

American University Kyiv

A Capstone Project

RETURNING OF UKRAINIAN FORCED MIGRANTS: MANAGEMENT OF THE POLICIES
IN UKRAINE, POLAND, AND GERMANY

ПОВЕРНЕННЯ УКРАЇНСЬКИХ ВИМУШЕНИХ ПЕРЕСЕЛЕНЦІВ: МЕНЕДЖМЕНТ ПОЛІТИК
В УКРАЇНІ, ПОЛЬЩІ ТА НІМЕЧЧИНІ

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ABSTRACT

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has led to an extensive population crisis, with numerous forced migrants seeking asylum in adjacent nations. Poland and Germany served as the primary destinations for a significant number of Ukrainians, collectively accommodating more than 2.2 million people compelled to abandon their homes due to unprovoked Russian military aggression against Ukraine.

This capstone project analyzes the policies and management measures implemented by Ukraine, Poland, and Germany to support the repatriation of Ukrainian forced migrants. The study explores the socio-political, economic, and logistical dimensions of repatriation policies, aiming to identify best practices, challenges, and potential pathways for sustainable reintegration of Ukrainian forced migrants.

Through a comparative analysis, the study explores the effectiveness of these policies, the challenges faced by returning migrants, and the socioeconomic impacts on both the host and home countries. The research utilizes an analytical approach, official data from Ukrainian and hosting countries' sources, and quantitative data analysis. The project analyzes governmental frameworks, international collaboration, and support mechanisms implemented in the three countries. It also describes the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international institutions, and host communities in supporting the migration process.

The findings aim to provide insights into best practices for managing forced migration and reintegration, offering recommendations for improving policy frameworks to facilitate the sustainable return of Ukrainian forced migrants to their homes.

This study enhances the comprehension of reintegration policies implemented by Germany, Poland, and Ukraine for displaced Ukrainians but also enriches the importance of further development and improvement of such policies in the coming years, emphasizing the importance of focusing on diverse groups of forced migrants and conducting diversified state policies.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 caused one of the most significant refugee crises in Europe after World War II, with more than 7.5 million Ukrainians forced to leave their homeland (Letki et al., 2022). The surge of Ukrainian refugees into adjacent nations, especially Poland and Germany, has necessitated a reassessment of immigration policies and procedures. Understanding the status of these forced migrants in different countries is crucial for developing effective return policies and integration strategies. The various legal frameworks and public attitudes toward forced migrants in these host states make the situation even more complicated (Letki et al., 2024; Duszczuk et al., 2023).

The ongoing war and the accelerated migration process have generated new topics for migration research. Scholars have analyzed the socio-demographic profile of individuals who had to leave Ukraine due to full-scale war (Brücker, 2022; Kohlenberger et al., 2023), their circumstances in the labor and housing markets (Duszczuk et al., 2023; Haase et al., 2024). Recent research has also focused on the intentions of forced migrants to remain abroad or to return home (Malynovska, 2023; Dörfler-Bolt and Kaindl, 2023). Most of the authors state that the majority of Ukrainian forced migrants were and still are planning to come back home. Such tendency is also confirmed by different poles also described in this work. Most of these studies offer significant institutional-level analysis and provide up-to-date socio-demographic data concerning Ukrainian forced migrants, as well as insights into their opportunities and obstacles concerning registration, housing, labor market access, and financial support. The analysis of current state policies and the development of practical recommendations toward the return of Ukrainian forced migrants remains understudied, and very few practical analyses are executed on this subject. This mismatch is happening because Ukraine is still fighting with the aggressor, allocating all possible resources to the army and focusing diverse security spheres against military threats. This means that resources for any alternative policies and analysis are minimal. The hosting states like Germany and Poland were primarily focused on properly accepting and supporting tasks for Ukrainian forced migrants, and the focus was placed on providing emergency support and temporary shelter, meaning dealing with

the integration of Ukrainian migrants within national societies rather than returning to Ukraine policies. Only in 2024, because of Ukrainian activity in this regard, have we seen several opinions from German and Polish officials, so the practical steps are now under preparation. The development of working mechanisms now is especially significant for Ukraine in the future as it will struggle to reintegrate its citizens during the post-war recovery period. Host countries like Poland and Germany, which have protected the main numbers of Ukrainian forced migrants, are very crucial parties in facilitating and endorsing the repatriation process. For Ukraine, the planned and managed return of its citizens is a critical component of post-war recovery, as it goes together with rebuilding communities, restoring labor markets, and improving the national economy. All of the abovementioned details are the main reasons why a special focus on combined multi-national initiatives and intergovernmental cooperation in the repatriation of Ukrainian migrants is made in this work.

Despite the return process, it faces various challenges, including ensuring safe and voluntary repatriation, rebuilding infrastructure, and providing adequate reintegration support. Poland and Germany must actively participate in their policy transformation from hosting migrants to facilitating their return. Only properly designed and well-managed policy, including all involved states – Ukraine, Germany, and Poland - may balance humanitarian responsibilities and domestic considerations in hosting states. This cooperation constitutes a pathway to success.

