



Migrants from Ukraine as an answer to the needs of the Polish labour market – the perspective of border enterprises

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Abstract

Motivation: Russia's war against Ukraine triggered a sharp rise in cross-border mobility across Europe. Neighbouring states at the EU's periphery absorbed substantial inflows, offering safety and socio-economic stability to displaced Ukrainians. For host economies, this coincided with acute labour shortages, enabling employers to stabilise staffing while host states gained predominantly working-age residents.

Aim: The main objective of the study was to determine whether the employment of migrant workers, especially from Ukraine, contributes to closing gaps in the labour markets in specific industries in Poland's border regions/voivodeships.



Results: We developed an original dual profile capturing (1) the migrant/refugee entering the labour market and (2) the employer hiring them given sectoral needs and organisational capacity. Descriptive evidence shows that over half of firms operate locally, one-third nationally, 10% within the EU market, 5% across Europe, and 2% are globally oriented. Migrants are most frequently employed in construction, hospitality, retail/wholesale, and services. In over 50% of firms, migrants work more than 40 hours per week. 76% of employers expect an improved output-to-input (productivity) ratio following recruitment. The most salient enablers are economic instruments, notably greater access to national and EU funding – subsidies, tax relief, co-financed training. These results add value by providing firm-level evidence from border regions—an under-researched context—linking employers’ demand with migrant integration and highlighting institutional infrastructures – qualification recognition, skills databases as decisive complements to short-term administrative simplification.

Keywords: empirical analysis; labour migration; industry characteristics; labour shortage

JEL: C40; D22; F22; J21; J23

1. Introduction

The dynamics of the labour market is influenced by a number of economic, including the rate of economic growth affecting the size and structure of employment, and non-economic, technological progress, social and cultural changes, factors. The influence of demography, which determines the size and structure of the labour force and employment trends, is also significant. The situation is also shaped by state policies: fiscal, tax, educational, social (Piekutowska & Fiedorczuk, 2018), programmes supporting entrepreneurship or wars and geopolitical crises destabilising economies.

Given these conditions, labour shortages are becoming an increasingly serious problem. This is strongly felt by entrepreneurs (mainly in the IT, medical, engineering, construction and agricultural sectors) (PARP, 2024). In order to ensure business continuity, they are increasingly employing migrants.

The issue of migration in the context of the labour market is gaining importance, also in Poland. Poland’s accession to the EU in 2004 opened access to the Single Market and EU funds while intensifying competitive pressure. These shifts—amplified by the pandemic and the 2022 inflow of Ukrainian citizens—compelled firms to adjust employment structures. In this context, Ukrainian migration unfolded in distinct waves: 2004 (EU entry; predominantly labour migration), 2014 (annexation of Crimea; mixed refugee–labour flows), 2017 (visa-free travel; labour migration), and 2022 (full-scale war; >1.5 million refugees). The interest of entrepreneurs in migrants is due to the deficit of employees with relevant competences, unfavourable demographic changes and emigration after accession to the EU (1.4–2.3 million people

left Poland) (SP, 2023; SP, 2024a). Migrants, especially from Ukraine, are becoming an opportunity to fill the labour shortage; their contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) in 2023 was estimated at 0.7–1.1% (UNHCR, 2024).

Poland's integration policy environment can be assessed using the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX). The latest update of the MIPEX 2025 index indicates a slight improvement to 44/100 (Yavçan & Gorgerino, 2025) from 41/100 in 2015 (Huddleston et al., 2015) and 40/100 in 2020 (Solano & Huddleston, 2020). This trajectory suggests incremental progress but continued structural gaps that shape labour-market matching and employers' integration capacity.

The main objective of the study was to determine whether the employment of migrant workers, especially from Ukraine, contributes to closing gaps in the labour markets in specific industries in Poland's border regions/voivodeships. Throughout the article, we use "region" interchangeably with "voivodeship" (NUTS 2); in Poland, NUTS 2 generally corresponds to voivodeships.

Therefore, the following revised research hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Enterprises employing Ukrainian migrants not only expect to fill employment gaps and improve financial results, but also anticipate long-term stabilisation of their workforce structure, increasing resilience against demographic decline.

H2: The creation and systematic development of databases on migrants' qualifications and educational backgrounds will strengthen strategic human resource planning in enterprises, allowing employers to match skills with sector-specific needs and facilitate labour market integration

H3: Institutional and financial support (from the state and EU) acts as a decisive factor not only for the short-term employment of migrants, but also for enhancing innovation and competitiveness of enterprises in the long run.

In order to achieve the main goal and verify the hypotheses, it was necessary to analyse migrants' characteristics and identify the needs of entrepreneurs. Therefore, an original profile was created: 1) of a migrant/refugee employee and 2) of an entrepreneur taking into account their needs when employing a migrant/refugee. It is worth noting that the issue of such professional activity of migrants (especially from Ukraine) from the employer's perspective in the economic aspect is a relatively new topic and has not been explored so far. Although the subject of professional activity of migrants from Ukraine is gaining popularity in Polish scientific works (Górny & Kaczmarczyk, 2018; Duszczek & Matuszczyk, 2018), so far the research has not focused on the analysis of the needs of enterprises. Therefore, the authors noticed a research gap that they are trying to fill (Zabielska & Kowalewska, 2024). Migrants from Ukraine were selected for the research group, as they constitute the largest immigrant population in Poland. Additionally, a dis-

inction was made between economic migrants and refugees. The phenomenon of migration, especially in the context of refugees, is currently global. The research process was conducted in 2023–2024, capturing employer behaviour in the immediate postshock period following the 2022 refugee inflow.

