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War and migration: the recent influx from Ukraine into Poland and possible scenarios for the future

The outbreak of war in Ukraine has drastically changed the migratory situation in Central and Eastern Europe, especially Poland. This text by [@MaciejDuszczyk](#) [@kaczmarczyk cmr](#) attempts to estimate the possible future stocks of immigrants in the country and points out challenges. Regardless of developments on the front line, the number of Ukrainians in Poland will be significantly higher than at the beginning of 2022. Poland must be perceived as a new immigration country in Europe and in the global context.



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War and migration: the recent influx from Ukraine into Poland and possible scenarios for the future

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The outbreak of war in Ukraine has drastically changed the migratory situation in many countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Among them, Poland is playing the most important role, with around 3 million persons fleeing the war zone who arrived in Poland between February 24th and the end of April 2022. This unprecedented inflow of war refugees clearly raises questions about future developments and challenges related to the presence of Ukrainian citizens in Poland. This text presents the first attempt at estimating the possible future stocks of immigrants from Ukraine in the country and points out related challenges. For obvious reasons, this attempt is subject to a great risk of errors, but the presented scenarios indicate that regardless of the development of the situation on the front line, we have to reckon with the fact that in the perspective of the coming months (or maybe

years) the number of immigrants from Ukraine in Poland will be significantly higher than it was at the beginning of 2022. This requires firm and deliberate action on the part of public institutions. Poland must be perceived as a new immigration country in Europe and also in the global context.

Context

The recent inflow of Ukrainians fleeing the war zones to Poland is, by all means, an unprecedented event. Nonetheless, there are several contextual factors that (1) explain – to an extent – why Poland is the major destination country, and (2) are helpful for predicting and understanding the development of Ukrainian migration and the presence of Ukrainians in Polish society in the future. It should be borne in mind that the current inflow of war refugees from Ukraine¹ will have long-term

¹ In this text, we use the term "war refugees from Ukraine", so as to adequately reflect their specificity. These people are not granted the refugee status under the 1951 Geneva Convention, and most of them also do not intend to apply for one of the forms of international protection. Therefore, it was necessary to find another term for their status in the European Union. The proposed term includes very different categories of people,

both Ukrainian citizens and foreigners who, at the outbreak of the war, were on the territory of Ukraine and left it by crossing the border with, for example, Poland. Thus, citizenship does not matter here, but only the fact of leaving Ukraine after February 24. In this text, we use the term "war refugees from Ukraine", but unless otherwise indicated, we only refer to Ukrainian citizens.

consequences for Poland, which requires urgent measures to ensure the availability of social services in particular.

Importantly, just a decade ago Poland was not a country of immigration. On the contrary, due to the post-2004 massive mobility to the West, the migration balance of the country was clearly negative (Górny et al. 2010; Okólski 2012; King, Okólski 2018). Particularly if long-term immigration is considered, the inflow of immigrants to Poland was very limited – according to the 2011 Population Census, the total number of foreigners staying in the country was estimated at around 110 thousand. A few years later (in 2015), Poland was ranked as one of the last EU member states in terms of the share of immigrants in the total population. Immigration to Poland also had several important qualitative features, starting from a very limited number of source countries (with a clear domination of post-Soviet countries and Ukraine as the most important origin), through a clear concentration in a few big agglomerations (with Warsaw and the Mazowieckie region playing the most important role), to a predominance of specific – as for European standards – forms of migration, i.e. temporary or even circular mobility (Górny, Kaczmarczyk 2019; Górny et al. 2010; Okólski 2021).

