

Working Paper 8/2026

Migration Skill Corridor Report UKRAINE – POLAND

Viktor Borshchevskyy, Ukrainian Catholic University
Emil Chról, CRASH, Kozminski University
Ivanna Kyliushyk, CRASH, Kozminski University
Iryna Lapshyna, Ukrainian Catholic University

<http://link4skills.eu>



The Link4Skills project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon research and innovation programme under grant agreement number 101132476

Migration Skill Corridor Report

UKRAINE – POLAND

Author/s:

Viktor Borshchevskyy, Ukrainian Catholic University
Emil Chról, CRASH, Kozminski University
Ivanna Kyliushyk, CRASH, Kozminski University
Iryna Lapshyna, Ukrainian Catholic University

Corresponding/Contact partner:

Ivanna Kyliushyk ikyliushyk@kozminski.edu.pl
Iryna Lapshyna irina.lapshyna@gmail.com

Contributors:

Myroslava Chekh, Ukrainian Catholic University
Izabela Grabowska, CRASH, Kozminski University
Yevheniy Matvyeyev, Ukrainian Catholic University
Oksana Vasylytsya, Ukrainian Catholic University
Olga Wanicka, CRASH, Kozminski University
Valentyna Zasadko, Ukrainian Catholic University

1 Legal, political and institutional frameworks and relations

Overview of the development and types/forms of state-led partnerships on skilled migration, including bilateral agreements, institutional frameworks, initiatives, programs, regulations, MoUs, MoAs, inter-agency understandings (IAU), etc.; if no state-led agreements/partnerships exist, look at municipal/provincial governance, private sector partnerships. Explain the general approach regarding skilled migration of and between the two countries. Refer also to the corridor type (see p. 1), the role of critical events (crises/war), legal, political, administrative and educational systems.

The entry of migrants from Ukraine into Poland has been regulated by various legal acts aimed primarily at responding to the country's economic needs. Before Poland joined the European Union, there was a visa-free regime between the two countries; afterwards, visas were introduced, but they were free of charge for Ukrainian citizens. As early as 2006, a simplified declaration system for the employment of foreigners was introduced, allowing Ukrainian citizens to work legally in Poland without the need to obtain a work permit. This facilitated seasonal and short-term migration. A key milestone was the 2013 Act on Foreigners, which laid the groundwork for the long-term legalization of residence and employment.

Ukraine migration and diaspora policy is not a priority of the Ukrainian government. While Ukraine has a "Strategy of State Migration Policy" until 2025, it's not considered comprehensive. Responsibility for

migration policy is spread across several state bodies, hindering effective implementation. As Ukrainian migration expert explained:

There was no systematic migration policy in Ukraine before the full-scale invasion. This problem was never the focus of the state's attention (L4S_transcript_UA-PL_prac_02).

At the same time Ukrainian experts referred to the positive effects of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, signed in 2014, which includes provisions for cooperation on justice, freedom, and security, including migration. While not explicitly focused on migration, the agreement aimed to strengthen cooperation on various aspects of migration and mobility. In 2017, visa-free travel between Ukraine and the EU was introduced and further facilitated short-term border crossings and intensified mobility flows.

Since 2014 Poland, due to geographical proximity, extensive migration networks, and liberal residence and work permit regulations, remains the main EU in which Ukrainians work, hosting over 1.3 million Ukrainians in 2019 (GUS, 2020).

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 triggered large-scale cross-border displacement and marked a turning point. Poland – as the first EU member state – implemented a special law on March 12, 2022, enacting the provisions of the EU Temporary Protection Directive. The so-called “special act” granted Ukrainian nationals legal residence and access to the labor market, healthcare, education, and social benefits. While its primary purpose was to provide protection to refugees, in practice it also created a framework that enabled the entry of skilled labor into the Polish labor market. Poland with large pre-invasion Ukrainian diasporas has become one of the major destinations of Ukrainian refugees, specifically due to existing migrant networks.

At the bilateral level, Poland and Ukraine currently lack a comprehensive network of state agreements concerning the migration of skilled labor. Existing forms of cooperation are rather ad hoc in nature and are limited primarily to the recognition of qualifications and seasonal employment. An exception can be found in the developing cooperation in the fields of education and science, where support programs have been introduced for Ukrainian students and researchers. However, Poland does not pursue a long-term policy aimed at attracting highly qualified migrants from Ukraine. Actions in this domain tend to be reactive, triggered mainly in response to crises or labor market demands, rather than forming part of a coherent migration strategy. There is no centralized model for managing skills-based migration; responsibilities are dispersed among various institutions, including voivodeship offices, labor offices, universities, and industry organizations.

Remarkably, Ukrainian migration experts had a somewhat different view of the situation in the Ukrainian-Polish migration corridor. While acknowledging the importance of improving the effectiveness of existing agreements in migration field, their overall perception of other bilateral agreements remained rather positive:

If we talk about Poland, there are agreements on the recognition of diplomas and qualifications, including academic degrees. There are also agreements on pension provision and avoidance of double taxation. In general, I can say that Poland compared to other countries has a very good regulatory framework, which probably covers almost all aspects related to employment between Ukraine and Poland, especially Ukrainian migrants in Poland (L4S_transcript_UA-PL_exp_08).

Several Ukrainian interviewees also expressed hope that the Ukrainian authorities will make it possible to intensify the signing of bilateral agreements and memorandums with EU countries, including on migration issues.

To sum up, the Ukrainian-Polish migration corridor is an established, asymmetrical and hybrid in nature - functioning simultaneously as both a crisis-driven and labor-driven corridor, with fluid transitions

between temporary protection status and economic migration. Although individuals with higher qualifications can relatively easily access the labor market, systemic support for the recognition of qualifications, professional development, or language acquisition remains limited, as will be discussed further below. What makes this corridor distinctive is that it is largely governed by informal migration networks, which play a crucial role in facilitating and driving migration from Ukraine.

2 Implementation: Recruiting

Provide insights into recruiting processes, challenges or opportunities, ethics; questions of supply and demand of skills; attractiveness of countries and skilled migrant profiles (relevant expectations and images); reasons for involvement or dropouts; role of actors; division of costs; if applicable: role of technologies; Please pay specific attention to employers as well as recruitment agencies, intermediaries or transnational education providers in shaping the migration skill corridor.

Ukrainians constitute the largest group on the Polish labor market. Even before the escalation in 2022, Ukrainians constituted 62% (1,390,978) of all migrants in Poland (GUS, 2020). Such a massive migration was possible not only due to the active involvement of formal and informal recruiters but also because it was strongly driven by well-developed migrant networks.

The individual initiative of migrants, as well as their relatives and friends who are already abroad, and assistance from them, is important. Before the war, people often found work in Poland mainly through their friends and relatives (L4S_transcript_UA-PL_exp_07).

Before the introduction of visa-free travel in 2017, recruitment agencies in Ukraine played an active role in connecting Ukrainian migrants with work in Europe, facilitating the employment of Ukrainian workers in various sectors, including agriculture, construction, and manufacturing. However, this period also saw instances of exploitation, where agencies took advantage of migrants' vulnerability and lack of knowledge about local labor laws. Some agencies offered jobs, accommodation, and assistance with paperwork, but in return, they often charged high fees or provided inadequate working conditions.

By the end of 2022, the number of Ukrainians in Poland had increased, and over 1.5 million refugees from Ukraine had registered for Temporary Protection or similar national protection schemes, with women comprising 65 percent of the total (UNHCR, 2022). However, the number of refugees in Poland declined by September 2024 due to return migration and secondary movements to countries like Germany. According to official data, in 2025, 993,000 individuals are registered with the PESEL UKR status (GOV, 2025). As a result of forced migration, the profile of Ukrainian migrants in Poland has changed significantly. While before 2022 the migrant population was slightly male-dominated, primarily composed of middle-skilled individuals, and characterized by economically motivated or circular migration, the current majority consists of highly qualified women with higher education.

There was no need to supplement the labor market with additional nationalities [situation before the COVID-19 pandemic]. Ukraine was easily accessible, culturally and linguistically close. And the profile of Ukrainian workers five or six years ago was perfectly aligned with Polish labor market needs. These were people who typically came as labor migrants, motivated by the desire to stay for a short period, work as many hours as possible, earn as much money as they could, and return home with those earnings. Moreover, the majority of this migration flow consisted of male workers from Ukraine, which again fit perfectly with the demands of the Polish labor market. However, it is clear that first the pandemic, and then the war, completely changed that reality [profile of Ukrainian migrants in Poland] (L4S_transcript_PL_prac_07).