The research question of this work is: "What are the most effective practical policies for Ukraine, Germany, and Poland in migration management to facilitate the proper reintegration of Ukrainian forced migrants and ensure their return to Ukraine?"

CHAPTER 2. BACKGROUND

The relocation of Ukrainians resulting from the 2022 invasion has significantly affected both the migrants and their host countries. Poland and Germany have been key destinations, collectively hosting millions of Ukrainian refugees. Poland, which shares a border with Ukraine, became a primary entry point and provided immediate humanitarian support. It currently accepts 981,335 Ukrainian refugees (UNHCR, Operational Data Portal). With its strong economy and established migration policies, Germany became another significant destination, offering refuge and employment opportunities to displaced Ukrainians. The current count of Ukrainian forced migrants in Germany is 1,222,695 (UNHCR, Operational Data Portal).

Alongside the management policy for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), currently estimated at approximately 3.5 million individuals (IOM, Ukraine Internal Displacement Report), Ukraine faces one of the most complex and long-lasting programs of return and reintegration of Ukrainian forced migrants to their homes. Successful implementation of such policies will form the base of the Ukrainian post-war recovery and rapid development of the country, when mistakes and wrong directions may lead to unfavorable socioeconomic circumstances. These reasons make the topic essential for Ukrainian political programs and business initiatives.

2.1. Status of Ukrainian forced migrants in Germany

Germany is actively supporting Ukraine in the ongoing conflict, not only in terms of military and budgetary issues but also in terms of humanitarian agendas, accommodating and addressing the immediate needs of Ukrainian refugees within its borders. Most of them are women with children, accounting for 80% of their total number in Germany (Brücker et al., 2022).

Germany has emerged as a primary destination for Ukrainian refugees, accommodating over one million displaced individuals by 2024 under the EU's Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), enacted on

March 4, 2022, with subsequent extensions in September 2023 and June 2024, prolonging temporary protection for Ukrainian forced migrants until March 2026.

The status of Ukrainian forced migrants in Germany reflects a combination of legal protections, integration efforts, and ongoing challenges stemming from the scale of displacement created by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The legal and social assistance for these individuals is thoroughly detailed in the European Union's Temporary Protection Directive.

Ukrainians displaced by the war are granted temporary protection status. This status includes residency rights—Ukrainians can live in Germany without going through the formal asylum process; work authorization—all immigrants have unrestricted access to the German labor market, allowing them to work in any sector; and access to services—displaced people get medical care, education for their children, and welfare benefits, such as help with housing and money for basic needs.

Germany has prioritized the integration of Ukrainian migrants into society and the workforce through language support—offering complimentary German language courses to facilitate daily life and enhance employability; employment programs—the Federal Employment Agency and affiliated organizations aid in job placement, particularly for skilled professionals; and educational access—Ukrainian children and youth are incorporated into the German education system, while universities provide expedited admissions for displaced students.

Ukrainian forced migrants can reunite with their families under certain conditions, access financial and banking services, and relocate to another EU state before issuing a residence permit. Individuals are authorized to travel without restrictions in EU nations, excluding their country of residence, for 90 days within 180 days following the issuance of a residence permit in the host EU nation (European Commission, Migration and Home Affairs).

The framework regulating relations with refugees in Germany has a diversified legislative structure. It consists of various levels of governance and numerous stakeholders with specific duties and

obligations. The entrance, reception, and integration of migrants in Germany are regulated by many national and international laws, orders, and rules that became used due to the growing and changing dynamics of refugee influxes during escalations in different parts of the world and the activation of forced migrants movement through Europe (war in Afghanistan in 2001-2021, ongoing civil war in Syria in 2011, full-scale war in Ukraine started in 2022). The German Government's federal, state, and local authorities play a significant role in this process. A broad and diversified network of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and active civil society are also participating in the practical implementation of the migration process inside the country. To obtain forms of protection (international or alternative), migrants who apply for asylum must first comply with the asylum procedure. The German Asylum Act forms the core regulations governing the asylum process, which, together with additional legislation, such as the EURODAC Regulation, the Dublin Regulation, the Asylum Procedure Directive, the Qualifications Directive, and the Admission Directive, form the German multilevel migration system. The leading institution that oversees the asylum process is the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF). Federal states organize the execution of support in sites. This support usually consists of the primary fundamental necessities of refugees, including foodstuff, residence for stay, and healthcare, which they can receive upon arriving in a specified local district of the state.

