

## UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN V4 COUNTRIES – HUMANITARIAN AID AND EMPOWERMENT

### УКРАЇНСЬКІ БІЖЕНЦІ В КРАЇНАХ V4 – ГУМАНІТАРНА ДОПОМОГА ТА РОЗШИРЕННЯ МОЖЛИВОСТЕЙ

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The article analyzes the humanitarian aid and opportunities provided to Ukrainian refugees in the countries of the Visegrad Group (V4) as a result of a full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022. This invasion caused the most acute migration crisis in the history of Ukraine, which led to significant human losses and mass flight of the population from the war zone. The countries of the Visegrad Group, in particular Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, played a key role in the reception of Ukrainian refugees, which is due not only to geographical factors, but also to the long-term tradition of labor migration from Ukraine.

The authors of the article investigate the socio-economic characteristics of Ukrainian refugees in the V4 countries, including their demographic structure, level of education and the situation on the labor market. Considerable attention is paid to the issue of integration of refugees in host societies, in particular, in Poland. A comparison of pre-war migrants and refugees showed significant differences in language proficiency, employment and willingness to stay in the host country.

The article examines refugee support programs implemented by V4 governments, such as obtaining individual identification numbers, access to the labor market, education and social benefits, as well as compensation for accommodation costs. Special attention is paid to the role of Poland, which was the first to come to the aid of Ukrainians, introducing special laws and initiatives to support refugees.

The study highlights the prospects for the integration of Ukrainian refugees in the V4 countries and the European Union in general. The importance of a comprehensive approach to integration, which includes the development of educational and professional opportunities, medical and psychological support, as well as the promotion of intercultural dialogue and tolerance, is emphasized. The authors conclude that the successful integration of migrants is a key factor for the development and preservation of social stability in host countries.

The article contains recommendations for improving the policy and practice of migrant integration, including raising awareness and tolerance in society, actively countering xenophobia and discrimination, as well as cooperation between EU member states in the development of common strategies. Successful integration of migrants will contribute to economic development, increase in the number of working population and technological progress.

Thus, the article provides a comprehensive analysis of the current situation with Ukrainian refugees in the V4 countries, outlines challenges and opportunities for integration, and also offers practical recommendations for improving the situation and ensuring successful adaptation of refugees in host societies.

**Key words:** refugee, migrant, integration, adaptation.

В статті зроблено аналіз гуманітарної допомоги та можливостей, наданих українським біженцям у країнах Вишеградської групи (V4) внаслідок повномасштабного вторгнення Росії в Україну у 2022 році. Це вторгнення спричинило найгострішу міграційну кризу в історії України, що призвело до значних людських втрат та масової втечі населення з зони бойових дій. Країни Вишеградської групи, зокрема Польща, Чехія, Словаччина та Угорщина, відіграли ключову роль у прийомі українських біженців, що зумовлено не лише географічними факторами, а й довготривалою традицією трудової міграції з України.

Автори статті досліджують соціально-економічні характеристики українських біженців у країнах V4, включаючи їхню демографічну структуру, рівень освіти та ситуацію на ринку праці. Значну увагу приділено питанню інтеграції біженців у приймаючих суспільствах, зокрема, у Польщі. Порівняння довоєнних мігрантів та біженців показало значні відмінності у рівні знання мови, працевлаштуванні та бажанні залишитися у країні перебування.

У статті розглядаються програми підтримки біженців, впроваджені урядами країн V4, такі як отримання індивідуальних ідентифікаційних номерів, доступ до ринку праці, освіти та соціальних виплат, а також компенсування витрат на розміщення. Особливу увагу приділено ролі Польщі, яка першою прийшла на допомогу українцям, запровадивши спеціальні закони та ініціативи для підтримки біженців.

Дослідження висвітлює перспективи інтеграції українських біженців у країнах V4 та Європейському Союзі загалом. Підкреслюється важливість комплексного підходу до інтеграції, що включає розвиток освітніх та професійних можливостей, медичну та психологічну підтримку, а також сприяння міжкультурному діалогу та толерантності. Автори роблять висновок, що успішна інтеграція мігрантів є ключовим фактором для розвитку та збереження соціальної стабільності у приймаючих країнах.