This picture changed substantially after 2014, i.e. after the first war in the Eastern part of Ukraine. In a very short time, Poland became a European leader in terms of newly issued residence permits, and even a global leader when seasonal foreign workforce is concerned. According to available estimates, the stock of immigrants in Poland has increased from around 100 thousand (2011) to a number exceeding 2 million (2019) (CSO 2020). Ukrainian citizens represented the majority of

this population, and, by all means, the radical change of the migration situation in Poland is attributable to the inflow from this country. This was possible only because of an interplay of factors operating on two sides of the process (Górny, Kaczmarczyk 2018, 2019; Górny 2017):

- War (2014) and the related socio-economic developments in Ukraine created a large-scale migration potential;
- The “transformation” into a country of immigration was possible due to the fast economic growth in Poland and related, persistent (and growing) demand for labour in general and also for foreign labour in the Polish labour market; as a consequence, contrary to expectations of some observers, the potential mentioned above has not been transformed into humanitarian type migration. Instead, we witnessed a mass increase in labour migration, particularly based on the simplified procedure, which made Poland one of the most liberal regimes in terms of the employment of foreigners (additionally, the fast-growing recruitment sector also contributed).

There are several structural characteristics of recent (pre-2022 war) migration from Ukraine to Poland that are highly relevant in the context of recent inflows:

- Already before the war, there was a substantial group of Ukrainians working/residing in Poland that can be estimated at around 1.35 million (based on the CSO data); this group was highly masculinized and comprised of predominantly economically active persons (over 95% of the total);
- Ukrainian immigrants clearly dominated in the case of all possible channels of inflow onto the Polish labour market (declarations

- 88%, work permits – 71%, seasonal work permits – 98% over the period 2018-2021);
- Immigration – including migration from Ukraine – has been more equally distributed across the country than in the pre-2014 period, with immigrants being present in almost all regions of Poland (with still a few important concentration centres – big agglomerations);
- Due to specific forms of migration, i.e. temporary or even circular mobility between Ukraine and Poland, the two countries were connected through well-developed transportation routes;
- As in many similar cases, such a massive migration was possible not only due to the active involvement of formal and informal recruiters but also because it was strongly driven by well-developed migrant networks (Kindler, Wójcikowska-Baniak 2019);
- Despite the more and more common presence of Ukrainians on the Polish labour market, the scale of economic and

social/cultural tensions remained at relatively low levels; this can be attributed mainly to very positive developments in the economy of Poland and a flourishing labour market (with the lowest levels of unemployment recorded since the systemic change in 1989) (Duszczuk, Matuszczyk, 2018).

Importantly, the substantial inflow of immigrants to Poland took place in practice without a coherent and clearly articulated migration policy. Individual governments have attempted to create a document that would have a strategic status. In particular, such a document was accepted in 2012, but it has been cancelled by the government that came to power in 2015, without replacing it with a new one (till today). From that moment on, it can be concluded that the migration policy pursued in Poland is highly dispersed and continuously focuses on liberalizing access to the labour market. As a consequence, before the 2022 war and the massive inflow of war refugees from