Refugees are assigned to federal states according to predetermined principles. The primary data for such allocation is tax income and the size of inhabitants living in the federal state, which are counted to form the proportional amount of refugees for further allocation. All these measures are aimed at optimizing the asylum process. The service delivery environment and local labor market influence the second distribution phase within federal states. The personal preferences and existing networks of asylum seekers also play an essential role in the final stage of the migration procedure (Kanas, A., & Kosyakova, Y., 2023). To obtain the right to undertake the asylum process, the migrants should receive proof of arrival from the federal state of their destination, which confirms their arrival details. This document provides the refugees the right to temporary stay in the country and benefit from all rights of asylum applicants.

Before this, BAMF verifies if Germany is responsible for the asylum process and, after confirmation of responsibility, conducts a personal interview with the migrants to arbitrate the asylum claim. The forms of protection that could be established for those who applied for asylum are prohibition (ban) on repatriation, subsidiary protection, refugee status, and the right to asylum. Each form has an individual duration and provides possibilities for residence permits. Migrants are required to leave the country if the asylum claim is denied. If the leaving is not performed by intention, the deportation is used.

NGOs play a pivotal role in service provision for refugees. German state entities closely engage with NGOs to deliver language training, psychosocial assistance, and labor market initiatives. The Federal Government primarily establishes the legislative foundation for refugees' integration, including language training and labor market access parameters, while the German federal states focus on practical execution. Job centers collaborate with leading welfare organizations, professional associations, chambers of commerce, and employer and employee groups to select and develop instruments and methods for integration, as provided for by law when implementing active labor market policies. Non-governmental organizations are essential collaborators in delivering immediate aid and fostering sustainable integration. Services offered to refugees comprise mentoring initiatives, targeted therapy assistance, career counseling, and specialized projects for finding jobs.

The initial phase of the nationwide survey conducted by the Institute for Employment Research (IAB) among thousands of Ukrainian refugees in Germany in 2022 revealed that a majority of forced migrants had secured proper housing in the private sector shortly after their arrival and actively were planning to engage in the German labor market, with 18 percent already employed (Brücker et al. 2022). One year post-arrival, the employment rate for Ukrainian refugees is estimated at 28 percent (Kosyakova et al., 2023).

Language training is essential to integrating refugees in Germany (EWL Migration Platform Report, 2023). Germany has a specific need when English is not usable in work and social communications, so learning German became an integral part of the integration process. Ukrainian

migrants predominantly listed the acquisition of the German language as their primary area of need, followed by employment opportunities (Brücker et al., 2023).

Being the most economically powerful state in the EU and one of the most developed in the world, Germany made an outstanding, significant contribution to helping Ukrainian forced migrants and established and adopted sophisticated rules and practices to integrate Ukrainian displaced persons into the German economic, social, and cultural environment.

Despite Germany's interest in maintaining the most skilled and educated professionals (so-called skilled migration) and granting them citizenship, the country is also interested in developing a long-term policy to support the main number of displaced persons returning to Ukraine after the war ends. Such a diversified approach benefits Ukrainian and German further development and growth.

2.2. Status of Ukrainian forced migrants in Poland

Poland, bordering Ukraine, has emerged as the principal shelter for roughly one million forced migrants as of 2024. The Polish Government offers a comprehensive support framework, encompassing residency and work permits under the EU's Temporary Protection Directive (TPD); access to social benefits, education, and healthcare; financial aid, including cash-based programs for the most vulnerable migrant groups; and other assistance.

Ukrainians granted asylum or temporary protection in Poland possess the same rights as Polish citizens, except for voting and participating in elections. They are required to adhere to all rules and procedures mandated for Polish communities (UNHCR, 2022a). The Polish authorities have provided Ukrainians the ability to receive a national identity number (PESEL) to facilitate their integration into Polish society and access to social benefits, the education system, medical facilities, and the establishment of their businesses. With its assistance, Ukrainians can acquire a Trusted Profile and a tax identification number called "NIP." As of now, almost 1.5 million (1,507,461) PESEL UKR numbers are

allocated to Ukrainian nationals, with less than one million (997,932) remaining active (Studia Europejskie – Studies in European Affairs, 4/2023).

Ukrainian refugees receive residency, social assistance, education, healthcare, and access to the labor market without the necessity of asylum proceedings. Temporary protection is effective for one year, with potential extensions contingent upon the prevailing conflict circumstances. The temporary protection method enables arrivals to work legally without delay, obviating the necessity of residing in refugee camps without employment rights. Fifty percent of Ukrainian refugees in Poland secured housing through employer assistance. The capacity to utilize Ukrainians in the workplace distinguished Poland from other recipient nations and facilitated rapid adaptation to the work environment (E. Kamyshnykova, 2024).

Ukrainian children are integrated into the Polish education system, with schools adapting to accommodate increased enrollment. Remote learning options tied to Ukrainian curricula are also popular among refugees.

As the country with the most refugees in the Regional Refugee Response Plan (along with the Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and the Republic of Moldova), which UNHCR and its partners created, Poland saw a complicated situation with a range of levels of social and economic inclusion, resulting in diverse humanitarian needs.

