



# Welcoming Ukrainian refugees in the EU

## Preliminary insights on socio-economic consequences

### • Introduction

The Russian federation, led by Vladimir Putin, launched a military offensive against Ukraine on 24 February 2022, triggering a humanitarian disaster on the European continent of an unprecedented scale since WWII. Faced with violent shelling, combats, and other massacres on the ground, which have caused a great deal of both military and civilian casualties and stranded part of the Ukrainian population with very little resources,<sup>1</sup> around 10 million of Ukrainians have fled their homes to find safety in other regions of Ukraine but also in neighbouring countries, Poland at the forefront.

Refugees have been met with open arms in the EU as heads of states and governments, and citizens alike have displayed true solidarity towards the Ukrainian people, in line with the European values enshrined in our treaties (Article 2 TEU).

Nonetheless, the influx of millions of Ukrainians in such a short amount of time will certainly have socio-economic consequences for our societies. This paper provides some preliminary insights on these consequences, although uncertainty remains a key element to consider in our analysis.

This paper first examines the situation today and how it seems to be evolving both in terms of the number and profile of those forced to leave their country, and in terms of what the EU's response has been so far. The second part of the paper outlines more specifically the need to guarantee emergency assistance for the refugees, which requires a considerable number of resources, both human and material, to be mobilised in the most affected Member States. The last part focuses on the long-term integration of those Ukrainian refugees who wish to stay in the EU, and, despite the tragedy at hand, the 'benefits' it could have for the EU.

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POLICY BRIEF  
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**Klervi Kerneis**  
Associate Research  
Fellow on gender  
equality, Jacques  
Delors Institute

## I • What is the situation today?

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than **4.3 million people** have been forced out of Ukraine –almost one tenth of the whole Ukrainian population. On top of this, at least an additional 7.1 million have been displaced inside the country,<sup>2</sup> mostly from the East, where most of the hostilities have been taking place, towards the central and western regions.<sup>3</sup> Refugees crossed borders into **neighbouring countries**, including Member States of the EU. They were **2.5 million to cross the borders of Poland, 660,000 of Romania, 400,000 of Hungary and 305,000 of Slovakia**, the four Member states with a direct border with Ukraine. A great many also went to the Republic of Moldova, as well as Russia or Belarus (see Table 1).

**TABLE 1.** Number of refugees crossing neighbouring countries' borders

Poland	2,514,504
Romania	662,751
Hungary	404,021
Slovakia	304,983
Moldova	401,704
Russia	350,632
Belarus	18,060

▲ Source: UNHRC, 6 April 2022

While about 1.5 million refugees still remain in Poland, many that entered the EU through the border states have moved on to other EU countries. According to EU Commissioner Ylva Johansson, Poland took the bulk of arrivals, but smaller countries like Austria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic and Estonia are also facing a great challenge relative to their size.<sup>4</sup>

To put the abovementioned figures into perspective, around 6.2 million people applied for asylum in EU countries between 2014 and 2021 (8 years), 2.5 million in 2015 and 2016 alone, during the peak of the 'refugee crisis'.<sup>5</sup> But contrary to the European response of the 'waves' of refugees fleeing Afghanistan, Iraq or Syria, which focused largely on securing the European external borders, the EU Member states have shown true solidarity with the Ukrainian people and refugees. On

4 March 2022, one week after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Council unanimously agreed to activate, for the first time since its adoption in 2001 (following the conflicts in former Yugoslavia), the **Temporary Protection Directive**. Under the temporary protection status granted by the Directive, Ukrainian citizens, who, since 2017, already enjoy visa-free travel stays in the EU for up to 90 days, are entitled to certain rights, for at least 1 year and up to 3 years, including the right to have access to suitable accommodation or housing, to receive social welfare and medical care, to study and to work, as well as the right to family reunification and to certain guarantees when it comes to the asylum procedure.<sup>6</sup> This marks a true shift in the EU migration policy and will certainly be very useful to ensure decent living conditions for Ukrainian refugees, **800,000 of whom have already applied for this protection**, and this is increasing quickly according to Commissioner Ylva Johansson.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, to support Member States in making sure that Ukrainians have access to these basic rights, the EU adopted the **CARE and CARE+ regulations** (Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe) to allow for the reallocation of the remaining 2014-2020 cohesion funds (the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived) and to make available around €10 billion from the 2022 Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe ('REACT-EU') fund,<sup>8</sup> amounting to a total envelop of about €17 billion. In addition, the European Commission, together with the Canadian government, launched a global pledging campaign that raised €9.1 billion, as well as an additional €1 billion in loans from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. This money will cater not only the needs of those who fled to the EU (€8.3 billion), but also of those internally displaced in Ukraine (€1.8 billion).<sup>9</sup>

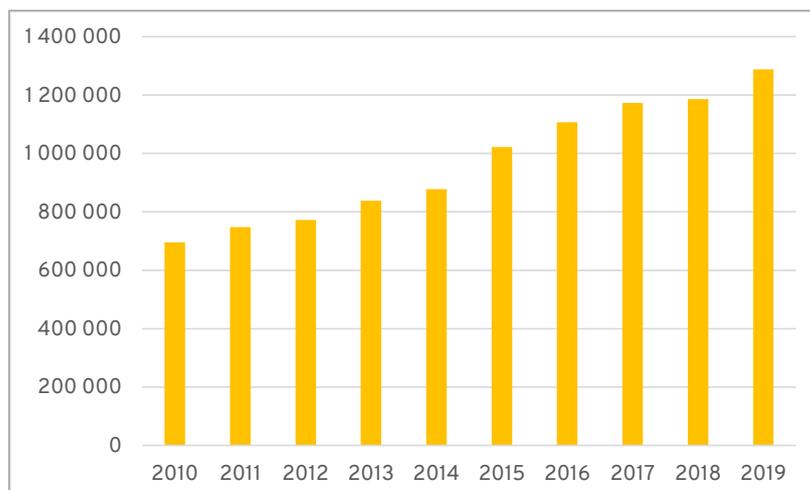
While the influx of refugees has been diminishing over the last couple weeks –from about 200,000 refugees every day, to around 40,000– and while many also decided to head back to Ukraine (about 364,000<sup>10</sup> since February 24th, although sometimes as a temporary solution to get other relatives to safety for instance), the situation remains