The article provides an overview of the literature on the subject, presents the research methodology used and the results of the analyses carried out, which refer to the findings of our own research and that of other researchers.

We employed quota sampling by firm size and sector, aligning sample proportions with those of the population of nonfinancial enterprises in four eastern (border) voivodeships. Quotas ensured approximate representativeness for the targeted strata. Within each stratum, units were selected without replacement (Lubelskie, Podlaskie, Podkarpackie and Warmińsko-Mazurskie).

2. Literature review

2.1. Theoretical foundations: labour mobility and migrant employment

Labour mobility has been analysed through complementary perspectives that emphasise (1) individual incentives and selection, (2) labour-market frictions and matching, (3) demand-side segmentation, and (4) institutional frameworks that govern access to work and integration. Together, these approaches provide a theoretical rationale for the three hypotheses formulated in Section 1.

From a human-capital and neoclassical perspective, migration is an investment decision driven by expected income differentials net of mobility costs (Sjaastad, 1962; Todaro, 1969). These approaches also highlight migrant self-selection and the role of transferable skills in shaping outcomes in the host country (Borjas, 1987). In practice, even when migrants possess substantial qualifications, their labour-market position may depend on whether credentials are recognised and whether skills can be effectively signalled to employers.

A second stream stresses imperfect information and matching frictions. Search-and-matching models show that vacancies and unemployment can coexist because employers and workers face costs of search, screening, and job switching (Mortensen & Pissarides, 1994). For migrants, frictions are amplified by language barriers and limited knowledge of local institutions, which can reduce the return to education and lead to occupational downgrading (Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003; Chiswick & Miller, 2009). In this framework, tools that improve information on migrants' qualifications and support

recognition pathways can reduce mismatch – providing a direct theoretical underpinning for Hypothesis H2.

Demand-side theories, most notably dual and segmented labour-market theory, explain migrant employment as a structural response to persistent labour demand in the secondary segment (Piore, 1979). Jobs in this segment are often characterised by lower wages, instability, and routine-intensive tasks, making them less attractive to native workers. This perspective predicts concentration of migrants in shortage-prone sectors and helps interpret employers' expectations that migrant labour will stabilise workforce structures under demographic decline – aligning with Hypothesis H1.

Finally, theories of cumulative causation and migrant networks emphasise that once migration corridors are established, information and social ties reduce migration costs and sustain mobility over time (Massey et al., 1993). In border regions, dense cross-border ties can reinforce circular mobility patterns, while shocks (such as war) may shift mobility toward longer-term settlement. Institutional perspectives complement this view by showing that legal channels, work authorisation, and integration support shape both the scale of inflows and the quality of labour-market matching – which is central to Hypothesis H3.

2.2. Ukrainian labour migration to Poland: empirical background

Labour migration from Ukraine has become one of the most significant socio-economic processes shaping the Polish labour market over the last decade. While earlier research on migration to Central and Eastern Europe often emphasised general mobility trends, more recent studies highlight the specific dynamics of Ukrainian migration to Poland, particularly after 2014, when political instability and conflict in Eastern Ukraine triggered an increased outflow of workers (Górny & Kaczmarczyk, 2018; Kindler & Kordasiewicz, 2019). These flows were initially dominated by temporary and circular mobility, especially in agriculture, construction, and low-wage services (Duszczyk & Matuszczyk, 2018), but after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, longer-term settlement intentions have become more prominent (Chmielewska et al., 2023).

The significance of this process becomes even more evident when placed against the background of broader demographic and labour-market challenges in Europe. Since the early 1990s, population ageing has been a defining trend in developed countries (Lee & Shin, 2021). Its effects, particularly visible in Europe, include declining productivity and a slowdown in new business creation (CORDIS, 2025). Projections suggest that by 2050 Europe may face a shortage of around 44 million workers, with Germany, France and the United Kingdom among the most affected economies (Kenny & Yang, 2021). In Poland, the shortage may reach up to 5 million workers (Piątkowski, 2018).



Estimates by the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) indicate that to maintain the current ratio of working-age to post-working-age populations, almost 1.5 million additional workers would need to be recruited from abroad by 2027 (SP, 2024a). Already today, labour shortages are acutely felt in many industries, both in Poland and across Europe, driving employers to increasingly rely on migrants.

In this context, the influx of Ukrainian workers has become particularly significant. Between 2022 and 2024 alone, more than one million Ukrainians entered the Polish labour market, with strong concentrations in construction, agriculture, logistics and services (SP, 2024b). This illustrates the direct response of Polish enterprises to acute shortages (Craveiro et al., 2019; Cillo, 2021). Importantly, recent research highlights not only the quantitative but also the qualitative aspects of this inflow: Ukrainian migrants often bring professional competences, adaptability, and cross-border experience that can strengthen enterprises in border regions (Janicki & Ledwich, 2021), making them distinct from other migrant groups (Szaban, 2022; Weisse, 2023; Zyzik et al., 2023).

Empirical studies also confirm that Ukrainian workers often fill labour shortages primarily in secondary labour-market segments characterised by instability and lower wages, consistent with the dual labour-market mechanism described by Piore (1979). Research by the National Bank of Poland (NBP, 2024) and Baran (2021) shows that Ukrainians provide essential workforce supply in occupations unattractive to native workers. At the same time, evidence from the Institute for Structural Research (IBS) suggests that their role is more complementary than substitutional, as their employment enables firms to expand production rather than merely replace domestic labour (Kaczmarczyk, 2021).