In the recruitment process in Poland, the key actors are recruitment agencies and employers themselves, who have neither been particularly supported nor adequately supervised by the state:

“(…) our authorities, in the context of migration management, have somewhat allowed a kind of Wild West scenario to unfold” (L4S_transcript_PL_prac_07). As a result, ethical concerns have arisen regarding unscrupulous employment agencies that exploit migrants by charging recruitment fees or illegally redirecting them to other EU countries.

International recruitment is complex and often leads to abuses and gaps in protecting migrant workers' rights due to factors like lack of formalized procedures and insufficient cooperation. Migrants are particularly vulnerable to exploitation (L4S_Transcript_PL_exp_18).

But from our perspective, the problem is not about the regulations themselves or the severity of penalties - the real issue lies in the enforcement of these regulations. And that is precisely the role of the supervisory authorities. If a shadow company operates by illegally employing people, selling fraudulent documents, or sending foreigners elsewhere, such a company finds it more profitable to continue its operations because it generally knows it will face no consequences. It's a company registered to a mailbox or a virtual office, because, in practice, no one will actually catch anyone (L4S_transcript_PL_prac_02).

Some Polish business associations claim to represent “honest companies,” yet acknowledges the problem of unfair competition and the lack of effective state oversight. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and various NGOs actively promote international standards for ethical recruitment and assist employers in understanding the complexities of recruitment chains. State migration policy is often marked by inconsistency and politicization, with the government avoiding open regulation of recruitment processes out of fear of negative public reaction (e.g., “migrants are taking our jobs”). This reluctance hinders the development of a clear and effective migration policy. Only recently has the government begun planning changes aimed at increasing control over recruitment agencies, in line with the newly adopted migration strategy.

After 2017 the role of recruitment agencies in Ukraine significantly reduced and shifted with a notable increase in focus on the IT sector. Individual agencies continued to operate as usual, while part of them was specializing in IT recruitment and staff augmentation.

The recruitment of Ukrainians largely takes place online, through social media platforms (such as Facebook groups, TikTok, and Instagram) and job advertisement portals (e.g., Pracuj.pl, OLX). Some recruitment agencies operate offices in Ukraine (Kyiv, Lviv) to facilitate direct recruitment, but the majority of hiring now occurs among Ukrainians already residing in Poland. The reputation of the recruiter, along with access to a well-established database of candidates, plays a crucial role in successful recruitment.

Bigger Polish Universities are actively recruiting students from Ukraine, with Ukrainians constituting the largest group of international students enrolled in both public and private universities in Poland. Many universities offer support programs, including tuition-free education and scholarships, for Ukrainian students, particularly those displaced by the war.

Ukrainian networking plays a crucial role in the recruitment process. Not only do social media play an important part, but so do new technologies. Some companies utilise automated selection systems (ATS) to scan specialists' résumés, helping to minimize bias in the recruitment process.

3 Implementation: Skilling

Provide insights into skilling processes, including language or professional training; pre-departure and follow-up training; existing programs/infrastructures, involved actors (educational providers); design and matching of curricula; where does the training take place primarily; related opportunities and challenges; questions of access and eligibility to attend classes; duration; cost division; insights into the local (vocational and academic) education and training market etc.

Ukraine does not provide any state-organized pre-departure programs, including language or professional training. Prior to the full-scale invasion, Ukrainians with migration aspirations to Poland typically learned Polish language either beforehand on their own or shortly after arrival, often directly on the job. After the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Ukrainian experts referred to a significant outflow of promising youth and skilled professionals, especially young men who can be mobilised for military service.

Many young people, particularly young men, are choosing to go to Poland to pursue qualifications in fields such as nursing, medicine, engineering, and construction. Rather than enrolling in Ukrainian colleges and universities, they opt for education abroad, where, within a few years, they can obtain a European diploma – granting them the opportunity to work across the EU (L4S_transcript_UA-PL_exp_08).

Poland does not have training programs specifically dedicated to Ukrainian citizens prior to migration; such processes typically take place only after arrival in the country. Many initiatives in this area originate from the private sector and non-governmental organisations, with a more limited role played by state institutions. The key components of skilling processes include vocational and language training. Recruitment organisations sometimes offer guidance on upskilling and provide support in onboarding for specific job positions. They also cooperate with International organisations, which funds vocational training and Polish language courses for Ukrainian refugees:

Some of them cover up to 100% of training costs. These may include vocational trainings across a wide range of sectors – from manual labor positions such as forklift operators, warehouse workers, welders, or plumbers, to more advanced trainings for managerial staff. For instance, if a company wishes to promote its Ukrainian employees to higher positions and an individual has the ambition to become a manager, relevant training can be provided. Thus, the available trainings are diverse, addressing various qualifications and professions. In addition, language training in Polish is also covered (L4S_transcript_PL-UA_exp_12).

Such companies also offer integration or informational packages for recruited individuals, along with support in daily activities, accommodation, and navigating the city. Trainings are conducted primarily in Poland, often directly at the workplace, as part of the pre-onboarding process.

Everything is implemented on site, at the moment of arrival in Poland. All individuals arrive at our so-called arrival departments, where the pre-onboarding process takes place. This process is directly related to the specific workplace. We explain the rules, provide a detailed overview of the job, the tasks involved, what the employer prioritizes, what to pay attention to, and what the standards are, among other things (L4S_transcript_PL_prac_07).

Part of social organisations run mentoring programs that assist migrants in preparing their CVs, LinkedIn profiles, and job interview skills. At the same time trade unions and other civil society actors organise language courses and provide legal advice for migrants.

Despite the availability of support mechanisms, including funding from international institutions, employers do not always engage in the development of migrant workers' competencies. In many cases, the main limitation lies in the lack of organizational resources – companies often lack time, specialized teams, or dedicated personnel responsible for implementing training programs. At the same time, there is a noticeable absence of systemic solutions from the state, particularly regarding Polish language instruction. Current initiatives are largely focused on basic levels and do not address the needs of professions that require specialized sectoral or technical vocabulary.

The lack of advanced, publicly coordinated language programs and the inconsistency of migration policy hinder the full integration of migrants and the effective utilization of their potential in the labor

market. Rather than a long-term strategy for human capital development, ad hoc measures prevail, aimed primarily at quickly filling labor shortages. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that plans are underway to develop Foreigners' Integration Centers (CICs), which will offer career counseling and Polish language instruction at basic levels. Specialist training will be provided by language schools and educational institutions.

(...) we will be implementing a project aimed at professional development and the restoration of vocational competencies for foreigners. Additionally, it will focus on improving language skills, including specialist language relevant to specific professions. Moreover, one of the priorities of our activities in the labor market is the integration of foreigners into Polish trade unions (L4S_transcript_PL_pol_08).

4 Implementation: Recognition

Provide insights into questions of skill recognition and related challenges and opportunities, including language and professional skills; formal and informal qualifications; focus on high- and medium-level skills; role of sector/occupation, role of professional bodies, recognition processes, involved actors; durations; cost division etc.

Most Ukrainians arriving in Poland have higher education and high- or medium-level skills. However, they face significant challenges in transferring these qualifications to the realities of the Polish labor market. These difficulties stem from systemic differences as well as limited proficiency in the Polish language, which constitutes a “serious barrier to fully realizing their potential in the [Polish] labor market” (L4S_transcript_PL_prac_02).

In many corporations, including international ones, proficiency in Polish (which often remains the language of internal communication) remains a key requirement alongside English, which complicates employment opportunities for foreigners who speak only English and their native language.

The language barrier is also a serious obstacle to fully realizing one’s potential in the labor market. Even when a person’s qualifications are compatible with the Polish system and there is a relevant job offer, the ability to take full advantage of that opportunity is often limited. This is due to insufficient language proficiency, particularly since specialist positions frequently require a strong command of Polish. Moreover, if the profession is regulated, obtaining special licenses or certifications is necessary (L4S_transcript_PL_prac_02).

At the same time, the situation differs in certain sectors such as construction. There is a high demand for construction workers in Poland, and Ukrainians are comparatively well-positioned in this field due to their competitive advantages. These include basic proficiency in the Polish language, cultural proximity, and familiarity with Polish work standards and ethics: “A Ukrainian construction worker hired today can typically begin working the very next day” (L4S_transcript_UA-PL_prac_05).