The Refugee Response Plan has expanded from 142 partners in its initial version to 313 partners in 2024, primarily comprising national and local organizations, in acknowledgment of the targeted response. Ongoing efforts will emphasize the vital contributions of regional and national NGOs and refugee-led groups to guarantee their visibility, access to finance and capacity-building opportunities, and appropriate acknowledgment of their essential role.

In 2023, financial support for Polish NGOs delivering humanitarian aid to Ukrainian refugees diminished compared to 2022. The establishment of the Pooled Fund for the Refugee Response in Poland

(POP Fund) sought to maintain continuous assistance from institutional and private donors. The POP Fund, operationally similar to humanitarian funds established in other circumstances, is overseen by the Polish Center for International Aid (PCPM) (POP Fund, 2024) and is designed to facilitate further engagement of corporate donors.

It is projected that 1.1 million refugees will reside in Poland due to probable demographic shifts. Women, children, and elderly individuals comprise almost 90 percent of the total refugee demographic in Poland (UNHCR, 2024).

All Polish governmental and private partner institutions focus on better integrating Ukrainian refugees into Polish social, economic, and educational lives. Still, diversified reintegration policies must be developed by Polish institutions to stimulate the return of Ukrainian migrants after the war ends.

2.3. Migration Trend and Situation in Ukraine

The migration trends stemming from the conflict in Ukraine illustrate a multifaceted interaction of elements affecting the choice to remain in host nations or repatriate. The persistent instability in Ukraine, marked by security issues and economic difficulties, hinders the chances for return migration (Husein & Wagner, 2023; Alrababa'h et al., 2020). Studies demonstrate that refugees' inclinations to return are shaped by their assessments of safety, economic prospects, and the political environment in Ukraine (Husein & Wagner, 2023; Alrababa'h et al., 2020).

The most recent projections of the Ukrainian Institute for Demography and Social Studies indicate that the population of Ukrainians within the country may range from 26 to 35 million by 2033. The director of the Institute, Ella Libanova, considers the projection of 35 million people to be very optimistic and will depend on many unknown factors resulting from the period of the active phase of the war. The longer the war remains in full-scale active phase, the smaller number of forced migrants will plan to return home. In the coming years, Ukraine may face a demographic crisis no European nation had before (Romashenko T., 2024).

According to a recent report by the International Organization of Migration (IOM, 2024), Ukraine has a substantial number of internally displaced persons (IDPs), which is equivalent to 3,555,000 individuals, in addition to forced migrants.

The highest proportion of internally displaced persons (IDPs) was recorded in Dnipropetrovska Oblast (14%) and Kharkivska Oblast (12%). The most significant percentage of internally displaced persons (IDPs) comes from Donetsk Oblast (28%). The predominant movement of intra-regional relocation persists in Khersonska (93%), Donetsk (86%), Zaporizka (85%), and Kharkivska (83%) Oblasts. Thirty percent (1,052,000) of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) are documented residents in frontline areas.

Seventy percent of de facto internally displaced persons indicated a desire to remain in their current location for more than the next three months. In contrast, thirteen percent were considering returning to their areas of origin. Of those contemplating repatriation, the majority (62%) indicated they would only proceed after the war's end (IOM, 2024).

The legal status of IDPs is governed by the Law of Ukraine, titled "Ensuring the Rights and Freedoms of Internally Displaced Persons" (2014), which has had several changes in recent years (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine).

Understanding these dynamics is essential for formulating effective return policies by addressing the needs and expectations of Ukrainian forced migrants and internally displaced persons. Ukraine faced the complicated and long-term challenge of developing and implementing a diversified policy for the reintegration of its citizens who had to leave their homes because of the war.

CHAPTER 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Theoretical Frameworks Used in the Capstone

The theoretical frameworks guiding this research include migration theory, integration theory, and policy analysis. Within these frameworks, the study investigates why people migrate, the problems refugees face, and how well current policies help them return and become part of society again.

The focus is placed on return migration theories from a theoretical perspective while preparing this work.

Numerous scholars have advanced the study of return migration by categorizing various types of returnees, such as Gmelch (1980) and Bovenkerk (1974). Cerase (1974) defines four typologies of return migration: "Return of Failure," "Return of Conservatism," "Return of Retirement," and "Return of Innovation" (Cerase 1974, 254). King (2000) proposes an alternative typology of returned migrants based on their stay in the country of origin: occasional returns, seasonal returns, temporary returns, and permanent returns (King, 2000). Batistella (2018) identifies four primary sorts of return: return of achievement, return of completion, return of setback, and return of crisis or forced return. This classification included two variable parameters: the time for return and the determination (decision) to return.

All previously mentioned research and types of return policies require additional consideration when advancing the examination of this topic. The continuing conflict in Ukraine is the most catastrophic war in Europe since the conclusion of World War II, and the consequent migration problem imparts distinct characteristics on the behavior of displaced individuals, so affecting the repatriation process during and after the war. Scholars will examine this soon.

