

## FOREIGN LABOUR MIGRATION OF UKRAINIANS TO POLAND: STATISTICAL RESEARCH FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF UKRAINIAN STUDIES

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**Abstract:** This article considers the three main waves of external labour migration from Ukraine to Poland in the second half of the twentieth century. Ukrainian and Polish statistics concerning the study of labour emigration of Ukrainians to the Republic of Poland were submitted and analysed. The author determines the scale of Ukrainian labour migrants and the causes of migration, based on the results of questionnaires.

**Keywords:** migrant workers, sphere of activity, official statistics, labour migrants, Poland, Ukrainians, migration policy, experts.

### 1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the 1990s the population of Ukraine has become much more involved in the processes of labour migration. The first to join the process were the residents of the capital mostly due to their free access to information and high mobility. The degree of contact they had with other countries, lead to the growth in activity among people, regardless of where they lived. Today, according to national sociological monitoring, residents of small towns (33% of identified migrant households) and rural areas (28%) are the most widely represented in the streams of temporary labour migration ([www.geograf.com.ua](http://www.geograf.com.ua), 2018.02.10).

There are 3 waves of external labour migration from Ukraine to Poland in the 2nd half of the 20th century which may be identified:

1. up to the 1990s, a small amount of external labour migration took place, consisting of representatives from the cultural and intellectual elite,
2. 1990-1995 – the geography of migration expanded. There was a greater outflow of labour resources abroad (qualified and experienced specialists),
3. since 1995, migration has become massive (workers with a range of different qualifications).

Particular features of external labour migration in Ukraine include:

1. The majority of migrant workers reside in the border areas.
2. The majority of migrants come from rural Ukraine.
3. Average age of migrants is 30-50.
4. Married people are more involved in labour migration than single people.
5. Men are more likely to be the actual migrants.

Official statistics do not, however, reflect the real state of labour migration abroad. Between 1 and 3 million Ukrainians go to work abroad every year; according to another source it is between 2 and 7 million people. Many Ukrainian migrants work in Russia (between 100,000 and 300,000). According to the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, almost 1 million people go to work in Poland every year ([www.geograf.com.ua](http://www.geograf.com.ua), 2018.02.10).

## **2. Ukrainians as labour migrants in Poland**

The highest number of migrant workers arrive in Poland from the western regions, primarily Lviv, Volyn, Ternopil, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Rivne. These regions have the closest historical contacts with Poland as before the Second World War, the territory was part of the Polish state. In addition, there is little work available in these areas, industry is poorly developed and there is a high level of unemployment (Zubik, 2014).

The number of migrant workers from big cities has recently increased. The majority is made up of young people. 71% want to stay in Poland. Their salaries in Poland are twice as large as in Ukraine. This statistic is provided by the Businessviews portal.

According to research by the Polish National Bank – “Citizens of Ukraine working in Poland” – 95% of labour migrants in Poland are Ukrainians. Practically men prevail in construction works while in the agriculture sector there is approximate gender parity among migrant workers and the work in the household and the service sector is the prerogative of women. The change of the demand in the western labour markets, which took place in the early 2000s, led to massive migration to Poland in order to get a job of a housekeeper, a babysitter, a house cleaner.

For a migrant to have an opportunity to work officially, the employer must register an employment declaration of a foreigner. This document gives the right to work in Poland for a period of up to 6 months. 1.3 million declarations were registered in 2016.

In particular, 71% of those, who received a temporary residence permit in 2016, desired to stay in Poland forever. The number of issued residence permits has increased since 2013.

2014 was marked by the tendency that mostly men went to work abroad while by 2013 two thirds of the Ukrainian migrants were women. Since 2014, the number of men migrants

increased, and now the new wave of labour migration consists prevailingly of men. Earlier mostly elderly migrated to Poland, during the period 2014-2016 this tendency changed, namely 38% of migrants were students and graduates from universities aged 18 to 25, and the percentage of the elderly was only 18%.