very uncertain and could change very quickly depending on the Russian progression in Ukraine. Should the situation deteriorate further, the total number of Ukrainian refugees could continue to increase, adding pressure on already overwhelmed states. While **no plan for reallocation of refugees has been agreed upon** as of yet in the Council of the EU,<sup>11</sup> the **Solidarity platform** set up by the EU aims to encourage such reallocation and ‘burden sharing’ between Member States and partners (UK, USA and Canada).<sup>12</sup> Transfers of people who took refuge in Moldova to EU Member States have also already taken place due to the country's limited resources. In addition, in its “10-Point Plan”, the EU committed itself to developing an ‘index’ to “follow the evolution of arrivals, allowing Member States to objectively assess the pressure they are under as well as providing immediate response in relation to locations under severe strain, at national or, when needed, at European level”.<sup>13</sup>

But reallocation constitutes a real challenge, and could ultimately remain very limited, as **many Ukrainians, hoping to return home, do not wish to stay away too far from Ukraine and prefer to remain in neighbouring countries**. Furthermore, even in the desirable situation that peace is reached swiftly, going back to their home will take time, and some may find they have little, or perhaps nothing at all, to go back to. As people settle into their new lives – children going to schools, adults finding a job, etc. – chances are that many will not return at all. It is admitted that in such situations, at least **one third of refugees will find themselves staying in their host country**,<sup>14</sup> meaning that at least 1.4 million Ukrainian refugees might stay in the EU and seek permanent residency.

This could prove to be especially true due to the already close ties between Ukraine and the EU. **Ukrainians are the third largest group of non-EU citizens living in the bloc** (behind citizens of Morocco and Turkey). Their number has been growing steadily for a decade (see Figure 1), from about 700,000 EU residence permits issued to Ukrainian citizens in 2010 to close to 1.3 million in 2019.

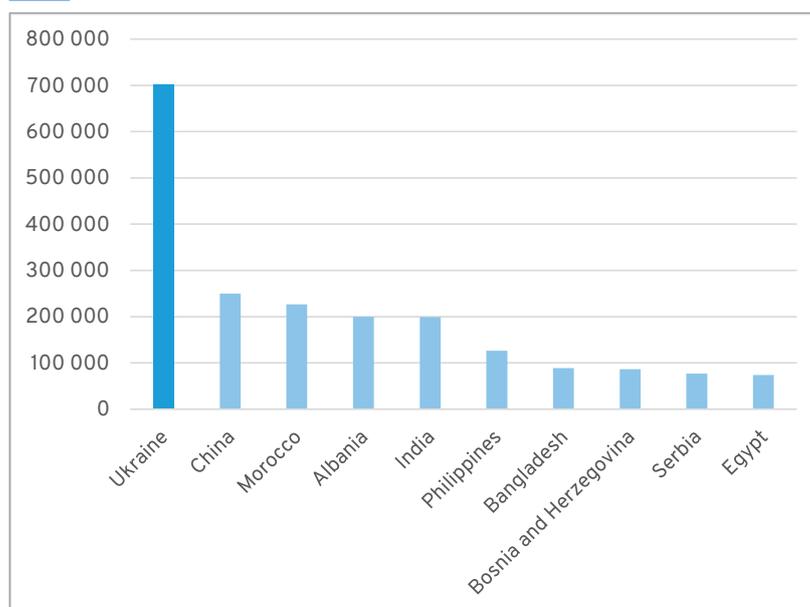
**FIGURE 1. Number of Ukrainians holding a valid residence permit in the EU, 2010-2019**



▲ Source: Own elaboration based on Eurostat data, [MIGR\\_RESVALID](#)

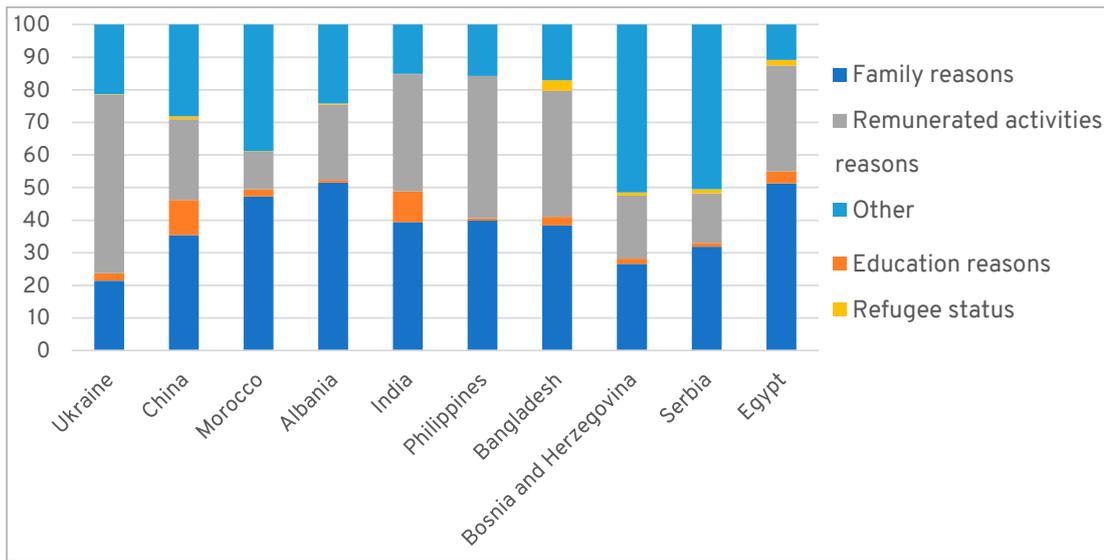
The number of Ukrainian labour migrants in the EU also increased, from 308,000 in 2011 to 702,200 in 2019,<sup>15</sup> making Ukraine **the main source of economic migrants to the EU** (see Figure 2). In 2019, 55% of Ukrainian migrants got their residence permits through work, while 21% came for family reasons (see Figure 3).<sup>16</sup>