3.2. Methodology Used in the Capstone

This capstone project employs analytical approaches to examine the policies and practices concerning Ukrainian forced migrants in Germany, Poland, and Ukraine.

While preparing this Capstone, I explored existing publications, scientific research, official reports, and studies conducted by international organizations, as well as official documents from Ukrainian, German, and Polish governmental bodies related to forced Ukrainian migrants and their prospective reintegration into Ukraine.

In reviewing European nations' migration and return policies, I employed comparative analysis to identify the most suitable ones for application in the Ukrainian context. This comparison includes positive and negative cases of return policies implemented by Poland, the Baltic States, and other EU countries, providing potential ideas for Ukraine.

CHAPTER 4. RETURN AND REINTEGRATION POLICIES FOR UKRAINIAN FORCED MIGRANTS

4.1 Return policies in Germany: legal framework and practice

Germany is typically considered a country that applies significant enforcement capabilities for forced migrants' return. However, its implementation is notably selective due to different historical, cultural, and economic factors (Leerkes et al., 2020). In 2023, in response to the increase of irregular arrivals in Germany, the German government applied a new regulation mainly designed to enhance the efficiency of return processes. Germany effectively applied various return policies. Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) operations in Germany, controlled by IOM - the International Organization for Migration, are mostly executed under the Reintegration and Emigration Program for Asylum-Seekers in Germany/Government Assisted Repatriation Program (REAG/GARP). This federal and state government initiative is financed by the European Union and supported by different institutions and organizations, including local authorities. NGOs are essential in supporting this program (Caselli et al., 2022). Another established policy is Forced Return and Detention, applying to all migrants staying in the country without authorization and consists of preparation actions (when an individual is under an entry prohibition) and secure detention (when an individual has a substantial threat to their own or others' lives or has been convicted of criminal acts (AIDA, 2023)). The initial preparation category is enacted when an individual is under an entry prohibition and poses a substantial threat to their own or others' lives or internal security or is convicted of criminal acts, including those seeking asylum.

The country also implements alternatives to return policies, such as Regularization programs, under which temporary residence permits can be issued under certain circumstances, such as having a tolerated status for a period over 18 months and, as a result, enforceable deportation is not implemented, Temporary Protection and Humanitarian Protection, which extends temporary protection to Ukrainian forced migrants who were resided in Ukraine before February 24, 2022, as well as individuals without

nationality and foreign citizens and their families who obtained international protection leaving Ukraine after this date (AIDA, 2022). Furthermore, temporary protection is granted to Ukrainians possessing any form of resident permit in Germany or those whose residency was previously allowed.

Another policy employed to regulate migration is the Informal or tolerated stay predicated on extraordinary circumstances, encapsulated in the legislative provision of *Duldung*, which signifies the right to remain for those granted toleration status. *Duldung* functions as a pragmatic solution for the non-deportability of certain migrants, effectively recognizing their presence in the national context while refraining from granting them formal legalization. These steps, however, indicate a transition of migration policy in Germany towards more enduring residency alternatives as opposed to temporary regularization procedures and may have a negative impact on the implementation of return policies towards Ukrainian forced migrants.

4.2. Return policies in Poland: legal framework and practice

Following the start of full-scale war in Ukraine, Poland has established a mechanism to manage substantial influxes of Ukrainian forced migrants by offering various forms of support, aid, and programs of voluntary return. The programs assist those forced migrants who choose to depart voluntarily. The primary source of funding for such programs comes from the EU. Among Ukrainian forced migrants, the central part of voluntary repatriation is performed without the implementation of voluntary return programs and governmental support (Conte et al., 2024).

Poland examines various return policies. Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) is a voluntary return program that provides substantial assistance to migrants who decide to return with their intention. Detention and Forced Return (DFR) is a recently applied program that consists of the implementation of strict border protocols, giving the Polish Border Guard the right to issue instant dismissal orders for migrants who violate the rules of border crossing. These orders take immediate effect, differentiating them from EU return process standards.

In Poland, alternatives to repatriation policies include regularization programs and processes, temporary protection, and humanitarian protection, which secure Ukrainian forced migrants. An informal category of tolerated residence established under exceptional circumstances, comprising two types of cases: one granted for humanitarian purposes to protect individuals unable to return due to the threat of human rights abuses; the other, termed "tolerated stay," allocated to applicants whose repatriation is unfeasible due to different factors, including logistical challenges and safety issues in the country of origin. Implementation of such tolerated policies has a negative impact on the return policy implementation of Ukrainian forced migrants from Poland. It has to be combined with joined initiatives of the Ukrainian and Polish governments in terms of the return of Ukrainians back home after the war ends, or a more secure stay in Ukraine can be implemented.