Стаття містить рекомендації щодо удосконалення політики та практики інтеграції мігрантів, включаючи підвищення свідомості та толерантності у суспільстві, активну протидію ксенофобії та дискримінації, а також співпрацю між країнами-членами ЄС у розробці спільних стратегій. Успішна інтеграція мігрантів сприятиме економічному розвитку, збільшенню чисельності працездатного населення та технологічному прогресу.

Таким чином, стаття надає всебічний аналіз поточної ситуації з українськими біженцями у країнах V4, окреслює виклики та можливості інтеграції, а також пропонує практичні рекомендації для покращення ситуації та забезпечення успішної адаптації біженців у приймаючих суспільствах.

**Ключові слова:** біженець, мігрант, інтеграція, адаптація.

In today's conditions of globalization and growing geopolitical tensions, the issues of migration and refugee protection are becoming increasingly important. Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which began in 2022, led to an unprecedented humanitarian crisis that forced millions of Ukrainians to flee their homes and seek refuge abroad. The countries of the Visegrad Four (V4) – Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia – have become the main destinations for Ukrainian refugees, as they are geographically close and share a common history.

The study of humanitarian aid and the process of empowerment of Ukrainian refugees in these countries is extremely relevant, as they are important actors in the regional context. Studying the experience of the V4 countries can provide valuable lessons for future crisis situations and contribute to the development of more effective refugee integration policies.

**Setting objectives.** The main problem is the need to adequately assess the effectiveness of humanitarian aid and the processes of integration of Ukrainian refugees in the V4 countries. It is important to understand how successful are the measures taken by these countries to provide social and economic support to refugees.

**Key aspects that require analysis include:**

1. Organization of humanitarian aid: Assessment of the scope and effectiveness of humanitarian aid provided to Ukrainian refugees in V4 countries, including access to housing, medical care, education and other basic needs.

2. Integration in the labor market: Analysis of measures aimed at promoting the employment of refugees, as well as studying the obstacles that Ukrainians face when entering the labor market in V4 countries.

3. Social integration: Research on the social integration of refugees, including access to language courses, cultural activities and other forms of social support that facilitate adaptation to the new environment.

4. Legal and political aspects: Analysis of the legal and political frameworks that regulate the status of refugees in the V4 countries, including issues of legal protection and access to citizenship.

Thus, this article is aimed at a comprehensive study of the issues of humanitarian aid and the expansion of opportunities for Ukrainian refugees in the V4 countries. Studying these aspects is critical for developing effective policies and strategies aimed at supporting refugees not only in the V4 countries, but

also in other states facing similar challenges.

Russia's full-scale invasion triggered the worst migration crisis in Ukraine's history and led to the largest influx of war refugees to Europe since World War II, as well as great loss of life. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 forced millions of people to flee the war zone. To date, the countries of the Visegrad Group have played a key role among the countries receiving refugees from Ukraine. This is explained not only by geographical factors, such as a common border, but also by a long tradition of labor migration from Ukraine.

The European Union quickly took up the protection of citizens of Ukraine who fled the country. Just 10 days after the Russian invasion, the EU passed legislation activating the Temporary Protection Directive for the first time since 2001. According to this law, Ukrainian asylum seekers need only present an identification card or passport to receive temporary protection status. This year, the ministers of internal affairs of the EU countries extended the effect of these measures, which were originally planned until March 2024, for another year.[1]

According to official data, due to Russian aggression, as of the end of November 2022, 1.5 million refugees from Ukraine were registered in Poland, almost half a million in the Czech Republic, 100 thousand in Slovakia, and 31 thousand in Hungary. Many of them lost relatives, were left without housing, without work and without means of livelihood. The vast majority of European countries have opened their doors to Ukrainians in order to provide them with assistance, including accommodation, food, employment, etc.[2]

Poland received the largest number of refugees. A significant number of refugees remained and continue to live in Poland, but a large number of refugees went to other countries. So, as of December 2023, the picture has changed somewhat.