One of the reasons of taking decision to earn money abroad for 60% of people is a low salary while for the period of 2013-2014 the percentage had risen. The number of those who migrate because of an unstable political situation has also increased. Not only residents from villages and towns took part in migration processes but also citizens of big cities with population of more than 500,000 people (Mykolaiv, Kryvyi Rih, Lviv, Zaporizhzhia) and of more than 1 million people.

In 2014 0.3% of migrants set up their business, 70% were looking for work with a help of friends or relatives, and only 15% of labour emigrants found work by ad.

New wave emigrants do construction work and one third of Ukrainians work in Polish rural households. The average salary of a migrant worker in Poland is more than twice as higher as the Ukrainian one. The average wage of a Ukrainian migrant in Poland comprises 2,100 zlotys, that is about 14,000 hryvnias. In comparison, the average salary in Ukraine is 7,400 hryvnias.

The highest wages get workers on construction works, the lowest are in households. Polish employers are ready to offer free accommodation and food (25%). 66% of the earnings Ukrainians bring to relatives in the homeland.

Ukrainian labour migrants spend only around one third of their money on their needs, saving the rest to send or take home. In fact, by 2013 migrants were only spending 20% of their earnings on their own needs. It is noticeable that women are more economical and send home bigger sums of money. In 60% of cases Ukrainians take the earned money home personally and rarely trust intermediaries or firms, and go back home every 2-3 months.

### **3. A visa regime in Poland and labour migration**

In order to get to Poland, Ukrainians need to get a visa. During 2016, Polish consulates issued 1,265 million visas to Ukrainians. 56% of these were Polish visas, meaning that their recipients aimed to work or study, while the Schengen visas are used for tourism.

A visa-free regime is intended for tourism, business negotiations or participation in a variety of events. To work in an EU country the migrant must get a labour visa. Work migrants possessing a residence permit comprise only 0.3% of the whole population of Poland. Thus, the total number of official migrants for the previous years is 103,000 people. It is difficult to estimate the number of Ukrainian who work unofficially in Poland.

Polish employers sometimes have a problem finding Polish workers as they are not keen on working in low skilled jobs. Therefore, 40% of Polish entrepreneurs in the sales and service sectors prefer to hire Ukrainians (<https://arena.press>, 2018.03.12).

For the last few years the number of migrant workers from Ukraine in Poland has increased significantly. However this is not just dry statistics; one can for instance easily hear Russian or Ukrainian being spoken here and there in Poland. There is, consequently, more attention paid to Ukrainians in Poland: some consider it to be a good thing, others as problematic and even dangerous.

The issue of the number of Ukrainians in Poland is a most complicated one. The Polish authorities cannot provide accurate figures. Labour migration is a cyclic phenomenon, since people travel back and forth. One thing is obvious: 5-7 years ago, the majority of labour migrants to Poland originated from the Ukrainian West but now the geography of migration has significantly expanded to the East and South. Relatively fewer eastern Ukrainians e.g. from Odesa, Dnipropetrovck, Poltava region, joined the labour migration to Poland. Now, conversely one can meet people speaking Russian with a specific Ukrainian accent in the Polish capital. This became especially noticeable after 2014, when, due to the sharp deterioration of relations between Ukraine and Russia, inhabitants of Central and Eastern Ukraine instead of the risky eastern direction chose the western one Poland is the closest and the simplest country to get into in this direction.

According to local officials' rough estimates, there may well be more than a million Ukrainians now in Poland. Polish radicals expressing anti-immigrant thoughts call the figure two million or more. It seems that both estimates are wrong: the number of visas issued to Ukrainians in the last year was 1.2 million, out of which 650,000 people found employment (officially and unofficially). If we also take into account the number of those who had a residence permit (approximately 100,000), plus 30,000 students, it becomes possible to suggest that the total number of Ukrainian citizens in Poland is between 500,000 and 700,000. However, it is obvious that this trend is still growing. In general, Ukrainians in Poland are working in construction, service and trade areas, agriculture and manufacturing. In other words, in spheres requiring low qualifications. However, there is a growing demand for highly qualified specialists – IT-specialists, doctors etc.