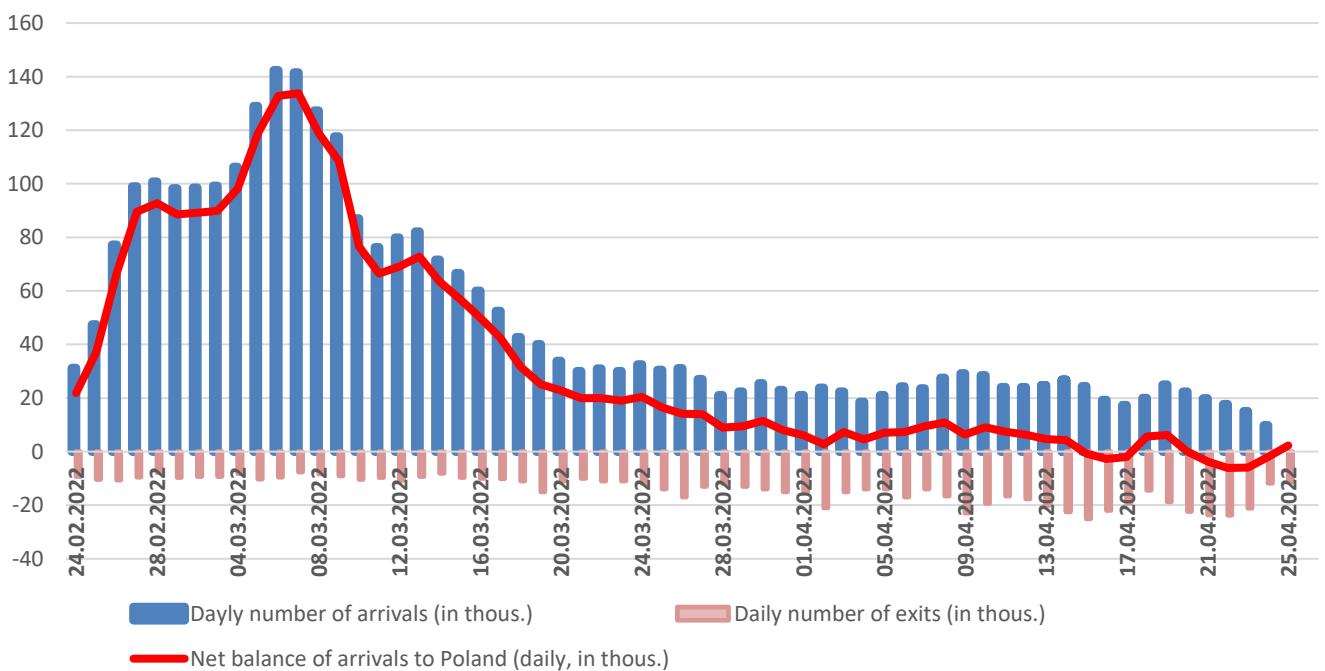


Figure 1. Border traffic between Ukraine and Poland since Feb 24th 2022

Source: Own elaboration based on the Border Guards data (data courtesy of Andrzej Kubisiak).

Ukraine, there was no general integration policy in Poland (with the exception of measures dedicated to refugees).

The process

The war triggered by Russia against Ukraine in February 2022 has resulted in the largest refugee migration in Europe after World War II, estimated by the UNHCR at 5.2 million persons. In the first two months, almost 3 million war refugees crossed the Polish border, of which over 95% were Ukrainian citizens. Figure 1 presents the scale of the border traffic between Ukraine and Poland and points to a spectacular increase in the scale of mobility in the first two-three weeks after the outbreak of the war.

The cumulative outcome of the above-presented flows is as high as over 3 million inflows and over 880 thousand outflows. Additionally, as shown in Figure 2, the volatility of both inflows and outflows is very high, which reflects changing war-related realities, but also

points to the fact that we are dealing with a highly mobile population that is inherently interested in returning to their places of origin (if only possible). This mobility pattern resembles, to some extent, the reality of pre-war migration between Ukraine and Poland, which comprised large numbers of temporary migrants and circulants moving between the two countries on a regular basis. We still lack data to estimate the scale of the phenomenon, but anecdotal evidence shows that some of the labour migrants continue their trips despite the war.

The above-mentioned numbers (3 million arrivals in Poland) equalled more than 60% of all border crossings with Ukraine's neighbours. At the same time, more than 860 thousand people left for Ukraine during the respective period. Among this number, there were about 60-80 thousand people who had lived in Poland before the outbreak of war and returned to Ukraine to join the army or territorial defence.

