

# LABOR MIGRATION REGULATION FROM UKRAINE TO THE EUROPEAN UNION: RECENT FLOW DYNAMICS OF UKRAINIAN CITIZENS

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## Abstract

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The issue of labor migration in Ukraine is complex and multifaceted. Experiencing the realities of both a post-COVID-19 era and the ongoing Russian war of aggression, the situation of Ukrainian labor migration and regulation has significantly deteriorated. According to the Ministry of Finance of Ukraine, in 2021, Ukrainian migrants remitted 15 billion dollars, which is equivalent to 8% of the Ukrainian gross domestic product (GDP), back to their homeland (Ministry of Finance of Ukraine, n.d.). This article aims to illustrate the tendencies of the labor market for Ukrainians to European Union (EU) member states. It draws parallels to the pre-COVID-19 migratory trends and the post-war 2022 situation in which, faced with unprecedented circumstances, many Ukrainian people left Ukraine to move abroad. Inductive and deductive methods have been applied to frame labor migration. A secondary literature review analysis has also been used to trace the dynamics of labor migration over recent years. The article suggests that low wages, high unemployment, and uncertainty have provoked the rise of emigration abroad, including labor migration. Ukraine should continue with the adoption of laws that would activate the labor market, stimulate employment among the population, and improve the economic situation.

**Keywords:** Labor Migrants, COVID-19, Remittances, War Conditions, Labor Market, Migration Policy

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The expansion of global economic ties in combination with the unprecedented growth and intensification of labor migration from Ukraine attracts attention from scholars to the study of external labor migration as a phenomenon that significantly impacts the development of interstate

relations, history, economy, social sphere, demographics, and other aspects of social life.

To grasp the relevance of this current study, it is important to understand the phenomenon of labor migration through the prism of macro and micro levels. At the supranational regional level, one

should remember that the Eastern partnership<sup>1</sup> countries had different indicators of labor migration before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, migrants from Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, and Belarus were very often united by common reasons; primarily, the search for job opportunities abroad — the lack of high-paying jobs in their homeland against the backdrop of economic problems in the states.

One of the largest and most significant migration flows from Ukraine is fueled by work-related purposes abroad. Considering the economic difficulties that ordinary Ukrainians have had to face since the fall of the Soviet Union, the opportunity to work abroad has become for many citizens a strategy for survival and a chance to improve their own well-being and situation with local households. Demonstratively, labor migration became a way of 'social shock observer', a factor that reduces poverty within the country, lessens tensions in the labor market, and is a source of significant foreign currency income.

Focusing on the micro-level approach, the dissatisfaction of Ukrainian citizens with the level of wages and the lack of clear prospects/opportunities for development and self-realization might dominate among the push factors that boosted labor migration from Ukraine. The introduction of a visa-free regime with European Union (EU) countries has expanded opportunities not only for tourism trips but also for the search for employment outside Ukraine. Many European countries' governments showed an interest in encouraging Ukrainian labor migrants and thus helped simplify the legislation regulating the entry of migrants and their employment.

The purpose of this article is to present trends in the labor market for Ukrainians in the EU and to provide comparisons between pre-COVID-19 and conditions for migration after the start of the full-scale invasion when Ukrainians experienced extraordinary circumstances due to the Russian escalation of the war.

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2021), more than three million Ukrainian labor migrants worked abroad permanently before February 2022. If seasonal workers are included in this calculation, the number of migrants reaches upwards of five million people. However, there are no exact indicators due to the fact that a large part of the Ukrainian population tends to work illegally, and this is not included in official statistics.

The theoretical framework of the article is composed of a way of illustrating broad-spectrum issues (the impact of COVID-19 and the full-scale invasion) that have pre-determined the state of Ukrainian labor migration to this date. The concept of this article is supported by the literature review and has also a logical explanation. Study of the Ukrainian legislative migration regulation, an article on the impact of COVID-19 impact mobility developments, and an analysis from a well-known expert on Ukrainian-Polish migration tendencies, Malynovska (2014), allow readers to comprehend various perspectives impacting the labor migration evolution over time.

Literature gaps were identified during the secondary literature analysis. The Ukrainian state migration policy was formulated back in 2019, adopted in 2020, and has lost significant relevance in 2022. Moreover, the statistical data included in the article was collected with significant challenges due to the absence of an integrated migration management approach to migration statistics. Therefore, it significantly limits the author's capacity to collect and work with various datasets due to time and resource constraints.