The Polish authorities generally have a positive attitude towards Ukrainian migrants. Being close to Poles culturally and mentally, labour migrants from Ukraine do not pose any danger to the actively-developing Polish economy. Ukrainians have partially filled the gap left after huge numbers of Poles, migrated to the West, especially to Great Britain, in search of a better life and earnings after joining the EU. Various sets of estimated data shows that about 1-2 million Poles live in Ireland and Britain. As a result, leaders of parties and presidential candidates visit those countries as part of their electoral campaigns. Another problem arises because of a demographic decline in Poland: every year the number of workers is going to decrease while the economy will demand more and more specialists. Two years ago, it was

difficult to imagine that Ukrainians would be offered work in different segments of the Polish service market. Commercial banks, insurance companies, consulting firms and mobile phone operators now provide special offers exclusively for Ukrainians.

Poland's migration policy regarding labour migrants from the countries of the former USSR, especially the CIS, is rather liberal. Changes to the rules of employment for foreigners in Poland are expected from July 1, 2018, within the framework of regulating the flow of labour migrants in the EU and reducing the level of fraud in the Polish labour market.

The introduction of a quota system for migrant workers has led to many discussions among the experts. The number of work permits should be set separately for each province of Poland per year, and for the entire country at 500,000. It should be noted that 1.3 million such permits were issued in the last year (<http://svitua.com.ua>, 2018.03.10).

#### **4. The reasons why Ukrainians go to Poland**

Poland attracts Ukrainians by being close to our borders and as a country with a similar language and ties. There are many legal ways for Ukrainians to find a job in Poland. The most popular include: studying at a Polish university with the prospect of further employment; labour migration to Poland; marriage to a Polish citizen; company registration (business migration), and the issue of a *Polish Card* based on Polish ancestry (Zubik, 2014).

It is mostly those who get married in Poland or have a work permit that plan their future in Poland. Students are often keen to return to Ukraine especially if the political and economic processes will support their self-realisation plans. Some labour migrants use their Polish visa to get to other European countries. In fact, the majority of work migrants in Poland constitute an illegal labour force who do the simplest kinds of work. They consider Poland to be the best source of earnings. These people do not intend to start any enterprises unless they help them to make more money.

Therefore, Ukrainian citizens have enough opportunities to work legally in Poland. A large number of Ukrainians have a positive work experience in Poland. For many years, the economic situation in Ukraine has remained difficult and made Ukrainians look for a job abroad. It is possible to say that Ukrainians will be still the most numerous group of work migrants in Europe for many years to come (Zubik, 2014).

A sharp increase in the number of Ukrainians has been seen in the Polish labour market. The main reason is the emergence of those migrants who go to work abroad due to the deteriorating economy in Ukraine and the armed conflict in Donbass. However, there is another tendency: in particular, far more men came to Poland in 2015 (57.9% compared to 32.9 % among the experienced migrants) especially the young (average age 32 compared to

42 in the previous migration wave). Furthermore there is an increase in the number of easterners taking up migrant work (28.4 % compared to 6.3%).

Polish experts have noticed a decreasing number of migrants with children (46% compared to 75.6%). This could probably lead to a complete absence of motivation to return to Ukraine and to stay legally in Poland or to move to other EU countries.

The research underlines the short lasting and cyclic character of labour migration from Ukraine to Poland. The average migrant from Ukraine visits Poland 9 times and stays there approximately 5 months. This is dependent on the way the migrant comes into the country.

The majority of migrants find jobs based on a Foreigner Employment Declaration (62.6%). 760,000 declarations were registered in 2015. This number is twice as high as in the previous year. The same increase is shown in the number of work permits issued to Ukrainians. In 2015 50,000 permits were issued while in 2014 26 000 were issued. This means that in the course of 2015 there were nearly 1 million Ukrainians working, both legally and illegally in Poland. Taking into account the short lasting character of much of this employment, it is possible to assume the presence of around 500,000 migrants in Poland at any one time.

