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Poland and War Refugees from Ukraine – Beyond Pure Aid



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(in both cases, the figures include all border crossings without distinction by nationality and multiple border crossings by the same persons, see Polish Border Guard 2022).

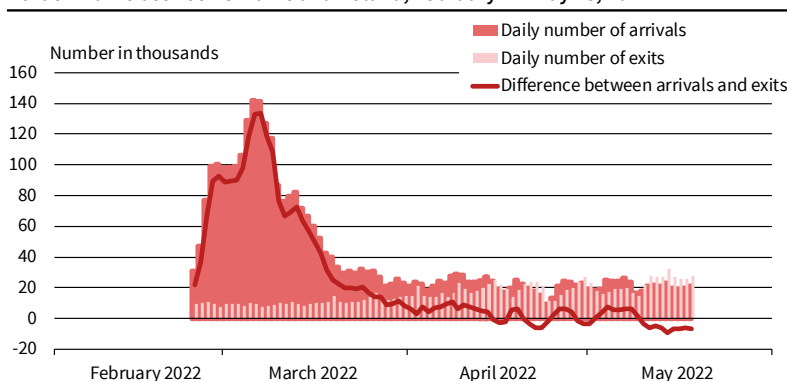
According to available estimates, about 1.5 million war refugees from Ukraine were staying in Poland at the end of April 2022 (Duszczyk and Kaczmarczyk 2022). Among them, females and children predominate. Detailed demographic data of war refugees residing in Poland can be obtained from registration in the PESEL system (an individual identification number assigned to Poles at birth and foreigners legally residing in Poland upon their application). Registration in the PESEL system and obtaining a number allows war refugees from Ukraine access to social benefits. As of the end of May there

were 1.15 million Ukrainian citizens registered in the system. Females in the age group 18–65 accounted for 45.75 percent of those registered, while those over the age of 65 accounted for 2.8 percent. Children under the age of 18 accounted for 45.7 percent of all registered war refugees from Ukraine. This demographic profile is mainly due to Ukraine’s internal regulations prohibiting men between the ages of 18 and 60 from leaving the country. Exceptions were men with more than three dependent children and persons with disabilities.

Back-of-the-envelope analysis shows that we are dealing with three main groups of migrants after the outbreak of war in Ukraine. The first are women with children who joined their husbands or partners who stayed in Poland before 24 February 2022, as labor migrants. Thus, we were dealing with family reunification in Poland. It can be assumed with a high probability that the majority of them will decide to stay in Poland or move to other countries and only a tiny minority will decide to return to Ukraine. The second group were women with children who decided to leave Ukraine, but their husbands or partners remained in Ukraine. Thus, we are dealing with separated families. In their case, at the current stage of development of the war in Ukraine it is difficult to predict where they will reunite shortly – in Poland, in other EU countries, or Ukraine. This depends largely on the development of the situation in Ukraine. The third group, the least numerous, consists of single women with children, women without children, but also full families (with at least three children, which allowed also men aged 18–60 to leave Ukraine). In their case, it is very difficult to predict whether they will decide to stay

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has led to the largest migration and related humanitarian crisis since World War II. According to UNHCR data, as of the end of May 2022, more than 6.8 million people (Ukrainians and foreigners who were staying in Ukraine when the war broke out) have left Ukraine since February 24. At the same time, 2.3 million Ukrainian citizens returned to Ukraine in the same period (UNHCR 2022). The UNHCR cautions that the figures it provides are estimates rather than accurate data, but this does not fundamentally change the picture. It can be assumed that at the end of May 2022 there were about 4.5 million war refugees from Ukraine outside the country. Poland is the country that is definitely in the first place both in terms of border crossings between countries bordering Ukraine and the number of remaining war refugees from Ukraine. According to the Polish Border Guard, from February 24 to the end of May 2022, 3.75 million border crossings into Poland and 1.75 million from Poland into Ukraine were registered

Figure 1
Border Traffic between Ukraine and Poland, February 24–May 18, 2022



Source: Authors’ elaboration based on the Border Guard data.

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Table 1
Structure of War Refugees from Ukraine
Who Registered to Obtain a PESEL Number
at the End of May 2022

Age	Share of total (%)
Children (0–18)	45.70
Adults 18–65	50.70
Female	45.75
Male	4.95
Adults over 65	3.60
Female	2.80
Male	0.80
Total	100

Source: PESEL.

in Poland, go to other countries, or return to Ukraine. The key to the decision may be the circumstances accompanying the migration decision, e.g., having dependent family members, education, or the ability to adapt to a new country.