2.3. Institutional setting in Poland and the enterprise perspective

The institutional framework has further shaped the scale and character of this migration. Since 2006, Poland has implemented the simplified “declaration system” (oświadczenia), which allowed employers to hire Ukrainians with minimal bureaucracy. These regulations were liberalised after 2014 and significantly expanded by the 2022 Special Act for Ukrainian citizens. Scholars underline that such instruments facilitated rapid adjustment of labour supply to employer demand, but also created long-term challenges for integration and employment stability (OECD, 2019; Górny & Kindler, 2023).

From the enterprise perspective, the employment of migrants is analysed through multiple lenses – economic, social, cultural and institutional. It addresses several critical needs:

- 1) filling shortages in hard-to-staff sectors (Dustmann et al., 2010; EC, 2024);

- 2) enhancing flexibility and reducing employment costs, for example by using labour from Ukraine, Georgia or Belarus to better manage seasonality and production peaks (Ruhs & Anderson, 2010; OECD, 2019);
- 3) introducing new competences and experiences, including technological know-how and innovative working techniques (Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003; Chiswick & Miller, 2009);
- 4) strengthening corporate image through diversity and equality policies, enhancing attractiveness to socially responsible partners (Poland Insight, 2025);
- 5) supporting internationalisation through access to a wider talent pool and cultural knowledge (Ashourizadeh & Saedikiya, 2023);
- 6) accessing public support instruments, such as grants, tax breaks, adaptation subsidies or simplified employment programmes for migrants (Union of Entrepreneurs..., 2023; Zabielska & Kowalewska, 2024).

Consequently, entrepreneurs employing migrants – particularly from Ukraine – not only aim to fill immediate workforce gaps but also increasingly expect institutional and financial support to strengthen their long-term business strategies (Privara, 2025). Addressing this dual perspective of short-term adjustment and long-term structural change is essential for understanding the evolving role of migration in the Polish labour market.

The research in Table 1 shows that effective integration of migrants into the labour market requires a coordinated combination of simplified administrative procedures, language and vocational training, recognition of qualifications, and financial support for employers. Such complementary measures support sustainable use of migrant potential and stabilisation of employment, and they provide an institutional rationale for Hypothesis H3 (Tabel 2).

3. Methods

The main objective of the study was to identify the activity of migrants (divided into: economic migrants, refugees) in relation to the (sectoral) needs of entrepreneurs. To achieve it:

- 1) a critical analysis of the literature on the subject was conducted;
- 2) statistical data on enterprises in Poland was analysed (using: SP, 2024c; SP, 2024d);
- 3) the minimum sample size for the finite population was established. At the significance level of $\alpha=0.05$, it amounted to 384 with a permissible estimation error (equal to 5%), both for the examined border enterprises and the examined immigrants (economic migrants and refugees);
- 4) the enterprises were selected from registers of non-financial firms (SP, 2024c; SP, 2024d) located in four provinces in eastern Poland. This



border (peripheral) region is characterised by high demand for migrant labour, reflecting shortages associated with out-migration from peripheral to central areas (SP, 2024e).

The selection of units for the sample was made on a quota basis according to the known structure of the general population, ensuring approximate representativeness. Within each stratum, units were selected without replacement, meant that a selected element of the population participated in the draw only once. Therefore, it could not be selected again for the sample.

- 5) original questionnaires for entrepreneurs and migrants were created, in which they were asked to indicate, among other things:
 - a. the type of migrant workers: refugees, economic immigrants or both;
 - b. factors conducive to employing migrants (based on the literature; Fig. 2);
 - c. expectations of entrepreneurs employing migrants (Fig. 1).

The questionnaire was in Polish and consisted of closed-ended questions. Some questions could be answered in more than one way. The article presents the results of a selected subset of analyses from a broader research project on border enterprises employing migrants from Ukraine (the questionnaire contained 11 questions). Due to limitations in scope and volume, we focus on modules and questions directly related to hypotheses H1–H3;

- 6) a survey was conducted in 2023 and 2024. The choice of research period was directly related to the outbreak of the war in Ukraine and the unprecedented migration wave of Ukrainians to Poland.
- 7) the method used was a telephone interview (90%) and an online survey (10%). The study analyse data from 400 surveys. The fieldwork was outsourced to a specialized research company with experience in survey studies;
- 8) primary (survey) and secondary (statistical) data were analysed. Statistica software (Statistica 13.3 PL statistical package) and Excel (Office 365 A1 Plus for teaching staff, version 2404) were used to analyse quantitative (primary) data. The authors' own findings are presented descriptively and graphically in the form of tables and figures;
- 9) multivariate correspondence analysis (Fig. 3) was used to graphically represent the structures and patterns of the data collected during the study. Due to the two-dimensional nature of the graphical representation (row and column axis), we examined how well these two dimensions describe the relationship under study: factors influencing migrant employment and migrant type. The first dimension explains most of the variability between columns (factors influencing migrant employment), while the vertical axis explains the variability between

- rows (migrant types). This approach ensures clear and easy-to-interpret results, enabling analysis of qualitative survey data;
- 10) the results of data analyzes and literature review were the basis for verifying hypotheses, formulating final conclusions and recommendations.