Another sector that stands out among skilled migrants is the Ukrainian IT sector, particularly in terms of qualifications, income levels, and the limited need for diploma recognition. Ukrainian IT specialists distinguish themselves from other Ukrainian skilled migrants due to their strong technical skills, high level of education, proficiency in English, and competitive salaries. These attributes make them highly sought after in the global IT outsourcing market, including Poland. In most cases, diploma recognition is not required for employment in Poland, which allows them to work without undergoing formal procedures. Interestingly, while some Ukrainian IT professionals are physically based in Ukraine and work remotely for Polish companies, others have relocated to Poland or other EU countries.

The Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA) operates a database called Kwalifikator, which facilitates the verification of foreign diplomas and their Polish equivalents. This tool is

particularly useful in the context of **non-regulated professions**, where formal recognition procedures are not required but employers or institutions may still seek confirmation of the educational level or field of study. Kwalifikator helps assess the compatibility of foreign qualifications with the Polish education system, thereby supporting the labor market integration of migrant professionals including those from Ukraine and enhancing transparency in recruitment processes. The result of the verification process conducted via Kwalifikator is a so-called recognition statement, which can be saved as a PDF document. The reliability and credibility of the information are ensured by the electronic signature.

The creators of Kwalifikator express the hope that the platform will facilitate the evaluation of foreign qualifications for both universities and employers in Poland. For holders of foreign diplomas, it is expected to support an informed assessment of their opportunities to pursue further education or an academic career in Poland (L4S_transcript_PL_prac_15).

A major challenge lies in the recognition of qualifications, particularly in the case of **regulated professions** such as doctors, nurses, teachers, or psychologists.

In the case of regulated professions, where specific legal requirements must be met, there is no separate pathway in Poland for the recognition of professional qualifications for individuals from non-EU or non-EFTA countries. Consequently, the only available route is nostrification (L4S_transcript_PL_prac_15).

Our interviewees described the diploma recognition (nostrification) process in Poland as “time-consuming, lengthy, complex” (L4S_transcript_PL_prac_02), and costly, although Labor Offices may offer financial support to facilitate it. The process of recognizing professional qualifications often requires individuals to compensate for differences in curricula or to pass additional examinations. Diploma recognition is particularly relevant in the health sector.

It goes in line with the Ukrainian practitioner’s opinion. As the representative of the Ukrainian recruitment agency that operates in Poland described:

In Poland, the nostrification process for a nurse’s diploma typically takes about a year, while for medical doctors it can take a year and a half or longer. In some cases, nurses have been unable to remain unemployed for such an extended period while navigating the lengthy and costly procedures. They are required to invest significant amounts of money in document translation, notarization, and other bureaucratic steps. The process is so complex, time-consuming, and expensive that one nurse, for example, ended up earning more by doing manual labor in fish processing than she would have as a nurse during the entire year and a half spent navigating what she described as “circles of hell” (L4S_transcript_UA-PL_prac_05).

As we see as a result, “many choose to take up unskilled or low-skilled jobs rather than wait for official authorization to work in their professions, such as nursing or medicine” (L4S_transcript_UA_pol_2).

In 2022 The Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy has introduced a simplified path for the temporary licensing of Ukrainian medical professionals, including funding for both basic and sector-specific Polish language instruction as well as nostrification courses. The earlier legal framework, introduced by the Act of 5 July 2018 amending the Act on the Professions of Doctor and Dentist and Certain Other Acts (Journal of Laws 2018, item 1669), allowed Ukrainian citizens to obtain the right to temporarily practice as doctors in Poland, provided they held appropriate qualifications. Previously, Ukrainian doctors were required to complete a number of administrative procedures, including diploma nostrification, confirmation of language proficiency, familiarization with the Polish legal and healthcare system, and participation in mandatory courses and training to ensure they could deliver medical services at the required professional standard. In 2022, these provisions were replaced with a simplified procedure under the Act of 12 March 2022 on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine in Connection with the Armed Conflict in the Territory of that Country (Journal of Laws 2022, item 583), enabling a

faster and less formal path to professional recognition. These regulations specifically apply to the medical profession as well. The act creates a legal framework enabling Ukrainian citizens with appropriate education and qualifications to obtain the right to practice medical professions in Poland more quickly, bypassing the lengthy process of diploma nostrification that would normally be required. According to this law Ukrainian citizens may apply for the right to practice as a medical doctor by submitting an official request, which must be positively assessed by the relevant Polish authorities. Such an application should include documents confirming the applicant's professional qualifications and, where applicable, any professional experience obtained in Ukraine or other countries. This is a significantly simplified procedure compared to the standard nostrification process, which typically requires full integration into the Polish medical education system or the successful completion of national examinations.

Between Poland and Ukraine, Poland is the only country that has enacted a law simplifying access for Ukrainian citizens to medical professions. This provision grants temporary rights to practice the profession, allowing individuals to obtain full professional licensure later on. This temporary license is limited in duration and currently applies under the special law in force. However, most of these individuals subsequently enter the nostrification procedure (L4S_transcript_PL_prac_15).

However in 2025 The Presidium of the Supreme Medical Council strongly opposes the current regulations that allow for obtaining the right to practice as a doctor or dentist in Poland through so-called simplified procedures. According to the Council, these pathways lower qualification standards, pose a threat to patient safety, and permit access to the profession for individuals whose knowledge, language proficiency, and adherence to medical ethics are not properly verified. The Council calls for the immediate repeal of these provisions (Position No. 15/25/P-IX of the Presidium of the Supreme Medical Council, 21 February 2025).

5 Implementation: Matching

Provide insights into processes of skill matching, potential chances or barriers; coordination of job interviews, selection criteria, which actors are involved in the selection, which partner is primarily responsible, insights into the contracting; role of sector/occupation; satisfaction by the employer (employee's preparedness, motivation and "fit") or the employee (location, work conditions, payment, professional hierarchy, responsible tasks and "fit" etc.).

It has been observed that Ukrainians are increasingly less likely to take on the simplest jobs. The decreasing share of Ukrainians in unskilled jobs from 53% in 2023 to 44% in 2024 illustrates a shift away from the most elementary forms of employment. At the same time, their growing presence in roles requiring higher qualifications (from 33% to 38%) reflects not only their competences but also their increasing ability to navigate the Polish labour system. This upward mobility is further reinforced by their language skills, stable housing, and accumulated work experience, which position them closer to the status of native workers. As a result, many Ukrainian migrants are no longer willing to tolerate substandard working conditions, leading to a segmentation of the migrant labour market, where the lowest-paid and least-desirable jobs are increasingly filled by newcomers from more distant countries.

From my perspective, the issue is not so much that, for example, men from Ukraine are currently unable to cross the border. Of course, there are still many of them in the Polish labor market, and they continue to work. In this context, not much has changed. However, the profile of the Ukrainian worker has changed significantly. In most cases, the Ukrainian worker is no longer primarily a labor migrant. What we observe in the market is that the Ukrainian worker is, in many ways, already somewhat like a Polish employee. Most already have their own accommodation, speak Polish, which was not the case before the war, and possess experience in the Polish labor market, sometimes extensive. Increasingly, such workers occupy higher-level positions. They have a specific background and certain skills. Above all, Ukrainian

workers are increasingly unwilling to accept difficult working conditions, so to speak (L4S_transcript_PL_prac_07).

Furthermore, the representative of the Ukrainian recruitment agency that operates in Poland referred to high expectations of the Ukrainian migrant job seekers:

A high level of support for job seekers has become the norm, and candidates now expect it as a standard part of the recruitment process. Our services go beyond basic information and often include paid and relatively expensive offers. For example, our agency and the employer may share the cost of the candidate's housing. Other services may include Polish language courses – we actively collaborate with various foundations to reduce costs – and advanced training or upskilling programs. These efforts aim to ease the financial burden on the candidate while improving their long-term integration and employability (L4S_transcript_UA-PL_prac_05).

Nevertheless the process of matching Ukrainian workers with the Polish labor market is quite problematic. One of the main challenges lies in the discrepancy between their high qualifications and the realities of the Polish labor market. Many Ukrainian refugees hold higher education degrees in fields such as finance, sales, marketing, as well as in the public sector (nurses, doctors, teachers), yet they are often forced to work below their qualifications. Only 14% of migrants from Ukraine actually use their higher education in their jobs (NBP, 2024). Language barriers, the complicated and time-consuming diploma nostrification process, and workplace discrimination are significant obstacles preventing Ukrainian migrants from returning to positions commensurate with their work experience. This situation is widely regarded as a 'waste' of human capital, where individuals lose previously acquired skills.

To facilitate better matching, new technologies play an important role, such as automated candidate selection systems (ATS), which scan CVs, identify competencies, and assess fit, thereby helping to avoid bias and ensuring foreign candidates are treated on par with Polish applicants. Following initial screening, recruitment interviews are conducted first with the agency recruiter, then with the client's representative and hiring manager; the process may also include additional assessment tests.