**FIGURE 2. Top ten nationalities with a valid permit for employment reasons in the EU in 2019**



▲ Source: Own elaboration based on Eurostat data, [MIGR\\_RESVALID](#)

**FIGURE 3. Top ten nationalities with a valid permit in the EU, by reason, 2019**



▲ Source: Own elaboration based on Eurostat data, *MIGR\_RESVALID*

The increase in Ukrainian labour migrants in the EU can notably be explained by the strained bilateral tensions between Ukraine and Russia due to the armed conflict of 2014<sup>17</sup> –Russia attracted 43% of Ukrainians working abroad in 2012, versus 26% in 2017– but also by the growth of the Polish economy, the 2017 visa liberalisation and legislative changes facilitating the employment of Ukrainians.<sup>18</sup> In 2020, 500,000 residence permits in Poland were for Ukrainians.<sup>19</sup> The **Ukrainian diaspora is also particularly strong in Italy, the Czech Republic, Spain and Germany**<sup>20</sup> with respectively 223,000, 166,000, 95,000 and 80,000 permits issued to Ukrainians.<sup>21</sup> Ukraine was also the top country whose citizens received a first resident permit in 2020 in Poland (82% of first time permits), Czechia (54%), Lithuania (44%), Hungary (38%), Estonia (38%) and Latvia (28%).<sup>22</sup>

**Before the war, 70% of migrants were men,**<sup>23</sup> and the same share came from the western part of Ukraine.<sup>24</sup> Ukrainian emigration tended to be medium and low-skilled, with only 16% of migrants having higher education.<sup>25</sup> However, today, the cards have been reshuffled entirely. People are not coming willingly to the EU for employment reasons, but are fleeing a war-torn country, that most probably never intended to leave. Since men aged 18-60 have been temporarily forbidden

to leave Ukraine, the profile of those coming to the EU are very different from previous emigration, being mostly **women, children, older people and people with disabilities**. So far, it is estimated that roughly **half of Ukrainian refugees are children**.<sup>26</sup>

Many Ukrainian refugees of working age have already expressed their wish to find a job in their host country, which is entirely possible thanks to the temporary protection status they enjoy. Nevertheless, it is important to reiterate that these millions of people are not labour migrants or economic migrants, but were forced out of their country suddenly and in very violent circumstances. For the ICMPD (International Centre for Migration Policy Development), **refugees feel pressure to rebuild their lives as quickly as possible, and thus have a high motivation to take up work immediately after their arrival in the host country**. This is not only “out of necessity but also out of the urge to deal with loss and trauma”,<sup>27</sup> which also poses some risks. Therefore, while we know that labour market integration is paramount to migrants’ integration and well-being inside a new country, Member States should in priority focus their efforts on providing refugees with basic needs.

## II • Guaranteeing emergency assistance for Ukrainian refugees

Member States are faced with the challenge of providing adequate reception for millions of people, which includes shelters, food, clothing, sanitation as well as medical care.

While transfers of Ukrainians in need of urgent medical attention have already taken place between Member States, **the EU is setting up a solidarity mechanism to transfer Ukrainian patients.**<sup>28</sup> The EU is also working to ensure access to vaccination against infectious diseases, especially for children, as well as to mental health initiatives.<sup>29</sup> Since Ukraine has very high rates of HIV cases, Member States should ensure treatment continuity. But treatment continuity should apply to all chronic diseases and all patients in need of long-term care; and high levels of need are to be expected since there are many older people among the refugees. It would also be crucial to take into account the situation of women. **Around 80,000 women refugees are due to give birth within the next three months.**<sup>30</sup> They must receive comprehensive and quality obstetric care, including in case of complications during or after the pregnancy. It is also imperative that women have access to sexual and reproductive health services, including contraception, but also safe abortion, a right that is virtually outlawed in Poland today.

Emergency assistance also includes security for refugees, which are especially vulnerable since most of them are women and children. There are already **reports or suspicion of human trafficking** (eg. disappearances at the border) **and sexual violence** (eg. rapes), be it at hubs, especially train stations, where men come to pick up women and children with false intent, within refugee camps, or in the homes of private individuals sheltering them. The grassroots solidarity displayed by everyday citizens, albeit welcome, increases these risks exponentially, in particular for those with no relatives in the host country. But it is also worth noting that **Ukrainians were already the top 5 citizens being trafficked in the EU before the war**, meaning that organised criminal channels already exist and will likely be used in this new context (or are already being used). To tackle this, the EU activated its network of national

anti-trafficking coordinators one week after the war broke out, and is also coordinating police efforts. Europol staff have been mobilised at the Ukrainian borders –already in Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Moldova, and soon in Hungary– to support national investigations.<sup>31</sup>

The reception of such a number of refugees comes with tremendous financial costs. Providing emergency shelter, distributing food, clothes and sanitary products, and ensuring security requires daily work, huge amounts of resources and very high coordination levels between local authorities, NGOs and other stakeholders. As the citizens who volunteered in the first days or weeks to help refugees will gradually have to scale back their efforts, more and more will rest on the shoulders of organisations present on the ground. It is thus crucial to **ensure that civil society is supported financially.**

Furthermore, in a joint letter addressed to the European Commission, Poland and Germany said that the financing needs of both countries amounted to billions of euros, already at least €2.2 billion for Poland.<sup>32</sup> They also suggested giving each refugee an amount of €1,000 for the first six months of their stay. Indeed, **minimum welfare support directly to refugees** needs to be provided as quickly as possible if they are to move beyond the stage of temporary reception. This minimum support should be granted to all regardless of their situation in the host country (eg. being employed or not).