4. Results and Discussion

Consistent with the dual/segmented labour market framework introduced in Section 2.1, drawing on the survey of 400 enterprises in Poland's border voivodships, the evidence depicts a labour-demand landscape marked by persistent vacancies in routine-intensive segments and by differentiated market scope across enterprises. More than half of them operate locally, one-third at the national level, with 10% active intra-EU, 5% across Europe, and 2% declaring global reach. Migrant workers are most frequently employed in construction, hospitality, retail/wholesale, and services – areas where staffing gaps are chronic, task sequences tightly coupled, and production delays easily propagate (statistical data confirms this, SP, 2024b). Read through the lens of segmented and dual labour-market theory, this allocation is fully consistent with secondary-segment pull: enterprises maintain throughput by allocating migrants to time sensitive, physically demanding, or routine tasks while preserving continuity in coordination-intensive and customer-facing roles typically staffed by native workers (Piore, 1979; Duszczyk & Matuszczyk, 2018; Kaczmarczyk, 2021). In border regions (SP, 2024e) – where replacement pipelines are thin and seasonal peaks are sharper – this pattern appears less a short-term fix than a structural response to demographic decline and long-standing shortages. Aligning with macro-level evidence on the measurable contribution of Ukrainian migrants to Poland's labour supply and GDP growth (Baran, 2021; NBP, 2024).

This pattern is consistent with firmlevel evidence that migrants often complement rather than substitute native labour, enabling expansion where shortages bind (Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003; Kaczmarczyk, 2021), and with macro studies showing aggregate gains (Baran, 2021; NBP, 2024).

Qualitative accounts clarify the channel through which these gains are realised (Brunarska et al., 2016). Entrepreneurs report that assigning migrants to routine, time-bounded tasks allows a withinfirm reallocation of native staff towards coordination, higher-autonomy and client-facing functions – positions where firm-specific knowledge, language proficiency and local networks are most valuable. This task boundary is precisely where complementarity emerges: migrants anchor the execution layer, protecting quality and timeliness at the customer interface. Where firms maintain basic onboarding and standard operating procedures, time-to-productivity shortens and the risk that migrant hiring becomes a revolving-door solution recedes (Duszczyk & Matuszczyk, 2018; Kaczmarczyk, 2021). The effect is most vis-

ible in construction and logistics. In these sectors, small increases in staffing continuity translate into measurable improvements in adherence to plans, utilisation of capital equipment, and the reliability of delivery windows.

The same enterprises, however, emphasise frictions that slow or blunt integration. Three constraints recur: administrative complexity (documentation, renewals, tracking permit validity), language deficits, and difficulties in recognising prior qualifications. These hurdles elongate time-to-productivity, constrain internal mobility and risk underutilising human capital – especially in SMEs lacking dedicated HR capacity. The Polish framework has long reduced entry costs via the “oœwiadczenie” mechanism and subsequent administrative simplifications, and the 2022 Special Act further eased access for Ukrainian citizens (OECD, 2019; Górny & Kindler, 2023; OECD, 2023). Yet respondents underline that beyond simplified entry, upstream frictions persist around nostrification/recognition, targeted language/vocational provision, and routine renewals that collide with production peaks—precisely when slack is scarcest. This is fully consistent with international evidence that policy architectures solving immediate shortages may still lock in precariousness unless paired with qualification recognition and active labour-market measures (Ruhs & Anderson, 2010; OECD, 2023).

Against this backdrop, the enablers flagged by entrepreneurs become legible. The most salient instruments are economic – notably access to national/EU funds (subsidies, tax relief, co-financed training) – and institutional infrastructures that reduce information and certification frictions: skills/qualification databases, streamlined recognition pathways, and simplified information systems for reporting and monitoring permits (Eurofound, 2024; Guzi et al., 2024; Bertè et al., 2023; EC, 2024). These preferences provide supporting evidence for H2–H3. Under H2, systematic knowledge infrastructures (searchable databases, faster nostrification) should strengthen strategic HR planning and matching quality. Such tools are precisely what entrepreneurs request (Bevelander & Irastorza, 2023; Klages & Mustafa, 2023; Kowalik et al., 2023; NBP, 2024; Shelest-Szumilas, 2024). Under H3, institutional and financial support is posited to affect not only short-term hiring but also longer-run innovation and competitiveness. Although these analyses do not identify causal enterprises-performance effects, the combination of co-financed training, public support schemes and recognition reflects a coherent pathway from rapid recruitment to durable integration (Eurofound, 2024; Guzi et al., 2024; Privara, 2025). Importantly, this is consistent with prior Polish experience: post-2006 procedural relief accelerated hiring (OECD, 2019), whereas deeper integration hinged on language, training and recognition (Górny & Kindler, 2023; OECD, 2023; Aronin & Singleton, 2025).

The multidimensional correspondence analysis adds structure to this interpretation by mapping how types of migrants align with factors encouraging employment. The association is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 156$; $p < 0.001$), with a dominant horizontal dimension that accounts for 96.49% of

column inertia (i.e., factors influencing the employment of migrants) and a vertical dimension explaining 3.51% of row variation (i.e., differences across migrant types). The first axis captures the bulk of the instruments enterprises connect to greater feasibility of hiring, while the second distinguishes who those instruments are thought to work best for. Refugees cluster with skills databases, improved job placement, cooperation with institutions, and free language/training – a package that reduces information asymmetries and barriers to first entry (OECD & EMN, 2024; IAB, 2024; Strzelecki i in., 2022). Refugees with prior economic-migration experience align with administrative/legal assistance, cross-border cooperation, diploma nostrification, and financial/substantive support – the needs of individuals with transferable but under-recognised credentials (OECD, 2023; Klages & Mustafa, 2023; EC, 2024). Economic migrants (non-refugees) align most closely with information/service portals, consistent with profiles that can navigate job search and onboarding if market information is transparent and procedural steps are standardised (Bertè et al., 2023; EC, 2024). Substantively, the analysis demonstrates that enterprises do not treat “migrants” as a monolith. They match distinct instrument bundles to distinct migrant profiles, reinforcing the policy implication that one-size-fits-all support underperforms in border-region labour markets where constraints and capacities vary markedly across sectors, enterprises and workers.