4.3 Reintegration Policies in Ukraine: Legal Framework, Practice, and Current Initiatives

The ongoing conflict and the need to support returning migrants shape Ukraine's emigration policies. The government has established initiatives to facilitate the reintegration of returnees, including access to social services and employment opportunities (Alrababa'h et al., 2020). However, Ukraine's lack of stability and security poses significant challenges for return migration, as many refugees express concerns about the safety and viability of returning home (Husein & Wagner, 2023; Alrababa'h et al., 2020). The legal framework governing return migration is still developing. In November 2024, the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, announced the creation of a new Ministry of National Unity and its appointed Minister, Oleksiy Chernyshov, who will be responsible for the development and implementation of national policy related to all Ukrainians residing in other countries as well as those who were temporarily moved from their place of living within Ukraine (Suspilne Media, 2024). On December 4, 2024, the Government of Ukraine decided to rename the Ministry of Reintegration of Temporary Occupied Territories to the Ministry of National Unity, enlarging its focus from internal Ukrainian affairs to international ones. On December 18, during a meeting with the Prime Minister of

Poland, Donald Tusk, in Kyiv, Zelenskiy emphasized the importance of establishing good cooperation between the newly created ministry and Poland and Germany. (Ukrinform, 2024). On January 16, 2025, newly appointed minister Oleksiy Chernyshov met his German colleague Wolfgang Schmidt, Head of the Federal Chancellery (Ministry of National Unity of Ukraine, 2025). During this meeting, the parties discussed the future repatriation policies to be developed and implemented by both countries. From the Ukrainian perspective, we observe that our government has hopefully started to pay significant attention to the return of Ukrainian forced migrants, and fundamental policies in this field are under preparation.

CHAPTER 5. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Focuses and priorities of Ukraine, Germany, and Poland

According to different research, most Ukrainian forced migrants indicate a desire to return to Ukraine. Such a positive intention could change significantly over time. A poll conducted by Info Sapiens in 2022 showed that 63% of participants intended to return home. Such a high percentage was also confirmed by another poll conducted by the United Nations High Commission on Refugees involving almost 4,000 Ukrainian refugee households in spring 2023, showing that 14% of participants expressed their will to return permanently within the nearest months, 62% aspired to return in the future, and only 6% indicated plans not to return (UNHCR 2023, Dombrovskis et al. 2024). A study conducted by the Factum Group during the summer of 2023 revealed that 64% of participants wished to return home. Specific surveys (e.g., AI for Good Foundation 2024) indicate that the number of refugees desiring to return may diminish the longer they remain in their host nations (Mykhailyshyna et al. 2023). Surveys conducted during 2024 indicate that the expressed intentions of displaced Ukrainians in the EU to return are still high (UNHCR, 2024b; Zaika & Vakhitov, 2024). However, as time passes, the extent of concrete planning for return diminishes. Such negative trends underscore the necessity to formulate and execute well-planned policies focused on facilitating the repatriation of forced migrants and preventing a potential demographic crisis and the crucial circumstances Ukraine is facing.

A comparative analysis of the policies in Germany, Poland, and Ukraine reveals significant differences in state focus and priorities regarding the management of Ukrainian forced migrants. Germany emphasizes integration and service access (Letki et al., 2022), while Poland prioritizes rapid response and temporary protection (Duszczyk et al., 2023). Ukraine focuses on facilitating return migration during ongoing conflict and instability (Alrababa'h et al., 2020). During the second half of 2024 and the beginning of 2025, Ukraine conducted a more active approach to reintegrating Ukrainian forced migrants by establishing the new Ministry of National Unity of Ukraine.

Considering such different approaches, Ukraine, together with its partners, must develop an effective, diversified policy and implementation plan for the return of Ukrainian forced migrants to Ukraine during the war and after it ends. The prolonged duration of the war, which is already lasting three years in its active phase, will result in an increasing number of Ukrainians becoming permanently displaced. The longer Ukrainian forced migrants leave abroad, the more they may change their further intention to non-return.

It is essential to focus on several possible initiatives that may help facilitate the return of Ukrainian forced migrants. One is investments by German and Polish states and enterprises in Ukraine during and after the war. Foreign direct investments (FDI) in Ukraine will establish the base for sustainable development of the country's socioeconomic potential and strengthen the defense industry needed to fight Russia in case the subsequent aggression happens in the future. The increased FDIs in Ukraine will set up the influence and secure the expansion of Polish and German capital in Eastern Europe. Such practical involvement by investing funds in Ukraine can motivate the governments of Germany and Poland to encourage some Ukrainian refugees to return to Ukraine and be employed in their companies in Ukraine. But even if such a return process does not happen in the short term, establishing modern European production facilities in Ukraine with highly motivated and well-paid staff will positively influence the return of Ukrainian refugees from other less wealthy European countries in medium- and long-term perspectives. Germany is already initiating these steps. In May 2023, German concern Rheinmetall announced its plans to form a joint venture with Ukrainian state-owned company Ukroboronprom. The main focus of such cooperation is manufacturing and repairing military vehicles in Ukraine on a newly constructed joint venture facility in the western part of Ukraine (Interfax-Ukraine, 2023). Due to ongoing war and security reasons, the details of such a partnership remain undisclosed.