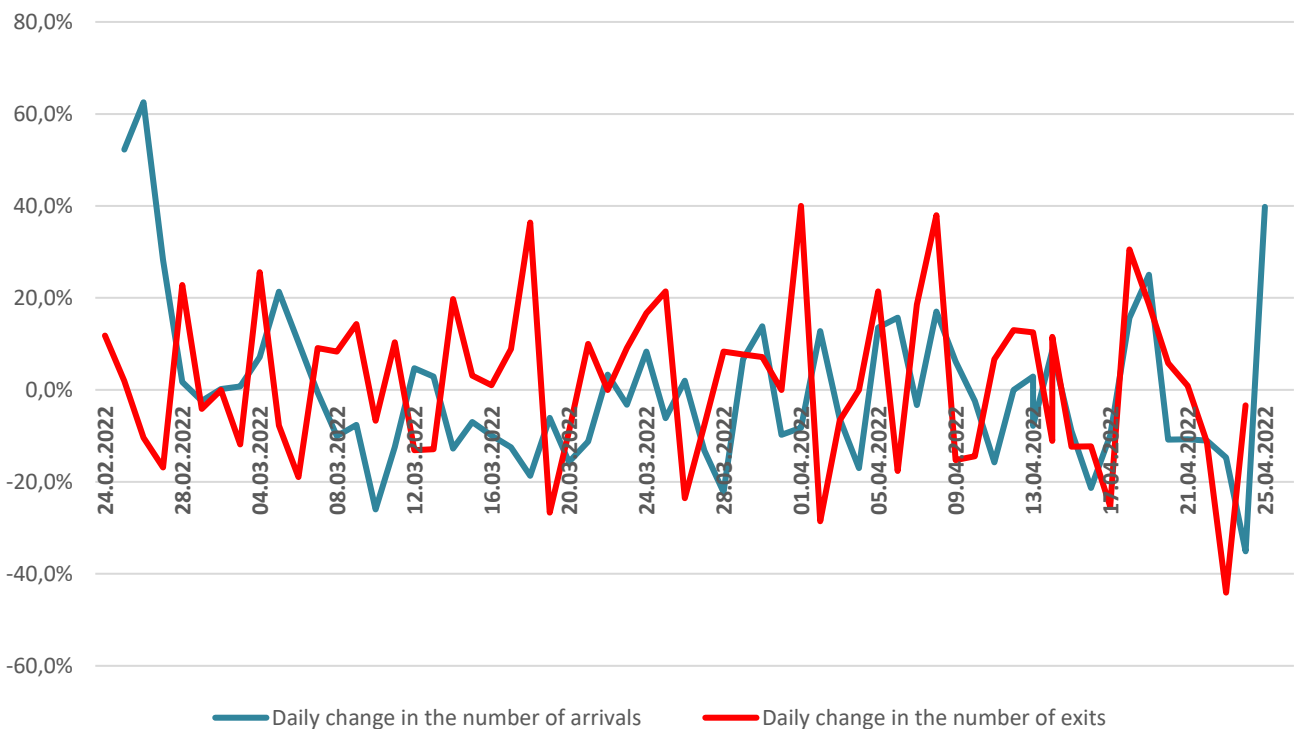


Figure 2. Volatility in daily arrivals/exits on the Ukrainian-Polish border since Feb 24th, in %

Source: Own elaboration based on the Border Guards data (data courtesy of Andrzej Kubisiak).

This means that the balance of war refugees crossing the border was about 2.2 million. It does not mean, however, that so many people arriving in Poland were still in the country at the end of April 2022. Those who only passed through Poland on their way to other countries, especially the European Union and – to a much lesser extent – Canada, the USA, or Israel, should be subtracted from this total flow. Based on available register data from receiving countries, this number can be estimated at 800 thousand people². At the same time, we also dealt with arrivals to Poland of war refugees from Ukraine who, after a short stay in other countries (mainly EU countries), decided to move to the country which is relatively close in cultural and linguistic terms (leaving aside the natural tendency for staying as close to the border with Ukraine as possible). Their number can be estimated at 70-80 thousand³. Summing up, the number of war refugees who were staying in Poland at the end of April 2022 can be estimated at 1.4-1.55 million people (we will use the latter estimate for further assessments).

The influx of war refugees from Ukraine has one very important feature. Those crossing the Ukrainian border with EU member states and Moldova are immediately covered by the provisions of the Temporary Protection Directive⁴, which grants them numerous rights. In principle, it makes the status of war refugees from Ukraine similar, but not the same, as that of EU citizens in terms of rights under the free movement of persons. This is the first time in EU

history that the Directive's provisions have been put into practice.