Heterogeneity by sector, enterprise size, and market scope further qualifies these patterns. Reliance on migrant labour – and the magnitude of stability gains – is strongest in construction and logistics, where bottlenecks are most acute and workflows interdependent (Duszczyk & Matuszczyk, 2018). Larger enterprises are more likely to internalise onboarding and training, achieving shorter time-to-productivity and buffering administrative shocks. SMEs depend more on simplified procedures and external support (public employment services, NGOs, cross-border partnerships), making them especially sensitive to documentation delays or renewal backlogs (Eurofound, 2024; Guzi et al., 2024). Enterprises serving extra-regional markets report stronger incentives to lock in stable migrant staffing to protect delivery reliability, contractual performance and reputation with upstream contractors, echoing findings that migrants’ linguistic and cross-cultural capital support expansion and internationalisation (Ashourizadeh & Saeedikiya, 2023). At the same time, some employers view diversity signalling as reputationally beneficial in value chains where corporate responsibility is monitored (Poland Insight, 2025), which may strengthen demand for stable integration over transactional hires.

Two boundary conditions warrant interpretive caution and shape priorities for further research. First, local-institutional variance – coverage of support programmes, practices of public employment services and the capacity of municipalities/NGOs – likely shapes recruitment frictions across

sites. This unobserved heterogeneity may amplify or attenuate the association between instrument availability and perceived hiring feasibility (OECD & EMN, 2024; IAB, 2024). Second, seasonality modifies measured work intensity and vacancy pressure, especially in agriculture, construction and HoReCa. Because fieldwork occurred in 2023–2024, the snapshot captures employer behaviour in the immediate post-shock period following the 2022 refugee inflow and amid evolving regulations, implying potential sensitivity to policy timing and the macro cycle (EC, 2024). These caveats do not overturn the core patterns but do highlight why administrative simplification alone is insufficient: without language provision, recognition of qualifications and financing for onboarding/upskilling, firms will continue to face integration bottlenecks at precisely the moments when demand peaks and slack is scarcest (OECD, 2019; Górny & Kindler, 2023; OECD, 2023; Aronin & Singleton, 2025).

The results also align with the broader migration timeline into Poland, which helps interpret employers' current stance. Earlier work documents how post-2014 inflows, initially dominated by temporary/circular mobility in agriculture, construction and low-wage services, gradually shifted towards longer-term settlement intentions after 2022 (Duszczyk & Matuszczyk, 2018; Górny & Kaczmarczyk, 2018; Kindler & Kordasiewicz, 2019; Chmielewska et al., 2023). This shift is exactly where administrative facilitation meets the limits of short-term instruments: when the modal profile evolves from short-stay, low-recognition employment to longer-horizon labour-market participation, recognition, training and databases become essential complements to basic procedures. In that sense, the border-region results here sit squarely within the literature's trajectory—from viewing Ukrainian workers primarily as a fast-moving buffer stock, to understanding them as a structural component of firm strategies under demographic decline (OECD, 2023; Eurofound, 2024; NBP, 2024).

The picture that emerges from Poland's border voivodeships is one of complementarity rather than substitution. In environments of demographic decline, fragmented internal mobility, and chronic shortages, migrant employment sustains throughput and enables incremental growth. The consistency with H1 is strongest where full-time workloads and continuity gains coincide. Support for H2–H3 is clearest in the coherent policy bundle employers demand. This is about skills databases and recognition pathways to reduce information and certification frictions, paired with subsidies, tax relief, and co-financed training to underwrite the costs of integration (OECD, 2019; Górny & Kindler, 2023; OECD, 2023; Eurofound, 2024; Guzi et al., 2024; Klages & Mustafa, 2023; Aronin & Singleton, 2025). For policy, the implication is immediate and practical: procedural ease is necessary but not sufficient. Durable integration in border-region labour markets requires coupling simplified hiring with knowledge infrastructures (searchable databases of qualifications, fast-track recognition and nostrification), language and vocational provision aligned with sectoral task structures,

and financing mechanisms that allow firms – especially SMEs – to invest at the moment when it matters most (Bertè et al., 2023; EC, 2024; Eurofound, 2024). For research, the next step is to move to multi-wave panels that link survey responses to administrative records (e.g. on hours, wages, turnover and training) and regulatory changes. Only then will it be possible to quantify the long-run effects posited in H3 on innovation and competitiveness, and to rank which bundles of instruments deliver the largest productivity and inclusion gains.

In sum, in Poland's border voivodeships, the employment of Ukrainian migrants has moved beyond emergency substitution to become a structural element of firm strategies in shortage-prone sectors. The evidence is consistent with H1, indicating longer-term workforce stabilisation rather than ad-hoc gap-filling. We also find supporting evidence for H2, as employers explicitly demand skills/qualification databases and streamlined recognition to improve matching quality. Finally, we observe support for H3, insofar as firms identify institutional and financial instruments (subsidies, tax relief, co-financed training) as decisive complements that turn rapid recruitment into durable integration and, prospectively, stronger competitiveness. While causal identification awaits multi-wave panels and linked administrative records, the directional alignment with H1–H3 is robust across descriptive, relational and narrative evidence.