In addition, emergency shelters should only be used in a temporary manner and Member States should make sure that refugees have access to **decent housing solutions, like through social housing.** This will become increasingly important since we know that while the first arrivals were mostly made up of Ukrainian refugees that already had contacts or relatives in the EU, as well of many third country nationals, most of whom managed to return to their home countries, **refugees that are now entering the EU often do not have any contact point in the host country**, meaning no place to live apart from the already overcrowded emergency shelters. This might however constitute a real challenge looking at the housing market in the EU and at homeless services that were already struggling to

cope with the level of needs within Member States before the war.<sup>33</sup>

Education is also a major issue. Experts have underlined “how important a school routine is for children, as it can support them emotionally during an overwhelming and frightening time”.<sup>34</sup> The number of children with a right to schooling among Ukrainian refugees is in the millions. According to the Polish Minister of Education, 130,000 Ukrainian children had enrolled in Polish schools as of March 30th, including 20,000 in pre-school and 85,000 in primary schools.<sup>35</sup> This number grows by 10,000 children every day. To guarantee **educational continuity for Ukrainian children**, additional resources need to be mobilised for the most affected education systems in the EU, in particular to increase the capacity of teaching staff, especially Ukrainian-speaking staff, to pay for additional infrastructure and equipment, to provide teachers with the adequate training to deal with the arrivals of Ukrainian children, and to provide pupils with psychological care and language classes. **Ukrainian teachers who have fled the country could help in this regard –after having received the adequate care and support–** provided it is possible to identify them quickly. At the same time, Ukrainian teachers that live or that have been displaced in less affected regions in Ukraine could also help guaranteeing educational continuity thanks to digital tools, which had already begun to be deployed due to the pandemic. The EU is providing support in this regard through the School Education Gateway, which supports teaching staff in EU countries for the integration of young Ukrainian refugees (exchange of best practices, training courses) and lists online educational resources available in Ukrainian.<sup>36</sup>

Lastly, given the large number of women that fled Ukraine with young children, **access to affordable childcare and pre-school education** will be essential to enable their participation in the job market.<sup>37</sup> This is especially true since **many women are not only coming with their own children, but also with children of their relatives or friends.**

The European Commission’s Communication “Welcoming those fleeing war in Ukraine –readying Europe to meet the needs” addressed most of the abovementioned

challenges as it aimed to ensure that refugees can effectively access the rights that they are entitled to under the temporary protection status.<sup>38</sup> It also underlined solutions for financial assistance at EU-level, in particular the CARE initiatives that we presented earlier. However, according to the OECD, “the cost for processing and accommodating asylum seekers for the first year in 2015-16 was estimated to be around €10,000 per application, and up to €12,500 per refugee in national studies for Germany”, which could result in **a direct first year cost of at least €37.5 billion for 3 million refugees (around 0.25% of EU GDP)**,<sup>39</sup> and of 50 billion for 4 million refugees (0.35% of EU GDP). As the number of refugees has continued to increase significantly, so should the projected costs. The funds mobilised through the CARE initiatives and the Stand Up For Ukraine Campaign, altogether amounting to €25.3 billion, would only cover between half and two thirds of the total projected costs for the first year. While the deviation of cohesion policy is welcome, since the money would have otherwise been lost<sup>40</sup> –especially when we look at the low absorption rates of some of the frontline countries, especially Slovakia and Romania (53% and 55% of 2014-2020 funds spent by 2021)<sup>41</sup>– relying on the 2021-2027 cohesion envelop would stray away from the funds’ original objective of reducing regional disparities within the EU.<sup>42</sup> While resorting to other flexibility and special instruments included in the EU Multiannual financial framework (MFF) should be envisaged,<sup>43</sup> **new funds, to deal specifically with this crisis, may become necessary. Lastly, extending flexibility to the Recovery and Resilience Facility** set up during the Covid crisis should focus on strengthening the overall capacity and quality of Member States’ social services in light of this new crisis. In this respect, the arrival of Ukrainian refugees, like the pandemic before it, demonstrated the importance of social expenditure and investment in the EU. As many of our social services –health, education, housing, welfare systems– were already facing tremendous pressure and difficulties before the war and before the pandemic, this new crisis will put additional pressure on them. While the need for a more equal ‘distribution’ of refugees has been pointed out earlier in this paper to prevent this (together with the limitations that come with it), we also need to **make the**

**resilience of our social systems a priority.** Additional social investment should thus be encouraged at EU level, as well as urgent new rules for the EU's socio-economic governance system, to put social and economic objectives on an equal footing.

### III • Labour market integration of Ukrainian refugees

The Temporary Protection Directive grants people the **right to employment, self-employment as well as vocational training.** Access to the labour market is often decisive for the **successful integration of migrants and refugees,** allowing them to be economically independent and to build social relations with the local population. In Germany, many asylum seekers were not allowed to work while their cases were being processed –which took sometimes years– leaving many impoverished and isolated in their new country. On top of driving integration, having migrants accessing employment reduces “the economic burden in the hosting communities”,<sup>44</sup> especially the pressure on national welfare systems.