Interestingly, satisfaction indicators among Ukrainian workers are often higher than those among Polish employees, which may be attributed to employment conditions, wages, or work culture in Poland, perceived more favorably compared to Ukraine. However, the sense of temporariness of their stay in Poland affects Ukrainian forced migrants' motivation to invest in long-term professional development and learning Polish. Employers, on the other hand, frequently expect employees who are ready to work immediately and are not always willing to fund training or language courses.

In most cases, clients have immediate needs and neither want to organise this type of training themselves nor are they willing to wait until we [the recruitment agency] are able to arrange it and actually guide the person through the entire learning process. So this is definitely a major challenge (L4S_transcript_PL_prac_07).

6 Implementation: Migration/Mobility

Provide insights into the support and facilitation of migration/mobility processes and related challenges or opportunities; involved actors; official procedures; duration; cost division; questions of status; questions of visa/official documents etc.

Entry into Poland (Migration/Mobility)

For many years, Ukrainian citizens were able to enter Poland through simplified procedures. Before Poland joined the EU, there was a visa-free regime between Ukraine and Poland. After Poland's

accession to the EU in 2004 and the Schengen Area, a visa regime was introduced, but visas to Poland remained free of charge for Ukrainian nationals. Most Ukrainians obtained visas based on employer declarations to hire a foreigner in Poland, which allowed them to stay for up to six months within a year. This, in turn, contributed to continuous mobility (circular migration) among Ukrainian workers, particularly in sectors such as agriculture and construction.

In 2017, a visa-free regime between the EU and Ukraine was introduced. Poland became one of the few EU countries allowing Ukrainian citizens to take up employment under visa-free entry. This system also facilitated circular labour migration, especially in construction, agriculture, domestic services, tourism, and other seasonal jobs under the so-called 90/90 rule – allowing stays of up to 90 days within any 180-day period.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected this mobility by imposing restrictions on cross-border movement. The introduction of temporary protection status for Ukrainian citizens since 2022 regulates forced migration and has also supported mobility, but exclusively for women. Due to the Ukrainian government's ban on the departure of men of conscription age, male citizens are not allowed to leave the country.

This has created specific challenges for the Polish construction sector, where Ukrainian men had constituted the dominant labour force. To address this issue our interviewee, Ukrainian builders are even sometimes “imported” from other countries. As the representative of the Ukrainian recruitment agency in Poland explained:

We started recruiting Ukrainians who were in other countries, such as Spain and Greece, so we could have brought them here, to Poland (L4S_transcript_UA-PL_prac_05).

Those men who were already in Poland at the time the ban was introduced now face limited mobility options.

Moreover, temporary protection status has enabled easier access for Ukrainian citizens to labour markets across the European Union. This has provided a significant boost to the development and international expansion of certain recruitment agencies, including Ukrainian ones, thereby further increasing the mobility of Ukrainians across the EU:

In general, we [recruitment agency] were somewhat lucky in an unlucky situation, because the opening of European labour markets to Ukrainian workers – thanks to the possibility of obtaining temporary protection – was a major boost for us in terms of growth and international expansion, specifically for our agency. Before the outbreak of the war, we operated only in the Polish and Czech markets, and that was it (L4S_transcript_PL_prac_07).

At the same time Ukrainian recruitment agency that operates in Poland referred to tough competition with Polish recruitment agencies.

With approximately 8,500 registered employment agencies in Poland, the competition in the sector is extremely intense. As a result, nearly every agency offers a range of additional services beyond basic job placement in order to attract and retain candidates (L4S_transcript_UA-PL_prac_05).

Long-term legalization of stay and work in Poland

The protracted and unpredictable nature of legalization procedures in Poland – particularly the issuance of work and stay permits – poses a serious challenge for both employers and employees. These processes can take anywhere from 3 to 12 months, leading to legal uncertainty, risks to business stability, and a deterioration in migrants' living and working conditions.

I would definitely like to see a regulation, above all, of the rules concerning – well, in general – the timeliness of issuing work permits. Because today Polish offices are absolutely clogged, absolutely ineffective. According to administrative law, such a permit should be reviewed and issued within a maximum of 60 days. Yet today we have the example that Polish employers wait several months for these permits, which constitutes a serious threat to business operations, but also a major problem for the workers themselves, who, very often, while waiting for the permit, have no means to live (L4S_transcript_PL-UA_prac_03).

These challenges, stemming from underdeveloped and inefficient state policies, are often mitigated by employment agencies, NGOs, and other intermediary actors who step in to provide support and navigate bureaucratic obstacles. For example the IOM operates helplines and informational portals in multiple languages and collaborates with embassies and employer organizations to promote legal employment and protect migrant workers. Polish Ministries are working on the development of the "Working and Living in Poland" platform, aimed at assisting foreigners (including Ukrainians) in navigating legal regulations and other related matters. Trade unions represent the interests of workers, provide opinions on draft legislation, and work to promote fair employment and social integration. Employment agencies offer a comprehensive package of support for Ukrainians from the moment of their departure from Ukraine.

Our services include detailed travel information – such as specific schedules from cities like Lviv to Wrocław – as well as assistance upon arrival. We meet individuals at the station and arrange transport to their accommodation, whether in hostels or hotels. Our support also covers all aspects of the legalization process. We ensure the individual is fully settled, provide necessary work clothing and footwear, and continue to monitor their situation to ensure a smooth integration (L4S_transcript_UA-PL_prac_05).

Additionally, although some Ukrainians in Poland hold temporary protection status, it reinforces a sense of impermanence among forced migrants, as the special law is itself provisional and continuously extended. This, in turn, affects the sense of stability for both employers and employees.

7 **Implementation: Integration, retention, circulation, return**

Potential topics: Support and facilitation of arrival / integration or return / reintegration of (current, future or returned) skilled migrants; onboarding; retention; involved actors (civil, private or state; welfare, diaspora or returnee organizations); language, housing, living costs, social, cultural, political and structural integration; how circularity and return are seen etc.

Integration

Today, there is virtually no town in Poland without a Ukrainian presence – and in fact, Ukrainians can now be found even in many villages. On one hand, integration has become easier due to the accessibility of Polish institutions: banks, ATMs, and public services often provide information in Ukrainian. On the other hand, this widespread presence has also led to a degree of social isolation. Many Ukrainians live within close-knit communities where there is little need to learn Polish, as they can often find Ukrainian-speaking doctors, salespeople, hairdressers, and other service providers (L4S_transcript_UA-PL_prac_05).

Despite the growing number of foreigners in Poland, for many years, Poland did not develop comprehensive integration policy frameworks. As a result, integration policy in the country remains at an early stage of development. To date, it has largely relied on the activities of non-governmental

organisations – activities that are not state-funded: “Because here, actually, Poland relied on the third sector, and to this day, this remains a very strong pillar of integration” (L4S_transcript_PL_pol_08).

Polish Integration policy was criticized by the representative of the Ukrainian employment agency in Poland:

Poland remains a relatively closed society for other nationalities. Although it has been experiencing the presence of Ukrainians for many years, it has not fully capitalized on the opportunities this process presents. One key reason is the lack of inclusive policies – many individuals were not hired for certain jobs due to insufficient Polish language skills or because of the highly complex and burdensome nostrification procedures required to recognize foreign qualifications (L4S_transcript_UA-PL_prac_05).

Ukrainian governmental officials are rather sceptical about integration policy of Poland:

In Poland, migration policy often prioritizes assimilation over genuine integration, particularly in the case of Ukrainians. We will actively oppose this approach. We fully support the productive integration of Ukrainians who have chosen to build their lives abroad, recognizing that a successful Ukrainian living outside the country is one of the best ambassadors Ukraine can have.

Currently, Polish Ministries are working on the development of a national integration strategy. This strategy aims, among other things, to prepare specialists in migration and integration and to support collaboration with NGOs and local governments. The overarching goal is for migrants to become “new residents” and full-fledged citizens of Poland, familiar with the principles of how the state functions.

The way I see it – and we, as the government, also see it – is that their role is that of new residents. And if that is the case, then it is fundamentally a fully equal, partnership-based role. It is a role that must address needs not only related to the labour market and housing, but also to public services – specifically, what is happening in schools and, more broadly, in the public sphere (L4S_transcript_PL_pol_08).

