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Long-term inclusionary agenda on decent work for women from Ukraine working in Italy and Poland

The limited employment opportunities in high-skill sectors and the path dependency of existing labour migration patterns “trap” many Ukrainians in low-wage sectors. This is the case of female war migrants in Poland and Italy, as researched by [@MartaKindler](#) and her team within a [@NAWAPoland](#) – financed project. This CMR Spotlight outlines principles for policies and their implementation to enhance the position of Ukrainian women in Polish and Italian labour markets while preventing additional trauma.



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Marta Kindler

The Temporary Protection Directive, in the case of Italy, and the Law “On assistance to citizens of Ukraine in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of the country” (Special Law) in Poland, guaranteed formal access to mobility, the labour market, and various social benefits to those under its protection. However, limited employment opportunities in high-skill sectors and the path dependency of existing labour migration patterns “trap” many Ukrainians in low-wage sectors. The demographic and social profile of women fleeing war varies from that of labour migrants. Their needs, capacities, plans, and integration are determined by traumatic experiences and the proliferation of insecurities and vulnerabilities. The current labour market experience poses a risk of their becoming stuck in precarious jobs in the long term, thus aggravating trauma. As part of the project [“Accessing migration infrastructure and employment strategies in a time of crisis: Ukraine female war refugees and migrants in Poland and Italy”](#)¹, we analysed the particularities of these laws and how they look in action, carried out qualitative research, and wrote the following three policy briefs on Poland and one policy brief on Italy, with recommendations that can be used to improve

the situation of Ukrainian forced migrant women in Italy’s and Poland’s labour markets:

- [Decent domestic work: women working in Poland under the Special Law | Ośrodek Badań nad Migracjami \(uw.edu.pl\)](#)
- [Fair work in the fields? Ukrainian women working in agriculture in Poland | Ośrodek Badań nad Migracjami \(uw.edu.pl\)](#)
- [From temporariness to stability: a holistic approach to the employment of women covered by the special law in Poland | Ośrodek Badań nad Migracjami \(uw.edu.pl\)](#)
- [Long-term inclusionary agenda on decent work in low-wage sectors in Italy: how to combat exploitation of women under temporary protection directive in domestic and agricultural sectors. | Ośrodek Badań nad Migracjami \(uw.edu.pl\)](#)

The improvement of working conditions for women fleeing war is linked to improving general working conditions in low-wage sectors, currently characterised by precarity, insecurity, and exploitation. By decent work, we refer to the definition proposed by the International Labour Organization (ILO), according to which decent work “involves work opportunities, that is productive and delivers a

¹ Full text of the report can be reached open access at: <https://www.migracje.uw.edu.pl/projects/accessing-migrant-infrastructure-and-employment-strategies-in-a-time-of-crisis-ukraine-female-war-refugees-and-migrants-in-poland-and-italy/>

fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for all, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.” Holders of TPD and PESEL UKR could be more actively involved in their adaptation, with the support of national and municipal funding and programmes. This could be done by engaging people with relevant expertise in education, health, social, and other sectors at an adequate professional level (doctors, teachers, or social workers). Measures that can help implement regulations to guarantee improvement in those sectors include solutions based on research involving the perspective of women beneficiaries of the TP (Temporary Protection), coupled with monitoring by state authorities of its implementation. Poland and Italy need to work out and communicate to TP holders and PESEL UKR holders a plan to shift to a more stable residence status for those who wish to apply.

The recommendations in the policy briefs relate to specific labour sectors. Despite the demand in the low-wage sectors, we recommend that EU countries do not shut down the option of other forms of **professional labour integration** of forced migrants. With a more nuanced approach, research into what such people have to offer, and fewer stereotypes about “typical immigrant jobs”, such countries might discover that among others, Ukrainians fleeing the war can contribute in many more ways to the national labour markets. We are aware that when it comes to effective policies, it is crucial to

consider the meeting of different vulnerabilities defining the lives of Ukrainians under the Special Law or the Temporary Protection Directive. Particularly, we highlight the specific temporary legal status, linked to a conflict that does not promise quick or clear resolution, the demographics of the displaced group (women, with children and other dependents) and the (ongoing) war trauma that affects their overall well-being and ability to function socially, professionally and personally. Nor can we forget the importance of the overall capacity of the state's bureaucratic system, which impacts not only the daily life of its permanent residents but also how effectively institutional assistance can be provided to a person amid a drama such as the one triggered by Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The legislative dimension should also be borne in mind. Retaining the certainty and predictability of the law requires that such important regulations as the extension of the right to temporary protection for war refugees not be decided almost at the last minute. Therefore, we offer some general principles linked to the materiality of being a displaced person. These can be used as guiding principles in developing further specific interventions at various policy levels.

Principle of predictability and continuity. The Special Law, although providing an opportunity for quick reception measures, reinforces temporal uncertainty in the long run. Poland needs to work out a **plan to shift from the protection under the Special Law into a more stable residence status** for those who wish to apply. It then needs a clear and transparent

communication strategy to inform the law's potential beneficiaries.

Principle of inclusiveness. It is important to implement workers' rights, without considerations of citizenship or types of employment. This can be done by trade unions' inclusive workers' solidarity, not discriminating among workers based on their status, involving workers in various activities and collective actions based on the workplace and not limited to those workers who are trade union members (Egan 2017).

Principle of practical implementation and monitoring. While legal frameworks often offer solid and fair grounds for employment in all sectors, reality is lagging behind these norms. Therefore, we emphasise the importance of developing policies and practices fostering control over and incentives for implementing the already existing legal norms and developing practical tools for implementing existing legal frameworks. Delineate the responsibility of state institutions from the responsibility of social organisations; introduce **mechanisms of accountability of state initiatives** by non-governmental organisations (watchdog type). The state ought to be held accountable for providing people under its protection with the right to housing, work, and education, which do not have to be dependent **on external financing**.

Principle of legal accountability and monitoring of support organisations. Introduce clear legal regulations framing the activities of support organisations in response to the crisis (and beyond) and related training for support organisations to ensure activities

align with the law. Develop a mandate and strategy for support, clearly outlining the general aim of support (temporary reception versus long-term integration) and what can be outsourced to social organisations (versus what could be integrated into local, municipal, and national programmes of reception and integration). Couple this with a stable funding source and further professionalisation of **support organisations**, including specialisation providing continuous training (cultural competencies), psychological supervision and cooperation among support organisations.

Principle of self-advocacy. Support programs and legal changes should not be imposed as "good" or "proper solutions" by institutions without consulting or involving in the process Ukrainian organizations and individuals with firsthand experience.

Principle of inter- and intrasectional dialogue. When developing the plan for integrating forced migrants, representatives of the different levels and sectors should engage in developing a coherent and transparent strategy from the beginning. Sharing know-how and working together leads to a particular type of **horizontal cooperation in civil society** (small and large organisations, national and local unite to provide a comprehensive service in line with their overlapping competencies in the field). However, state and local government regulators should monitor the activities of commercial actors. This applies especially to the possible exploitation by employers and agencies of the vulnerable position of forced migrant workers.



Marta Kindler

Sociologist, PhD. She works as an assistant professor at the Centre of Migration Research and the Institute for Social Prevention and Resocialisation, University of Warsaw. Her research currently focuses on the role of social networks in migration. She is the co-editor of the book „ Ukrainian Migration to the European Union: Lessons from Migration Studies ” (2016) and the author of the book “A Risky Business? Ukrainian Migrant Women in Warsaw’s Domestic Work Sector” (2011). She is a Board Member of IMISCOE Standing Committee “Reflexivities in Migration Studies”.

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