If we turn to statistics, according to the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as of June 21, 2023, there are 8,177,000 Ukrainian citizens abroad – about 20% of the existing population of Ukraine by February 24, 2022. Almost half of Ukrainians live in only three countries: Poland – 22%, Germany – 15%, and the United States – 11%. Only 6% of Ukrainians abroad are on consular records [4].

According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees of the United Nations (UNHCR), as of October 2023, there are almost 5.8 million Ukrainians

**The number of Ukrainian refugees from the war in the main European countries as of December 31, 2023, thousands [3]**

Country	Number of persons, thousands	Country	Number of persons, thousands
Germany	1125,9	Slovakian	114,2
Poland	956,6	Moldova	120,7
Great Britain	250,4	Ireland	102,6
Czech Republik	375,6	Austria	83,2
Spain	185,9	Romania	85,7
Italy	169	Belgium	83
Netherlands	140,7	France	69,5

in Europe who left the country after February 24, 2022. If we look at the socio-economic characteristics of migrants, the vast majority are people of working age with higher education. Almost 63% of Ukrainians living abroad are adults, 22% are children under the age of 18. Among migrants from Ukraine who are in Poland, women predominate – they are almost 70% of all respondents. [5]

The study conducted by Narodowe bank Polski "The life and economic situation of migrants from Ukraine in Poland – the impact of the pandemic and war on the nature of migration in Poland" deserves special attention. This study was conducted in 2023 and indicates that between migrants who came to Poland before the start of a full-scale war and refugees, there are large differences in the demographic structure, the situation on the labor market and plans for further stay in Poland.

1) Among adult refugees in Poland, a significant proportion are women (80% versus 54% among pre-war migrants).

2) Among all migrants from Ukraine, persons with higher education predominate.

3) With the beginning of the war, the share of people over 60 among the refugees has noticeably decreased.

4) On the other hand, pre-war migrants were characterized by a much better knowledge of the Polish language and more frequent employment (94% of respondents versus 65% among refugees).

5) Pre-war migrants also declared their desire to stay in Poland permanently more often (55% versus 19% among refugees).

6) Within nine months of the beginning of the war, the integration of refugees from Ukraine in the Polish labor market and their economic independence improved significantly. However, about 20% of them are people who live in Poland "from day to day". A comparison of the results of the survey for November and May 2022 shows that a significant part of the refugees quickly mastered the basics of the Polish language. Integration in the labor market is also happening quickly – among refugees, the percentage of those who work is 65%, and according to a survey in May – 28%.

7) Migrants most often worked in industry and the service sector, which did not require high qualifications. Among the refugees, the largest group was persons who provided services to households.

8) Knowledge of the Polish language is closely related to the possibility of employment. This is especially noticeable among refugees – 50% of the group that did not speak Polish worked, and 82% of the group that knew Polish well.

9) The gradual process of adaptation of Ukrainian citizens to life and work in Poland would be facilitated by assistance consisting of: organization of Polish language courses, simplified legalization of stay, introduction of facilitations regarding nostrification of diplomas and assistance in employment.

10) Migrants support their loved ones in Ukraine. Persons who arrived before the war did not change their desire to send money abroad (more than 60% of them transfer funds). [6]

In Poland, there is a large regional difference both in the number of migrants from Ukraine relative to the number of residents and in the characteristics of migrants. Refugees from Ukraine settled relatively often in the Mazovia and Lower Silesia voivodeships. In turn, the largest percentage of labor migrants was in the Pomeranian and Lower Silesian Voivodeships.

In studies, it is also customary to divide refugees from Ukraine into:

1) **Classical refugees** (25% of the total number) are mostly middle-aged women, most with children. They are most likely to be in Poland and the Czech Republic, in large cities. People from this group more often than others chose the host country because of its geographical proximity to Ukraine. These people are not well adapted to life abroad, know the language of the host country worse and rarely have friends among the local population.

2) **Quasi-labour migrants** (29%) are the most adapted to life abroad, most of them had previously been outside Ukraine. Compared to other groups, people in this group are more likely to know the language of the host country at a high level. Also, they are most inclined to work abroad, are most satisfied with their stay abroad and with government services,

have the fewest problems there, and most positively evaluate the attitude of locals towards Ukrainians.

