction with her current role, she responded by stating,

*"I am quite satisfied with it. In terms of professional development, I hope to advance to another position within six months. Financially, I receive a stable payment, so everything is fine." (Ivanna, 25).*

Although Ivanna is satisfied, she mentioned her acquaintance, a Ukrainian Warsaw resident who brought her friends and family to Warsaw under TPD status. According to her, these migrants have low-qualified specialities and face difficulties finding work. She mentioned that they had been working in a factory under challenging conditions. Ivanna commented on this:

*"Ukrainians do these jobs because Polish people do not take these jobs." (Ivanna, 25).*

As for the questionnaire respondents in Poland, the occupations vary from a Senior Compliance officer to a cleaner. Moreover, respondents in Poland work in more precarious jobs than those in the Czech Republic. This, however, is not indicative of the larger population because the study population may not be representative.

The respondent is currently employed as a kindergarten caregiver and previously worked as the head of a theatre studio. She said she wanted to return to Ukraine when asked about her future. Another respondent, currently employed as a cleaner, stated that she previously worked as a 'director' in Ukraine but did not provide any specifics. According to this data, Ukrainian forced migrants in Ukraine are not being integrated into local job markets according to their qualifications.

Also, one respondent based in Marbork, Poland, said construction workers must work 12-hour shifts six days a week, which is unsatisfactory. Also, she mentioned that even if they speak Polish, Ukrainians have trouble finding jobs that match their skills. Two respondents said there are lots of opportunities, and another said low pay, agency exploitation, and inconvenient work schedules are some of the main problems Ukrainian forced migrants face in local labour markets. In contrast, one said the labour market is fully accessible.

None of the respondents experienced discrimination or bias in the workplace.

Last, four respondents were somewhat satisfied with their jobs, and one was not. Finally, one is partially satisfied with his job but not financially.



Based on the data presented, it can be said that Ukrainian forced migrants in both countries work in various fields, including graphic design and information technology, as well as blue-collar jobs like cleaning and construction. Furthermore, many Ukrainian migrants struggle to find suitable jobs, particularly in the Czech Republic. Competition, lack of language proficiency, and discrimination are all factors that contribute to these challenges.

### *Concluding Remarks*

Both interviewees and questionnaire respondents were asked about improvements in employment conditions in their respective countries. Three respondents in the Czech Republic indicated that better salaries and remuneration packages are needed, and two respondents mentioned that the negative attitude towards migrants in general should be improved. Others also mentioned that better job search services for Ukrainian forced migrants should be developed. Finally, questionnaire respondents expressed gratitude for general hospitality but criticised Czech attitudes toward foreigners, slow bureaucratic processes, and poor communication in general.

Regarding Poland, it was noted that individuals who do not speak Polish require additional assistance in acquiring the language, and single mothers require improved accessibility to kindergartens and schools. In addition, another participant emphasised the significance of language courses and requested complimentary courses and job placement support from government entities. Another observation pertained to the overall inhospitable sentiment towards Ukrainian immigrants. Another comment expressed a desire for people to refrain from using the offensive phrase "spierdalaj na Ukrainiu" in Polish, as it is derogatory and unwelcoming towards Ukrainians.

## **6. Discussion**

This section will analyse the results by reflecting on the conceptual framework and study concepts. The main focal points of this study were integration, labour market integration, and precariat. These concepts were utilised in analysing the impact of labour market programs on Ukrainian forced migrants, focusing on the underlying factors hindering the

integration of Ukrainian forced migrants into the labour markets of Poland and the Czech Republic. In addition, Ager and Strang's conceptual framework (2004, 2008, 2010) on migrant integration, which includes social, economic, and cultural aspects, highlighting the significance of implementing measures such as government support for language courses, recognition of foreign qualifications and diplomas, access to information channels for job search, employment assistance, and skills development courses.