Limitations: The representativeness of the sample is limited to four border provinces and their sectoral and size composition, which makes it impossible to draw direct generalisations about other regions (e.g. those with higher high-tech intensity). In addition, institutional heterogeneity at the local level (scope of support programmes, PUP practices, activity of local governments/NGOs) may introduce systematic variation that we do not identify. Finally, the seasonality of employment (agriculture, construction, HoReCa) and the 2023–2024 measurement may distort the estimates of the effects; stronger identification requires a multi-wave panel with control for seasonality and the business cycle.

5. Conclusion

Based on empirical research and literature analysis, the authors propose a new approach to the phenomenon of migration from Ukraine – treating migrants not only as an integration challenge, but as a strategic response to the needs of entrepreneurs to fill staff (industry) shortages. In conditions of depopulation and competence deficits, migrants can provide effective support for the labour market, especially in border regions. They can revive local markets and stimulate the development of companies (increased financial and operational efficiency) by increasing employment, professionalizing activities and gaining new markets.

In response to the needs of the labour market, the authors developed two related profiles: an entrepreneur employing migrants and a migrant employee, demonstrating their partial compatibility – especially in terms of expected qualifications.

The verification of hypotheses supported (with noted causal limits): (1) the significant influence of institutional support, especially financial, on employment decisions, (2) motivations such as staff shortages and the need to simplify procedures and, as a result, increase the financial result, and (3) the need to create an information system on migrants. The main objective of the research was also achieved.

The authors' recommendations include: simplifying the legalization of work, language and training support, developing digital recruitment platforms, candidate databases and data protection. Such actions will help migration become an element of development policy, not just integration. Especially since migrants meet the needs of low-skilled professions, but do not solve the problem of the lack of highly qualified specialists. Therefore, the authors postulate the continuation and expansion of research to better recognise the needs of local (national) entrepreneurs and the conditions/opportunities for employing migrants.

This study demonstrates that labour migration from Ukraine to Poland has evolved into a structural and transformative factor shaping the national labour market. Earlier research already highlighted the increasing significance of Ukrainian mobility (Górny & Kaczmarczyk, 2018; Kindler & Kordasiewicz, 2019; Duszczyk & Matuszczyk, 2018), but our analysis provides additional evidence from a microeconomic perspective, particularly in border regions where the intensity of inflows has been greatest. By combining firm-level data with broader demographic and institutional analyses, the study bridges the gap between macro-level findings (Baran, 2021; NBP, 2024) and the underexplored perceptions of employers themselves.

The findings provide strong support for the first hypothesis (H1), indicating that Ukrainian workers contribute not only to filling immediate shortages but also to stabilising workforce structures in the long run, thereby enhancing firms' resilience to demographic decline. This resonates with Piore's (1979) dual labour market theory, which explains the concentration of migrants in secondary segments, but extends it by showing that migrant labour can also strengthen long-term business continuity. Complementarity rather than substitution, as emphasised by Kaczmarczyk (2021) and IBS reports, appears to be a defining feature of Ukrainian migration.

The second hypothesis (H2) is also confirmed. Our results show that the absence of systematic databases on migrant qualifications hampers effective human resource planning. International evidence (OECD, 2023; Aluchna et al., 2024; NBP, 2024;) supports the claim that knowledge infrastructures and recognition mechanisms are essential to reduce inefficiencies in labour

market matching. Importantly, this study contributes by documenting employer demand for such tools, highlighting a gap in the Polish institutional framework.

The third hypothesis (H3) is validated by evidence on the importance of institutional and financial support. While simplified mechanisms such as the declaration system and the 2022 Special Act for Ukrainian citizens facilitated rapid responses to labour demand (OECD, 2019; Górny & Kindler, 2023), our findings confirm that employers also expect more sustainable instruments: subsidies, tax incentives, and EU co-financed programmes that support vocational adaptation and innovation (Eurofound, 2024; Guzi et al., 2024; Prvara, 2025). Without such complementary policies, there is a risk that migrant employment remains precarious, undermining long-term integration.

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes by integrating segmented labour market theory, human capital approaches, and institutionalism into a coherent framework for understanding Ukrainian migration. It highlights that the dynamics of migrant employment cannot be fully explained by demand-supply mechanisms alone but require attention to institutional arrangements, recognition of qualifications, and employer perceptions at the firm level.

From a policy perspective, the results underline the need for comprehensive frameworks that go beyond short-term administrative simplification. Effective integration requires:

1. simplified but reliable legal procedures,
2. structured databases on migrant qualifications and competences,
3. systematic recognition of skills and vocational training opportunities, and
4. targeted financial instruments to support employers.

Finally, the study opens new avenues for further research. While our evidence is based on border regions, future work could explore sectoral differences, long-term career trajectories of migrants, and the interplay between public policies and firm-level strategies. Comparative analyses across Central and Eastern Europe would also enhance understanding of whether the Polish case is unique or reflects broader regional trends.

5.1. Scenarios for migrant labour in Poland's border voivodeships

Scenario A – Consolidation and integration upgrade.

Sustained inflows of Ukrainian workers are complemented by stronger integration instruments (faster recognition of qualifications, language and vocational training, and support for SMEs). In the analysed voivodeships, this would likely reduce turnover and gradually increase migrants' presence in more skilled roles, consistent with the mechanisms behind H2-H3.

Scenario B – Status quo / patchwork governance.

Recruitment remains fast through simplified procedures, but knowledge infrastructures (skills databases, recognition pathways) and financing instruments remain fragmented. As a result, migrants stay concentrated in secondary segments with persistent mismatch and limited upgrading, reinforcing the dual labour market logic behind H1.

Scenario C – Restriction and volatility.