Our interviewees noted that many employers – particularly large companies – take a proactive approach to integration. They provide support through integration coordinators, translation of documents (including occupational health and safety instructions), legal assistance with residence permits, and even help with housing. Some employers also offer cultural awareness training for their staff. However, smaller employers, or those hiring for low-skilled positions, tend to see less need to invest in training or integration efforts.

We have a certain problem with those employers who are focused on low-skilled jobs. That’s a bit of a problem, because they see less need to invest in integration activities. They see less need to improve the qualifications of foreigners, to raise awareness of their rights, and so on” (L4S_transcript_PL_pol_08).

Trade unions argue that it is employers who should bear the costs of training and language courses, since they are the ones seeking employees. It has been noted that Polish employers are often unprepared – mentally or structurally – for these expenses, such as the legal requirement to translate employment contracts into Ukrainian.

(...) integration policy should be a shared responsibility between the state and employers, with employers bearing the primary cost for specific worker training and language courses, while migrant individuals should contribute to the smallest extent (L4S_transcript_PL_exp_17).

Retention, circular migration and return

The Polish side expresses a clear interest in retaining Ukrainian migrants, viewing them as essential for addressing demographic gaps and labour market shortages, and thus aims to promote long-term settlement rather than merely short-term migration. Stakeholders observe a high degree of circularity among Ukrainians, who frequently return to Ukraine and subsequently re-migrate to Poland or other EU countries. Ukrainian diaspora networks – such as NGOs and social media groups – play a crucial role in facilitating this mobility. Some Ukrainians, particularly those with children, plan to remain in Poland for an extended period, whereas individuals without families are more likely to consider returning. Nonetheless, Poland does not intend to obstruct the actions of the Ukrainian government, which pursues return-oriented policies, recognising its concerns regarding demographic collapse and brain drain.

We stand by the position that integration policies towards Ukrainian citizens should not conflict with Ukraine's return migration efforts. At the same time, Ukraine should not hinder our integration actions, while both sides make use of return options (L4S_transcript_PL_pol_08).

It is not in our interest for these individuals to return to Ukraine, yet we regard Ukraine as a close ally and partner (L4S_transcript_PL_pol_08).

Hence, Poland neither actively promotes nor obstructs Ukraine's repatriation policies but focuses on integration and long-term settlement of Ukrainian nationals. From Ukraine's perspective, the priority remains the return of citizens to rebuild the country, as reflected in planned initiatives like the "Unity Hubs".

Obviously, we would like to bring back everyone who left. We need this as a country, as an economy first and foremost. I won't even mention the demographic situation. (L4S_transcript_UA-PL_pol_04).

At the same time Ukraine's negative political narrative towards emigrants have shifted after 2014 and migration is increasingly viewed not as a problem to be solved. In the post-independence period from 1991, and in continuation of Soviet traditions, negative coverage of migration prevailed in Ukrainian policy and media discourses. Migrants were presented in a highly unfavourable fashion. They were often framed as either traitors, defectors, prostitutes or threats to the economy, demography, culture or security. Migration was also viewed as "brain drain". At the same time, the diaspora was perceived as unwelcome naïve outsiders in vyshyvankas who felt they "knew better" than those back home, or as union of the millionaires and a "cash cow" for much needed foreign currency. However, recently, migrants and diaspora have been perceived more favourably in the political and public debate (Lapshyna, 2022). While acknowledging the challenges that can arise from large-scale emigration, there is a growing recognition of its positive contributions to labor markets, economies, social development and post-war reconstruction. As one representative of the Ukrainian government argued:

We have no objection to integration of Ukrainians [in the host countries] – as long as individuals can retain their identity. One can become a citizen of Germany, for example, and still remain proudly Ukrainian. Our position supports both the return of those who have left and their meaningful integration abroad. Naturally, we would welcome the return of all Ukrainians who have left, but we also acknowledge and support their success and well-being wherever they choose to reside (L4S_transcript_UA-PL_pol_04).

Ukrainian interviewees expressed concern about the rapid integration of Ukrainians abroad, fearing that rapid integration may reduce the likelihood of return to Ukraine in the future:

Factors such as learning the host country's language, enrolling children in local schools, and accessing social services all contribute to making the prospect of return more complicated. (L4S_transcript_UA-PL_exp_07).

The issue of incentives for retaining skills in Ukraine during wartime is considered “inappropriate” by experts, given the scale of destruction and the humanitarian situation (L4S_transcript_UA_pol_2).

Despite these divergent aims, both sides strive to ensure that Poland’s integration policies and Ukraine’s return policies do not contradict each other. On the international cooperation front, there is a view that talent partnerships represent a promising approach, though opinions about applying this model to Ukraine are cautious given the already strong grassroots ties and talent flows predominantly benefiting Poland. Finally, the lack of bilateral agreements on labor migration between Poland and Ukraine stems from Ukraine’s preference to negotiate at the European Union level - a position Poland partially supports.

8 The role of technologies

Evaluate how technological changes (e.g. work automation, remote credentialing, AI-driven matching platforms, online skilling) influence corridor dynamics (e.g. replacing migration or facilitating recruiting).

Automation and artificial intelligence have not yet significantly replaced labor migrants in Poland, primarily due to the high investment costs, employers’ lack of readiness and cheap Ukrainian labour.

“The availability of relatively inexpensive Ukrainian workers has contributed to Poland maintaining one of the lowest levels of robotization in Europe” (L4S_transcript_UA_pol_4).

However, demographic changes will make automation inevitable in the long term.

To put it plainly, when looking at the automation, AI, and robotization rates in Poland, they are still relatively low. Unfortunately, the competitiveness of the Polish economy has been significantly reduced, which, in my opinion, is largely due to workforce availability. This has driven wage increases, which in turn drained company budgets that could have been invested elsewhere. Therefore, the adoption of these technologies in Poland remains relatively limited, and alongside technological progress, there is still an enduring need for concrete labor, especially for simple and initial tasks (L4S_transcript_PL-UA_exp_04).

In sectors such as HoReCa (hotels, restaurants, cafés) and social care, replacing human labor is either impossible or feasible only to a very limited extent. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Poland often lack the financial capacity to bear the substantial costs associated with implementing such technologies. Consequently, employers may prioritize recruiting migrants as a quicker and more cost-effective solution to address labor shortages (L4S_transcript_PL_prac_02).

Large recruitment organizations utilize Automated Candidate Selection Systems (ATS) to scan CVs, create employee profiles, and assess competency matches. This helps to reduce bias and streamline the recruitment process, although final verification is still conducted by recruiters: “The ATS scans CVs, translates them into employee profiles, extracts competencies, and, of course, checks a certain level of match” (L4S_transcript_PL-UA_exp_04).

9 Partnership/Program monitoring evaluation

How are the partnerships/programs monitored and evaluated? By whom? What are timelines for such evaluations (immediate increase in numbers? Incremental institutional changes? Pilots that are replicated by other actors?); What do different actors think parameters for success are? Do you agree? Please share your conclusions on how effective partnerships or skilling programs are; who considers them a success, who a failure?

Ukraine does not have any formal skills mobility partnerships with Poland. As Ukrainian migration expert explained:

In Ukraine, there have been no formal agreements or consistent policies regarding labor migration. We didn't have an official position on labor export. As a result, labor migration has largely occurred spontaneously – driven by individual initiative rather than guided or supported by state institutions” (L4S_transcript_UA-PL_exp_07).

At the same time Ukrainian migration expert emphasized the role of migrants and migrants organizations in lobbying bilateral agreements that simplify the diploma recognition process between Ukraine and Poland:

During the active Ukrainian emigration phase in the 2000s to Europe, it was often the migrants themselves – as well as migrant organizations – who took the initiative to push for formal agreements. They exerted pressure on Ukrainian embassies and consulates in countries where Ukrainians were employed, particularly with Poland, advocating for agreements on key issues such as diploma recognition, qualification equivalency, and pension provision. Ukrainian migrants were especially concerned about how work experience would be credited abroad and how it would impact future pension payments. As a result of their efforts, some agreements were established, many of which were directly influenced and lobbied for by the migrant worker community (L4S_transcript_UA-PL_exp_08).

Polish stakeholders point to several key reasons why a talent partnership between Ukraine and Poland is not considered necessary or desirable. First and foremost, from Ukraine’s perspective, establishing such a partnership does not align with its national interests. Ukraine is facing a demographic crisis and is in urgent need of its own workforce; engaging in a policy of “sending” workers abroad – even within a formal bilateral agreement – would only deepen the country’s depopulation and brain drain. Furthermore, migration from Ukraine to Poland is already highly facilitated and well-established through existing mechanisms such as visa-free travel and the temporary protection status, which provides Ukrainian nationals with unrestricted access to the Polish labour market. There also exists a strong and expansive migration network, including informal channels, that effectively connects Ukrainian workers with Polish employers, rendering formal intergovernmental agreements largely redundant and unlikely to generate substantial additional benefits.