The article's findings illustrate that the Ukrainian government most clearly outlines the issues of labor migrants when it concerns their remittances to Ukraine and whenever the interests of the Ukrainian national economy are at stake. At the start of 2020, the National Bank reported that Ukrainian workers transferred roughly 12 billion dollars to Ukraine which helped stabilize the situation on the foreign exchange market. Remittances during 2021 have been mentioned in the paper's abstract. This article suggests that since February 2022 no data is indicating how many Ukrainians have left the country for work-related purposes versus those who have fled primarily as a result of the war. There are only statistics from the IOM and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on the number of Ukrainians who have crossed the border between Ukraine and the EU. Additionally, there is information on the ones who have applied for the EU's temporary protection directive (Eurostat, 2025). Nevertheless, data collection on labor migration is extremely difficult in such conditions and there is no evidence concerning when it may return to the level of 2021.

The structure of this paper is as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature. Section 3 analyzes the methodology used to research the impact of different migratory factors such as COVID-19 and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine on the transformation of the labor market. Section 4 presents the results of the study through a discussion that is divided into four parts: labor migration from Ukraine and COVID-19, the impact of the Russian war of aggression 2022 on the labor market development, Ukrainian labor migrants in the EU in the year 2022, and the role of the state before 2022 and beyond. Section 5 further elaborates on the discussion of the results and outlines some factors that may be relevant for further in-depth study. Section 6 concludes the article with a suggestion for potential further framing of the article's topic and discusses the limitations of the study.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Analysis of the topic commences from one of the key pieces of Ukrainian legislation that regulates external labor migration (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2017). The strategy aims to direct the efforts of the state and society towards the formation and implementation of the state migration policy to have a positive impact on the consolidation of the Ukrainian nation and state security.

The document outlines that labor migration, being the largest migratory reason, has a multifaceted impact on Ukrainian society. On the one hand, it reduces tensions in the labor market, improves the well-being of families, and stipulates intangible transfers of new knowledge, on

<sup>1</sup> EEAS: Eastern partnership — is a joint initiative involving the EU, its member states and six European partner countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine.

the other hand, it leads to shortages of workers in some industries and regions, negative impacts family relations, and child-rearing, and provokes increases in prices, inflation, and imports.

The strategy highlights some of the ways this may be realized and the state's objectives for enhancing the situation regarding labor migration. To reduce the negative consequences of migration from Ukraine and increase its positive impact on state development, the following measures should be adopted:

- develop opportunities for temporary legal employment abroad;
- accelerate educational exchange programs;
- raise public awareness about migration opportunities;
- ensure the protection of the rights of Ukrainian citizens who work and live abroad;
- maintain close contact with civil society through engaging Ukrainians abroad in cultural life and Ukrainian education, and adequately nurture the development of migrant communities abroad.

The strategy concludes by discussing the expected results of these policy implementations. For example, the document argues that such a state migration policy will have a positive impact on the consolidation of the Ukrainian nation and state security, will accelerate the socio-economic development of the country, meet the economic needs of the labor force, and align international standards and international obligations of Ukraine.

The article by Astramowicz-Leyk et al. (2022) helps better frame pre-COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 developments in the labor market. The authors have primarily analyzed the legal and normative framework of the Republic of Poland in the field of migration policy and why many Ukrainians choose Poland as their primary destination country. It is outlined that 180 thousands of Ukrainians had to leave Poland at the beginning of 2020 and return to Ukraine. However, as illustrated, this was a consequence of the low spread of COVID-19 on the territory of Poland rather than the Ukrainian government's achievement in bringing Ukrainian migrants back to their homeland. The author highlights that the rights of Ukrainians who remained in Poland during the pandemic have been violated by some Polish employers. This was a result of poor Ukrainian legislative frameworks that should have regulated the rights of labor migrants outside of Ukraine.

Another paper by Flyunt (2022) is worth attention, the author highlights that Germany became an increasingly attractive destination for Ukrainians back in March 2020 when new labor regulations for non-EU citizens were introduced. Higher salaries, better overall working conditions, and greater stability in the social security system were more favorable for Ukrainian labor migrants when choosing between Poland and Germany. However, there is also a clear distinction to be made when considering Ukrainian labor migrants in Germany; the ones who reside in Germany temporarily, still belonging to their households in Ukraine, and the ones residing in Germany permanently with Ukrainian passports. The article concludes that among other EU member-states, Germany, on average, has a solid quota of Ukrainian employees in higher-skilled employment types.