In this section we look at data about the Ukrainian workforce, in particular the role played by women, to try to understand the economic status of refugees coming to the EU. We then examine how the arrivals – and subsequent settlement– of Ukrainian refugees can also be an opportunity for the EU, to **address labour shortages and tackle the demography challenge.**

#### I DATA ABOUT THE UKRAINIAN WORKFORCE

While there is obviously no statistics available yet on the education levels and occupations of those who fled Ukraine, looking at data from the Ukrainian labour market before the war may provide some insights. Since most of the Ukrainian population of working age coming to the EU will be women, it must be noted that **the employment rate of Ukrainian women is low,** 50.4% for women aged 15-70, compared to 61.5% for men,<sup>45</sup> mostly due to the inactivity of young women (aged 25-39) with family responsibilities compared to higher employment rate for men in this age group –on average 63.6% versus 82.3%. High inactivity is also due to a great

number of pensioners, men and women, that are of working age,<sup>46</sup> while informal work represents 20% of employment in Ukraine, but mostly concerns men (60%).<sup>47</sup> Both youth unemployment and the share of young people not in education, employment, or training are higher for women than for men (20.3% and 19% respectively).<sup>48</sup>

**Ukraine has extremely high levels of literacy,** almost 100% according to UNESCO reports.<sup>49</sup> “Formal educational attainment in Ukraine is very high. Around 48% of the population has a higher education level.”<sup>50</sup> But at the same time, the rate of **participation in adult learning is very low,** standing at 0.9% in 2019<sup>51</sup> and education and training are mostly focused on theory rather than on the skills relevant to the workplace,<sup>52</sup> leading to significant skills mismatches in the country. And indeed, “education does not lead to better labour market outcomes as unemployment rates do not vary significantly across groups with different educational attainment”.<sup>53</sup>

Gender segregation is also very common, from the choice of the field of study –women are more likely to study healthcare and education<sup>54</sup>– to the subsequent choice of occupation. For instance, women represent 83% of health and social care workers in Ukraine.<sup>55</sup>

#### I ADDRESSING SKILLS SHORTAGES: STATE OF PLAY, SKILLS MATCHING AND RETRAINING.

The influx of new people into the EU workforce may also be seen as an ‘opportunity’ to **address labour market needs, in particular to help fill skills shortages.** This is in line with the agenda of the European Commission, as it proposed a ‘talent and skills package’, including an EU talent pool, as a follow-up to the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, to develop the potential of legal migration in the EU in terms of skills availability. Indeed, 77% of companies in the EU report difficulties to find staff with the required skills,<sup>56</sup> which they consider to be the main obstacle to investment –Austria, Czechia, Poland, and Slovakia are among the top ten countries with the stronger reported skills constraints.<sup>57</sup>

*State of play* – A recent report from the European Labour Authority (ELA) gives us an overview of on the shortage occupations in the EU, and can provide some guidance to identify Ukrainian refugees that are more likely to find work, those who might find work more easily in another country where their skills might be more needed, and finally those who might have had a job in Ukraine with little demand in the EU and need to be upskilled or retrained accordingly.

In the EU, the most reported shortage occupations are listed in the table below (see Table 2, next page). These can be summed up into four main groups, namely healthcare-related occupations, software professionals, construction, and engineering craft workers.<sup>58</sup> Apart from healthcare-related occupations, the great majority of shortage occupations in the EU are male-dominated, with female representation at best “in the low 20s and in many cases is virtually absent”.<sup>59</sup> As similar patterns of occupational gender segregation seems to exist in Ukraine and in the EU, this means that Ukrainian refugees –like female workers in the EU– may be facing disadvantages on the labour market and be more vulnerable to unemployment or to poorer working conditions.

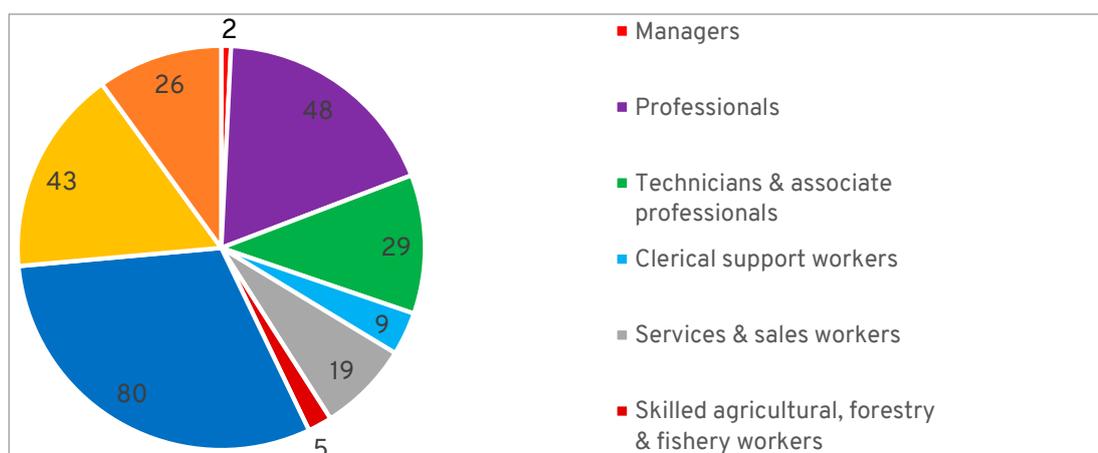
However, looking at occupations identified as severe shortages, female representa-

tion rises from 29% to 38%. This is mostly because the severe shortages also include the five healthcare-related occupations listed as widespread shortages, as well as two other female-dominated occupations that are home-based personal care workers and contact centre information clerks.<sup>60</sup> This is partly due to the COVID-19 crisis, which has boosted the demand for such skills. Severe shortage occupations also include four of the five software occupations, also driven by the pandemic.

There is also a strong concentration of medium-level vocational qualifications (construction, engineering) in labour shortages, while higher education seems to be both associated with labour shortages and labour surpluses in the EU, providing evidence, that despite of overall trend of labour polarisation in the EU, medium-skilled workers in in-demand sectors like construction or engineering will likely have better employment prospects that those with higher degrees in fields like humanities.<sup>61</sup>

This data on labour shortages fully applies to the Member States that are receiving a great number of Ukrainian refugees,<sup>62</sup> as they record the strongest shortages in craft trade workers (incl. construction) and professionals (incl. health, ICT and engineering professionals) (see Figure 4).

