

Working Paper 12/2026

# Migration Skill Corridor Report UKRAINE - NETHERLANDS

Julia Reinold, Erasmus University Rotterdam  
Viktor Borshchevskyy, Ukrainian Catholic University  
Iryna Lapshyna, Ukrainian Catholic University  
Godfried Engbersen, Erasmus University Rotterdam

<http://link4skills.eu>



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

# A Corridor Apart: Bridging Forced Migration and Skills in the Netherlands

## **Authors**

Julia Reinold, Erasmus University Rotterdam  
Viktor Borshchevskyy, Ukrainian Catholic University  
Iryna Lapshyna, Ukrainian Catholic University  
Godfried Engbersen, Erasmus University Rotterdam

## **Contributors:**

Myroslava Chekh, Ukrainian Catholic University  
Yevheniy Matvyeyev, Ukrainian Catholic University  
Oksana Vasylytsya, Ukrainian Catholic University  
Valentyna Zasadko, Ukrainian Catholic University

## **Abstract**

This working paper examines the emerging Ukraine–Netherlands migration skill corridor, focusing on governance arrangements, migration trends and drivers, labour market integration outcomes, and links to broader integration and return dynamics. Drawing on 26 semi-structured interviews with policy-makers, practitioners and experts in Ukraine and the Netherlands, complemented by statistics, literature and policy documents, we show that the corridor changed abruptly after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Before that it was characterized by small flows of mainly family, study, and highly skilled migration. Since then, numbers of Ukrainians arriving in the Netherlands under the EU Temporary Protection Directive rose sharply. We therefore categorize the Ukraine-Netherlands corridor as the humanitarian type. With no substantial bilateral framework beyond a tax treaty, the corridor is characterised by ad hoc governance, where public actors (e.g., municipalities, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, UWV) and especially private recruitment agencies play key roles in facilitating labour market entry of Ukrainians under temporary protection, who are granted immediate access to the Dutch labour market. While employment among Ukrainians under temporary protection is relatively high, many experience deskilling due to slow recognition of qualifications, language barriers, and sectoral mismatches, reinforced by a “work-first” approach and uncertainty about length of stay that discourages employer investment. Integration is supported by strong migrant agency and community initiatives but constrained by framing of displacement as temporary, creating a paradox in which employer demand and societal support coexist with limited long-term policy commitment, leaving Ukrainians’ skill potential underutilised despite growing labour shortages in the Netherlands.

## Introduction

In this working paper, we investigate the state of the art of the Ukrainian-Dutch migration skill corridor, including frameworks governing the corridor, recent trends and drivers of migration from Ukraine to the Netherlands, aspects of labour market integration of Ukrainians in the Netherlands, and integration and return. Migration skill corridors are pathways between country dyads that can possibly be used to ease labour market mismatches by facilitating migration, and knowledge transfer. Analytically, they can explain how skilled migration develops by linking state policies, labour market conditions, institutional arrangements and migrants' individual migration decisions. They can take multiple and overlapping forms, including post-colonial, post-guest worker, highly-skilled, medium-skilled/ sector-based and humanitarian types, and differ in their degree of formality, establishment and governance.<sup>1</sup>

While some Ukrainians lived in the Netherlands before Russia's full-scale invasion of 24 February 2022, numbers sharply rose afterwards. Prior to 2022, migration was limited and mainly family-related, with smaller arrivals of highly skilled migrants (*kennismigranten*) and students. Accordingly, the corridor can be best categorised as the humanitarian type, which is characterised by ad hoc migration and only emerged recently. Due to its forced/ humanitarian nature, public and private actors are not directly involved in facilitating migration as such, but play an important role in facilitating labour market integration of Ukrainians in the Netherlands, with private actors taking the lead. In this sense, the Ukraine-Netherlands migration skill corridors is "different" from other corridors that are shaped by more voluntary, labour migration dynamics – hence the title of this report.

This working paper is based on 26 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders and experts in Ukraine and the Netherlands, including five policy makers, twelve practitioners and nine experts. Seven interviews were specifically on the Ukraine-Netherlands corridor, while the remaining 19 covered more general aspects of skilled migration and labour migration in the Netherlands, including information about Ukrainians (see appendix for a complete list of interviews). In combining the views of origin and destination countries, we contribute to going beyond the destination country bias in migration research. We transcribed, coded and analysed all interviews, focusing on specific issues relevant to this report (i.e., issue-focused analysis). Interview findings are complemented with additional statistics, literature and policy documents.

In the following, we first discuss (the lack of) frameworks governing the Ukraine-Netherlands migration skill corridor. Subsequently, we describe recent trends and drivers of migration within the corridor. After that we zoom in on Ukrainian's labour market situation in the Netherlands, including employment outcomes and remaining barriers. We then summarise key points regarding general integration and return and finally conclude.

## Frameworks Governing the Ukrainian-Dutch Corridor

There are no bilateral state agreements or frameworks on skilled migration between Ukraine and the Netherlands. As it was mentioned by our interviewee:

“Labour migration never really gave problems to the Netherlands that needed to be dealt with at government level” (L4S\_UA-NL\_pol\_01).