Greater regulatory uncertainty or restrictions on entry/support reduce the availability of migrant labour. Border-region SMEs face larger vacancy pressures, rising costs and higher risks of informal employment, weakening long-run integration and competitiveness.

In sum, Ukrainian migration to Poland is no longer a temporary response to labour shortages but a transformative process with implications for theory, policy and practice. Only an integrated approach – combining administrative, institutional and financial instruments – will allow Poland to fully harness this potential while contributing to the resilience and competitiveness of its labour market in a rapidly changing European context.

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Appendix

Table 1. Areas of business support when employing migrants – in light of the literature

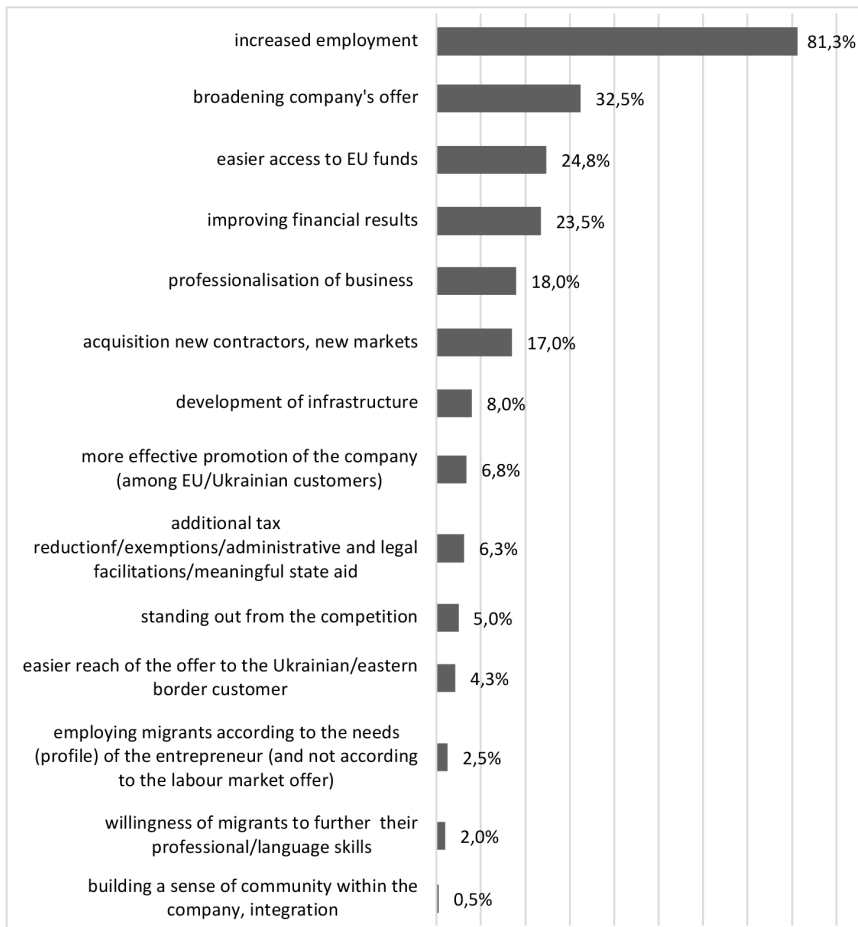
Institutional and policy enablers of migrant employment		References
legalisation of employment, procedural support, counselling	difficulties related to documentation and administrative procedures – the need to facilitate recruitment and legalization processes	OECD&EMN (2024); IAB (2024); Kubiciel-Lodzińska et al. (2024); Strzelecki et al, (2022)
language and adaptation courses	lack of language skills – the need to organize language courses and adaptive adaptations	Aronin&Singleton (2025); Guzi et al. (2024)
vocational training and courses	on-the-job training, career counseling, onboarding programs – financing/co-financing by the state/EU	Adamczyk et al. (2022); Aluchna et al. (2024)
recognition of professional qualifications	migrant workers (from Ukraine) with education and professional experience not recognized in Poland – need for support in the process of nostrification of diplomas, recognition of qualifications	OECD (2023); Klages&Mustafa (2023); Weisser (2023)
adaptation of job offers to the specific characteristics of migrants	the possibility of adapting the job offer to the competences of migrants (possibility of retraining)	Shelest-Szumilas (2024); Bevelander & Irastorza (2023); Kowalik et al. (2023)
simplified information system	the ability to quickly report the employment of foreigners and track permits and their validity dates	Bertè et al. (2023); EC (2024)
systems financial support	subsidies/tax relief for companies employing migrants, access for entrepreneurs to professional activation programs (e.g. through labor offices)	Eurofound (2024); Guzi et al. (2024); Prvara (2025)
databases	regarding migrants ready to work in various sectors	NBP (2024)

Source: own work based on a literature review.

Table 2. Theoretical lenses and their links to hypotheses H1–H3.

Theoretical lens	Key mechanism for migrant employment	Link to hypotheses (expected patterns)
Dual / segmented labour market (Piore, 1979)	Structural demand for labour in secondary segments; migrants concentrated in routine, time-sensitive and physically demanding tasks.	H1: migrant employment stabilises firm operations in shortage-prone sectors; complementarity with native workers in primary segments.
Human capital + search/matching frictions (Sjaastad, 1962; Mortensen & Pissarides, 1994)	Imperfect information, credential non-transferability and language barriers raise mismatch and underutilisation of skills.	H2: databases of qualifications + recognition pathways reduce frictions, improving HR planning and matching quality.
Institutionalism / migration regime	Entry channels, work authorisation, and public co-financing shape both the scale of inflows and the sustainability of integration.	H3: institutional and financial instruments (subsidies, tax relief, EU co-financing) complement simplified procedures and enable durable integration.