The resistance of the Ukrainian army and society to Russia's aggression shows that the scenario of a quick end to the war is very unlikely. It should be assumed that Ukraine, after supplies of armaments from European countries, Canada, Turkey, and Japan, and above all, from the United States, will be able to defend its independence and even regain a part of the territory occupied by Russian troops. At the same time, it is difficult to assume that we will see, within the next year, a complete economic and military defeat of Russia. In the most predictable scenario, we will see a war that is fought over limited Ukrainian territory in the coming months, but no peace treaty (whatever that would mean). Missile attacks on western Ukrainian territory and parts of Russian territory are possible (though the latter definitely to a lesser extent). In this scenario, one has to assume a continuous influx of refugees, but also economic migrants to Poland and other EU countries. There will also certainly be several temporary and permanent returns to non-war regions, mainly western Ukraine. It should be assumed that as a result of the continuation of the conflict, which will have different phases of quieting down and intensification of fighting, the economic situation in Ukraine will be bad, which should stimulate more intensive labor migration than in the past. This means that the structure of the currently observed inflow may change, with an increasing share of men and older people. In this scenario, we assume that the ban on men aged 18–60 leaving Ukraine will be significantly liberalized or even lifted over time. Assuming the above-described factors affecting flows and residence patterns of different demographic groups, in this scenario, we assume that by the end of 2023 there will be about 3.1 million Ukrainians in Poland (economic migrants who came to Poland before the outbreak of war and war refugees). This would mean a doubling of the

population of Ukrainians residing in Poland compared to the pre-war period. At the same time, their demographic structure, due to the influx in recent months of mainly women with children, would be significantly different from that of February 24, when men were in the majority. As part of the discussion, we have developed two other scenarios for the development of the situation in Ukraine (Duszczuk and Kaczmarczyk 2022b). However, they are less likely, so we do not discuss them in this text.

The massive influx of foreigners in a short period causes the simultaneous occurrence of various challenges related to their stay and integration in the society of the host country. In the case of war refugees from Ukraine, the most important and the most difficult to solve are those related with housing, education, health care, and the labor market.

HOUSING

Before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, it was estimated that there was a shortage of more than 2 million apartments in Poland, and about 1.5 million flats that were occupied were in urgent need of renovation (HRE 2018). The influx of war refugees from Ukraine exacerbated this problem. The analysis of the situation after 24 February 2022 shows that we are dealing with at least four ways of providing temporary shelter to war refugees from Ukraine. Most (about 600,000) were hosted in private houses and apartments belonging to Poles. It should be assumed that the provision of accommodation is temporary and most of the refugees will have to find another place to live. As of 1 July 2022, subsidies for the stay of war refugees of 40 PLN (approximately 8 euros) per person per day have been suspended. This will certainly result in the need to leave the apartments in cases when Polish families do not have sufficient funds to cover the costs of the war refugees' stay. In the second model, refugees were taken in by family members living in Poland (about 400,000–500,000). This would seem to be the optimal solution. However, it should be noted that most of the seasonal workers lived in small, low-standard apartments. The arrival of family members made the standard of living worse. This results in the necessity to look for larger flats or houses, which is very difficult at present due to the lack of housing on the rental market. Some refugees (about 200,000) have been accommodated in hotels and holiday centers, which remain empty during the winter and spring months. Most of them, however, are places for Poles or foreign guests during the summer months. This means that war refugees staying in them will have to leave them temporarily and find another place to live. In the fourth model, war refugees are housed in large sports and exhibition halls, which have been turned into temporary residence centers. Approximately tens of thousands of people are staying in them. Some war

refugees also rented apartments at their own expense. However, no estimates in this respect are available.

The housing challenge largely depends on the number of war refugees who will remain in Poland this fall. It is reasonable to assume that some of them will travel to Ukraine during the holiday season to visit family or meet with husbands and partners who cannot travel abroad. If the situation in Ukraine does not improve significantly, which – as suggested before – seems unlikely, most of them will leave again for Poland or other EU member states. This will mean the need to prepare hundreds of thousands of places to stay, as it is difficult to expect that Poles will again offer accommodation in their private houses and apartments, especially when they will no longer be able to count on the reimbursement of related costs. Part of the challenge may be solved by making places in hotels and holiday centers available again to war refugees. However, this is certainly not enough. The government should be prepared to build settlements of modular homes where refugees could temporarily stay and to seek support from other countries to carry out voluntary relocations. Otherwise, we could face a situation of war refugees becoming homeless or living in very substandard housing.