Olena Malynovska is one of the leading specialists in the study of labor migration of Ukrainians to Poland. In one of the studies, she

analyzed the dynamics of the rapid increase of Ukrainians to Poland in recent years, its causes, and its changes in the composition of migrants in favor of young people and professionals from Eastern/Central Ukraine (Malynovska, 2014). Additionally, she proved that the intensification of migration threatens Ukraine with population losses, strengthens anti-Ukrainian sentiments in Polish society, and may affect bilateral relations. However, it is important to re-emphasize that these trends related to pre-2022 may have changed tremendously after the start of the Russian full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine. The author has proposed measures that could help reduce the negative consequences of the mass emigration of Ukrainians to Poland. The author concludes that since both states are interested in organized and secure migration flows, positive results might be expected from joint control over facilitation in terms of cross-border employment, in the interaction of employment services of neighboring territories regarding employment of Ukrainians in Poland. It is necessary to coordinate efforts to inform migrants about the need to participate in social security initiatives and to intensify the achievements of relevant interstate agreements and their implementation. Moreover, conducting more bilateral Polish-Ukrainian research on migration would contribute to the adoption of adequate management decisions.

One of the latest developments published during the war-2022 times is the article by Melnyk et al. (2022). Its authors attempted to highlight the contemporary issues of the labor market in Ukraine. However, it outlined that negative trends in the Ukrainian labor market existed long before the start of the full-scale invasion. Demographic crisis, the transformation of the national economy, and shortcomings in the state regulation of the labor market have recently deteriorated the overall situation. The authors found similar conclusions regarding pre-COVID-19 and post-military aggression time, highlighting that the Ukrainian labor force started to increasingly transform from temporary to permanent labor migration, which creates new threats for the labor market within the country and incentives for young people to emigrate abroad.

This article has also focused attention on the Ukrainian realities after the start of the full-scale invasion in February 2022 to trace changes in labor market tendencies and the placement of Ukrainian refugees abroad. The influx of labor and the spending of Ukrainian migrants abroad stipulate positive factors for the host countries' economies, according to the National Bank of Ukraine (NBU), although a significant influx of migrants in a short period can create several challenges. At the same time, the net fiscal effect for Europe in the long term will be positive, because Ukrainians are actively integrating into the European labor market and are paying taxes. Ukrainian migrants support host country economies primarily through private consumption. In 2022, the expenses of Ukrainians abroad increased by a factor of three compared to the previous year to an upward total of two billion dollars per month. Also, the spending of Ukrainian migrants stimulates state consumption in the field of housing infrastructure, healthcare, and the education systems (taking into account that Ukrainians form a significant share of total children — from 28% to 44% in different countries).

Another piece of relevant research, published in 2023 by the Center for Domestic Policy Studies of the National Institute of Strategic Studies (NISS), highlights the potential situation of post-war labor migration in Ukraine (Potapenko et al., 2023). The authors outline the importance of codifying a new state policy of adaptation and integration of labor immigrants into Ukrainian society. Such need is dictated by the probability that many workers will return to Ukraine once the war ends. However, the threats and risks associated with a mass influx of labor immigrants from so-called 'developing' countries are considered purely hypothetical since there is no clear indication regarding the cease of hostilities, mechanisms of economic recovery, and the number of investments expected in the Ukrainian economy.

After the end of the war, due to the international aid flows, there will be a demand for labor in Ukraine which can be met by attracting labor migrants from other countries. Unfortunately, the current migration legal framework is not designed for the arrival of a large number of labor migrants to Ukraine in order to participate in the recovery of the economy in a post-war period. Therefore, according to the NISS, it is necessary to adopt a separate law that would define the ways of adaptation and integration of labor migrants.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this research, inductive and deductive methods have been applied to more adequately frame the analysis of labor migration tendencies in Ukraine.

Various methods of comparison, systematization, synthesis, and analysis have been employed to track the trends in labor migration over recent years. Alternatively, a broader application of the synthesis approach enables a more detailed timeline, spanning from the pre-COVID-19 era to developments during the pandemic and the situation in 2022 amidst the ongoing war, and highlighting the impact of these shocks on the labor market.

Analysis of documents and legislation is another instrument applied within the research framework. Document analysis provides the opportunity to examine important aspects of the social reality of the labor migration dynamics, identify gaps available in the current legislation, and obtain information needed to describe certain state-level processes occurring throughout the years relevant to this research.

The present methods enable the collection of information from various sources such as acts, reports, and analytical assessments. Analyzing these sources facilitates the application of their findings to explain the observed dynamics of labor migration within the Ukrainian context.

The literature review method allows the characterization of the labor migration dynamics from a global, national, and local perspective. The review of labor migration developments in Ukraine and beyond enables the consideration of the various groups of migrants affected, including, but not limited to, students, young people, and children, and the various ways of adaptation in the rapidly changing contexts.

Nevertheless, the author should be transparent about the lack of available relevant literature on the topic since labor migration has not been a main focal point among Ukrainian scholars and

the rapid transition from post-COVID-19 to full-scale invasion realities may negatively impact scientific material design.