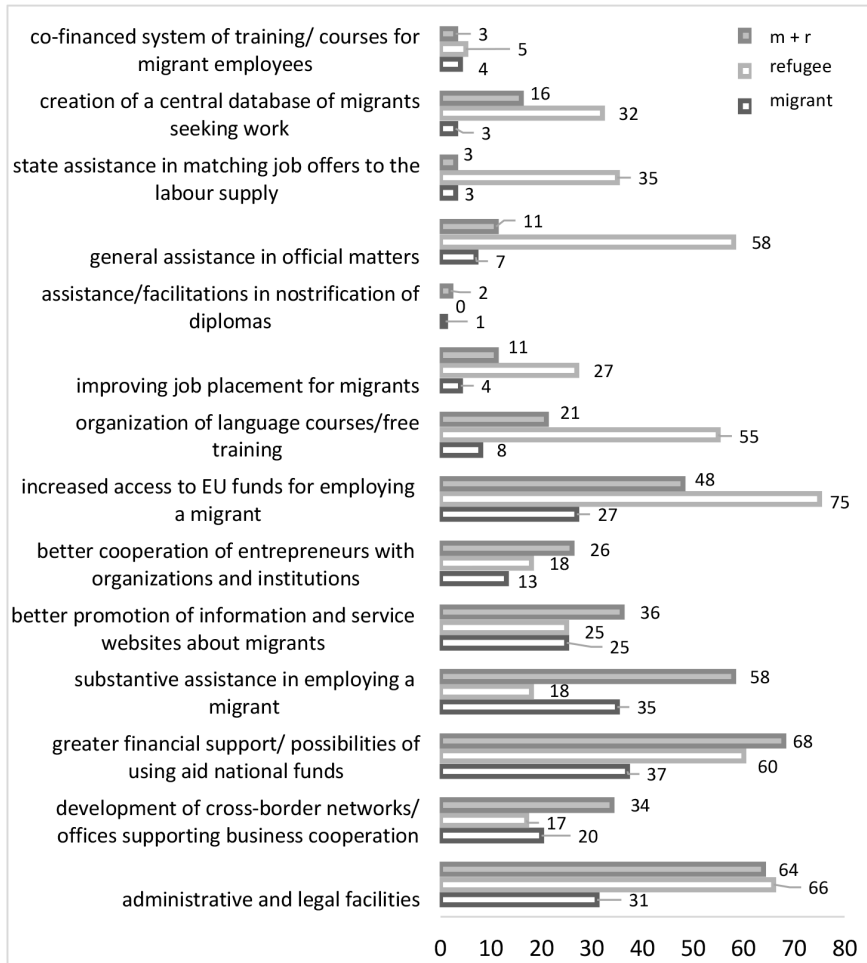
Figure 1. Expectations of entrepreneurs from employment of migrants by type of migrant – entrepreneur’s perspective



Source: Own preparation.



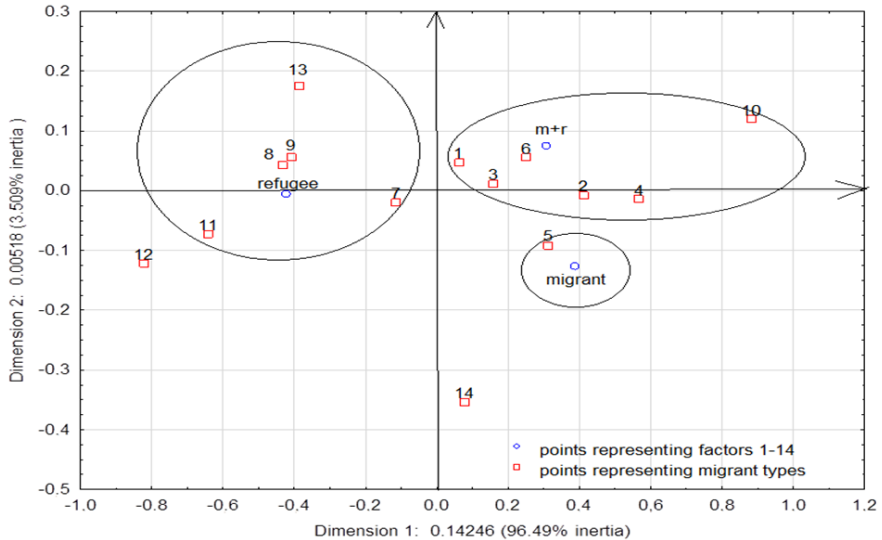
Figure 2. Factors contributing to the employment of migrants – the entrepreneur’s perspective



Migrant types: migrant; refugee; migrant+ refugee (m+r)

Source: Own preparation .

Figure 3. Correspondence analysis



Migrant types: migrant ; refugee; migrant+ refugee (m+r)

Factors: 1 – administrative and legal facilities; 2 – development of cross-border networks/ offices supporting business cooperation; 3 – greater financial support/ possibilities of using aid national funds; 4 – substantive assistance in employing a migrant; 5 – better promotion of information and service websites about migrants; 6 – better cooperation of entrepreneurs with organisation and institutions; 7 – increased access to EU funds for employing a migrant; 8 – organisation of language courses/free training; 9 – improving job placement for migrants; 10 – assistance/facilitations in nostrification of diplomas; 11 – general assistance in official matters; 12 – general assistance in official matters; 13 – creation of a central database of migrants seeking work; 14 – co-financed system of training/ courses for migrant employees

Source: compiled on the basis of own research using the statistical package Statistica 13.3 PL.