Foreign Direct Investment is a significant source of capital and is essential in financial support. Domestic savings must also be united and used in the process of Ukrainian post-war reconstruction together with FDI. Western and Southwestern parts of Ukraine, which benefit from better security due to

their proximity to EU markets and greater distance from the front lines, will be the most interesting from the investment point of view. War insurance programs, which have already been implemented in Ukraine, are expected to be the most cost-effective in these regions due to the lower risk of damage and destruction. Such parameters can be used to prioritize the reconstruction process and focus on areas significantly supported by foreign capital. Establishing fortified economic production clusters first in Western regions of Ukraine and Kyiv and moving towards the East parts will allow the mobilization of domestic and foreign resources and achieve better results. Because of their advantages in terms of security and market access, Western and Southwestern regions of Ukraine are in the most outstanding position to draw in refugees, internally displaced people, and foreign direct investment during the ongoing military conflict.

Germany and Poland could consider Switzerland's recent initiatives to repatriate Ukrainian refugees (SWI 2023), which anticipate a departure timeframe of six to nine months following the termination of temporary protection status. To facilitate this procedure, preliminary financial support has been suggested, with potential sums ranging from CHF 1,000 to CHF 4,000 (EUR 1,050 to EUR 4,200) per individual, contingent upon the departure time—the sooner the departure, the greater the financial aid. Norway has recently implemented a comparable repatriation scheme. The Norwegian government allocates NOK 17,500 (EUR 1,500) to Ukrainian refugees for repatriation and reintegration (UDI, 2023).

5.2. Business initiatives and actions

Business initiatives and their collaboration with government programs could significantly aid the repatriation of forced migrants to Ukraine. Establishing partnerships between the public and commercial sectors may improve the effectiveness of reintegration initiatives and facilitate the economic advancement of forced migrants during their return process.

German and Polish enterprises can lead in reconstructing Ukrainian infrastructure and the housing sector destroyed by the war. Such foreign investments can potentially develop newly constructed

residential and infrastructure complexes that offer housing and employment opportunities for Ukrainian forced migrants and internally displaced persons. This could be achieved through collaboration with state authorities and providing long-term financing and appropriate insurance capabilities.

Ukrainian businesses are also capable of fostering corporate collaboration and generating added value. A successful illustration of this type of collaboration is the logistic project of the Ukrainian investment fund Dragon Capital in the western region of Ukraine. During the full-scale war, Dragon Capital, having direct financing from the EBRD, was able to develop the M10 Lviv Industrial Park.

5.3. Practical steps of Ukraine to improve the reintegration of Ukrainian forced migrants

Practical implications of Ukrainian policy toward Ukrainian forced migrants are under formation. The newly established Ministry of National Unity aims to prepare a concept and implementation plan for successfully reintegrating Ukrainians who stay abroad.

Some practical recommendations may involve prioritizing and diversifying focus to ensure a quicker return of Ukrainian forced migrants. From a demographic perspective, we could prioritize the prompt return of mothers with children living in host countries. Such return may be motivated by unique financial and social benefits from the Ukrainian government with the support of international organizations and coordinated with the policies of host states. The benefits may include obtaining free education for children after they are back in Ukraine, long-term financing for purchasing housing, and additional taxation preference for mothers who have decided to return to Ukraine with their children after the war ends.

Another segment of the Ukrainian focus may be the entrepreneurial category of those who stay abroad. Despite that, German and Polish governments will do everything in their power to keep for a long time in their countries those Ukrainians who were able to integrate qualitatively into various spheres of their societies and will also be focused on employed professionals; they might be in parallel interested that some part of Ukrainian entrepreneurs are back home and free the market for their private business

development. Ukraine should encourage and facilitate such policy by reaching agreements with German and Polish governments and providing unique financial and tax benefits to Ukrainian entrepreneurs who are back in Ukraine. Such benefits may include taxational vacations (tax minimization or termination for some time), long-term financing for small and medium businesses, and establishing different clusters and funds to unite the entrepreneurs from a specific area and attract additional investment with such tools.

The Ukrainian government may also consider several programs to motivate returning Ukrainian forced migrants after the war ends. Upon return, land and housing (real estate) could be a beneficial initiative. The ongoing Russian military aggression in Ukraine is destroying prosperous cities and villages and creating devastated wastelands, displacing hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians from their residences. No repatriation policy could be successfully implemented without a destination to return to. To solve this issue, the Ukrainian government should provide refugees a legitimate chance to obtain new households in Ukraine shortly after their return. In this scenario, a powerful motivation for the return of yesterday's forced migrants could be the provision of a free plot on which they may construct their own homes.

One-time repatriation payments could serve as an additional successful method. In this scenario, the Ukrainian government may consider the experience of its Swiss or Norwegian counterparts by offering financial incentives for individuals to return to the country rather than for departing from it. The level of financial aid may vary based on the category of refugees applying to participate in the program.