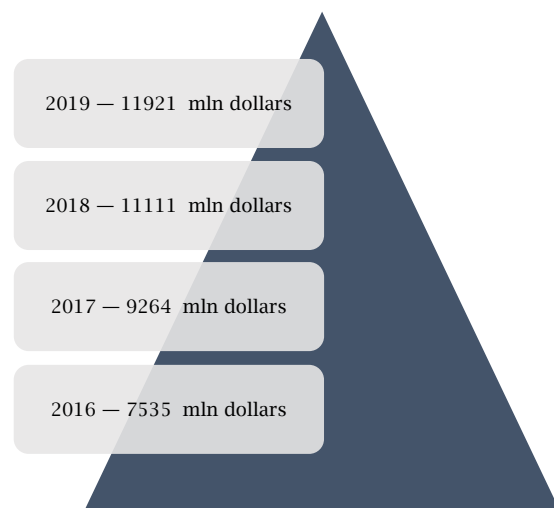
## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. Labor migration from Ukraine and COVID-19

Labor migration is a significant social and economic phenomenon in Ukraine. According to various estimations, the number of migrant workers residing abroad at the same time ranges from 2.6 to 3.2 million people. According to the results of a study conducted by the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, in 2015–2017, 1.3 million people, or 4.5% of the workable population, worked abroad at least once (State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2021).

Diagram one shows the official and unofficial numbers of remittances Ukrainian citizens sent home during the period from 2015 to 2019 (NBU, 2020).

**Figure 1.** Remittances from abroad to Ukraine in 2015–2019



Over the last six years, the EU has become the main destination for Ukrainian labor migrants. The number of residence permits issued by EU countries to the citizens of Ukraine is steadily increasing each year. The realities of 2022 simply accelerated these trends due to the introduction of the temporary protection directive by the European Commission.

In 2019, the number of first-time issued residence permits to Ukrainian citizens with a duration of 12 months or more in the Czech Republic increased to 33.100 compared to 9.100 in 2017, and in Poland — to 44.000 (28.100) (European Commission, 2024).

A significant share of Ukrainian labor migrants both in the EU and other countries are employed illegally or with violations. It is nearly impossible to define their exact number due to the existence of plenty of indicators that describe the scale of the problem. According to the IOM survey in 2019, the share of family members who were employed illegally abroad was 30%. According to Eurostat (2020), 41.300 citizens of Ukraine who were recorded on EU territory have been residing there illegally. Typical violations include working without a proper permit, working on a tourist visa, or a free-visa regime.

Over the last four years, the 'gray' scheme of worker delegation in the EU consists of official employment in Poland with subsequent relocation to the territory of countries within the framework of the directive on delegated workers (EU Monitor, n.d.) has become increasingly widespread. Cases of such employment have been detected in the Czech Republic, Sweden, Finland, and Germany.

Consequently, unofficial employment abroad, on the one hand, makes migrant workers a particularly vulnerable category, increasing the risks of human trafficking and other violations of workers' rights. On the other hand, it complicates the collection and analysis of data on labor migration and the formation of relevant effective policies, both in the countries of destination and in the country of origin.

#### 4.2. Impact of the Russian war aggression of 2022 on labor market developments

The Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine only aggravated all the issues that were presented before within the labor migration discourse of Ukraine. Military actions on the territory of Ukraine are destructive for both the economy and the labor market. Therefore, radical changes are ongoing in the labor market. Indeed, estimations of real damage are burdened at the moment due to the ongoing hostilities.

The loss and damage of production assets and infrastructure, along with the interruption of supply chains within trade networks, significantly weakened the labor market's capacity. This situation led to disruptions and the loss of employment opportunities for many Ukrainians. Small businesses have fewer opportunities to financially support their workforce, and small and medium-sized enterprises have to dismiss more than one million of their employees.

Ongoing hostilities across the Ukrainian territory forced a significant part of the population to leave their permanent place of residence. According to approximate estimations, 22% of citizens changed their place of residence within Ukraine, in particular, among the population aged 18-24 and 25-34 years old such a share is 36% and 34%, respectively. Around 6% of the Ukrainian population has been forced to flee abroad. According to Eurostat (2025), 4.2 million Ukrainians have obtained temporary protection status which was activated by the European Commission at the beginning of March 2022. An accurate assessment of the international distribution of forced migrants from Ukraine is currently impossible since they tend to change plans and country of destination, sometimes not even registering for temporary protection (Ukrainian citizens have a right to stay in EU countries for 90 days without a visa).

The imbalance between labor supply and demand has become significant. The demand for labor has decreased dramatically due to the inability to work in war zones, reduced demand for goods and services, logistical problems, and uncertainty about the future. According to recent polls among employers, almost 29% of companies are temporarily inactive or have completely stopped their work. At the same time, slightly more than 61.5% of businesses continue to work in their cities, and almost 10% have to evacuate their enterprises<sup>2</sup>.