Some of these measures are implemented through Lex Ukraine in the Czech Republic and the Act of March 12, 2022, on assistance to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of this state in Poland. The labour market integration programs for Ukrainian forced migrants in the Czech Republic are mainly regulated by the Lex Ukraine. This legislation seeks to regulate procedures for migrants fleeing the armed conflict and includes provisions to enhance their access to health insurance, social security, education, and the job market. Lex Ukraine provides Ukrainian forced migrants with temporary protection, the right to enter the labour market, and unemployment benefits. In addition, migrants are provided with standardised humanitarian stipends, household allowances, and access to language courses and childcare services.

On the other hand, labour market integration programs for Ukrainian forced migrants in Poland are regulated by the Special Law on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine. These programs encompass provisions for Polish language instruction, regulate procedures for acquiring temporary residence permits for employment, and eligibility for social benefits and subsidies. Ukrainian nationals residing in Poland can work without requiring a permit, access unemployment services, and establish businesses. They are also eligible for financial allowances, family benefits, and educational allowances for their children.

Before concluding the data and analysis, it is important to note the research's limitations. The research was limited by interviewing only English-speaking participants due to the author's inability to speak Ukrainian. Also, sample size limits the generalizability of in-depth semi-structured interviews. Furthermore, using Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook video calls may have caused bias and sensitivity to the subject. Finally, the questionnaire

data collection method was the most limiting because it lacks human interaction, which limits the author's ability to gain deeper insights into the subject.

It is also important to note that the cases of Poland and the Czech Republic had different snowball sampling efficiency. The author had social connections in Prague (Czech Republic) but none in Poland. Thus, many Facebook posts over time have sought members of Expats in Warsaw/Gdansk, Ukrainians in Poland, and others. As a result, the author found only one interviewee in Poland, compared to five in the Czech Republic.

Regarding the barriers to labour market integration, the analysis section is categorised into five main areas: selection of destination country, proficiency in the local language and participation in language courses, recognition of education and prior qualifications, access to employment and employment services, and employment status and socio-economic well-being.

According to Ager and Strang (2004, 2008, 2010), the process of integration starts as soon as a migrant arrives in a new country, regardless of the specific circumstances. The findings indicated that individuals who participated in interviews and completed questionnaires selected the country based on several factors. These factors included the country's proximity to Ukraine, their connections and knowledge of the Czech Republic and its culture, well-established social networks, a thriving job market for expatriates, and opportunities for academic study. Hence, networks of individuals and cultural proximity played an important part in the decision-making process when selecting Poland and the Czech Republic as their preferred destination countries.

Concerning language proficiency, According to Ager and Strang (2008), language is crucial for finding employment opportunities, establishing social connections, and participating in community groups. Therefore, obstacles that prevent language-related

connections can hinder integration into the labour market. Accordingly, two Czech interviewees expressed dissatisfaction regarding the language courses the government and universities offered. Therefore, future policies should improve the efficacy and accessibility of language courses in the Czech Republic, as access to employment prospects is currently limited. In addition, Oleksandra (24) observed that the bureaucratic procedure for applying for unemployment benefits in the Czech Republic was challenging for individuals who do not speak Czech. The data indicates that Ukrainian forced migrants residing in Poland exhibit a higher proficiency in the local language compared to those residing in the Czech Republic, potentially related to the language resemblance between Ukrainian and Polish. Thus, similar to Prokop's (2023) and Šafářová's (2024) findings, the results point out the key role of language in labour market participation.

Regarding the recognition of education and qualifications, Ager and Strang (2008) state that numerous highly educated migrants face difficulties in getting their prior qualifications and diplomas recognised, hindering their integration into society and the labour market. According to the data, only one interviewee from the Czech Republic mentioned a problem with recognising engineering degrees. Moreover, the data indicate that language barriers, visa type, and migrants' hesitancy to engage in the process due to conflicting priorities impede the recognition of further education and qualifications in both the Czech Republic and Poland. However, this problem had a lower effect on Ukrainian forced migrants' labour market integration compared to other categories.