The estimations based on data on border crossings can be supplemented with early information on the registration process, as Ukrainians are expected to register to obtain the Polish ID (PESEL), necessary to get access to public goods and services. As of April 25th, the number of registered persons was as high as 998 thousand, with a very special demographic structure, including over 48% of children (persons aged 0-18, with a majority of them aged 3-14 – approx. 34% of the total), 42% of females (at productive age) and roughly 4% of elderly (>65). Places of registration clearly reflect the locations of the biggest Polish agglomerations, with Mazowieckie (20% of the total), Śląskie (10%) and Dolnośląskie (10%) playing the most important role. Polish administration reports that so far around 100 thousand adult war refugees have already entered the Polish labour market (data of the Polish Ministry of Labour).

Other data is scarce and very incomplete. For this reason, we will refer only to the data provided by the city council of Warsaw (as the most important place of residence for newly arrived war refugees). According to the available data, the number of persons who arrived in Warsaw was as high as 700 thousand (as of April 24th, 2022). Out of these, approximately 300 thousand persons were still staying in the city, and around 100 thousand registered to obtain the ID number. The majority of persons who arrived in Warsaw

² This number was obtained by adding the numbers (presented in official statistics or during government press conferences) from countries not bordering with Ukraine.

³ This number was cited by the Polish government when the law on help for Ukrainian citizens of 12.03.2022 was amended.

⁴ Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof.

have found shelter in private flats/homes, and the number of persons in care facilities was as high as 90 thousand (cumulated number). The scale of the challenge faced by the local administration is visible through the number of children staying in Warsaw, estimated at 150 thousand, which massively increased the number of children of school age in the city. Out of those, roughly 16.5 thousand have already been integrated into the schooling system (data courtesy of Warsaw City Council).

Outlook

We are perfectly aware of how difficult it is to predict what will be the future of Ukrainian war refugees in Poland (and other countries). Their numbers – as well as the number of those returning to Ukraine – mainly depend on war-related developments and the future reconstruction of the country. Additionally, one may select other criteria defining particular scenarios (e.g. EU policy). The main aim of the exercise provided in this section is to estimate the scale of possible challenges we will expectedly face. In this context, as we show below, it should be assumed that in each scenario we will deal with a higher stock of immigrants from Ukraine than was the case before the war.

We estimate the scale of Ukrainian presence in Poland at the starting point (April 2022) at approximately 2.9 million. Importantly, this number is a sum of two subpopulations: those persons who were staying in Poland before the war (around 1.35 million) and those who arrived since then (around 1.55 million – as discussed above). This is a key remark, as our further estimates refer not only to the recent inflows but also to those persons who were/are unable to return to Ukraine because of the war and, as a consequence, are also experiencing the impact of the situation in Ukraine. Due to the very special demographic structure of the newly arrived war refugees, we estimate that the total population is drastically different from typical labour migration as observed before, including a large share of women (aged 18-65): 40%, 26% of children, and 2% elderly (see Table 1).

In the next step, we consider three main hypothetical scenarios (numerical estimates are presented in Table 1 and Figure 3 – please note that these are rough estimates only based on certain assumptions concerning the main demographic groups). In all cases, we consider the short/medium term, i.e. we are estimating the stock of immigrants from Ukraine in the next 12-20 months, i.e. till the end of 2023.

	Starting point (April 2022)		Scenario I		Scenario II		Scenario III	
	Estimated numbers	Share in the total	Estimated numbers	Share in the total	Estimated numbers	%	Estimated numbers	%
M (18-65)	950 000	33%	1 150 000	37%	850 000	49%	850 000	25%
F (18-65)	1 150 000	40%	1 150 000	37%	650 000	37%	1 350 000	40%
<18	750 000	26%	750 000	24%	200 000	11%	1 100 000	32%
18-65	2 100 000	72%	2 300 000	74%	1 500 000	86%	2 200 000	65%
65>	50 000	2%	70 000	2%	50 000	3%	100 000	3%
TOTAL	2 900 000	-	3 120 000	-	1 750 000	-	3 400 000	-

Table 1. Post-war migration from Ukraine to Poland, the starting point (April 2022) and possible scenarios

Source: Own elaboration based on CSO data, National Insurance Institution data and early registration data.