---

<sup>1</sup> Engbersen, G. & Reinold, J. (forthcoming). Chapter 1. Migration Skill Corridors. In I. Grabowska and M. B. Setrana (Eds.), *Fair Skilled Mobility. A Manifesto*. Routledge, Abingdon/New York.

Ukrainian experts mentioned the Dutch Highly Skilled Migrant Scheme (*Kennismigrantenregeling*),<sup>2</sup> which allows highly qualified workers and experienced experts to enter the Netherlands for employment quite easily, provided they meet the income requirements.<sup>3</sup> It also provides an opportunity to settle there and obtain citizenship in the long term.

“The Netherlands does not have a very clear migration policy for attracting personnel, except for very, very highly qualified ones. That is, they call it highly skilled migrants” (L4S-UA-NL\_exp\_05).

One agreement that is in place between the Netherlands and Ukraine and broadly speaking also concerns migrants is the “Convention between the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Ukraine for the Elimination of Double Taxation with respect to Taxes on Income and on Property and the Prevention of Tax Evasion and Avoidance”.<sup>4</sup> The Netherlands concluded Treaties with a number of non-EU countries regarding working and social security, but notably not with Ukraine.

Currently, the most important legal instrument for recent Ukrainian migration to the Netherlands is the Temporary Protection Directive.<sup>5</sup> Ukrainians’ eligibility for this status is what makes this group of migrants “different” (L4S\_NL\_prac\_01; L4S\_NL\_prac\_02; L4S\_NL\_prac\_03; L4S\_NL\_pol\_15) or “special” (L4S\_NL\_pol\_08) compared to groups of skilled or forced migrants, with the main difference being the immediate access to the labour market.<sup>6</sup> One interviewee criticised that “it became quite obvious that the distinction is not that justifiable between asylum seekers and temporary protection (L4S\_NL\_exp\_17). The Temporary Protection Directive has been extended until 4 March 2027 as the war in Ukraine continues.

Ukrainian experts generally agree that the main players in the Ukrainian-Dutch migration corridor are representatives of private business, state institutions, local governments (e.g., municipalities), and civil society institutions. All of them either have some direct interest in the development of this migration corridor, or are faced with various economic, social and humanitarian effects from its operation (positive or negative). While the Ukrainian-Dutch migration skill corridor was more led by the private sector before 2022, forced migration is dealt with by a mix of the public and private sector.

It was noted, however, that at the state-level, the Dutch authorities are now beginning to somewhat restrict business in terms of its ability to attract migrants. This affects the attractiveness of the Netherlands for international talent in general and is not specific to the Ukrainian-Dutch migration skill corridor. Universities are also gradually being restricted from attracting many foreign students. As a result:

---

<sup>2</sup> [Highly skilled migrant | IND](#)

<sup>3</sup> In 2025, the gross monthly income required is EUR 5,688.00 for highly skilled migrants above 30, EUR 4,171.00 below 30 and EUR 2,989.00 for the reduced salary criterion.

<sup>4</sup> [wetten.nl - Regeling - Verdrag tussen het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden en Oekraïne tot het vermijden van dubbele belasting met betrekking tot belastingen naar het inkomen en naar het vermogen en het voorkomen van het ontduiken en ontwijken van belasting - BWBV0001259](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Directive - 2001/55 - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

<sup>6</sup> A comparison of the situation of Ukrainians under temporary protection and migrants with refugee status can be found on p. 7 of this report: [Tijdelijk thuis?](#)

“Many international programmes have been closed, which is quite unusual for the Netherlands, as the country was for a long time among the leaders in attracting international students. Now this is no longer the case” (L4S-UA-NL\_exp\_05).

## Ukrainian Migration to the Netherlands: Trends and Drivers

The Ukraine-Netherlands Migration Skill Corridor can be categorized as the humanitarian and ad-hoc type: While there were some Ukrainians in the Netherlands before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia on 24 February 2022 (L4S\_NL\_prac\_02; L4S\_NL\_prac\_18), numbers only increased significantly afterwards (Figure 1). Before 2022, Ukrainian migration to the Netherlands was rather limited and mostly driven by family reasons (i.e., both family reunification and formation). Ukrainians who came to the Netherlands for work, were mostly highly skilled migrants as other labour migration channels are rather restricted. There was also a limited number of Ukrainians coming to study in the Netherlands (Figure 1).

Following the full-scale invasion, more than 100,000 Ukrainians were registered under temporary protection in the Netherlands in 2022; 36,950 in 2023, and 29,405 in 2024, lifting the number of Ukrainians living in the Netherlands to a historically high level.<sup>7</sup> “If there was no war, we would have very little skilled migration” (L4S\_NL\_prac\_02). In 2024, there were only 120 Ukrainians who came to the Netherlands through other channels than temporary protection (Table 1). The numbers did not only increase that much because of new arrivals, but also because Ukrainians who were staying in the Netherlands irregularly beforehand (e.g., Ukrainians who had entered the Netherlands as posted workers and overstayed their assignment), had a chance to regularize through temporary protection (L4S\_NL\_prac\_02).

Most Ukrainians moved to the Netherlands independently after the Russian invasion, often with the support of social and professional networks. Due to the possibility to receive temporary protection status relatively easier, Ukrainians may rather choose this migration channels over others that would be an option, like the startup visa (L4S\_NL\_prac\_11). This is also mirrored by official statistics, which saw other visa schemes that were rather prominent before 2022 dry out (see Table 1). There are anecdotes of companies, which had outsourced their IT department to Ukraine for cost reasons, and then brought their employees to the Netherlands at the outbreak of the war (L4S\_NL\_prac\_02).