Based on information from informants and interviewees, it can be concluded that migrants generally did not rely on the government or government-provided information regarding employment and employment services. Instead, they used their relatives based in the Czech Republic and Poland along with their friends and job portals on LinkedIn. The data indicate that social capital plays a vital role in accessing employment information. Hence, the study results have found that social connections remain significant in securing employment, which is often interrelated with improvement in language, as Ortlieb and Knappert (2023) emphasised in their research. In addition, only a small number of respondents to the questionnaire received vocational training from the government, and

none of the interviewees in their respective countries received such training. Oleksandra (24) has been granted unemployment benefits; however, she is currently encountering difficulties in obtaining them.

The final category, pertaining to the current employment status and overall satisfaction, reveals that Ukrainian forced migrants in both countries are working in diverse occupations. Similar to Šafářová's (2024) arguments, the study results have shown that Ukrainians are working below their qualifications. A significant number of Ukrainian forced migrants face difficulties in securing employment and often find themselves in precarious working conditions in both countries. The root causes of these problems are lack of vocational courses, competition, language barriers, and discrimination based on migrant status.

Last, participants in interviews and surveys were asked about the labour conditions prevalent in their respective host countries. Accordingly, three respondents from the Czech Republic expressed the need for improved salaries and remuneration packages, while two respondents emphasized the importance of addressing the negative attitude towards migrants. Some individuals proposed enhancing the job search services available to Ukrainian forced migrants.

As for Poland, the findings indicate that individuals who do not speak Polish require assistance in acquiring the language in Poland. Another person emphasized the significance of government support in finding employment. The hostile attitude towards Ukrainians was also mentioned by respondents in Poland. A respondent mentioned that

Polish speakers should refrain from using the offensive expression "*spierdalaj na Ukrajinu*" when referring to Ukrainians.

In conclusion, it is crucial to ensure that all Ukrainian forced migrants in both the Czech Republic and Poland have access to efficient language courses, employment services, and comprehensive information regarding employment opportunities. Moreover, the anti-immigrant sentiments prevailing in both countries are experienced by the migrants themselves, which has the potential to further exacerbate the vulnerability of migrants who already have an uncertain legal status and precarious working conditions.

## **7. Conclusion**

This study has shown that forced migration renders individuals ill-equipped to adapt to a new personal and professional life in a foreign country, whether there is cultural proximity or not. Accordingly, Ukrainian forced migrants who arrive in Poland and the Czech Republic lack significant connections to the host country, possessing only a limited understanding of the language and with legal and social systems.

The data has shown that especially Ukrainian forced migrants in the Czech Republic face some discrimination based on their status. Scholars agree on integration as a two-way process, which concerns the host society, stating that social interaction between migrants and host society members is important (Atalay et al., 2023; Prokop et al., 2023). For the future, it remains critical for the respective governments to assist individuals in finding new employment without jeopardizing their work permits in the event of unemployment, as well as facilitating access to return programs and enhancing national job placement networks to support employees who might face specific barriers.

Finally, Ukrainian forced migrants' labour market experiences in the Czech Republic and Poland demonstrate the complex interaction of structural barriers, socio-cultural dynamics,

and individual agency. Though resilient, migrants face systemic barriers like language, discrimination, and bureaucracy that prevent them from integrating into the labour market.

Prokop et al. (2023, p. 6) recommend expanding “the range of Czech language courses available to employers and job applicants through the Labour Office”. This ensures that forced migrants working below their qualifications are given information on these courses and other language training opportunities to better integrate into the job market.

Respondents in both countries also noted slow bureaucratic processes and unclear communication, highlighting the need to streamline administrative procedures and improve information dissemination. In the future, unemployment benefits and vocational training for migrants can be made more accessible by improving government transparency.