In the **first scenario** (long continuous war), we expect the continuation of the conflict (with varying intensity, scope and scale of activities) for the next several years – e.g., similar to the war over Donbas and Luhansk after the Russian aggression of 2014. This would mean that the peace would not be signed within the next 18 months and (large) parts of Ukraine would still be under threat. This would mean a continuous flow of refugees, but also economic migrants to Poland. There would certainly also be numerous temporary and permanent returns to regions not affected by the war, mainly western Ukraine. It should be assumed that, as a result of the continuation of the conflict, which would have different phases of calming down and intensification of fighting, the economic situation in Ukraine would be bad, which would stimulate more intensive economic migration than in the past. This means that the structure of the inflow could change, with an increasing share of men and older people (we assume that the ban on leaving Ukraine by men aged 18-60 will be significantly liberalized or even lifted). Assuming factors influencing flows and patterns of residence of particular demographic groups as described above, this scenario implies that about 3.1 million Ukrainians would reside in Poland in the medium term (economic migrants who came to Poland before outbreaks of the war and war refugees). Considering the assumptions described above, we can conclude that the demographic structure would be as follows: 24% children, about 37% women, and 37% men (at productive age). About 72% of people would be of working age, which means that the age structure would be similar to the one we have now.

In the **second scenario** (a quick and lasting peace), one should assume a quick (by autumn) conclusion of peace, which would stabilize the situation in the short-run, at the same time

bringing relatively favourable conditions for Ukraine (territorial, reparations, possibilities of joining the EU, etc.) in the medium and long term. It would mean a relatively large reduction (during the 12 months following the signing of the peace agreement) in the stock of women and children, some outflow of men (including those residing in Poland in the pre-war period), and a stable stock of elderly people. In this scenario, it should be assumed that the number of Ukrainian citizens staying in Poland would stabilise at around 1.75 million, of which 1-1.25 million would be "pre-war" immigrants (mainly males) and 0.5-0.75 million war refugees transforming into "post-war" immigrants (mainly females, children and the elderly, to a large extent family members of those staying in Poland before the war). It should be assumed that mainly people from the east of Ukraine would stay in Poland, since the destruction of the infrastructure is the greatest there, and reconstruction will take the longest. The demographic structure would be as follows: 11% children, about 37% women, and about 49% men. The economically active adult population would account for about 86%, which would mean a gradual but rather slow return to the structure of the population residing in Poland before the outbreak of war (share of economically active persons: over 95%).

The **third scenario** is – at the level of assumptions – similar to the previous one, but we assume that the war will lead to greater destruction also in the west of Ukraine, but a peace agreement will be signed earlier than assumed for scenario one. This means that regardless of the conditions of the assumed peace, an additional influx of children, the elderly and women should be expected, as well as a possible outflow of men (ongoing fighting, reconstruction of the country after signing the peace agreement). In this variant, one should

assume an increase in the number of Ukrainians in Poland to around 3.4 million (end of 2023). This is due to the potential devastation caused by the prolonged war and the partial integration of Ukrainians into Polish society, which would encourage part of the population to remain in Poland for longer. The demographic structure would be as follows: 32% children, 40% women, and about 25% men. The economically active adult population would account for about 65%, due to the increased proportion of minors compared to the pre-war (or even baseline) period.

Scenarios two and three should assume significant investment to rebuild damaged infrastructure, financed either by international aid or reparations. If the funds for this purpose are substantial, it may cause an exodus of workers currently employed in the construction industry in Poland. However, it is difficult to assume that Ukraine's GDP will quickly return to pre-war values. Therefore, labour immigration to Poland and other EU countries will be higher than before the war (with higher shares of females). There will also be a reunification of

families that are now separated, especially from areas where Ukrainian control will not be restored or bordering them, as well as those most damaged by war. The end of the war refugee-humanitarian immigration should be assumed in this scenario. The period of temporary protection in the EU, granted based on the 2001 Directive, is likely to end after one year. An EU Council decision will be required to extend it for another year. Numerous actions by the Ukrainian government to induce emigrants to return can also be expected.