Table 1: Ukrainian Migration to the Netherlands (2022-2024)

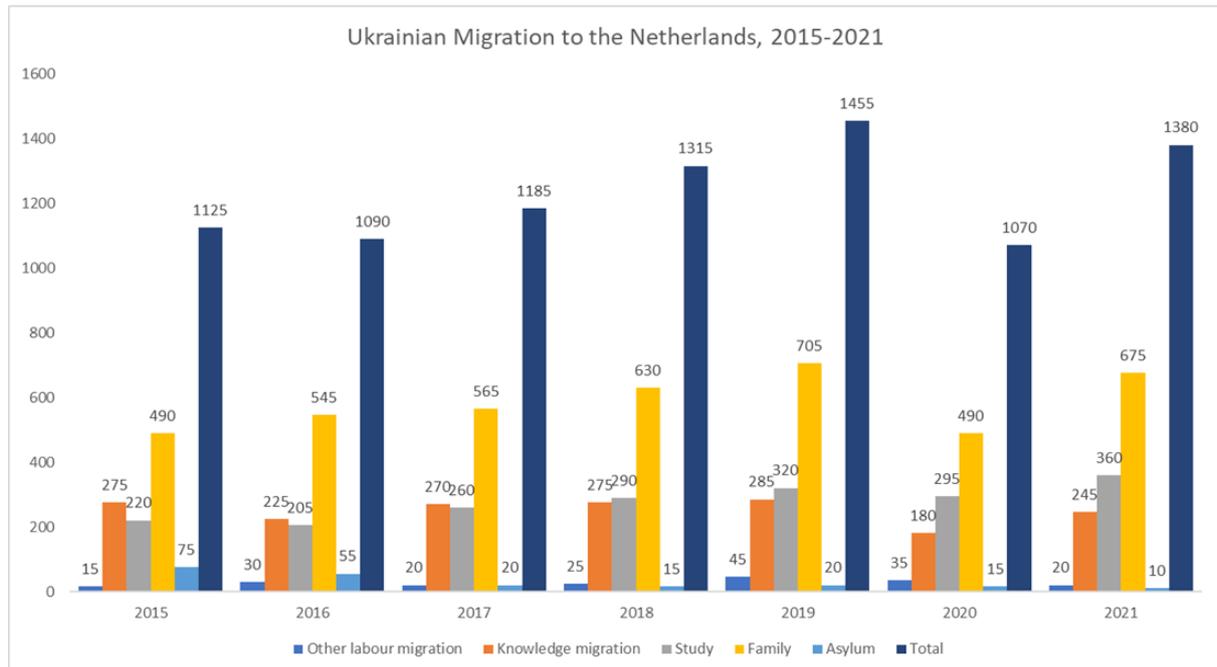
|                             | 2022    | 2023   | 2024   |
|-----------------------------|---------|--------|--------|
| <b>Knowledge migration</b>  | 440     | 215    | 10     |
| <b>Other labour</b>         | 110     | 70     | 30     |
| <b>Study</b>                | 350     | 380    | 35     |
| <b>Family</b>               | 820     | 255    | 30     |
| <b>Asylum</b>               | 40      | 10     | 5      |
| <b>Temporary protection</b> | 101,620 | 36,950 | 29,405 |
| <b>Total</b>                | 104,545 | 38,485 | 30,230 |

Source: CBS<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> <https://opendata.cbs.nl/#/CBS/nl/dataset/84809NED/table?dl=C6A33>

<sup>8</sup> <https://opendata.cbs.nl/#/CBS/nl/dataset/84809NED/table?dl=C6A33>

Figure 1



Source: CBS<sup>9</sup>

Few Ukrainians had also come to the Netherlands voluntarily before 2022 (L4S\_NL\_prac\_02). In terms of attracting highly qualified personnel, the significant role of IT companies, which have sufficient opportunities to recruit employees from abroad, was noted. Although the country's IT business is currently in a slight slump, many IT specialists moved from Ukraine when it was developing very actively. Companies could quite easily attract the specialists they needed, especially highly qualified ones. However, the vast majority of Ukrainians who came via this way are usually IT specialists.

“There are some other specialists, but these are mainly people who already worked in international companies and were simply transferred to the Netherlands. They moved up the career ladder to high positions. For example, someone worked in a bank in Ukraine and now works in the Dutch office of the same bank. Someone became an international brand director and was able to move to the Netherlands. For example, there is *Unilever* and many other companies that are represented in Ukraine” (L4S\_UA-NL\_exp\_05).

Some IT companies had also outsourced IT services to Ukraine to save costs (L4S\_NL\_prac\_02). Beyond IT, the sectoral picture is more mixed.

As the most important drivers of migration from Ukraine to the Netherlands besides fleeing the war, social or professional networks and language have been cited frequently.