**FIGURE 4.** Number of shortage occupations mentioned by broad occupation groups<sup>63</sup> in EU countries most affected by the arrival of Ukrainian people



▲ Source: Own elaboration based on data from the 2021 ELA Report on Report on Labour Shortages and Surpluses

**TABLE 2.** Most often reported shortage occupations in the EU, incl. highest magnitude shortages, 2020-2021

Occupation	Number of reporting countries	Occupation	Number of reporting countries
Plumbers and Pipe Fitters	19	Applications Programmers	11
Nursing Professionals	18	Health Care Assistants	11
System Analysts	17	Motor Vehicle Mechanics, Repairers	11
Welders and Flame Cutters	17	Nursing Associate Professionals	11
Heavy Truck and Lorry Drivers	16	Specialist Medical Practitioners	11
Civil Engineers	14	Civil Engineering Technicians	10
Software Developers	14	Metal Working Machine Tool Setters / Metal workers	10
Carpenters and Joiners	13	Toolmakers and Related Workers	10
Concrete Placers and Finishers	13	Accountants	9
Generalist Medical Practitioners	13	Air Conditioning/Refrigeration Mechanics	9
Agricultural & Industrial Machinery Workers	12	Cooks	9
Bricklayers and Related Workers	12	Roofers	9
Building and Related Electricians	12	Software Developers nec	9
Electrical Mechanics and Fitters	12	Web and Multimedia Developers	9

High magnitude shortages reported in 7-9 countries

High magnitude shortages reported in 5-6 countries

High magnitude shortages reported in 4 countries

▲ \*Other severe labour shortages that were not included in the most widespread shortages:

Contact Centre Information Clerks	Home-based Personal Care Workers
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▲ Source: European Labour Authority (ELA), Report on Labour Shortages and Surpluses, November 2021

Migration can be a solution to alleviate labour shortages in the EU. According to the ELA, “many of the countries which reported shortages have a very low share of immigrants working in the skill group where the shortages were identified”,<sup>64</sup> such as Poland, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Bulgaria. In addition, as pointed out in the report, the fact that “several elementary occupations such as cleaners, boners, building labourers and farm workers have relatively high shares of migrant workers suggests that some job-seekers in the domestic labour force may consider such jobs to be unattractive, and this may give rise to shortages”.<sup>65</sup> It is indeed widely acknowledged that “highly educated migrants are more likely than average to be over-qualified for the job they are doing”,<sup>66</sup> in particular women.<sup>67</sup> Already before the war, **only 27% of Ukrainians working abroad stated that they worked in jobs that were in accordance with their qualifications, and 36% in jobs that did not require any qualification.**<sup>68</sup> This phenomenon may lead to a “depreciation of [migrants’] skills”<sup>69</sup> and reduce their chances to improve their economic situation.<sup>70</sup>

*Skills matching* –To prevent this, **skills matching will be a very important aspect of the integration of Ukrainian refugees on the labour market.** The first step is the recognition of the skills that Ukrainian refugees possess. On 5 April 2022, the European Commission proposed a Recommendation to organise the recognition of professional qualifications for people enjoying temporary protection, in particular for regulated occupations. It calls on Member States to “reduce the formalities for recognition of professional qualifications to a minimum”, to be flexible (only ask for essential documents, accept digital format, reduce or eliminate fees, set-up fast-track procedures, etc),<sup>71</sup> and to support the National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC) so that they are able to deal with the recognition requests rapidly. The text also presents the digital tools already available to help Member States in this regard, like the hub created by the European Training Foundation to support the recognition of qualifications from Ukraine, the possible use of European Digital Credentials for Learning to reissue degrees in digital format, as well as the Commission’s e-translation tool to deal with diplomas in Ukrainian or Russian. The Recommendation

focuses on healthcare and education to meet the needs of people fleeing the war.

Firstly, it puts a special emphasis on paediatrics and mental health services, but also reminds of the existing minimum training requirements for some healthcare professions (eg. general and some specialised doctors, nurses responsible for general care, dental practitioners, midwives, pharmacists). This will be a crucial element because healthcare occupations have been identified as severe shortage occupations in most Member States. Moreover, due to the overrepresentation of women in this field in Ukraine, and the underrepresentation of women in any other labour shortage occupations in the EU, it is likely that **refugees that held healthcare related occupations back in Ukraine will be the main ‘source’ of people that can fill labour shortages in the EU.**<sup>72</sup> These people should however **care in priority for other Ukrainian refugees**, to help in particular with the language barrier, which is a crucial element to make sure those receiving care are fully informed about their treatment.<sup>73</sup>

Secondly, the text recommends **making the best use of teachers among the displaced** to ensure governments have the capacity to provide children with the best possible education at all levels (early childhood education and care, primary, secondary, vocational, and higher education), by facilitating their employment and providing them with language training. This can prove extremely useful for schools which have received Ukrainian children.

Lastly, the Recommendation insists on the sharing of information on Ukrainian qualifications and the Ukrainian education system between Member States. European cooperation will also be crucial to encourage people with specific qualifications to move to another EU Member State where their skills might be more in-demand. Even though data indicates that most shortages are ubiquitous in the EU, meaning that the potential for such cross-border matching remains limited, the scale of **the arrivals of Ukrainian refugees in some EU countries, where the demand might be saturated, does call for an effective EU cooperation.** The European Labour Authority could play a role in this regard.