To prevent possible mistakes, Ukraine should study the successful and unsuccessful cases of reintegration policies of CEE and Baltic States countries and use shared insights from their experience. For example, the experience of Poland in returning its migrants who left the country in the early 2000th and, after returning to Poland, chose the so-called double return migration and decided more profoundly to leave the country for the second time. This happened for different reasons, including difficulties in finding a job, Poland's developing economy and infrastructure at that time, and others (White A., 2013).

This work could not describe several migrations and return flows in Baltic countries. Still, it is worth attention to the Latvian experience of failed return migration in the late 1990th – early 2000th when those people who migrated after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 decided to come back home. After they arrived home because of difficulties in finding work, hostile attention society to those who were absent for a long time, leaving and working in other countries, and wrong governmental policies in migration with passive communication of the importance of those returnees in life and economy of the country the negative trend in their adaptation started to escalate. As a result, almost 2/3 of all who returned home decided to leave again in 3-4 years after return (Melke Z., 2024). These are notable examples to consider and avoid such mistakes.

A sophisticated national demographic policy and a successful program for returning home for Ukrainian forced migrants are essential for the future development of Ukraine, its security, and prosperity.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS

Ukraine is facing serious demographic challenges, and fighting with them remains the same priority as fighting with the aggressor by military tools. The policies described in this work emphasize the necessity of a coordinated approach that focuses on the different needs, expectations, and threats of Ukrainian forced migrants and aims to facilitate their reintegration into Ukraine from short- and long-term perspectives.

The future success of Ukraine is closely dependent on the demographic conditions within the country, and the prompt and sustained return of Ukrainian refugees is crucial in this context. Ukraine must mobilize all available resources for this task and collaborate with its strongly supported European partners like Germany and Poland to create well-working mechanisms for the effective return of Ukrainian migrants settled in these countries. Many of those who left Ukraine after 2022 had very different reasons for that (such as the destruction of their homes, loss of employment due to fear and security risks, because of old parents or young children, and many other reasons). It is essential to restore trust between the state and its citizens by providing security, employment, housing, healthcare, education, and other opportunities in post-war Ukraine. The 'easy way back' policy should provide no penalties or limitations for military conscript men who left abroad to avoid military service in Ukraine. Of course, such an attitude should not be used by those individuals who left Ukraine using criminal or other law violations, which would be the case for Ukrainian and foreign law enforcement agencies in the future.

Future research and policy development must focus on addressing the challenges faced by Ukrainian migrants and promoting sustainable solutions for their return and reintegration. These solutions are in the plane of intergovernmental, business, and social interactions. As the primary beneficiary of such successful reintegration policies, only Ukraine can lead and guide the process with state institutions of another country, international and local businesses, and formulating the proper agenda for Ukrainian and international societies.

The return of Ukrainian forced migrants presents a complex challenge for Ukrainian, Polish, and German political and state officials. Despite the different approaches of Ukraine and the host states described in this work, a mutually beneficial policy should be developed and implemented. The focus of such policy should be placed on securing the future reintegration of Ukrainian citizens who left the country because of war. This will significantly affect how quickly Ukraine will recover in the difficult post-war period. Post-war efforts must be focused on the eastern and southern parts of Ukraine to avoid a poverty trap and address demographic development imbalances between the regions, even though the western part of the country is expected to obtain short-term economic improvements in the nearest time after the war ends or temporary terminates.

Ukraine must be prepared and implement deregulation investment policies to create the necessary circumstances for large-scale repatriation. This will attract foreign investments to Ukraine and create an investment boom following the end of the war. Implementing various investment plans that attract foreign capital to Ukraine would indirectly increase the repatriation of forced migrants. Even if this does not happen in a short period, in the medium to long term perspective, due to the presence of European and joint enterprises in Ukraine, Ukrainian forced migrants will be planning to return and will try to obtain jobs in these companies. Securing the interest of international investors for Ukraine's postwar reconstruction will be a serious challenge for the nation. The most efficient strategy to enhance labor input is optimizing the recruitment and retraining of internally displaced persons and forced migrants. The political power must establish clear, trustworthy, and sometimes challenging communication with its citizens to formulate policies that effectively balance the necessity of army mobilization with the predictability of working relationships. So-called economic deferment from the army will become transparent, and undoubtedly, with proper recognition of the civil society and military service people, it is a necessary and important tool for further development of the economy, tax generation, and support to the army. To encourage the return of Ukrainian forced migrants, it is essential to ensure their safety and create robust opportunities for employment in Ukraine.

It remains essential to make significant progress in the fight against corruption, which will also indirectly accelerate the return of internally displaced persons and forced migrants to their homes in Ukraine. This work is dedicated to the topic's great importance and aims to facilitate further studies into effective return policies during and after the war in Ukraine.

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