One can find below statistical data on the number of business registrations between 2021 and 2022 and assess the impact of the war also on individual entrepreneurs.

**Table 1.** Number of business registrations in Ukraine (2021-2022)<sup>3</sup>

Month	2021	2022
February	3619	78
March	30552	2553
April	29995	15080
May	26810	18564
In total registrations	90976	36275

Moreover, there has been a significant reduction in the labor market in the country — many vacancies are offered without registration, part-time work, etc. Ukrainians cannot rely on a legal salary and social guarantees in such conditions. Due to the war, there is a decrease in wages because there are far more unemployed people than there are vacant jobs.

#### 4.3. Ukrainian labor migrants in the EU in 2022

As already mentioned, since the beginning of the Russian war on Ukraine, more than four million Ukrainians have registered for temporary protection in the EU countries. Such data have been published by UNHCR (ODP, n.d.). The majority of Ukrainians moved to the countries of the EU: Poland, Romania, Germany, Hungary, and Slovakia.

Ukrainians, until recently, could receive social benefits and financial assistance in the majority of the EU member states. However, the governments of some countries are gradually encouraging Ukrainians to look for jobs. For instance, Poland, starting from July 1, 2022, stopped assisting refugees from Ukraine in the amount of 40 zlotych for food and accommodation. This was stated by the Government Commissioner for Refugees, Pavel Shefernaker<sup>4</sup>. Indeed, the percentage of Ukrainian refugees who have officially secured employment in Poland remains relatively small. Out of the 1.2 million who have received identification codes, only approximately 200,000 have successfully found work.

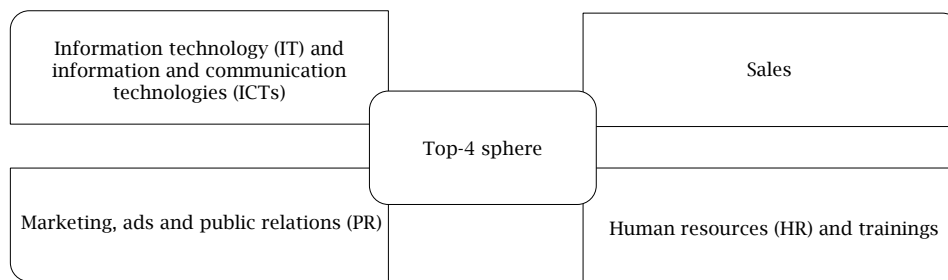
Poland continues to lead in providing job opportunities to Ukrainians. It is interested in attracting Ukrainian citizens due to the shortage of personnel in certain industries. The Polish government constantly works to simplify normative legal acts that contribute towards the acceleration of hiring of foreign specialists. The greatest number of vacancies one may find is in food and light industries, the fields of transport and logistics, and construction. Beyond the EU one should also mention that Armenia, the Republic of Moldova, and the USA actively invite Ukrainian specialists for different job positions.

According to Figure 2, the job positions that are offered for Ukrainians abroad in the above-mentioned countries can be observed. Research has been carried out by the <https://grc.ua/> portal which provides job vacancies for Ukrainian citizens internally and also abroad (top 4 professions Ukrainians find themselves abroad in).

<sup>3</sup> Diia. Business — State of Ukrainian business in the first months of the war. Number of new registrations.

<sup>4</sup> Rzeczpospolita Endowment. The government cuts off the tap with money for refugees from Ukraine.

<sup>2</sup> <https://grc.ua/> (vacancy portal of Ukraine). Data on the business registrations.

**Figure 2.** Top-4 spheres where Ukrainian citizens find themselves mainly in terms of labor opportunities abroad

There are also options in the field of IT for those interested in working in a remote format. Such vacancies account for a third of all remote position options. Developers can claim a salary between three and five thousand euros monthly. Project managers' wages start from 2000 euros per month. Also, customer service managers could be a position that is offered for Ukrainian specialists. For instance, a sales manager with knowledge of English who works in Romanian, Estonian, Lithuanian, or Latvian markets could receive from 700 up to 4000 dollars monthly (European Business Association [EBA], 2022).