But public employment services at national level will without a doubt be on the front-line to “act as matchmakers on the labour market” and make sure the skills of those newly arrived are put to good use.<sup>74</sup> Ensuring the efficiency of such services is thus crucial, to identify those with the most urgently needed skills (language skills, care and healthcare, education, etc.), but also to help with the labour market integration of the rest of the displaced population. Already existing fast-track integration procedures should be set up in this regard, taking example on the Swedish model for instance,<sup>75</sup> or any best practice from other EU Member States. Cooperation of public employment services with social partners, companies, civil society and the Ukrainian diaspora should be encouraged as well, to identify opportunities for Ukrainian refugees. **Temporary agencies could play an important part**, as some reports seem to indicate that, for now, Ukrainians are mostly interested in short-term employment.<sup>76</sup> Some temp agencies have already opened their doors to Ukrainian refugees, such as Adecco, the global temporary agency, which launched a recruitment site dedicated to the employment of Ukrainian refugees.<sup>77</sup>

*Retraining* –However, while skills matching is important, it is also likely that many refugees will have previously worked in what are labour surpluses in the EU, making them more vulnerable to unemployment,<sup>78</sup> or that they might not have been working at all. This is more than probable as many Ukrainians, despite having achieved a higher education level, may not have the skills required on the labour market, but also as there were very high rates of women and of older people of working age who were not active on the Ukrainian labour market. Refugees fitting these profiles and wishing to take up work in the EU will therefore **need to upgrade their skills and/or to be retrained**.

The Temporary Protection Directive includes not only a right to access employment but also to engage in “activities such as educational opportunities for adults, vocational training and practical workplace experience”.<sup>79</sup> Member States should thus make sure to **include Ukrainian refugees in their current lifelong learning system**. Already existing schemes, including targeted ones (eg. for low

skilled people), should be extended to those benefitting from the Temporary Protection status, but more generally, it is crucial to ensure that training is made available to refugees for free. The Commission also called on employers to adopt a “human capital management” approach, meaning employing people that may be underqualified for a job and upskilling them.<sup>80</sup>

Furthermore, information and guidance will be a key element to the training of Ukrainian people, not only to assess their skills but also to give them advice on training courses that fit their personal needs and are likely to help them find a job, especially jobs facing shortages. It would also ensure that people “gain relevant experience and skills during their period of temporary protection, which adds value to their qualifications when returning to the home country”.<sup>81</sup> This might also **encourage women to choose fields with high demands for labour but that are stereotypically seen as men’s jobs**, or at least where men are overrepresented, in particular ICT professionals, as well as construction and engineering craft workers.

Lastly, we must stress that training should not only be reserved for those entering the labour market, but for all refugees, in particular to **provide them with language courses to make integration in the host country as smooth as possible**. This concerns for instance pregnant women or women on maternity leave, parental leave or with young children, older people, disable people or any person that is not in the physical or mental capacity to work, especially due to the trauma of the war and the displacement process.

To support the skills matching, training and activation of Ukrainian refugees, the Commission has added the **Ukrainian language to the EU Skills Profile Tool** for third country nationals and will soon launch an EU Talent Pool pilot initiative, a web-based tool that will allow candidates to present their skills and availability to work. “The platform could provide particular help to priority sectors, such as helping to identify teachers for displaced children or to give language courses, as well as interpreters and care professionals to support key services for new arrivals.”<sup>82</sup>

## I TACKLING THE DEMOGRAPHY CHALLENGE

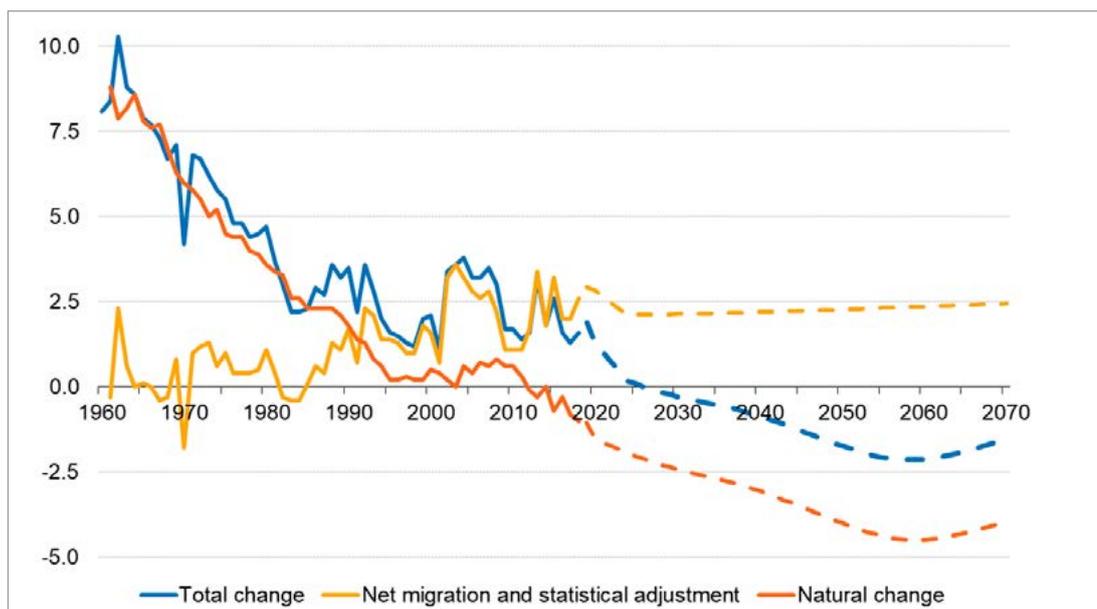
In addition to potentially alleviating the EU's labour shortages, the arrival of Ukrainians in the EU may help with the bloc's demography challenge.