Policymakers must use language training, legal protections, and anti-discrimination measures to help forced migrants enter the workforce. To develop targeted interventions that address migrants' diverse needs and experiences, government agencies, employers, civil society organizations, and migrant communities must collaborate more.

To help forced migrants thrive and contribute, workplaces and society must promote inclusivity and diversity. This study used Ager and Strang's (2008) conceptual framework on migrant integration, in which the ten dimensions are intricately linked (Ager & Strang, 2008; van Dijk et al., 2022). Henceforth, future policies should address the social, cultural, and structural obstacles that hinder the integration of Ukrainian forced migrants living in the Czech Republic and Poland into the labour market.

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## **List of Appendices**

Appendix I: Interview Script (text)

Appendix II: Questionnaire script (text in Ukrainian)

### **Appendix I: Interview Script (text)**

#### *Introduction*

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our research. I intend to interview several Ukrainian forced migrants to gain a better understanding of their inclusion within the local labour market in the Czech Republic and in Poland, including what works well, what challenges they face, and what should or could be improved. These interviews are part of my research for my master's degree.

#### *Oral Consent Form*

The study is conducted anonymously. We will never mention your name or other identifying information, except for general information like your age or city of origin, which is used for categorization. We will use some quotes from the interview in subsequent reports on the research findings, but any information that could lead to your identification will be changed. Your participation in the research is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any point during the study. The interview will not be recorded. Do you agree to participate in the research?

#### *Interview Structure*

##### **Introduction Questions:**

- 1) Destination place (country, city)
- 2) Place of origin (county, city):
- 3) How old are you?
- 4) What is your gender?
- 5) Education level (Do you still study or intend to continue your education?)  
-What did you study?
- 6) What is your family status?

7) Which languages are you able to speak and read?

8) Did you take any local language courses in the Czech Republic/Poland?

### **Migration experience**

1. When did you leave the country?

2. How did you decide where to go after you left Ukraine? Why did you choose the Czech Republic/Poland?

3. Do you have a Ukrainian community here?

### **Current work and life situation**

4. What did you know about the conditions of Ukrainian migrants in the Czech Republic/Poland before coming here?

5. How did you collect this information?

6. What is your current job?

7. Do you hold any contracts?

8. Did you take any training/course before starting work?

9. Where did you look for job information? How did you obtain this information? Did the government assist you with job searching, language courses, skill development, and so on?

10. Did you have any problems getting a job here? For example, have you encountered any legal or social issues while job searching?

- Do you know if other Ukrainians in your community have problems? If so, what are they?

11. If applicable, did you need to register with the unemployment office?

12. How satisfied are you with your job? How confident do you feel about your job? (Financial)

13. Do your qualifications match the position you currently hold?

14. What do you think can be done to improve the flow of employment information?

15. What was your job in Ukraine? Have you worked in Ukraine?

16. Have you tried to have your qualifications recognised in the Czech Republic/Poland? Have you searched for retraining?

17. Who or what has been most helpful along the way?
18. How about your family? Do any other members of your family work? (If applicable)
19. Do you have any additional sources of income besides your job?
20. Is there anything about your stay in the country that concerns you?
21. Do you know where you can get help with housing, a job, the labour office, and other issues?
22. Do you get any help while living here that you haven't mentioned yet? (What type of assistance? Who provides it? How? How did you learn about it?)

### **General Information and Concluding Remarks**

23. When you need information about life in the Czech Republic/Poland, where do you look? (Are there any sources you regularly consult?)
24. Do you intend to stay here, return, or relocate to another place/country?
25. What is your ultimate professional goal?
26. Do you want to obtain a permanent residency permit? Why, or why not?
27. Would you like to add anything important to your life in the Czech Republic/Poland that has not yet been mentioned?