“I think yeah, there is a group of people, of course, which had connections to the Netherlands. They had friends here or families or people they knew. I know that

<sup>9</sup> <https://opendata.cbs.nl/#/CBS/nl/dataset/84809NED/table?dl=C6A33>

there are also people who just knew about some possibilities for work, so it also can be a reason. But I also think that there is a big group of people, including myself, we just wanted to go as far as possible. I think also the language is a very important reason because of course in Dutch language. But English is quite around the Netherlands. So, if we are talking about Western Europe, then I think it's one of the best options to go to. If you speak English but you don't speak any local language” (L4S\_NL-US\_prac\_16).

“And what we've seen is some people actually a lot of people with higher education ended up in cities like to The Hague, Rotterdam, Amsterdam because they actually know people in the region, so they've moved through family and friends, but also because of job like reasons that I think I have a finance background that will move to The Hague because there are finance companies” (L4S\_NL\_prac\_02).

Another interesting phenomenon in the Ukrainian-Dutch migration corridor is posted workers (L4S\_UA-NL\_pol\_01; L4S\_NL\_prac\_02; L4S\_NL\_exp\_06; L4S\_NL\_exp\_21). It is when Ukrainian migrants find employment in other European countries and are then sent to the Netherlands to provide services there. Ukrainians are primarily posted via Poland and often engage in seasonal agricultural work and to a lesser extent in construction.<sup>10</sup> Posted workers are subject to employment standards of the country they are posted from and often at risk of abuse and exploitation (L4S\_NL\_exp\_21):

“I know that in 2021, Poland had issued about 300,000 Western permits for labour migration from Ukraine. These people not only worked in Poland, but also completely legally within the EU system. But you will not trace these people in the Dutch statistics” (L4S\_UA-NL\_pol\_01).

In sum, the most important groups migrating from Ukraine to the Netherlands include forced migrants under the temporary protection, posted workers, and also a limited number of highly skilled migrants, students, entrepreneurs and family migrants. The biggest Ukrainian community before the war was located in the Randstad, there was also a Ukrainian (Sunday) school already. These communities and infrastructures served as pull factors for new arrivals (L4S\_NL\_prac\_02; L4S\_NL\_prac\_18).

## Labour Market Integration of Ukrainians in the Netherlands

Ukrainians under temporary protection are allowed to start working soon after their arrival in the Netherlands. In general, Ukrainians with temporary protections status in the Netherlands are often highly educated (L4S\_NL\_prac\_02) and female. Interviewees mentioned various EU, national and local initiatives aimed at facilitating labour market integration as well as private sector initiatives, including from employment agencies.

The Dutch UWV participated in the EURES EU Talent Pool Pilot<sup>11</sup> organised specifically for Ukrainians through the European Commission (L4S\_NL\_exp\_20): It's an online platform where

---

<sup>10</sup> Heyma, A., Bussink, H., & Vervliet, T. (2022). *Posted workers to the Netherlands: Facts and figures*. SEO. <https://www.seo.nl/publicaties/posted-workers-to-the-netherlands/>

<sup>11</sup> [EU Talent Pool Pilot](#)

people may register and find a job with the EER plus Switzerland based on their capacities” (L4S\_NL\_exp\_20).<sup>12</sup>

The European Commission furthermore funded the Horizon project “Seeds of Bravery”, with 20 million Euros to be distributed among Ukrainian tech start-ups, both in Ukraine and abroad, to facilitate their relocation (L4S\_NL\_prac\_11).<sup>13</sup> The project also includes a “Mapping of European innovation Ecosystems Players” and availability of “soft landing” programmes for entrepreneurs by (destination) country (L4S\_NL\_prac\_11) to assist Ukrainian founders in identifying the most suitable locations in Europe. However, according to one practitioner, many entrepreneurs had already relocated by the time such initiatives were implemented. As this interviewee observed, while there is significant interest in information about relocation, once entrepreneurs have resettled, they are generally less inclined to move again unless it provides a clear benefit to their business. Consequently, although projects such as *Seeds of Bravery* anticipated greater mobility among Ukrainian entrepreneurs, this has not materialised (L4S\_NL\_prac\_04).

Various interviewees mentioned the rather passive role of the Netherlands, for example in the *Skills Alliance*<sup>14</sup> (L4S\_NL\_prac\_01; L4S\_NL-UA\_prac\_16). Our interviews suggest that there is limited direct cooperation between the Netherlands and Ukraine; instead, the Netherlands appears to address the reception and management of arrivals from Ukraine largely independently. (L4S\_NL-UA\_prac\_16).

Interviewees referred to different programmes or projects in the healthcare sector that were implemented recently or in the past:

“I know about the programme that existed 20 years ago. It was mainly aimed at nurses. It was a Dutch organization that invited Ukrainians or young Eastern Europeans. I know about Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, coming to the Netherlands, getting the training, and then being able to work and have Dutch qualification” (L4S\_UA-NL\_pol\_01).

“A project where people involved invited from the project Ukrainian healthcare talent.<sup>15</sup> It's a project in Haarlem and they provide mentoring, training and recruitment to highly skilled Ukrainian healthcare professionals [...] They have some good cases. They also provide language learning to them and yeah, so they just help people from that field to get into their job on their level” (L4S\_NL-UA\_prac\_16).