Indeed, **Europe's population is getting older.** Today, the median age of the EU-27 population is about 44 years old –it was 38 years old in 2001– and 20% of the population is aged above 65. The working age population (20-64) amounts to 59% of the entire population. Projections for 2070 show that we could reach a median age of 49 and 30% of people aged over 60, while only half (51%) of the population would be of working age.<sup>83</sup> On the other hand, the share of young people (0-19) in the EU was 20% in 2020, a decrease of 3 percentage points (p.p.) since 2001. Looking at Member States receiving the bulk of Ukrainian refugees (border countries, like Poland and Romania, as well as other countries, which, relative to their size, are under pressure, like Austria and Cyprus), we see that, while most of them seem to be performing better than the EU average, for some of them, the situation seems to be deteriorating very fast. Romania has for instance recorded an increase in its population's median age of around 8.6 p.p. since 2001 (5.7 p.p. for the EU as a whole), although it ranks well compared

to the other Member States taking only into account data from 2021. Similarly, Cyprus, Poland and Slovakia, all very good performers for the indicators mentioned above, actually suffered some the highest declines in the share of 0-19-year-olds in their population since 2001. **Poland, Slovakia and Czechia also recorded some of the starkest increases in the share of people over 60 during the same period.**<sup>84</sup>

The ageing of Europe's population comes from an increasing life expectancy and low birth rates. In 2019, the average number of childbirths per woman was 1.53, well below the level required to keep the population size constant in the absence of migration (2.1).<sup>85</sup> Cyprus, Poland and Austria all ranked below the EU average in 2019. However, even though the natural population change has been in the negative in the EU since 2012 (see Figure 5), Europe has long been a continent of net immigration, meaning that more people moved into the EU than left.<sup>86</sup> In 2021, there were 23.7 million third country nationals in the EU-27 population, representing 5.3% of the population.<sup>87</sup> The lowest share of third country nationals in the EU are found in Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, all very impacted by the arrival of Ukrainian refugees.

**FIGURE 5.** Population change by component, EU-27, 1960-2070 (Observed and projected annual crude rates, per 1000 persons)



▲ Source: European Commission, [Additional figures, maps and tables on the key aspects of demographic change and its impact](#), Staff Working Document, June 2020

While net migration has safeguarded the EU's overall population growth so far, it is projected that this might no longer be the case in less than 10 years (see Figure 5) and that the EU population would diminish to 424 million persons by 2070, a 5% reduction compared to the current value.<sup>88</sup> Encouraging the migration of third country nationals will thus be a key issue for the EU over the next decade, and all the more so since non-nationals tend to be younger than the national population, with a median age of 36 compared to 44 in the EU. In the case of Ukrainian refugees, little is known about their socio-demographic or socio-economic 'characteristics' yet. While the high number of children among them is certain (around 1.8 million according to UNICEF),<sup>89</sup> the number of senior citizens has not been assessed. However, some studies have shown that "age, and the attachment to home that comes with it, influences people's desire to return to their home country, making it more likely that older people will return".<sup>90</sup> But this will also depend on how long the war stretches on.

In sum, the arrival of newcomers on the EU labour market can be seen as an opportunity to address labour shortages and tackle the challenge that is the EU's ageing population. On top of all the pre-requisites outlined in this paper before Ukrainians should access the job market, the EU and its Member States have a responsibility to ensure equal treatment of Ukrainian refugees on the labour market, especially in terms of pay and working conditions (incl. working hours, health and safety standards, leave entitlement, etc.). They should also pay a particular attention to the risk of undeclared work and labour exploitation, especially for domestic workers, made up mostly of migrant women,<sup>91</sup> as they are at heightened risk of exploitation and abuse, sometimes even subjected to the most severe forms of labour exploitation, equalling slavery, servitude and forced labour, often fostered by a complete lack of monitoring.<sup>92</sup> States and companies should also guarantee continued mental health support, for instance as part of a firm's occupational health and safety prevention programs, and employers should be encouraged to offer more flexible working arrangements, considering the likely high number of single parents with caring responsibilities.

Lastly, while working is indeed a factor of integration for migrants and refugees, host countries should not undermine the role of other non-salaried activities in this regard, such as volunteering, sports and cultural activities, and more generally, engaging with the Ukrainian diaspora already present before the war to prevent social exclusion and facilitate integration through one's own network.

## • Conclusion

As the situation in Ukraine remains very uncertain, so does the impact of the arrival of Ukrainian refugees in the EU. Fulfilling over several months the immediate and most urgent needs of millions of people, a figure that has not stopped growing since the beginning of the war, demands considerable resources, a part of which the EU and its Member States have already managed to mobilise. Ensuring the smooth integration of hundreds of thousands of people, or even millions, within a handful of EU countries in the long haul, even beyond the 3-year maximum provided by the EU's Temporary Protection status, is another matter altogether. Member States will need to improve their social services' capacity, including healthcare, public employment services, education and training systems, childcare services, their housing system, etc. and design policies accordingly. But, as refugees become permanent resident, the long-term economic benefits greatly outweigh the initial costs,<sup>93</sup> and, as highlighted in this paper, can even bring additional gains, to fill labour shortages in the host countries and to help support an ageing population.

While these findings apply to the Ukrainians, due to the context of the war and the scale of the arrivals, they are also true for all refugees, coming from Europe or not. Refugees continued to face pushbacks at European borders in 2021, endangering their lives and undermining fundamental human rights,<sup>94</sup> and were not provided with basic needs, such as accommodation, or other minimum reception standards. Such human rights violations need to be addressed urgently. Looking ahead, the EU must end its double standard regarding refugees fleeing wars, conflicts, or persecutions from other parts of the world. While turning back time is impossible, the EU

should, in the future, activate the Temporary Protection Directive when faced with a mass influx of displaced persons, as well as reform its Migration and Asylum policies, from adopting measures focusing almost exclusively

on return policies, security and the reinforcement of its external borders, to building a true European protection area.<sup>95</sup> The EU's dignity and its future are at stake •

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#### Institut Jacques Delors

Penser l'Europe • Thinking Europe • Europa Denken  
 18 rue de Londres 75009 Paris, France • [www.delorsinstitute.eu](http://www.delorsinstitute.eu)  
 T +33 (0)1 44 58 97 97 • [info@delorsinstitute.eu](mailto:info@delorsinstitute.eu)