## **Appendix II: Questionnaire Script (text in Ukrainian)**

### **Опис:**

Дякую за Ваше зацікавлення в участі в моєму Магістерському дослідженні "Оцінка включення вимушених переселенців з України в чеський і польський ринки праці." Ваш цінний досвід допоможе мені визначити виклики і можливості в цій сфері. В цьому опитуванні будуть два типи питань: з кількома варіантами відповідей і відкриті. Ваші відповіді залишаться анонімними. Це опитування стосується багатьох тем, включно з вашим досвідом працевлаштування, викликами, з якими Ви зіткнулися, Вашим сприйняттям місцевих ринків праці і пропозиціями щодо можливих покращень.

Наперед дякую за Ваш час і участь.

## Частина 1: Вступ

### 1.1. Стать:

- Чоловік
- Жінка
- Небінарна
- Вважаю за краще не казати

### 1.2. Вік:

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55+

### 1.3. Теперішній статус працевлаштування: (Ви можете вибрати більше, ніж один в разі необхідності)

- Працевлаштований/-на
- Безробітний/-на
- Студент/-ка
- Інше (поясніть, будь ласка)

### 1.4. Який Ваш найвищий рівень освіти?

- Нижчий ніж повна загальна середня освіта
- Повна загальна середня освіта
- Професійна (професійно-технічна) або фахова передвища освіта
- Бакалавр
- Магістр
- Докторський ступінь

### 1.5 Якою була ваша основна область навчання (що ви вивчали)?

[Відкрита відповідь]

## 1.6 Родинний статус

Будь ласка, виберіть категорію, що найраще відповідає вашому теперішньому родинному статусу:

- Неодруже-ний/-на
- Одруже-ний/-на
- Розлуче-ний/-на
- Вдівець / вдова
- Проживання з партнером
- Інше (поясніть, будь ласка): \_\_\_\_\_

## 1.7 Якими мовами Ви можете спілкуватися і читати?

[Відкрита відповідь]

## 1.8 Який Ваш рівень знання мови країни, у якій Ви проживаєте?

- Базовий (розумію знайомі слова і дуже базові речення)
- Середній (можу зрозуміти основну думку в чіткій стандартній мові)
- Професійний (можу ефективно використовувати мову в соціальних і професійних цілях)
- Ця мова для мене рідна

## **Частина 2: Інформацію про досвід переселення:**

### 2.1 Куди Ви переселялися (країна, місто)?

[Відкрита відповідь]

### 2.2 Звідки Ви переселялися (країна, місто)?

[Відкрита відповідь]

### 2.3 Коли ви покинули Україну?

[Відкрита відповідь]

### 2.4 Чи можете Ви коротко пояснити, як Ви прийняли рішення куди їхати, після того, як покинули Україну? Чому Ви вибрали саме ту країну?

[Відкрита відповідь]

2.5 Який Ваш теперішній візовий статус для перебування тут?

[Відкрита відповідь]

2.6 Чи знали Ви інших українців, що живуть тут, перед переїздом? Чи є Ви частиною спільноти тут?

[Відкрита відповідь]

### **Частина 3: Досвід на ринку праці**

#### **Частина 3.1: Інформація щодо працевлаштування**

3.1.1 Що Ви знали про умови для українських біженців в Польщі / Чеській Республіці перед тим, як приїхали сюди?

[Відкрита відповідь]

3.1.2 Де Ви шукали інформацію щодо працевлаштування? Як Ви її отримали?

[Відкрита відповідь]

3.1.3 Можете поділитися загальним враженням від місцевого ринку праці?

[Відкрита відповідь]

3.1.5 Чи стикалися Ви з дискримінацією чи упередженнями на робочому місці через Ваш статус вимушеного переселенця?

- Так
- Ні
- Не знаю

3.1.6 Чи намагалися Ви отримати офіційне визнання Ваших кваліфікацій у Чеській Республіці? Або чи шукали Ви можливості перекваліфікації?