Another crucial aspect regarding the presence of the Ukrainian labor force in the EU is the European Commission's efforts toward simplifying and expediting Ukrainian citizens' access to the labor markets across EU nations. One of the initiatives that have been launched recently is the EU talent pool pilot initiative (European Employment Services [EURES], n.d.). The project allows Ukrainians who were forced to flee abroad to quickly and effectively integrate into the labor market. The EU talent pool is implemented through the EURES which is managed by the European labor agency. EURES brings together national employment services, private agencies, and employers across the EU and contains information on more than three million job vacancies and 4000 employers within the EU. Ukrainian citizens granted temporary protection status have access to professional training and are entitled to equal treatment, including pay and other work conditions, as workers in EU member states. The introduction of the EU talent pool pilot commission also provides an opportunity to develop language and basic digital skills with the help of the 'Pact for skills' networks that unite regional authorities, educational organizations, and non-governmental organizations involved in supporting people who have left Ukraine. Additionally, the European Commission (2022) published a recommendation to simplify the recognition of scientific and professional qualifications obtained in Ukraine. This will make it easier for employers and educational institutions to assess the skills of Ukrainians who apply for one or another job position.

#### 4.4. Role of the state before 2022 and after

During and after the COVID-19 pandemic, pre-existing gaps in migration management policies have been revealed. Several events occurred during 2020 that vividly illustrate, in particular, the problem of qualitative analysis and interpretation of migration phenomena by relevant stakeholders.

Initially, the notion of 'closing borders' and shifts in migration patterns led Ukrainian officials to anticipate a mass return of Ukrainian labor migrants. This anticipation was evident through

various official discourses highlighted across multiple layers of mass media. However, the most striking illustration was a statement made during an interview with Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal who reported the return to Ukraine of two million labor migrants from the EU (RBC-Ukraine, 2020). At the time, this statement did not attract a lot of attention. However, in hindsight, it appears that the understanding of migration processes in 2020, at the highest levels, may have been inaccurate. The reality revealed a much smaller number of returnees and complicated forms of identification of labor migrants. The logical continuation of the idea of millions of returnees was the assumption that they had lost the opportunity to seek employment abroad, and, therefore, would need a 'retention policy' in Ukraine through the creation of jobs that labor migrants would willingly accept despite a much lower salary than citizens had abroad (Ukrainian government promised a 200 dollars payment per month while the common employee income in Poland per month would be around 600–700 dollars). This policy was significantly criticized and, in fact, never implemented.

An adequate understanding of migration processes has been hindered not only by the lack of competent but also by low-quality statistical data. The decision of workers to leave for work abroad and return was not always a rational one. The paths of evolution of migration flows often have a counter-intuitive logic.

In the spring of 2020, the NBU made a mistake in its forecasts regarding the development of migration processes. Having recorded a decrease in the volume of remittances from abroad in the first months of the pandemic, the NBU logically predicted a significant drop at the end of the year as well as the overall volume of labor migration. However, already in August–September, the volume of transfers exceeded the similar indicator of last year, and according to the results of the year, it amounted to 12.1 billion dollars, exceeding the number of 2019.

The full-scale invasion of 2022 has brought momentum when state authorities were supposed to rapidly find a way to introduce various support programs for businesses. One of the huge initiatives was designing the 'Unified vacancies portal' (State Employment Service, 2022) which allows people to find jobs according to the region, industry, and expected salary level. The creation of the portal was initiated by the Ministry of Economy and the State Employment Service in the spring of 2022. Since May 2022, an agreement on cooperation and information exchange has been signed between the Ministry of Economy, the State Employment Service, and the five largest employment sites. 'Unified vacancies portal' helps both employers and employees and is already contributing to the recovery

and further development of the economy. New vacancies appear on the portal in real-time and are as relevant as possible.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that annual remittances from labor migrants provide significant foreign currency income to the Ukrainian economy. In 2019, 11.9 billion dollars were transferred to Ukraine through informal and formal channels which is significantly more than the previous years (NBU, 2020).

Another significant factor for understanding the labor migration situation of Ukrainians abroad is that intensive labor migration eases pressure on the labor market within Ukraine, contributing to a decrease in the unemployment rate. Simultaneously, in the medium and long term, labor migration results in demographic losses, depletion of human capital, and shortages in the workforce. Ukrainian labor migration also plays a significant role in the economies of host countries by filling important gaps in the labor market and ensuring economic growth. According to the estimates of the National Bank of Poland, Ukrainian workers provided 13% of Poland's gross domestic product (GDP) growth in the period from 2013 to 2018 (Strzelecki et al., 2022). Additionally, through taxation, Ukrainian workers can contribute several billion dollars to the EU economy every year.

Relocation and forced migration have led to changes in the structure of the Ukrainian labor market as well as the composition of job opportunities and the distribution of specialists across different regions. The number of jobs decreased, and competition increased in the regions most affected by the military aggression of the Russian Federation.