The authors of the report note that the majority of Ukrainians arriving in Poland are university graduates. 37.7% have university degree; 53.94% secondary education; and just 8.4% obtained vocational training or did not complete their secondary education. The majority of migrants (70.7%). do simple tasks requiring no qualifications. The working week for Ukrainians amounts to 54 hours which is much longer than for Poles. The average income is 2,100 zlotys (13,000 hryvnias). The highest incomes are enjoyed by those who work on construction sites (2,729 zlotys).

Comparing the average earnings to with the number of hours worked then the wage is about 10 zlotys per hour. The financial advantage is that some workers are provided with food and accommodation. The greatest number of migrants work in households (37.6 %), doing construction and restoration/decoration (23.6%) and in agriculture (19.3%).

The majority of migrants in Poland come from rural regions (33.6% in total), as well as from towns of under 100,000 people (39.0% in total). Nevertheless, there is also a percentage who come from big cities.

In 2015 Ukrainians earned 8 billion zlotys – 1.8 billion euros. The majority of the migrants interviewed (66%) transferred money to Ukraine. 60% of them preferred to take the money to their families personally. The average transfer is estimated at 1,800 euros (more than 11,000 hryvnias) and is carried out every 2-3 months. This money is usually spent on current needs or for improving the migrant's accommodation in Ukraine.

It has been mentioned that in 2015, Ukrainians earned 8 billion zlotys, or 1.8 billion euros. The sum of money transferred to Ukraine amounts to 5 billion zlotys. Migrants who transfer money claim that they prefer to exchange zlotys for other currency usually dollars (42.5% ), euros (9.1%) or hryvnia (5%). The rest (42.5%) do not exchange the zlotys.

Students constitute another important group of migrants, whose numbers at Polish universities have increased significantly. 30,600 Ukrainian students were registered at Polish universities by the end of September 2015. According to the research half of those who study are also active in the labour market. Nevertheless, their situation is a bit different from other migrant groups.

Students work fewer hours, often getting a job in trade or catering. The average wage for students is 1,586 zlotys or 9,800 hryvnias but they usually work part-time. Among the students interviewed, 36.6% would like to live in Poland in future, and 32.5% would like to carry out professional activity there (<https://ua.112.ua>).

According to the official data from the Department of Foreign Affairs in Poland, there are official statistics from 2016 concerning Ukrainians and the legalisation of their residence in the country. As has been noted, in 2016 the number of Ukrainians who applied for a temporary residence permit in Poland (“temporary trading card”) increased by 54%. In 2014, 18,638 applied in 2015, 58,744 and in 2016 the number applying was 87,891. These figures speak for themselves. It is worth mentioning that many applications were declined. In 2014, 11,010 temporary residence permits were issued, in 2015, 37,833 and in 2016, 57,789 were issued. Work is the most common basis for an application for a residence permit accounting for 73% of applications. The other reasons are education (8,000 permits issued); and rejoining family (a little over 6,000).

An increasing number of Ukrainians have applied for the right to permanent residence (*karta stalego pobytu*). These have been made on the basis that the government has simplified the procedures for the holders of a Polish Card or people of Polish origin. In 2014 there were just 3,841 applications, in 2016 it increased to 7,601 and in 2015 it was 8,772. The acceptance rate in these circumstances is much higher. In 2014, 2,413 permits issued, 6,729 in 2015, and 5,949 in 2016.

The Department of Foreign Affairs report points out that by December 16 2016, 102,600 Ukrainians received permits of different kinds (permanent or temporary or EU residence). In general there are 224,700 Ukrainian holders of different permits in Poland.