In the context of Ukraine’s European integration – yes – but even without joining the EU, Ukraine already benefits from visa-free travel, and that route has been thoroughly explored by Ukrainians. In my view, this is already ensured without any formal agreements [such as a Talent Partnership]. And without any companies either – in the sense that it has relied more on networks. Yes, very often on migration networks. So, in my opinion, Ukraine’s openness to such an agreement is unlikely. It is simply not possible, because we ourselves need people. Ukraine also needs its people, and we are now facing a demographic collapse, depopulation of the country. So this is not in Ukraine’s interest. It’s a completely different situation than, for example, the Philippines, which sends migrants abroad L4S_transcript_PL_prac_02.

On the Polish side, the government demonstrates general scepticism towards signing new, large-scale talent partnerships, including the EU’s Talent Pool initiative, due to the high costs and significant administrative burdens associated with their implementation and management.

They are not convinced that joining this platform would, well, require simply creating a team of staff to manage the National Contact Point, increasing personnel resources, relevant authorities responsible for credential recognition within the Talent Pool, universities overseeing and curating it, enormous administrative costs, translations, delegations, the personnel servicing the system (L4S_transcript_PL_pol_06).

Ministries prioritises the reform of currently inefficient procedures (especially in the wake of the visa scandal in Poland) and the activation of underutilised domestic labour resources (such as the unemployed and economically inactive), rather than relying solely on labour migration. Poland already admits the highest number of foreign workers in the EU, and its migration policy is highly politicised and sensitive to negative public sentiment, making the pursuit of an open and liberal migration policy – especially involving new bilateral agreements – difficult to implement. Instead of formal bilateral arrangements, Poland prefers sector-specific measures that facilitate access to the labour market in shortage occupations, regardless of the country of origin.

Despite this, Poland participates alongside other countries and organizations in “Skills Alliance for Ukraine” project, aiming to facilitate the recognition and utilization of professional qualifications held by Ukrainian citizens. The initiative seeks to assist both employers – by helping them understand the legal and qualification requirements for employing Ukrainians in specific professions – and employees, by providing guidance on what steps they must take to practice their profession in Poland (e.g., completing relevant education, attending training, or obtaining Polish or European certificates). The Alliance strives to develop concrete guidelines for employers in both the public and private sectors on how to support employees in acquiring any missing qualifications. It also enables companies to access funding for vocational and language training through the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). Some organizations support companies in obtaining these funds, which can cover up to 100% of training costs, thereby strengthening employees' human capital. This is one of the few “talent partnerships” or “skills partnerships” identified for Poland in international inventories, highlighting its importance in light of the general lack of broader action in this area by the Polish government (L4S_transcript_PL-UA_exp_12).

While we do not provide direct support in this area and do not hold such competences, we are part of the secretariat of a project called *Skills Alliance for Ukraine*. This initiative is being implemented in cooperation with the governments of the Czech Republic, Germany, Poland, and Ukraine. As part of this project, we have jointly prepared a study – together with CARE and UNICEF – on the transfer of qualifications from Ukraine to Poland (L4S_transcript_PL-UA_exp_12).

10 Consequences and effects

Evaluate consequences and effects in your corridor: distribution of costs and wins (for whom?); questions of fair, ethical and transparent recruiting; effects on local skill usage and developments (brain drain / gain / waste / exploitation / mismatch); which interests and logics inform policies and practices on skill mobility? etc. How powerful are systemic or structural issues (e.g. colonial legacies, visa hierarchies, gatekeeping, inter-regional competition and alternatives to migration)?

In global comparison, already before the full-scale invasion Ukraine was among the top ten countries with the highest emigration levels (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020). Ukraine's population shrank from almost 52 mln in 1991 to about 41 mln at the beginning of 2022. This is due to a mix of a high emigration rate, coupled with high death and low birth rates. The Russian invasion, which started on 24 February 2022, has triggered a large-scale migration, with significant consequences for Ukraine's population and its future. Millions of Ukrainians have been internally displaced or have sought refuge abroad, resulting in a shrinking population within the country. The country's population is currently estimated to be between 30 and 35 mln.

We understand that the depopulation of Ukraine can no longer be ignored. The loss of six million people – many of them young, including over one million children – is a demographic shift too significant to overlook. The state has begun to recognize the seriousness of this issue and is now directing focused attention toward it. Society, too, is increasingly aware of the implications. According to recent surveys, demographic risks now rank third or fourth among

the most pressing concerns identified by Ukrainians themselves (L4S_transcript_UA-PL_prac_02).

Demographic forecasts for Ukraine are rather pessimistic, primarily due to the ongoing war and its consequences. These projections are driven by factors like displacement, low birth rates, and potential unwillingness of refugees to return. According to numerous surveys, only roughly 30% of the Ukrainians living abroad may return within the year after the war's potential end, another 30% may not return at all. In addition, between 200,000 and 500,000 men could leave Ukraine after the war with Russia ends and all travel restrictions are lifted (Fornusek, 2025).

This mass displacement has had profound economic, social, and demographic consequences – including significant labor shortages and the risk of long-term brain drain - the loss of human capital, including highly skilled specialists. Ukrainian interviewees highlighted the outflow of qualified specialists, including in sectors such as healthcare, STEM, and construction. When combined with the broader consequences of the war, these dynamics are contributing to a deepening labor crisis across key industries.

It's widely recognized that the Ukrainian economy is facing a severe personnel shortage: some specialists have died, others have been injured, and many have lost family members who were breadwinners, making it difficult to fully engage in work. As a result, some enterprises have begun hiring foreign workers – for example, Filipinos. There are also discussions about recruiting men from Moldova for long-haul cargo transport, as they offer a level of stability – specifically, the assurance that they will not be mobilized and are more likely to remain alive. These examples reflect emerging migration trends in Ukraine today, where businesses are independently addressing workforce shortages through international recruitment (L4S_transcript_UA_pol_4).

Another effect of the war and massive internal displacement within Ukraine is structural unemployment in Ukraine:

Today we have a lot of structural unemployment, when people simply cannot find work according to their qualifications, because they were doing something else when they lived in the eastern regions, and no one can offer them such work. I think this may also apply to people who will return. They will need professional retraining, language integration and, perhaps, socio-cultural integration (L4S_transcript_UA-PL_pracl_2).

When considering the strategic prospects of Ukrainian citizens returning home, experts emphasized that many have acquired new European values and beliefs while living in host countries:

We observe that those who have lived in the EU tend to develop a high level of trust in the host countries' institutions – such as government bodies, social services, and the broader public sector. However, this trust does not automatically extend to Ukrainian institutions. It is crucial that, upon their return, people can experience a comparable level of trust in Ukraine's own institutions: the parliament, the government, and the judicial system. When individuals return and begin the process of reintegration, we must recognize that they come back changed. They return with lived experience of European values and standards – and this must be acknowledged and reflected in how we rebuild trust at home (L4S_transcript_UA-PL_exp_08).

What is also important, that people will return not only with new skills and qualifications, but also with different expectations – expectations of living in a European-style society where rules are followed and laws are respected. They will expect Ukraine to reflect the standards they became accustomed to abroad. This shift in mindset is a critical factor that must be considered in planning for the reintegration of Ukrainian forced migrants.

For Poland as the host country, migration from Ukraine has been and continues to be a crucial remedy for labor shortages, particularly in sectors such as constructions, health, industry, logistics, trade, STEM, as well as the service and care sectors. These migrants contribute to Poland's economic growth and GDP. However, Poland also faces costs and challenges. One of the most significant issues is the inefficiency and protracted nature of residence and work legalization procedures, which can last months or even years, impacting the stability of employment and the lives of migrants. The lack of a coherent and clear state migration policy, coupled with the politicization of migration issues, hinders effective management of these processes. Despite this, labor migration provides Ukraine with remittances that enrich the country and creates opportunities for skills development and experience for returning migrants, who can become "returning experts." Additionally, many Ukrainian companies are relocating or opening branches in Poland.

This situation essentially creates competition over human capital resources between Poland and Ukraine. Therefore, it is crucial to approach this challenge thoughtfully and strategically to ensure mutual benefits for both countries. Investing in education and training is paramount, as it not only addresses immediate labor market needs but also prepares individuals for future roles. Notably, those who receive additional qualifications and upskilling now may, after the war, return as so-called experts, bringing valuable knowledge and experience back to Ukraine. This cyclical dynamic highlights the importance of coordinated policies that foster sustainable development and cooperation between the two nations (L4S_transcript_PL_exp_09).