In the **fourth** (hypothetical and highly unfavourable) **scenario**, which is currently unlikely and unwelcome but cannot be completely ruled out, Russia would gain a military advantage and eventually occupy much of Ukraine's territory. Ukrainian citizens, knowing what happened in Bucha, Mariupol and other territories occupied by Russia, would flee en masse to Poland and other European countries. In such a scenario, the number of refugees could even exceed 10 million, of which about 60% would stay for some time in Poland. In this scenario, all existing assumptions would

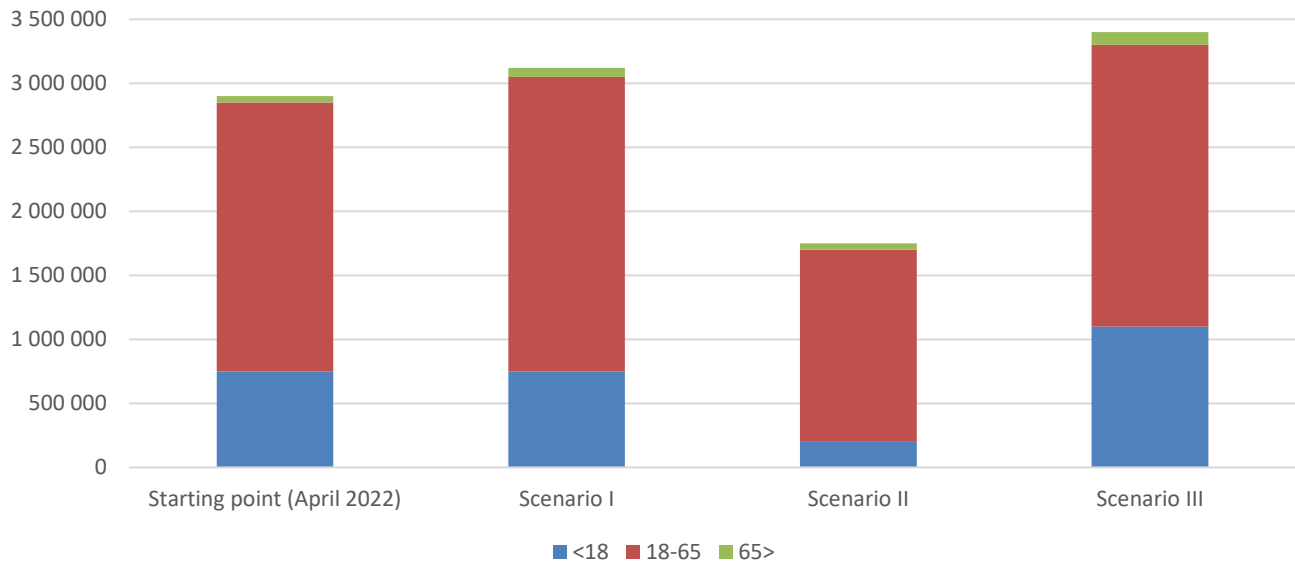


Figure 3. Post-war migration from Ukraine to Poland – possible scenarios, absolute figures

Source: Own elaboration.

have to be changed. Poland and the European Union would be hit by a humanitarian crisis that would require massive relocation within the EU. It would be crucial to provide basic needs in the form of housing, food, medical care, etc. However, this is not explored further within this text.

As shown in Figure 3, all three scenarios considered would mean a substantial increase in the number of Ukrainian citizens residing in Poland, as compared to the pre-war situation (approximately 1.3 million). However, the scale of this presence varies depending on the scenario. Differences lie not only in the scale of the process but also in its structural features with scenarios one and two to be linked to a significantly higher presence of children (and the elderly).