While these are examples for initiatives to integrate healthcare workers into the Dutch labour market, another recruitment agency noted:

“Now we have many Ukrainian refugees working with us. But our experience is that very few of them have a healthcare background. In Ukraine, there is a high

---

<sup>12</sup> The European Employment Service (EURES) in general facilitates finding employment across borders in the European Union, both in cross-border regions, as well as across longer distances.

<sup>13</sup> [Home - Seeds Of Bravery](#)

<sup>14</sup> More information about the Skills Alliance is available on the official website: [About Skills Alliance - Skills Alliance for Ukraine – Global Partnerships Empowering Vocational & Digital Skills](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Over ons - Ukrainian Talent](#)

demand for healthcare workers because of the war, so it is actually good that they are staying. There was even a call for Ukrainian healthcare professionals not to leave the country. [...] We do see people with technical backgrounds and other skilled trades, and we try to help them find work in those areas” (L4S\_NL\_prac\_13).

Moreover, the Tent Partnership for Refugees<sup>16</sup> was mentioned. It operates in 11 countries to help companies recruit refugees. In the Netherlands, more than 40 larger companies cooperate to facilitate labour market integration of refugees, including, but not limited to Ukrainians.<sup>17</sup> These last examples are mostly examples for individual or private-sector initiatives to facilitate labour market integration of Ukrainians.

Universities also play an active role in the reception and integration of Ukrainians under Temporary Protection:

“Universities and colleges have launched programmes for scholars at risk” (L4S\_NL\_exp\_06).

“Some schools are having Ukrainians study for lower tuition fees, instead of asking the higher third-country national tuition fee. That is a very down-to-earth way to facilitate skilling of Ukrainians in the Netherlands, but it is only a couple of schools and universities, definitely not all of them” (L4S\_NL\_exp\_17).

In addition, interviewees mentioned initiatives that ultimately aim at facilitating reconstruction which has quite some economic angles as well in terms of skill exchanges, etc. (L4S\_NL\_prac\_02; L4S\_NL\_prac\_04; L4S\_NL\_prac\_11; see also: L4S\_NL-UA\_prac\_16). Actors involved here include, but are not limited to:

- Ukraine Partnership Facility (also subsidies for businesses, including in healthcare and agriculture)
- RVO, Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Ukraine Water Platform (bring together private sector actors)
- EU governments
- NGOs
- Private sector
- Start-ups

Finally, there are organisations based in the Netherlands, notably around the city of The Hague, which work on Ukraine, but not necessarily in a way that relates to the skill corridor, but rather because it is their job to be active in conflict-affected countries (L4S\_NL\_prac\_02). Examples here are Oxfam, Save the Children, UN and EU agencies.

We have already established in the previous section that the Ukrainian-Dutch migration skill corridor was more led by the private sector before 2022, and that forced migration is dealt with by a mix of public and private sector actors. In addition, the important role of employment agencies in the Netherlands was also noted. The representative of Dutch recruitment agency shared:

---

<sup>16</sup> [Tent Partnership for Refugees](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Nederland - The Tent Partnership for Refugees](#)

“I think the Netherlands has registered the biggest number in Europe, around 7,000 temporary agencies registered in the Netherlands. So, to get in touch with the employees, to find the employees, we have to use this time almost everything. So, especially some job portals, we cooperate also with other agencies, also social media, also company websites, internal channels, but also employee referrals are very important for us. Because when we treat people on a very good level, they see that they can be safe with us, they can trust us as an agency. And for our company, we have recruitment offices in many countries, which makes it a little bit easier to find good candidates, not only from one country. We are not focusing on one country but also trying to find solutions for other countries and other nationalities” (L4S\_UA-NL\_prac\_06).

One Ukrainian expert referred to a strong civil society in the Netherlands:

“Their organisations and non-profit organizations are very active. They can help, for example, with the recognition of diplomas, with searching, i.e., with accompanying procedures, with finding housing, with finding services for children, schools, kindergartens, etc. There are also Ukrainian organisations, not as numerous as in other countries, but they do exist” (L4S\_UA-NL\_exp\_04).

### Employment Outcomes and Challenges

On a positive note, the employment rate of Ukrainians in the Netherlands is with an average of 60 per cent (November 2024) quite high. There are regional differences, with the highest employment rate of Ukrainians in the Province of Flevoland and the lowest in South Holland (mentioned in interview L4S\_NL-UA\_prac\_16, referring to official statistics). The UWV’s Ukraine Monitor furthermore tracks employment of Ukrainians well (L4S\_NL\_exp\_06).

“The speed with which the Netherlands enabled access to the labour market after the war began was unprecedented. Previously, EU rules implied strict procedures, but the Netherlands opted for immediate access via a simple notification. That raised questions about the unequal treatment of asylum seekers, who still face many restrictions. [...] For many, work provides structure and pride. Yet there is a disparity: Ukrainians receive more recognition of their qualifications than asylum seekers or status holders. At the start, we estimated 5,000 Ukrainian workers per year. In reality, we received 50,000 notifications. Meanwhile, asylum seekers only get about 600 permits a year. I was surprised by how fast employers found Ukrainian workers through agencies—far quicker than with asylum seekers. Yes, there are permit hurdles, but also stigma.” (L4S\_NL\_pol\_08).

Municipalities and Welcome/ Expat Centres supported Ukrainians with finding employment or recruitment agencies, often with a supporting role of the UWV (L4S\_NL\_prac\_02; L4S\_NL\_prac\_03; L4S\_NL\_exp\_20).

