

## The migration of Ukrainians in times of crisis

Marta Jaroszewicz

---

Before the Russian annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of the conflict in eastern Ukraine, the scale of labour outward migration of Ukrainians had been characterised by a slight downward trend. Back in 2014, an increase in the number of Ukrainians who migrated to Russia was observed, although no similar increase was recorded for EU countries (excluding Poland). The year 2015 brought a more rapid surge in the number of Ukrainians migrating to the EU, again mainly to Poland. Due to the lack of current EU-wide data, estimates can be made based only on data compiled by national statistical offices in countries which are the most popular with Ukrainian migrants. In Poland, as of October 2015 Ukrainians held 52,000 valid residence cards. Much greater migration dynamics have been observed in the case of temporary migration – the number of declarations which enable an individual to take up a temporary job in Poland, issued in the first half of 2015, was a staggering 400,000. This means a more than twofold increase – in the whole of 2014 372,000 declarations were issued to Ukrainian citizens. No similar increase has so far been observed in other EU states, including Italy and the Czech Republic, which have always been popular destinations for Ukrainian migration. In late 2014, 233,000 Ukrainian migrants were registered in Italy (in late 2013 the figure was 191,000), whereas in the Czech Republic the number of Ukrainian migrants remains stable – 104,000 in June 2015.

---

The ongoing military conflict in eastern Ukraine, as a result of which approximately 6,000 individuals were killed and approximately 2,000,000 had to flee their homes, has contributed to a significant increase in the number of applications for refugee status submitted in EU countries by Ukrainian citizens. In 2014, Ukrainians submitted 14,000 applications for refugee status (1,120 in 2013). This increase should be viewed in an EU-wide context. For comparison, in 2014 individuals who fled Syria submitted 138,000 applications for refugee status in the EU and citizens of Western Balkan states submitted 109,000 applications. Bearing in mind the current migration crisis in Europe, it should be expected that during this year citizens of Syria alone will submit over 500,000 applications for refugee status within the EU.

Data compiled for 2014 and the first half of 2015 suggests that in the case of Poland there was a change in the trend regarding migration dynamics and strategies applied by Ukrainian citizens. Temporary migration to Poland is becoming an increasingly popular method of coping with poverty and instability in Ukraine. It has also been evident that, unlike in previous years, Ukrainians ever more choose settlement migration to Poland. It is still unclear how popular new migration patterns are among residents of other parts of Ukraine, i.e. other than the western part. Similarly, it is unclear whether the current increase is merely a temporary reaction of Ukrainian society to the unfavourable economic situation and to the military conflict. Of equal importance is the question whether Ukrainian citizens' current increased interest

in migration is aimed only at Poland or whether it will affect other EU countries as well. It will take several years for this question to be answered.

### 'Pre-war' migration

The large scale of external migration was a feature typical of Ukrainian society for a long time following the collapse of the USSR. However, in 2008-2009 the dynamics of migration became weaker. According to all-Ukrainian research on labour emigration, in 2005–2008 1.5 million Ukrainians worked abroad, and in 2010–2012 the figure was 1.2 million<sup>1</sup>. The decrease was mainly due to the global economic crisis and reduced demand for Ukrainian workers in the EU and in Russia. Similarly, the migration strategies of Ukrainian citizens have changed. They began to prefer temporary and circular migration, which enabled them to earn a lower income, but in exchange made it easier to maintain close relations with the homeland. This trend was also connected with the change in the list of most popular migration destinations. Back in 2005–2008, the most popular countries included Russia, Italy and the Czech Republic, whereas in 2010–2012 the top two destinations were Russia and Poland. Both countries applied relatively liberal migration policy towards Ukrainians, which fostered frequent travels by migrants<sup>2</sup>. In total, Russia and the EU each accounted for approximately 50% of migration flows from Ukraine, with Russia's share decreasing slowly. Moreover, as shown in a research project carried out in 2013-2014 by OSW in cooperation with research centres from seven countries of the region, 'pre-war' migration (from before the annexation of Crimea by

Russia and the outbreak of the military conflict in eastern Ukraine) was characterised by more rational migration choices inspired by experiences of migration gained over many years and by extensive migration networks in destination countries. The main features of this trend involved attempts by migrants to legalise their stay in host countries as well as the increased popularity of migration for educational purposes<sup>3</sup>.