Since the beginning of the tragic events – the annexation of Crimea and the armed conflict in Donbas – those living in these territories started to look for a safe place to live, particularly in Poland. According to the Department of Foreign Affairs, our compatriots became the second-biggest group after Russians in applying for refugee status. The peak was 2014 when Ukrainians constituted 34% of the entire group of foreigners seeking asylum abroad. The Polish government considered 2,318 applications that year. There were far fewer of them 2,305, in 2015, and in 2016 there were 1,229. There were not many acceptances since the Polish government believed just the territories of Crimea, Luhansk and Donetsk were unsafe, while the rest of Ukraine was regarded as completely safe. That was the dominant reason to decline applications for refugee status. However, 2 Ukrainians did succeed in gaining refugee

status in 2015, and 16 in 2016. Moreover, 18 people received additional protection from Poland in 2015 and 13 more in 2016.

The Polish government provides social support to Ukrainians during the proceedings. 1,308 migrants obtained this support. Residents from Donetsk region were the most frequent applicants for refugee status (32%), followed by Luhansk region (15%) and 10% were residents of annexed Crimea. The rest of the applicants are from the other regions of Ukraine even from the Western ones. The applicants are in the age range – 17-76, equally men and women, dominantly university graduates (68%). According to the annual report there are politicians from the Centre, representatives of security forces and police among the applicants.

The legalisation of Ukrainians in Poland is a long lasting and dynamic process. 2,916 applications for temporary residence and 561 for permanent residence were registered by January 15, 2018. During two weeks in 2017 the government succeeded in issuing 2,470 temporary and 230 permanent residence permits. Moreover, a further 32 Ukrainians applied in 2018 for a refugee status in Poland and officials are still processing 432 applications (Denisok, 2018.02.20).

## 5. Conclusions

The positive results of external labour migration are as following:

- integration promotes Ukraine to the world labour market,
- unemployment decreases in the national labour market, reduction of social tension in society,
- supply of foreign exchange to Ukraine in the form of money transfers by work migrants and investment of funds in the state economy by means of creating joint ventures with foreign founders,
- providing the able-bodied population with opportunities to realise their skills abroad, improve their qualifications, improve their financial situation,
- providing specialists with rare professions and qualifications from Ukraine at the expense of the foreign labour force,
- encouragement of productivity by Ukrainian workers by creating competition with foreign specialists.

Involvement of a prevalingly young, educated population in migration processes is to some extent a demographic and demo-economical “investment” in immigration countries and vice versa, it can lead to population ageing, deterioration in labour source capacity. However, international work migration is an important factor in the development of technology, and in the exchange of work experience. It is a factor in the restructuring of professional and



qualifications structure of employment, and leads to rapid and effective adaptation to the conditions of the world market.

The disadvantages of the consequences of labour migration are:

- the loss of the most competitive part of the labour force (especially scientists and specialists), which leads to a slower pace of scientific and technological progress in Ukraine,
- increased pressure on the national labour market due to competition among foreign and local workers,
- loss of foreign currency exported by immigrants as their own savings,
- discrimination and exploitation of Ukrainian citizens by local employers,
- the emergence of political and economic claims to Ukraine by recipient countries in connection with the increase of illegal labour migration of Ukrainians,
- increase of the level of crime and social tensions in society due to inter-ethnic conflicts.

The processes connected with external labour migration are regulated by the state migration policy of Ukraine. Today, the Government's important task is not only to create conditions by means of legal and economic mechanisms for legal employment of Ukrainian citizens abroad, but also primarily to implement a policy for returning Ukrainian citizens – labour migrants to their homeland.

The main problems requiring regulation are:

- Registration of labour migrants working abroad.
- Activation of the policy of creating an advantageous local labour market.
- Implementation of the policy of strengthening social protection for migrant workers – Ukrainian citizens who work in other countries.
- Implementation of preventive measures for illegal labour migration.

The further development and efficiency of labour migration in Ukraine, recognition and prestige of the state in the world depends on the clarity and thoughtfulness of its migration policy.

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