3) **Professionals** (29%) are more likely to work in their own or a related specialty. People from this group have relatively comfortable living conditions in the host country: they received more assistance than other groups. The country of residence was chosen because of the presence of friends there, knowledge of the language or a good attitude towards Ukrainians.

4) **People from the war zone** (16%) – these refugees are not adapted to life abroad, but are most ready to take steps to adapt abroad, because they are less certain about returning to Ukraine. These people suffered the most losses from the war. Most tend to live in small towns. Before the war, most of them were working, the most ready to take steps to find work abroad. [7]

The question of the return of migrants to Ukraine is no less acute today in terms of the demographic situation. According to the Info Sapiens survey commissioned by the Center for Economic Strategy, 16% of people who left Ukraine have not yet decided whether they will return, 8% probably do not plan to return, and 2% definitely do not plan to return.

According to the M. V. Ptukh Institute of Demography and Social Research of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, the population of Ukraine in 1991 as of January 1, 2023 is approximately 37.6 million people, and within the territories controlled by Ukraine – 31.6 million. Figures are not exhaustive, because the exact number of dead civilians and soldiers, as well as the total share of people who left the country, is unknown. The outflow of the working population will negatively affect the economy: consumption will decrease, there will be a shortage of labor, and the burden on the social sphere will increase. [8]

Among the main factors that block the return of refugees to Ukraine are usually war and uncertainty about the future, lack of security and material support, as well as the energy crisis. From 5.6 million to 6.7 million Ukrainians remain abroad, according to a study by the Center for Economic Strategy (CES). These are people with different educations, professional skills and well-being, but two-thirds of them would like to return to Ukraine. From 1.3 million to 3.3 million may stay there forever, depending on the optimistic or pessimistic scenario. This is stated in the study of the Center for Economic Strategy (CES), which is based on the data of two waves of sociological surveys conducted by the research agency Info Sapiens in November-December 2022 and April-May 2023. [7]

The non-return of Ukrainians will significantly affect the Ukrainian economy, which may lose from 2.7% to 6.9% of GDP annually, the authors of the report note. Most of the forced migrants found a place in Poland. Mostly women aged 35–49 and children left Ukraine. From May 2022, more people began to

return to Ukraine than leave, but this trend continued until August inclusive. In the fall of 2022, when Russia began shelling the energy infrastructure of Ukraine, the number of those who went abroad increased. But these are relatively small numbers, the CES notes. "In October, 76,000 Ukrainians left and did not return, in November – 84,000, and in December – 55,000," the study says. In the winter of the new year, this trend intensified: in January, the difference in favor of departures increased to 140,000, and in February they were 120,000. Compared to the end of 2022, at the end of June there were 0.3–0.5 million more Ukrainians abroad due to the war.

If you are looking for an answer to the question: Are Ukrainians ready to return from abroad? 62% of Ukrainian refugees are ready to return to Ukraine when the "situation allows it," according to the April-May 2023 survey. "These are mostly people of respectable age; live in countries bordering Ukraine; have close family members who are in Ukraine," the study says. 14% of refugees planned to return within three months, 6% did not plan to return. Among the latter, mostly residents of the East, which suffered the most from the war. Compared to November 2022, in May 2023 the mood of some Ukrainian refugees has changed: 8% are more inclined not to return, 24% are inclined to return, but later than previously planned, 5% plan to return earlier than planned, and 3% plan to return, although they previously answered the opposite. 59% of Ukrainian respondents have not changed their plans. [9]

Speaking about the adaptation and integration of Ukrainian refugees, one should emphasize programs and their social support. Evidence that Poland was the first to come to the aid of Ukrainians was the adoption on March 13, 2022 of a special law defining a set of tools for supporting refugees. The main ones are:

1) The possibility of obtaining an individual identification number has been introduced, which facilitates the opening of a bank account and provides access to the labor market, education and social benefits.

2) The government agreed to compensate the costs of housing Ukrainian refugees in Polish family homes and private hotels. The amount of compensation is approximately 8 euros per day per person.