### There was a change in the ranking of the most popular destination countries for Ukrainian migration to the EU – Poland replaced Italy and the Czech Republic.

Before 2014 approximately 70% of Ukrainian labour migrants came from the western part of the country, in which migration had become a widespread method of coping with poverty and low salaries. A 2012 all-Ukrainian research study on labour migration revealed that the ratio of involvement in migration among residents of western Ukraine<sup>4</sup> aged 17–70 was 10.8%, whereas in the eastern part of the country<sup>5</sup> the corresponding ratio was a mere 1%. More than two thirds of migrants heading for Poland came from Galicia<sup>6</sup>.

In the period under discussion, migration by Ukrainians was purely economic in nature. This was in contrast to, for example, Georgians or inhabitants of North Caucasus, who had to flee war or persecution. Until the outbreak of the conflict, Ukrainians had practically submitted no applications for refugee status in EU countries.

<sup>1</sup> For more see O. Betliy, The perspective of Ukraine, (in:) M. Jaroszewicz, M. Lesińska (ed.) Forecasting migration between the EU, V4 and Eastern Europe, OSW 2014, pp. 160-162.

<sup>2</sup> M. Jaroszewicz, Poland more attractive for Ukrainian economic migrants, *OSW Analyses*, 12 June 2013, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2013-06-12/poland-more-attractive-ukrainian-economic-immigrants>

<sup>3</sup> Jaroszewicz, Lesińska, *op. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> Researchers have identified the following regions as western Ukraine: Volyn, Zakarpats'ka, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, Rivne, Ternopil, Khmelnyts, Chernivtsi.

<sup>5</sup> The following regions have been identified as eastern Ukraine: Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Luhansk and Kharkiv.

<sup>6</sup> International Labour Organization, Report on The Methodology, Organization and Results of a Modular Sample Survey on Labour Migration in Ukraine, 2013, pp. 37–40

## What has changed? The evolution of internal migration

Russia's annexation of Crimea, inhabited by 2 million people, in March 2014, combined with the outbreak of the still ongoing military conflict in parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in spring 2014 (according to the UN estimates, approximately 5 million individuals have been directly affected by the conflict), have mainly changed the nature and the dynamics of internal migration of Ukrainians. A rapid increase in the level of mobility of residents of eastern Ukraine, who previously had lived a relatively settled life, was observed. According to the data of Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, in mid-September 2015 the official number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Donetsk and Luhansk regions and from Crimea was 1,438,000. Interestingly, in the initial phase of displacements most of these individuals head-

**The Annexation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine have mainly contributed to an increase in the level of internal mobility of Ukrainians.**

ed for western Ukraine (these included mainly Crimean Tatars); at present people are migrating within the Donetsk and Luhansk regions or to the nearest neighbouring regions (including the Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia regions) and to Kyiv (for more see map). These regions host nearly 80% of all IDPs<sup>7</sup>. Since the beginning of the conflict, an increase in the number of internal refugees has been observed, and the growth dynamics depends mainly on the level of intensity of military action and on changes to the rules for registering displaced individuals. At present, the dynamics is at the level of medium-high – approximately 15,000–20,000 individuals per week<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Data compiled by the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

## External migration: the consequences of the military conflict

As far as external migration of Ukrainians is concerned, the trends are more diverse. At present, no EU-wide statistical data is available to explicitly confirm the assumption that the pre-war trend in migration of Ukrainians to the EU has changed as a result of the outbreak of the military conflict. It should be remembered, however, that in 2014 EU countries registered 14,000 applications for refugee status submitted by Ukrainian citizens, including 2,318 applications in Poland. These figures are not alarming. Moreover, it is unclear whether the upward trend will be continued in 2015. Between February and April 2015 there was a significant increase in the number of submitted applications for refugee status, although in May and June 2015 a decrease was recorded. Generally speaking, between April 2014 and June 2015 the monthly trend for the whole EU oscillated around 1,000-2,000 individuals (for more see Appendix: Table 1). Polish data suggesting that since June 2015 the number of applications submitted by Ukrainians has been in decline, might be considered a kind of indication<sup>9</sup>. It should also be taken into consideration that the so-called recognition rate regarding asylum applications submitted by Ukrainians is relatively low – 21% in 2014<sup>10</sup>, which suggests that in the future Ukrainians may abandon this method of getting to the EU. According to the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), Ukrainians seeking international protection can be divided into two groups with two different migration profiles. The first group are individuals fleeing those parts of eastern Ukraine which remain outside central government's control, and the other group includes individuals dodging compulsory military service<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Office for Foreigners, Report on citizens of Ukraine (as of 13 September 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Data compiled by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO).