EDUCATION

According to the PESEL data and data presented by the Polish Ministry of Education and Science, among the refugees there are approximately 600,000–650,000 children. At the same time, only less than 200 thousand of them were enrolled in Polish kindergartens and schools. The others participated in remote learning under the Ukrainian curriculum. This situation should be considered temporary. As of September 1, when the new school year begins, it will be necessary to develop a systemic solution for the education of Ukrainian children residing in Poland. Once again, however, it is not known how many of them will stay in Poland after the summer holidays and how many will start the new school year in Ukraine. It should be assumed, however, that it will not be possible to guarantee education to all Ukrainian students in the same model. Therefore, it is necessary to apply hybrid and non-standard solutions. Three complementary solutions can be applied. First, some Ukrainian children will be able to attend Polish schools and thus study within the Polish curriculum. However, this will require them to study the Polish language very intensively during the summer holidays so that they will be able to participate fully in classes beginning September 1. It will also be necessary to organize additional classes of Polish in the first months after the vacations and to compensate for differences in curriculum. This model of teaching should be preferred

for students whose parents have decided to stay in Poland.

In the second model, it would be advisable to create preparatory classes for Ukrainian students who will not be able to attend classes with the Polish curriculum due to, for example, linguistic reasons. A year in such a class should allow them to catch up with their Polish language skills. Such children, if their parents decide to stay in Poland, would be able to start attending Polish schools for the 2023/2024 school year.

In the third model, online education in the Ukrainian system would be continued. It would be dedicated especially to those students whose parents or guardians intend to return to Ukraine in the coming months. It would allow such students to continue their education in Poland, but following the Ukrainian curriculum so that they do not fall behind in their studies. However, it would be advisable to allow them to integrate with Polish children at school through, for example, sports activities. They should also learn the Polish language. Organization of remote teaching is possible based on the experience of the coronavirus pandemic. However, it is known that it has many disadvantages. Therefore, remote teaching should take place in buildings specially adapted for this purpose, so that students are incentivized to leave their homes and go to school. It is also necessary to provide an adequate number of computers or multimedia projectors, learning materials, and staff to look after the students at the schools. Currently, it is very difficult to predict the scale of funding needed to create and maintain such a hybrid teaching model, but it will certainly be a major financial challenge. Support from international funds (UNHCR, UNICEF) and the EU budget will be necessary.

HEALTH

The Polish health care system was hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic. Many Poles postponed necessary visits to the doctor, which translated into their health deteriorating. The influx of 1.5 million potential new patients into the health system in a short period may have an impact on lengthening the queues for doctors or surgeries, which in turn may create tensions between Poles and Ukrainians. The latter may be blamed for decreased opportunities to access the healthcare system. This tension may be particularly evident in the autumn months when there is an annual increase in illnesses among children and teenagers. It is also important to note the difficulty for war refugees from Ukraine to obtain medical assistance. This is due to a lack of medical documentation and language problems. These issues require the introduction, as in the case of education, of several above-standard solutions. According to available data, there are several thousand Ukrainian patients currently in Polish hospitals, including sol-

diers wounded in combat. Ukrainian patients (mainly women with children) also are appearing in primary care clinics. At the same time, among the war refugees, there are people previously employed in the health sector, including doctors and nurses. The system of employment of Ukrainian doctors and nurses in the Polish health care system was simplified in early 2021. Under special legislation since the outbreak of the war, Ukrainian medical personnel have been granted additional temporary entitlements for 18 months that allow them to be employed under simplified rules.

To deal with the challenge of maintaining the capacity of the Polish health care system, it is necessary, first of all, to build a system of information for Ukrainian citizens about medical and care services. It should consist of two elements: a hotline in Ukrainian and Russian and a system of access to interpreters who would act as intermediaries between patients and doctors. It is also possible to create a network of doctors speaking Ukrainian or Russian, to whom patients who do not speak Polish would be directed in the first place. After the summer holidays, it will also be necessary to retrieve medical records (if available), translate them, and carry out an action of filling in questionnaires in the Internet system, especially about the state of health of children, including vaccinations. Due to the specificity of war refugees, it is also an urgent need to provide psychological and psychiatric care for those affected by war trauma. It will also be crucial to carry out efficient recognition of professional qualifications of medical personnel from Ukraine so that they can take up employment in Poland.