[Відкрита відповідь]

3.1.7 Чи знаєте Ви, куди звернутися по допомогу стосовно проживання, роботи, де знайти центр зайнятості, ін.?

- Так
- Ні

3.1.8 Чи отримували Ви ще якусь допомогу протягом Вашого проживання тут, про яку Ви ще не згадували? (Яку саме? Хто її надає? Як? Як Ви про це дізналися?)

[Відкрита відповідь]

### **Частина 3.2: Інформація про теперішню роботу**

3.2.1 Яка Ваша теперішня робота?

[Відкрита відповідь]

3.2.2 Чи є у Вас зараз якийсь контракт?

- Так
- Ні

3.2.3 Якщо Вашою відповіддю на попереднє питання було «так», то який тип трудового контракту у Вас є?

[Відкрита відповідь]

3.2.4 Чи відвідували Ви якісь професійні тренінги / курси перед початком працевлаштування?

- Так
- Ні

3.2.5 Якщо Ви відповіли «так» на попереднє питання, то які професійні тренінги / курси Ви відвідували і хто їх Вам надавав?

[Відкрита відповідь]

3.2.6 Чи отримували Ви якусь допомогу від уряду, пов'язану з пошуком роботи / мовними курсами / розвитком професійних навичок, тощо?

[Відкрита відповідь]



3.2.7 Хто і що найбільше допомогло Вам протягом всього процесу?

[Відкрита відповідь]

### **Частина 3.3: Задоволення від роботи і порівняння з попередньою ситуацією**

3.3.1 Наскільки Ви задоволені Вашою роботою? Наскільки фінансово забезпеченими Ви почуваетесь?

- Взагалі не задоволе-ний/-на / забезпече-ний/-на
- Певною мірою задоволе-ний/-на / забезпече-ний/-на
- Дуже задоволе-ний/-на / забезпече-ний/-на

3.3.2 Як Ви думаєте, що може бути покращено серед умов працевлаштування в Польщі / Чеській Республіці?

[Відкрита відповідь]

3.3.3 Якщо Ви працювали в Україні, то на якій роботі?

[Відкрита відповідь]

3.3.4 Чи відповідають Ваші кваліфікації Вашому теперішньому працевлаштуванню?

- Так
- Ні

3.3.5 Чи маєте Ви інші джерела доходу, крім Вашої роботи?

[Відкрита відповідь]

### **Частина 4: Цифрові навички/способи передачі інформації**

4.1 Коли Вам необхідна інформація про життя в Чеській Республіці, де Ви її шукаєте? (І чи є якісь джерела, до яких Ви звертаєтесь регулярно?)

- Друзі (чехи, українці, українці, що проживають у ЧР вже давно)
- Чат-боти
- Групи в Facebook

- Новини в Telegram
- Корисні вебсайти (урядові, сайти неурядових організацій...)
- Неурядові організації
- Інше (поясніть, будь ласка): \_\_\_\_\_

4.2 Звідки (з яких джерел) Ви отримуєте найбільш корисну інформацію? (Приклади: WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, Twitter, V Kontakte, Odnoklassniki, LinkedIn, TikTok, ін.)

[Відкрита відповідь]

### **Частина 5: Майбутнє**

5.1 Чи маєте Ви плани залишитися там, де Ви проживаєте на даний момент, повернутися, чи переїхати в інше місце / іншу країну?

[Відкрита відповідь]

5.2 Яка Ваша кінцева ціль у працевлаштуванні?

[Відкрита відповідь]

5.3 Чи зацікавлені Ви в отриманні дозволу на постійне проживання? Чому або чому ні?

[Відкрита відповідь]

5.4 На Вашу думку, які зміни могли б покращити включення вимушених переселенців з України в ринок праці?

[Відкрита відповідь]

5.5 Чи хотіли б Ви додати ще щось важливе, що стосується Вашого проживання в Чеській Республіці, що ще не було сказано?

[Відкрита відповідь]