<sup>11</sup> <https://easo.europa.eu/wp-content/uploads/EASO-Annual-Report-2014.pdf>

To clearly confirm whether after the outbreak of the military conflict the scale of migration of Ukrainians to the EU indeed increased, one would need to analyse not only data on asylum seekers but also information on the number of residence permits issued to citizens of Ukraine in specific EU countries according to the regions from which these individuals come (which would help determine whether they come from regions affected by the conflict). So far, no such data has been compiled. Only aggregate Eurostat data for 2014 is available which shows that in that year Ukrainians held 859,000 residence cards in the EU (in 2013 849,000).

The assumption suggesting that there was a surge in external migration from Ukraine, caused by the war, is undoubtedly more legitimate in the case of Russia which directly borders the territory affected by the conflict and supports separatists' rule there. However for political reasons, Russia's leadership tend to overestimate the number of refugees; a detailed analysis of available data suggests that approximately 500,000 individuals from eastern Ukraine arrived in Russia. The Federal Migration Service of Russia has announced that between the beginning of 2014 and 1 July 2015 as many as 355,000 citizens of Ukraine submitted their applications for so-called temporary refugee status in Russia. A further 209,000 individuals applied for temporary residence permits, 114,000 individuals joined the programme of voluntary resettlement of ethnic Russians, and 43,000 individuals submitted applications for permanent residence permits. The exact number and type of applications submitted by residents of regions directly affected by the military conflict is not known, however.

## Labour migration

It would be more legitimate to assume that as a result of deterioration of the economic situation in Ukraine, triggered by the military conflict, and of devaluation of income earned by

Ukrainians in real terms, there was an increase in the scale of labour migration of Ukrainians to the EU. One should bear in mind that Ukraine closed 2014 with the 7% GDP drop. In the first and the second quarter of 2015 a drop in GDP was recorded of 17% and 14%, respectively. In 2014, the value of the hryvnia declined by 70%, and the inflation rate stood at 50%<sup>12</sup>. All this has contributed to a major decline in the level of real income earned by Ukrainian citizens.

**There is no evidence to confirm the increased scale of migration of Ukrainians to the EU as a result of the outbreak of the military conflict. There has been a rapid increase in short-term economic migration to Poland.**

According to data compiled by the World Bank, in 2014 Ukraine's annual GDP per capita was US\$ 3,000 (calculated according to the current exchange rate), whereas in 2013 the figure was US\$ 4,000. Additionally, as shown by data from the Statistical Committee of Ukraine, in the first four months of 2015 the real wage was reduced by over 20% as compared with the corresponding period of 2014. The US dollar equivalent (calculated according to the current exchange rate) of an average salary in Ukraine in April 2015 was a mere US\$ 130, which ranked the country in last position in the list of former USSR countries<sup>13</sup>.

According to Italian, German and Portuguese statistics, in 2014 a slight increase in the number of Ukrainians holding residence permits in these countries was recorded (sometimes, however, national data are in contrast to Eurostat data, which do not show any upward trend).

<sup>12</sup> For more see T. Iwański, A ship run aground. Deepening problems in the Ukrainian economy, *OSW Commentary*, 16 June 2015, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2015-06-16/a-ship-run-aground-deepening-problems-ukrainian-economy>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.epravda.com.ua/news/2015/05/26/544039/>

The Ukrainian diaspora in Italy (approximately 200,000 individuals) and in Germany (100,000 individuals) is too small, in the context of the influx of migrants from other countries, to make Ukrainians a well-researched migrant group in quantitative and qualitative terms. In recent years, the Czech Republic, which in 2003–2008 recorded a significant increase in the scale of economic migration from Ukraine, introduced restrictions in its admission policy. As a consequence, the number of Ukrainians staying in this country has remained practically unchanged.