“Many wanted to work, if not only to forget what it is that they were fleeing from, but also to feel like they were somehow contributing or developing themselves and not standing still” (L4S\_NL\_exp\_20).

“The problem is that they are working below their level [...]”  
(L4S\_NL\_UA\_prac\_16)

The process of matching Ukrainian workers with the Dutch labour market is quite problematic, because of issues with recognition of qualifications, language, and different professions and specialisations.

“There is a mismatch of specialties. For example, there is a specialty here called clinical psychologist. Previously, this did not exist in Ukraine at all. And this is also a problem for the employment of psychologists, although there is a demand for them here. That is, not every specialist will be able to be a psychologist here”  
(L4S\_UA-NL\_exp\_05).

“For example, I know someone who studied psychology in Ukraine, specialising in trauma. You would expect her to work here with Ukrainian clients, but because of language requirements she cannot find a job. Her Dutch is insufficient, and her English is also weak. For a psychologist, language is crucial” (L4S\_NL\_exp\_19).

“Very often, the profession of Ukrainian migrants, especially women, does not match their activities in the Netherlands. There are numerous discrepancies in that highly educated people are forced to perform low-skilled work, for example, doctors as nurses or physician assistants” (L4S\_UA-NL\_exp\_03).

There are challenges regarding the recognition of qualifications and skills. Ukrainian experts referred to incompatibility of Ukrainian bachelor's programmes with Dutch universities:

“While Ukraine has introduced a four-year bachelor's programme, the Netherlands has already switched to a three-year programme. As a result, programmes often do not match, and graduates' skills do not meet employers' requirements. Similarly, the Dutch cannot understand the qualification level of our “specialists”  
(L4S\_UA-NL\_exp\_04).

This is for example also true for people from a legal background “because you need either Dutch or you need to be educated in an EU system to understand the legal perspective” (L4S\_NL\_prac\_02). Recognition of qualifications thus remains a problem:

“And of course, there are a lot of obstacles, mainly the language, but also diploma recognition. There are sectors where you can just recognize your diploma quite easily. But also, there are protected sectors where besides of just like formal recognition you have to pass the language tests, and you have to pass additional exams. We are also working on development, say career path. So, people can start working in some specific sectors. Of course, below their level as assistance or a yeah group help. If I am not mistaken, that's how they call it. But the idea is that yeah, they will grow step by step. They will also learn the language in this already and they will get some practice and also, they can show themselves. So that is how it is possible to get to your level. Of course, it will take time” (L4S\_NL\_UA\_prac\_16).

Due to these barriers, Ukrainians, are frequently employed below their qualifications. As a result, many Ukrainian migrants have to retrain or take jobs below their skill levels (L4S\_NL-UA\_prac\_16; L4S\_NL\_prac\_09; L4S\_NL\_prac\_18; L4S\_NL\_exp\_19), which results in (highly) skilled people working in supermarkets, logistics, restaurants, horticulture or other agriculture (L4S\_NL\_prac\_02).

“We have calculated that less than half of 200 people can work in the same field in both Ukraine and the Netherlands. One of the reasons is that the bachelor's degree is different. In other words, this is a rather serious problem” (L4S-UA-NL\_exp\_05).

Other factors that exacerbated such mismatches is that “things moved quickly due to extreme labour shortages” (L4S\_NL\_pol\_08) and that “many of these workers were supposed to return after a few months and are now here for three years. The new challenge is how to support their long-term development” (L4S\_NL\_prac\_09).

“The Netherlands applies a work-first approach, focused on rapid labour participation. This has been mostly successful, but criticism remains: more attention should be given to training, as in Germany, and to enabling self-employment. The current ban on Ukrainians working as freelancers (so-called ZZP'ers) limits cross-border economic activity from the Netherlands” (L4S\_NL\_exp\_06).

“Outside, employers are very positive about hiring Ukrainians and working with them. The only very big issue is the stay of Ukrainians in the Netherlands. It is almost everywhere that it's for one year and nobody knows if it's going to end if it is not going to end, and what we hear is that a lot of employers are afraid to invest into people because they just don't know if they will stay here or when they're going to return back to Ukraine. So yeah, I think that's one of the main obstacles” (L4S\_NL-UA\_prac\_16).

This highlights that there are limited investments into skilling of Ukrainians with temporary protection status in the Netherlands because the length of their stay is uncertain and employers are hesitant to invest in them. This and the fact that many work below their skill levels, arguably leads to “de-skilling” in the destination country. Nevertheless, experts pointed out that the Netherlands faces a significant shortage of skilled labour, which has encouraged investment in the integration of Ukrainians. One interviewee explained: “That’s why the whole process, but also language training from the city halls, many additional extras for the refugees, like free transport, many extras for the houses when they rented – they also don’t want to lose this part of the employees from Ukraine” (L4S-UA-NL\_prac\_06). At the same time, “we do see migrant refugee entrepreneurship grow as a topic” (L4S\_NL\_prac\_04). Nevertheless, access to housing remains one of the most pressing challenges (L4S\_NL-UA\_prac\_16).

One Ukrainian expert talked about controversy and lack of logic in migration and labour market policy of the Netherlands. On the one hand there are investments in housing and language, but on the other hand, there are no investments in long-term skilling.