LABOR MARKET

Before the outbreak of the war, about 1.6–1.7 million foreigners were present in the Polish labor market, which accounted for about 10 percent of the labor force (Ministerstwo Rozwoju Pracy i Technologii 2022). Ukrainian citizens accounted for more than 80 percent of employed immigrants in Poland. More than 60 percent of them were men under the age of 45. Simplifying somewhat, this type of dependence of the Polish labor market on immigrants from one neighboring country can be called the “Ukrainization of the Polish labor market,” especially in selected sectors of the economy. At the same time, comparative studies show that the increase in the presence of immigrants in the Polish labor market has not negatively affected the situation of Poles in the labor market (Duszczuk and Matuszczyk 2018). What is also very interesting is that since 2018 the aspirations of foreigners, especially Ukrainians, in terms of the working conditions offered to them, were growing. This was happening in a situation of shortages in the labor market and high demand for immigrant labor. Foreigners, realizing the shortages, were inclined to

expect not only higher wages but also improved work conditions.¹

As already noted, among the war refugees from Ukraine there are about 500,000–600,000 females (of working age). Data from the Ministry of Family and Social Policy show that about 25–30 percent of them have taken up legal employment since they arrived in Poland. This data comes from a special register system created based on information from employers who employed war refugees from Ukraine. However, it is not known whether this employment was incidental or permanent. It is known, however, that non-standard contracts of a short-term nature were concluded with war refugees, mainly in sectors that do not require qualifications, such as trade, work in warehouses, food discount stores, or cleaning. The proposed salary was only slightly higher than the minimum provided by law. This means, on the one hand, a high desire for professional activation in Poland, but on the other hand, low wages and unstable employment conditions, which do not cover the full cost of living. It should be mentioned, however, that parents of Ukrainian children residing in Poland are entitled to receive an allowance of 500 PLN (approx. 120 euros) per month for each child. This helps improve, to some extent, the financial situation of refugee families in Poland. The employment sectors for Ukrainians in Poland show that these are rather male-oriented occupations. This means that females may find it more difficult to enter the labor market. The key factors here are learning the Polish language and arranging childcare so that they can take up employment or participate in training or qualification upgrading courses beforehand.

The appearance on the Polish labor market of several hundred thousand potential employees, mainly women, will certainly affect the level of employment and increase competition for jobs in sectors which primarily employ immigrants from Ukraine. However, this impact should be moderate in the short term and statistically insignificant in the medium term. The Polish labor market remains receptive and the level of unemployment remains well below the EU average. At the same time, a temporary reduction in the upward pressure on wages and improved working conditions by immigrants from Ukraine can be anticipated. Thus, the increase in the position of labor immigrants in the labor market, which took place until the outbreak of the war and the influx of additional people of working age ready to enter the labor market, may be limited or even inhibited. At the same time, the position of Ukrainian citizens in the labor market and their ability to take up work will depend on the impact of the economic slowdown awaiting Poland, high inflation

¹ Conclusions from research carried out under the project funded by the Polish National Science Centre, titled “In Search of Labour Market Security. Migration to and from Poland and the Attractiveness of the Polish Labour Market” (Reg. No. 2014/15/B/H55/01148).

(14 percent), and rising interest rates on loans, which will translate into demand for goods and services, including in sectors where labor migrants are mainly employed.

CONCLUSIONS

Polish governmental and local administration institutions and, in particular, Polish society responded to the influx of war refugees from Ukraine in a uniquely efficient way. The assistance provided has been and continues to be unprecedented. At the same time, it is important to recognize that there will be challenges of enormous scale in the coming months (and maybe years). They will concern, in particular, the provision of accommodation, access to quality education for Ukrainian children, the integration of Ukrainian women into the labor market, and ensuring the functioning of the health care system. Only then will it be possible to avoid the social exclusion of Ukrainian citizens residing in Poland and the emergence of tensions between Poles and Ukrainians. Considering the challenges ahead, we should assume that Poland alone cannot cope with these challenges. It is, therefore, necessary to seek solutions both through long-term support from international organizations and the European Union and through support for Ukrainians remaining in the country so that they are not forced to leave. It may also be necessary to create a general

system of voluntary relocation within the EU and to other countries. The autumn and winter months, as well as the development of the war in Ukraine, will be crucial in dealing with the challenges. The situation should be constantly monitored to flexibly adapt instruments both for the reception of war refugees and their integration.

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