For the migrants themselves, Poland offers access to better employment conditions and higher wages compared to their countries of origin. Simplified procedures for Ukrainian citizens (the special act on assistance to Ukrainian citizens) have ensured rapid access to the Polish labor market. However, many migrants experience skill mismatch, working below their qualifications (for example, qualified nurses employed in low-skilled jobs). Language barriers, prolonged legalization procedures, and the sense of temporary stay hinder full integration and the realization of their potential.

Employers often show reluctance to invest in language training or retraining for migrants, expecting employees either to bear these costs themselves or to already possess the necessary skills. Nonetheless, there are initiatives aimed at supporting their job search aligned with their qualifications.

11 Summary of key points

Four key findings on migration to Ukraine

- 1.** Ukraine does not have any formal skills mobility partnerships with Poland. Migration from Ukraine is driven by migration networks and to a lesser extent facilitated by recruitment agencies. After 2014, Poland has become the main EU destination country for Ukrainians within the EU due to its geographical proximity, extensive migration networks and liberal residence and work permit regulations.
- 2.** Ukraine is facing a severe demographic crisis and widespread skill shortages, significantly impacting its workforce and future recovery. A 40% decrease in the working-age population since 2022, coupled with an aging population and emigration, has created a critical shortage of skilled workers across various sectors. This situation is further exacerbated by the ongoing war, which has displaced millions and disrupted the labour market.
- 3.** Rapid integration of Ukrainians in host countries, including Poland may reduce the likelihood of return to Ukraine in the future. It is estimated that approximately 30-40% of Ukrainians who left will remain abroad. It is especially difficult to return women and children aged 18–45 who have already gone through the integration process.

4. The issue of incentives for retaining skills in Ukraine during wartime is considered inappropriate, given the scale of destruction and the humanitarian situation.

Five key findings on Ukrainian migration to Poland

- 1. Lack of strategic migration policy**
Poland does not have a long-term, evidence-based migration strategy. Migration governance remains reactive, politicised, and fragmented, with no formal talent partnership with Ukraine. While other countries pursue structured bilateral agreements, Poland relies on ad hoc mechanisms.
- 2. Structural and legal barriers to integration**
Despite simplified access for Ukrainians, legal procedures remain bureaucratic and unstable. Frequent policy changes, limited support for language learning, and recognition of qualifications hinder migrants' long-term integration and professional development.
- 3. Underutilisation of migrant skills**
Highly skilled Ukrainians, are frequently employed below their qualifications due to systemic barriers. This situation contributes to "brain waste."
- 4. Poland as a transit country in EU talent competition**
Poland competes with Western EU states for Ukrainian talent but often fails to offer attractive long-term conditions. Many Ukrainians view Poland as a temporary stop before moving to countries with higher wages, clearer legal pathways, and stronger integration support.
- 5. Reliance on informal channels and weak oversight**
Ukrainian migration to Poland has been largely driven by informal diaspora networks rather than formal programmes. State institutions lack capacity and oversight, enabling exploitative practices by intermediaries / recruitment agencies and weakening protection for migrant workers.

As in Ukraine, and so too in Poland, migration policies are characterised by a lack of sustainability, marked by turbulence, ad hoc measures, and fluidity.

12 Good practices

1. In December 2024, **the Ministry of National Unity of Ukraine was established in Ukraine**. It was a government ministry in Ukraine focused on issues related to reintegration, return and national unity, particularly in the context of the war and the displacement of people. The Ministry of National Unity was working on developing a Unity Hub network for Ukrainians abroad, including in Poland. However, on July 21, 2025, the Ministry of National Unity was reorganized as part of a broader government reform, with its social policy functions being absorbed by the Ministry of Social Policy, Family, and Unity. The reform aims to improve the effectiveness of social support for citizens, strengthen institutional capacity in family protection, and enhance national unity both within Ukraine and abroad.
2. **Support for migrant entrepreneurship and diaspora engagement:** projects such as DIABUSINESS support Ukrainian entrepreneurs in Warsaw, offering business advice and facilitating transnational business continuity. The strong Ukrainian diaspora in Poland plays a key role in job referral networks and informal peer support. Legal frameworks also facilitate the establishment of sole proprietorships.
3. **The Special Law Providing Fast and Simplified Access to the Labour Market**
The law adopted in March 2022 ("special law") granted Ukrainian citizens almost immediate

access to the Polish labour market without the need to obtain work permits. This regulatory liberalisation contributed to a record-high employment rate among Ukrainian migrants, especially women, shortly after their arrival.

4. **Cross-sectoral partnerships for upskilling and labour market integration:** collaborative programs have emerged to recognize and develop the skills of Ukrainian migrants. For instance, TENT and EBRD fund vocational and language training, while the “Skills Alliance for Ukraine” helps for upskilling. Mentoring programs, job fairs, and initiatives for highly skilled women (e.g., “Women in Tech”) further enhance employability.

13 Policy recommendations

1. Recommendations for the Ukrainian Government:

To effectively leverage the Ukrainian diaspora for reconstruction and national unity, Ukraine should adopt a **comprehensive diaspora engagement strategy** focused on both encouraging return and fostering closer cooperation with those abroad.

2. Recommendations for the EU:

Transitioning of Ukrainian forced migrants to other legal statuses:

A coordinated approach for transitioning Ukrainians out of temporary protection is needed, focusing on facilitating integration into host countries and enabling a gradual return to Ukraine.

Supporting Integration into Host Countries:

- **Upskilling and Reskilling** (invest in initiatives to upskill and reskill Ukrainian refugees to align with the needs of both host countries and the eventual reconstruction of Ukraine).
- **Facilitate Remote Work/Transnationalism** (encourage and support Ukrainian refugees in working remotely for Ukrainian companies or engaging in business with Ukraine).

Supporting a Gradual and Sustainable Return:

- **Voluntary Return Programs** (establish voluntary return programs, in close coordination with Ukrainian authorities, to facilitate a phased return when temporary protection ends).
- **Exploratory Visits** (encourage and facilitate exploratory visits to Ukraine to allow individuals to assess the conditions and make informed decisions about returning).
- **Address Skill Mismatches** (enhance collaborations between businesses, educational institutions, and job placement services to address skill mismatches and ensure a smooth return for those who choose to go back to Ukraine).
- **Support for Reconstruction** (provide support for Ukraine's reconstruction efforts, which will be crucial in creating a conducive environment for returnees).

3. Recommendations for the Polish Government:

- Poland should **develop a long-term integration strategy** for Ukrainian migrants, encompassing both labor market inclusion and broader social integration. Such a strategy is essential to ensure sustainable participation, social cohesion, and the effective use of migrants' skills and potential.
- **Strengthen and institutionalize skills recognition pathways for Ukrainians professionals:** while some initiatives (e.g., in the medical sector) support the recognition of Ukrainian

qualifications, a more comprehensive, transparent, and multi-sectoral system is needed. Poland should work toward establishing bilateral agreements or automatic recognition mechanisms for selected professions, especially in sectors with acute labor shortages. This requires closer coordination between Polish ministries, Ukrainian institutions, and EU bodies such as ENIC/NARIC.

- **Invest in targeted, state-funded language and upskilling programs aligned with labor market needs:** current access to vocational and language training is fragmented and often short-term. To fully utilize the potential of skilled Ukrainian migrants, the Polish government should co-finance long-term training programs in partnership with employers, NGOs, and vocational schools. These programs should include job-matching components and be responsive to regional labor market dynamics, especially in STEM, healthcare, and education sectors.