“The Netherlands is very focused on repatriation. But at the same time, they also need people. The problem with the Netherlands is this lack of a logical migration

policy. Plus, its controversy. There is an obvious conflict of interest, which is already very apparent when politicians say, “Everyone must be returned,” while officials from individual ministries say, “No, no, our pension fund depends on migrants.” And then there is the position of businesses that need people, especially skilled workers” (L4S\_UA-NL\_exp\_05).

What seems even more illogical is that in other contexts there are circular migration initiatives to facilitate short-term recruitment and skilling (5 years) of Indonesian and Filipino nurses that the private sector (i.e., hospitals) is supportive of, while the lack of perspective of retaining Ukrainians leads to unwillingness to invest in their professional development.

“There is an ongoing debate about whether people should return. Local administrators, for instance the mayor of Eindhoven, warn that if Ukrainians leave, it will cause major problems for the labour market. The cabinet has not reached agreement. They allow work permits for Ukrainians already integrated in the labour market, but broader decisions stall. Each time, concerns are raised about pressure on public housing and healthcare. Deficits in these areas are already large. The central tension remains: how to balance labour market needs with the burden on public services and state spending. I also notice this uncertainty in interdepartmental discussions with colleagues. Perhaps the cabinet will resolve it over time, but for now we are struggling with how to position ourselves on labour migration” (L4S\_NL\_pol\_15).

## Integration, Retention and Return

In this section, we discuss general integration of Ukrainians in the Netherlands and prospects of retention and return. Overall, Dutch society is perceived as supportive of displaced persons from Ukraine: *“I think the society in general supports Ukrainian displaced persons in the Netherlands”* (L4S\_NL-UA\_prac\_16).

A recurring theme in the interviews is the importance of Dutch language skills for social and economic integration. While the Netherlands ranks among the world’s leaders in English proficiency, and English is widely used in business and everyday life, experts emphasised that full integration requires knowledge of Dutch: *“Without knowledge of Dutch, it is impossible to expect full integration [...] the language issue is usually one of the top priorities”* (L4S\_UA-NL\_exp\_03).

At the same time, Ukrainians were described as distinctive compared to other migrant groups. As one Dutch interviewee observed, *“Ukrainians stand out from other migrant groups in terms of their ability to organise, exchange information, and their openness to contact with the authorities”* (L4S\_UA-NL\_pol\_01). This was linked to their different legal status and the fact that, unlike many other refugees, *“they are not fleeing their own government, so they are not afraid of their fellow citizens”* (L4S\_UA-NL\_pol\_01).

Civil society initiatives also play an important role. Ukrainian hubs, spread across different regions and cities, primarily function to connect people, organise volunteering, and foster community. *“It’s not that they have any specific role in employment... but it is more just in connecting people uniting them. But also it is a lot of volunteering”* (L4S\_NL-UA\_prac\_16). Some of these initiatives have even developed into formal foundations (L4S\_NL\_prac\_02).

Integration has also been shaped by how Ukrainian displacement was initially perceived. One practitioner noted: “One barrier to integration in different areas of life was that Ukrainian migration was only seen as temporary at the beginning, and it took a while until different actors started to switch to long-term solutions” (L4S\_NL-UA\_prac\_16). This temporary framing reflects Ukraine’s official stance: “We want everybody back. Don’t integrate people. We want to rebuild the country together with them” (L4S\_NL-UA\_prac\_16).

European countries, including the Netherlands, have also hesitated to fully embrace long-term integration. Instead, the emphasis has often been on participation rather than integration. For instance, “the Ministry of Education does not provide language courses for Ukrainians, but the Ministry of Employment does because it is assumed to facilitate labour market integration” (L4S\_NL-UA\_prac\_16).

Discussions about return revealed several obstacles. Ukrainians referred to Ukraine’s unpreparedness to “cooperate” with or return people who are currently abroad. As one Ukrainian expert who works in IT sector in the Netherlands explained:

“I also have personal experience of wanting to return to Ukraine, but what I see is that many companies, for example, in Ukraine are not ready to cooperate with people who are currently abroad and want to return. They are ready, for example, to cooperate with you when you are already there, only then. That is, they will consider your candidacy. This is also a little scary in terms of whether to return or not, because in fact you have to arrive on site before you can look for a job. There is currently no way to do this remotely or through any specialised centers to help you return. This is probably what is stopping me personally now, because it raises questions about the uncertainty of the future and whether I will be able to find the job I want to do in Ukraine” (L4S\_UA-NL\_exp\_03).