There are certain categories of vacancies where the demand for labor has decreased significantly less than in others. These are medicine and pharmaceuticals, agriculture and agribusiness, and the IT industry. One of the features of the contemporary Ukrainian labor market is also the appearance of volunteer vacancies. Headhunters search for volunteer cooks, cleaners, coordination center operators, and even HR specialists.

Obtaining comprehensive and relevant information regarding labor market trends in a country during wartime, in which the size and composition of the workforce is ever-changing, is a difficult task. Given the outflow of several million competitive refugees, unemployment rates remain high in Ukraine. Despite the revival of economic activities and a gradual return of businesses to 'normality', many businesses have not resumed their activities, and this continues to affect the labor market.

Nevertheless, like any crisis, war is a time of maximum cost optimization. Both people and businesses were initially shocked by these terrible events but later began to recover and adapt to new conditions. Within the regions where active hostilities are not taking place, most companies continue to operate.

Ukrainian migrants residing abroad face challenges in seeking employment in the EU. These hurdles primarily arise from difficulties in diploma recognition, professional certification, and language barriers in the host country. Therefore, plenty of Ukrainians are forced to rely only on low-skilled labor opportunities. As a result, many refuse to work

or try to spend the last savings that would allow them to terminate work searches for some period of time.

The state took an active role in managing labor migration starting from the COVID-19 times. When evaluating the events of 2020 regarding labor migration regulations, it becomes apparent that there existed a significant disparity between the rhetoric of authorities and the actual implementation of migration policies. This disconnect was compounded by government officials' misunderstanding of the drivers and dynamics of labor migration, compounded by insufficient statistical data and ineffective communication. Despite either justified, or unjustified expectations of stakeholders, migration flows and individual tactics of migrant workers quickly adapted to new conditions, partially thanks to loyal politicians of destination countries whose need for workers from abroad remained high, and partially due to other factors that require deeper and detailed analysis.

Ukraine receiving candidacy status for EU membership (European Council, n.d.) has served as a pivotal moment prompting Ukrainian authorities to intensify their focus on labor migration trends. Some of the experts and politicians highlight that this may impact the labor migration tendencies such as how long active warfare will be taking place and how fast reconstruction processes will commence. Thanks to its status as a candidate for EU membership, Ukraine has the opportunity to improve its economic situation. Candidate status will trigger Ukrainians to use access to financial instruments aimed at supporting and developing candidate states. Ukraine will also get access to loans and grants that would allow it to stabilize internal labor market deteriorations.

Stabilization of the labor market in the post-war period is an extremely important task, taking into account the emergence of various population groups affected by the armed conflict, including, but not limited to, internally displaced persons, children and women, and people with disabilities. The specific needs of these groups must be taken into account when planning and implementing sustainable reintegration policies including employment. There should be a priority on developing an effective labor market management system (mechanisms and tools for its implementation), taking into account the requirements and needs of education, development of special skills, as well as increasing the level of social protection and security.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The contribution of labor migrants to Ukrainian economic development is difficult to overestimate. Before 2022 labor migration from Ukraine had also positive consequences, when remittances from migrants were filling the state budget, the well-being of household owners who were working abroad improved, and a rise of initial start-up capital was detected across the country.

There is a tendency among EU member-states to claim the fact of slowly increasing of Ukrainians back to their homeland. It might be assumed that the return of people is to some extent connected with the reduction or curtailment of refugee programs in many EU countries. Some of the EU states try to transfer Ukrainians to the status of workers, not refugees, Poland cancels compensation for housing for Ukrainian refugees, and Ukrainians

are being transferred from social services to employment centers in Germany.

Meanwhile, in many EU countries, employment procedures for Ukrainian citizens and recognition of qualifications have been simplified, especially within the positions that are scarce in local labor markets (doctors, engineers, drivers, etc.). Presumably, such a policy of European countries will contribute to the fact that the process of return of Ukrainian citizens may slow down. Therefore, those who cannot or do not want to find a job in Europe will return to Ukraine in the near future (in case there is no escalation on the battlefield). The current article's follow-up research is signified by the fact that there will be a large layer of Ukrainians who will stay in the EU and have found jobs, kindergarten, school, or higher education institutions for their child. Thus, it is likely that, due to the above reasons, there will be a shortage of labor in Ukraine after the end of martial law in the country. It would be of utmost importance to further research the need of Ukraine for labor migrants, what countries or cohorts Ukraine may find appealing, and how these immigrants potentially will be perceived in Ukrainian society traumatized by the war, violence, and cruel realities of everyday life.

A factor of martial law should not be underestimated within Ukrainian realities. According to the statistics provided by UNHCR (ODP, n.d.), about 90% of Ukrainians fleeing abroad are women with children and men mostly stay in Ukraine. Reason — during martial law, there is a ban on traveling abroad for men aged 18 to 60 years old, with minor exceptions for certain categories. And here is a paradox — Poland tends to offer usually more job positions for men than women and currently several bricklayers, loaders, drivers, plumbers, welders, and cleaners are most often sought. These job offers are mostly addressed to men. There are significantly fewer vacancies for women.