Challenges

Long-term stays of war refugees in Poland, depending on the presented scenario, will generate numerous challenges in the field of social services, which must be prepared to serve a larger number of people. In each scenario, the key challenge is to provide housing infrastructure. It is unsustainable (even in the short term) for war refugees to live mainly in private houses or apartments. While the challenge can be overcome somehow in the summer months, from the autumn it will be of absolute priority. Accommodation infrastructure must have heating and an appropriate standard of protection against frost. The solution to the situation would be relocation within the EU, within Poland, and the construction of modular housing estates, in which people who do not have an apartment would be able to spend autumn and winter. In the absence of immediate actions or in the case of an additional influx of war refugees, it will be

necessary to build large centres of temporary stay.

In scenarios one and three, it will be a massive challenge to provide education and care to children from Ukraine residing in Poland. In an extreme situation, there could be as many as 1 million children in need of care and education. Without it, it is difficult to expect most mothers or family members performing care functions to be able to take up employment. Therefore, it is necessary to prepare extraordinary solutions based on three models. In the first one, Ukrainian children will continue to follow the Ukrainian curriculum, and the goal of the government and local government will be, on the one hand, to provide infrastructure for distance learning and, on the other, to recognize the qualifications of Ukrainian teachers residing in Poland, to create Ukrainian school classes, particularly in big cities. In the second model, preparatory classes can be created to prepare Ukrainian children for entry to Polish schools next year. Since Ukrainian children start school a year earlier than Polish children, spending a year in a preparatory class should not be a serious problem. In the third model, directed only at those children from Ukraine who have a sufficient command of the Polish language, the possibility of attending Polish schools on the same terms as Polish children should be created. The decision to choose a given model should be made by parents, but at the same time entering the third model would require confirmation of the knowledge of the Polish language.

All three scenarios show that the presence of elderly war refugees, and therefore requiring frequent medical care, is limited. However, we should be aware that some of them have not yet registered in the system, so their percentage may be higher than it was assumed.

At the same time, the Polish health system has been strongly affected by the pandemic, and many people have postponed their medical care. Meanwhile, an additional 1-2 million people are now entitled to use the system. This will result in longer lines to see doctors. We have to deal with this challenge at the latest until the number of sick people increases in the autumn and winter seasons. It may be necessary to ask for support from the other Member States so that they provide temporary hospitals and post doctors to Poland for a certain period. Solving communication problems will also be crucial.

As we showed in the first part of this text, the presence of Ukrainians in the Polish labour market was significant already in the pre-war reality. It can therefore be assumed that there should not be a problem with employing another several hundred thousand people. Unfortunately, this is a very optimistic scenario. As we have presented in the previous section, the recent inflow comprises mainly of women with children, while prior to the war Ukrainians had been employed in Poland rather in masculine occupations. Thus, we may be dealing with classical maladjustment of skills to the needs of the labour market. This will require a very high level of activity of labour offices, which will have to prepare training and retraining offers tailored to the professional profile of Ukrainians. Moreover, it will be of key importance for employers to organize large job fairs or arrange virtual platforms to secure efficient job matching between employees and employers. Information regarding threats such as exploitation in the workplace, mobbing or sexual harassment will also have to be widely disseminated.

Preventing conflicts that may occur between Ukrainians and Poles is also a very important

challenge. Such a large influx of foreigners affecting the daily life of the host society has the potential to cause conflicts. Even though in the short term, due to the uniqueness of the situation, it can be easily avoided, tensions will certainly emerge in the medium and long term. Therefore, war refugees should be treated in the same way as Poles in terms of access to social services. Some necessary instruments, such as access to social services, should only deal with deficits and not constitute preferences for war refugees from Ukraine. The role of the government in launching social campaigns and planning aid in such a way as to limit controversy and suspicions of Poles is also very important here. It is to be expected that over time tensions will increase in various areas. Especially people using public services may experience a deterioration in the standard of living due to the presence of a significant number of war refugees, who will also be entitled to benefit from state support. A similar situation may also take place in the labour market, with possible adverse effects, particularly on the local scale. These risks should be identified, monitored and addressed through well-tailored public policies, including communication campaigns.

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