The lack of a social security agreement between Ukraine and the Netherlands is another major concern: “*Since there is no agreement, Ukraine is not a part of EU and there is no at least minimum regulation of social coordination, I think that's quite a big question*” (L4S\_NL-UA\_prac\_16). Without such arrangements, returnees may face uncertainty regarding pensions and benefits once temporary protection ends. Dutch and international comparative research shows that many Ukrainians display low intentions to return.<sup>18 19</sup>

## Conclusion

Before Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, migration from Ukraine to the Netherlands was limited, mainly for family, study, or IT-related work under the Highly Skilled Migrant Visa (*Kennismigrantenregeling*).<sup>20</sup> There are no bilateral agreements beyond a tax

---

<sup>18</sup> WODC (2024). *Tijdelijk thuis? De positie van Oekraïense vluchtelingen in Nederland*. Den Haag: Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid, Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en Documentatiecentrum

<sup>19</sup> Van Tubergen, F., Wachter, G. G., Kosyakova, Y., & Kogan, I. (2024). Return intentions among Ukrainian refugees in Europe: A cross-national study. *International Migration*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.13291>

<sup>20</sup> See Kubal, A., & Dekker, R. (2014). Exploring the Role of Interwave Dynamics in Stagnating Migration Flows: Ukrainian Migration to the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 12(3), 274–292. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2013.839068>

treaty, and no structured state-led cooperation. The full-scale Russian invasion transformed the corridor into a humanitarian one rather abruptly: over 100,000 Ukrainians arrived in 2022 under the EU Temporary Protection Directive, which granted immediate labour market access and distinguished them from other asylum seekers. We therefore categorise the Ukrainian-Dutch Migration Skill corridor as the humanitarian type, which is only emerging and characterised by ad-hoc mobility. Labour market integration is driven by a mix of public and private actors, including private recruitment agencies, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, Municipalities with support of the UWV, and civil society. While the main reason for leaving Ukraine is of course the ongoing conflict, migrants' location decisions seem to be mostly driven by social and professional networks. Employment rates of Ukrainians under temporary protection in the Netherlands are relatively high (around 60% in November 2024), but many Ukrainians experience deskilling due to slow recognition of qualifications, language barriers, and sectoral mismatches. A "work-first" approach prioritises rapid labour market participation, while (longer-term) skilling and prospects of professional development or mobility remain lacking.<sup>21</sup> This is also due to the uncertainty surrounding Ukrainians' prospective length of stay in the Netherlands and employers exercising restraint in investing into Ukrainian employees.

Integration is shaped by strong migrant agency: Ukrainians are described as proactive, organised, and open to authorities, supported by Ukraine hubs across the Netherlands and community initiatives. Yet housing shortages, language barriers, and the initial framing of displacement as temporary have constrained deeper integration. Dutch policy emphasises participation rather than full integration, partly reflecting Ukraine's official stance that citizens should return. This seems to be in contradiction with the Netherlands' growing need for talent.

The corridor is also strongly linked to the Ukraine-Poland one as a "transit" country. It is marked by paradoxes: broad societal support and employer demand coexist with political reluctance to commit to long-term integration, leaving skilled Ukrainians underutilised despite their potential.

Based on our findings, we can formulate the following policy recommendations. First, we recommend to facilitate the recognition of qualifications, improve prospects of professional development and invest in more sustainable economic and social integration. Second, enhancing bilateral cooperation with Ukraine, especially in terms of social security and possibly more streamlined education and training systems, is needed. Third, stakeholders should start preparing for the expiration of the temporary protection directive already now, for example by facilitating the move to other migration schemes for those interested in staying in the Netherlands more long-term (e.g., knowledge migrant scheme, student visa, start-up visa), which would give the migrants better prospects and the employers more certainty. Finally, we encourage skilling through reducing tuition fees in fields that are subject to shortages in the Netherlands and fields that will be urgently needed for the reconstruction of Ukraine so that both the origin and destination country can benefit from migration within the Ukraine-Netherlands corridor.

---

<sup>21</sup> See Dagevos, J., & Rusinovic, K. (2024). Hoge arbeidsparticipatie Oekraïense vluchtelingen maar vaak onder niveau. *ESB*, 109(4830), 120–123. Retrieved September 2025 from [https://esb.nu/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/058-060\\_Dagevos.pdf](https://esb.nu/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/058-060_Dagevos.pdf)

### Appendix: List of Interviews

Interviews were conducted with five policy makers, twelve practitioners and nine experts. They are marked as \_pol, \_prac, or \_exp respectively in the interview labels. Seven interviews were specifically on the Ukraine-Netherlands corridor (left column). In the interview label, the country acronym mentioned first refers to the country in which the interview was conducted.

| Corridor specific interviews | General interviews |
|------------------------------|--------------------|
| L4S_NL-UA_prac_16            | L4S_NL_prac_01     |
| L4S_UA-NL_pol_01             | L4S_NL_prac_02     |
| L4S_UA-NL_pol_02             | L4S_NL_prac_03     |
| L4S_UA-NL_exp_03             | L4S_NL_prac_04     |
| L4S_UA-NL_exp_04             | L4S_NL_exp_05      |
| L4S_UA-NL_prac_05            | L4S_NL_exp_06      |
| L4S_UA-NL_prac_06            | L4S_NL_prac_07     |
|                              | L4S_NL_pol_08      |
|                              | L4S_NL_prac_09     |
|                              | L4S_NL_exp_11      |
|                              | L4S_NL_prac_13     |
|                              | L4S_NL_prac_14     |
|                              | L4S_NL_pol_15      |
|                              | L4S_NL_exp_17      |
|                              | L4S_NL_prac_18     |
|                              | L4S_NL-exp_19      |
|                              | L4S_NL_exp_20      |
|                              | L4S_NL_exp_21      |
|                              | L4S_NL_pol_24      |

*Note: We only provide a clean list here to protect interviewees anonymity.*