It is worth emphasizing the role of the state in the circumstances that have come up in Ukraine in 2022. The issues of both the internal labor market and the employment of Ukrainians abroad became very acute. Given the internal realm, the issue of improving the mechanism of foreigners' employment in Ukraine with the aim of foreign investment attraction and improving the conditions for the realization of the right to work by foreigners became even more urgent. On September 21, 2022, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted a law 'Draft law on Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine on Employment of Foreigners and Stateless Persons in Ukraine' (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2022). The relevant draft Law 5795 was developed by the Committee on Social Policy and Protection of Veteran's Rights as well as with representatives of central executive bodies as the main ones. The draft law includes in itself: 1) simplification of the process of meeting the labor force needs of Ukrainian employers by employing the labor of foreigners and stateless persons; 2) ensuring equal working conditions for citizens of Ukraine, foreigners and stateless persons in Ukraine; 3) implementation of state control over compliance with legislation on employment of the population.

Equally important is the fact that draft Law 5795 ensures the transparency of the mediation mechanism for the employment of Ukrainians abroad: since September 2022 and onwards, the provision of such services has been carried out

after the conclusion of the relevant contract. A business entity that acts as an intermediary in employment between an employer and an employee is obliged to advise citizens of Ukraine on the pros and cons of employment abroad on a gratis basis.

Despite all the forecasts, the least that the state can and must do for the sake of workers is to ensure their work with social and security guarantees. And given measures will also help to attract the labor force to Ukraine for its just and fair recovery. It is important to adopt laws that would activate the labor market, stimulate employment among the population, and also would improve the state of the economy. Such measures gained more importance in the context of a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. By its decision, the Verkhovna Rada created conditions for the openness and transparency of the labor market bringing Ukraine one step closer to the EU. With millions of Ukrainians either internally displaced or fleeing to other nations, the government must make sure that its citizens are supported by implementing cash assistance programs for unemployed workers and internally displaced persons, which are funded by both the government and foreign partners like the EU and Europe (United Nations). Ukraine has to maintain the unity of the diverse business sectors in the nation, therefore, the issue of temporary housing solutions and assistance for laborers who have lost their homes, allowing them to find employment in safer areas, should be taken into account.

Moreover, employees should be able to work remotely from safer locations regularly thanks to new regulations for remote contracts and tax breaks for employers who keep their employees in these circumstances.

The current article sets up an angle for further research on how EU accession requirements and Ukrainian current labor migration legislative framework should be synchronized, what type of additional measures should be adopted, and what the current state of play in Ukraine with labor market accession according to the EU standards.

The circulation of human capital will have positive consequences for the economy of Ukraine, will strengthen its status in the international arena, and will be also useful during the reconstruction of Ukraine after the end of the war.

Another aspect that might lead to more scientific findings is the EU — Ukraine promotion of organized labor migration with the maximum-security measures of those who take part in these processes. *De facto*, labor migration has been an ongoing process already for a while within Ukraine-EU relations. It stresses only additionally how important it is to regulate the processes while also referring to and studying examples of other countries that have similar developments. Ukraine has obtained EU-candidate status that opens up additional perspectives to stabilize labor migration issues on the national level.

A matter of labor migrants' reintegration into ordinary life in Ukraine might be another dimension that should be researched from the short-midterm perspective. It is also a point of the literature review research of the National Institute for Strategic Studies. A need for real, reliable, and viable programs for the reintegration of labor migrants increases also in the context of the war in Ukraine. Loans and jobs on the internal Ukrainian market are promising signs for Ukrainians who return from Poland and Germany. However, it is definitely not enough in order to encourage people to return to

the country and participate in the sustainable reconstruction of the country. Reintegration could be accomplished way of a complex set of information measures, social protection, economic conditions, and psychological assistance.

There were several limitations to the study of labor migration in Ukraine. The first is the accessibility of data. Very often, migration data is incomplete or not updated frequently, which leaves gaps in the author's understanding of the actual scope or trends of movement. Another drawback is that a large number of migrants from

Ukraine may not be formally registered or included in statistics, which causes underrepresentation in studies. This happens frequently when Ukrainian migrants live illegally in the host country or work in the unofficial sector. Temporal dynamics have been identified as one more limitation. Several variables, including shifts in the political landscape, the state of the economy, and immigration laws cause migration patterns to alter quickly. It has been extremely difficult to take these rapid shifts into account in order to design up-to-date research.

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