3) Ukrainian children were given the opportunity to study in Polish schools. In particular, it is possible to open school branches in temporary accommodation centers and parallel Ukrainian classes in Polish schools.

4) A simplified system of recognition of qualifications for nurses and doctors was introduced. Despite the recommendations of experts, the law does not consider simplified recognition of qualifications for teachers, educators or psychologists from Ukraine.

5) All adults from Ukraine who arrived after February 24 have the opportunity to work freely.

As for 2024, changes in the rules regarding benefits and payments for Ukrainian refugees, as well as the terms of granting temporary protection, are foreseen in Poland. According to the announcement, temporary protection for refugees from Ukraine will be active only until March 4, 2024. At the moment, the Polish government has not announced the further extension of the special status for Ukrainians until 2025, but it is expected that a corresponding decision will be made within the next two months.

For now, the same rules as in 2023 remain for refugees. Ukrainians have the right to free housing for a period of 120 days under the "40+" program, as well as free housing for persons belonging to vulnerable categories, such as large families, people with disabilities, pensioners, pregnant women and mothers with babies. They are also given the possibility of official employment (provided that PESEL UKR is issued within 30 days from the moment of arrival in Poland), free medical and educational assistance, as well as the possibility of receiving a monthly payment for each minor child [10].

According to official statistics, Ukrainian refugees spent more than 20 billion dollars abroad in 2022. More than 1.87 million employment contracts were concluded by this category of population in 17 countries of the European Union. According to the results of one of the conducted studies, Ukrainian migrants contributed to the growth of Poland's GDP by 1%. The majority of the able-bodied population from Ukraine who emigrated found employment in the eastern and central parts of Europe. Bloomberg analysts estimate that the loss of working-age women, who make up a significant portion of the refugees, could result in a loss of 10% of Ukraine's pre-war GDP, estimated at \$20 billion. These significant financial expenses of Ukrainians abroad reflect the great impact of their presence on the economy of the European Union, which emphasizes the importance of studying this aspect of migration to understand the economic and social consequences of migration processes.[11]

**Conclusion.** Summarizing, we note that in Poland special attention was paid to programs and initiatives aimed at supporting the social and economic integration of migrants and refugees. These programs cover a wide range of activities, including the provision of educational and vocational opportunities, medical and psychological support, as well as programs of adaptation and integration into local communities.

The prospects for the integration of migrants and refugees in the EU in general, and Poland in particular, are related to the development of comprehensive

approaches to this process, including the creation of effective support programs, improving access to education and employment, as well as promoting intercultural dialogue and tolerance. However, successful integration requires not only the efforts of the government and international organizations, but also the active participation of the public and target groups in creating a favorable environment for all residents. The successful integration of migrants depends on factors such as language skills, education and qualifications, social support, legal status, cultural openness, economic opportunities and the availability of cultural programs and initiatives. Providing access to these factors contributes to the adaptation of migrants and the building of harmonious intercultural relations in the host society.

One of the key areas of improvement is increasing awareness and tolerance in society regarding migrants and their needs. It is necessary to actively combat xenophobia and discrimination, to spread information about the contribution of migrants to society and to promote intercultural dialogue. Cooperation between EU member states, in particular Poland, in the development and implementation of joint strategies and policies for the integration of migrants is also important. This will allow implementation of best practices, exchange of experience and unity in relation to migration issues. Thus, it can be concluded that the successful integration of migrants and refugees will be a key factor in the development and preservation of social stability in Poland. The host country benefits from the successful integration of migrants and refugees. Although the state must invest in the integration of migrants upon their arrival and for several years afterwards, their macroeconomic impact becomes positive when they become permanent residents, integrate into the labor market and start paying taxes. In addition, migrants and refugees increase the size of the working population, arrive with skills and thus contribute to human capital development as well as technological progress.

In order to achieve social stability, it is necessary to continue to work on improving integration policies and practices, providing migrants with decent living conditions and equal opportunities to realize their potential. Integration programs must be well prepared and implemented in cooperation with all stakeholders, taking into account the needs of all participants. Democratic consultation processes and collection of socio-economic data will help improve the integration of refugees and migrants, removing barriers to their full enjoyment of economic and social rights.

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