References and key documents [Please share 4-6 key academic references or policy/practitioner documents that give basic overviews and insights into current skilled labor mobility policies and practices for your corridor (countries)]

1. Act on the Professions of Doctor and Dentist and Certain Other Acts (Journal of Laws 2018, item 1669).
2. Position No. 15/25/P-IX of the Presidium of the Supreme Medical Council, 21 February 2025.
3. Act on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine in Connection with the Armed Conflict in the Territory of that Country (Journal of Laws 2022, item 583).
4. Fornusek, M., Sorokin O. 200,000-500,000 men could leave Ukraine after war ends and borders open, minister says /The Kyiv Independent 2025, <https://kyivindependent.com/200-000-500-000-men-could-leave-ukraine-after-war-ends-borders-open-minister-says/>
5. Lapshyna I. Migration and diaspora at times of crisis: public perceptions of emigrants in Ukraine (2022) in: Anastasakis, O., Pratsinakis, M., Kalantzi, F. and Kamaras, A. Diaspora Engagement in Times of Severe Economic Crisis. Migration, Diasporas and Citizenship. Palgrave Macmillan. pp 405-431.
6. GUS (2020). *Populacja cudzoziemców w Polsce w czasie COVID-19*, <https://stat.gov.pl/statystyki-eksperymentalne/kapital-ludzki/populacja-cudzoziemcow-wpolsce-w-czasie-covid-19,12,1.html>.
7. GOV (2025). Obywatele Ukrainy w Polsce – raport. <https://www.gov.pl/web/udsc/obywatele-ukrainy-w-polsce--aktualne-dane-migracyjne2>.
8. UNHCR (2022). *Ukraine Refugee Situation*, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>.
9. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020. International Migration 2020. Highlights. https://www.un.org/en/file/105459/download?token=oh_ySkJg.

List of interviews [here or as annex]

This report draws on empirical material collected within the Horizon Europe research project *Link4Skills* (2024–2026). The empirical basis of the analysis consists of in-depth interviews (IDIs)

conducted with policymakers, practitioners, and experts in the field of Ukrainian migration. Participants included representatives from recruitment and labour intermediation agencies, migrant support organizations (both local and international), trade unions, employer associations, governmental institutions and ministries, and academic institutions.

The research in Ukraine was done by the Ukrainian Catholic University research team. 8 corridor-specific and 4 non-corridor-specific have been conducted in Ukraine (see Table 1). The interviews were conducted between April and July 2025.

The research in Poland was conducted by the Kozminski University research team, who carried out 18 IDIs focused on the Filipino–Poland and Ukraine–Poland migration skill corridors. However, this report draws on 13 of these interviews (see Table 2): four were specific to the Ukrainian case, while the remaining nine, although more general, primarily focused on Ukrainian migration. The interviews were conducted between April and July 2025.

Table 1. List of interviews from Ukrainian side of the corridor

Corridor-specific interviews					
No.	Transcript data name	Full name of organization or institution	Work area/ expertise / department / specialist field	Actor group (Policy-maker, practitioner, expert)	Date and Place
1	L4S_transcript_UA-PL_pol_01	Lviv region council	policy-making	Policy-maker	09.04.2025, Lviv, online
2	L4S_transcript_UA-PL_prac_02	NGO	Migration, demography, Migration policy	Practitioner/expert	2.05.2025, Kyiv, online
3	L4S_transcript_UA-PL_prac_03	International Organisation in charge of migration governance	International organisation, Migration policy	Practitioner	21.03.2025, Kyiv, online
4	L4S_transcript_UA-PL_pol_04	National Ministry	Migration policy, Diaspora policy	Policy-maker	17.04.2025 online
5	L4S_transcript_UA-PL_prac_05	Recruitment agency	International recruiting	Practitioner	13.05.2025, Wrocław, online
6	L4S_transcript_UA-PL_prac_06	National Ministry	Migration policy, social policy	Practitioner/policy-maker	16.04.2025, Kyiv, online
7	L4S_transcript_UA-PL_exp_07	Institute for Demography and Social Studies	Migration, demography policy	Expert	1.05.2025, Kyiv, online
8	L4S_transcript_UA-PL_exp_08	International Institute of Education, Culture and Diaspora Relations	Migration, diaspora	Expert	19.03.2025, Lviv online

Non-corridor-specific transcripts					
1	<i>L4S_transcript_UA_pol_1</i>	National Ministry	Health care	Policy-maker	30.04.2025, Kyiv online
2	<i>L4S_transcript_UA_pol_2</i>	National Ministry	Education, science	Policy-maker	26.04.2025, Kyiv, online
3	<i>L4S_transcript_UA_exp_3</i>	Ukrainian Catholic University, Innovation Office	Innovations, STEM	Expert	23.05.2025, Lviv online
4	<i>L4S_transcript_UA_pol_4</i>	Parliament, Verkhovna (Rada)	Migration, education	Policy-maker	7.05.2025, Kyiv online

Table 2. List of interviews from Poland side of the corridor

No.	Transcript data name	Full name of organization or institution	Work area/ expertise / department / specialist field	Actor group (Policy-maker, practitioner, expert)	Date and Place
1	L4S_transcript_PL_prac_02	Employers' association	Employment	Practitioner	14.03.2025 Warsaw
2	L4S_transcript_PL-UA_prac_03	Private recruitment agency	International recruiting	Practitioner	13.03.2025 Warsaw/online
3	L4S_transcript_PL-UA_exp_04	Private recruitment agency	International recruiting	Expert / practitioner	18.03.2025 Warsaw
4	L4S_transcript_PL_pol_06	National ministry	Labor market	Policy-maker	04.04.2025 Warsaw/online
5	L4S_transcript_PL_prac_07	Private recruitment agency	International recruiting	Practitioner	17.04.2025 Warsaw/online
6	L4S_transcript_PL_pol_08	National ministry	Integration policy	Policy-maker	22.04.2025 Warsaw/online
7	L4S_transcript_PL_exp_09	International organisation	Migration, labour market and integration	Expert / practitioner	28.04.2025 Warsaw/online
8	L4S_transcript_PL_pol_10	National ministry	Migration policy	Policy-maker	29.04.2025 Warsaw/online
9	L4S_transcript_PL-UA_exp_12	Non-governmental organisation supporting refugee labour market integration (Poland)	Mediator network between Ukrainian refugees and businesses	Expert /practitioner	12.05.2025 Warsaw/online
10	L4S_transcript_PL-UA_prac_14	Ukrainian migrant-led non-governmental organisations (Poland)	Entrepreneurship and economic integration	Practitioner	15.05.2025 Warsaw/online
11	L4S_transcript_PL_prac_15	National agency	Skill and education recognition	Practitioner /expert	30.05.2025 Warsaw/online

12	L4S_transcript _PL_exp_17	National trade union (Poland)	Labor market, migration and integration policy	Expert / practitioner	14.07.2025 Warsaw/online
13	L4S_Transcript2 _PL_exp_18	International organisation	Integration, labor market, policy implementation	Expert/ practitioner	15.07.2025 Warsaw/online

Key information [will be used for a comparative table of the comparative report]

<p>Select the corridor type. [Mark with an X; combinations possible]:</p>	<p>(Post-) colonial corridor (Post) 'guest worker' corridor (Post) EU enlargement corridor X <u>Highly skilled mobility corridor</u> New strategic skill mobility partnership corridor X <u>Humanitarian / Forced migration corridor</u> X <u>Mixed-migration corridor</u></p>
<p>Emerging vs. established corridor?</p>	<p>Established</p>
<p>How relevant are formal state-led skill partnerships/agreements?</p>	<p>There are no formal state-led skill partnerships. The majority of experts argue there is no need, as the migration skill corridor functions well governed by established migrant networks.</p>
<p>Who is dominant - private vs. public actors?</p>	<p>Private</p>
<p>Give the corridor a title.</p>	<p>"There is no such thing as bad weather": Ukrainian Migrants as Passengers on an Express Train to Poland with Flexible Tickets</p>
<p>Degree of dynamism within the corridor (intensive dynamics, ups-downs, static, etc.)?</p>	<p>Intensive but at the same time with up-down dynamic</p>
<p>What general perceptions do involved actors have about (to-be/skilled) migration (positive, negative, etc.)? Is it a politically or publicly controversial topic or accepted?</p>	<p>In both countries general public perceptions tend to be rather controversial.</p>

What is the major <u>skilled migration type</u> (study, vocational or language training, non-formal skilled, job search, etc.)? Any trends ?	All types are relevant. Additionally humanitarian migration.
Where does <u>skilling mainly take place</u> (origin or destination, both)?	Destination
What <u>skill sectors/occupations</u> primarily shape the corridor? Any new(er)/emerging occupations (e.g. digital health, green tech)?	There is no one clear primary sector that shapes the corridor. Ukrainians are omnipresent in every sector with an exception of the government.
What <u>skill level</u> shapes the corridor (high, medium, low)?	All of them.
How do dynamics in one corridor affect other corridors (e.g. competition for talents; diaspora networks reinforcing secondary migration)?	There is a clear dynamic within Ukrainian-Polish-German-the Netherlands migration corridor. Ukrainian extensive networks often reinforce secondary migration to other countries than Poland.
Any other comments:	Ukrainian-Polish migration corridor encompasses features of many corridor types and includes all types of migration. Thus it is rather a mixed-migration type of corridor.