### The case of Poland

So far, Poland has been the only EU country to record a significant increase in the scale of migration from Ukraine. This mainly results from the Polish economy long-term growth and simplified procedures of access to the job market granted to citizens of Eastern Partnership states, as well as a relatively large demand for workers in agriculture and in private households. The so-called system of declarations has been a particular ‘pull factor’ for Ukrainians. Pursuant to a regulation by the Minister of Labour and Social Policy of 2011, a citizen of Ukraine who wants to take up a temporary job in Poland is exempt from the obligation to obtain a work permit. The only requirement they need to meet is to hold a declaration confirming the intention to employ the specific individual, registered by their prospective employer with the local employment office. The procedure is free of charge and requires minimal formalities. Other ‘pull factors’ include linguistic and cultural similarity, as well as low travel costs. Direct bus connections linking Polish cities with Ukrainian towns, used mainly by migrants, have become particularly popular. As the number of Ukrainians living in Poland increases, migration networks are becoming extended, which makes migrants feel safer due to the fact that they have access to legal, medical and employment assistance in their native language.

In the Polish context, it is very important to differentiate between long-term migration and temporary migration. Long-term migration has recorded an upward trend, even though it is insignificant in absolute numbers, yet at the same time being relatively well described in figures. Temporary migration, on the other hand, has probably been increasing much more rapidly, although it is still difficult to research in statistical terms. As far as long-term migration is concerned, in the 2011 national census in Poland a mere 24,000 individuals claimed that they held Ukrainian citizenship. According to data compiled by the Office for Foreigners, at the end of 2013 Ukrainians held over 37,000 valid residence cards. In October 2015, however, the number was 52,000, including 21,000 permanent residence cards and 28,000 temporary residence cards. No data is available as to how many residence cards have been issued to individuals coming from the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

**It is difficult to estimate the current number of individuals staying in Poland in a specific period under a simplified employment procedure.**

A major problem involves estimates regarding the current number of Ukrainian migrants temporarily working in Poland. In this case, citizens of Ukraine obtain declarations enabling them to take up a job by a simplified procedure for up to six months in a year (however, here statistics do not show the number of individuals but the number of permits and one individual may hold several permits). The other possibility is that they work illegally holding only tourist visas. According to estimates, currently there are approximately 300,000–500,000 such individuals in Poland. In 2014, 372,000 declarations regarding the intention of employing a foreigner were issued to Ukrainians (an increase of 60% as com-

pared with 2013). In the first half of 2015 alone, as many as 402,000 such declarations submitted by citizens of Ukraine were registered, most of them for jobs in agriculture. As many as 139,000 declarations were issued to women, which is typical of Ukrainian migration to Poland. Also, in this case it is not known whether these declarations are still being issued mainly to residents of Galicia or equally to residents of other parts of Ukraine, in particular the eastern regions (for more see Appendix: Table 2).

Poland is thus becoming a host country for immigrants and is reinforcing its status as the EU's most popular destination country for Ukrainian temporary migrants. It is likely that the upward trend will continue for several more years as there are no prospects for a quick improvement of the economic situation in Ukraine. Several questions still remain unanswered, however. It is not known whether Ukrainian migrants will develop migration networks in other EU countries and move to those states which may offer them higher salaries. Due to the still prevalent temporary nature of immigration to Poland, it is too early to explicitly state that Poland is becoming the EU's main destination for settlement migration of Ukrainian citizens.

### Forecasts and the political context

When assessing further prospects for migration of Ukrainians to the EU, two aspects should be taken in consideration. The first aspect involves possible factors which could either foster greater geographical expansion of migration to countries other than Poland or, conversely, could restore its 'pre-war' scale. The other aspect involves the political and social context in which the migration of Ukrainians or, more broadly, any migration, is currently being viewed in Europe which is undergoing the largest wave of refugee migration since the end of World War II.

As far as possible variables which could impact the dynamics and the nature of migration are

concerned, undoubtedly the most important factor is the economic situation in Ukraine. Although the first symptoms of stabilisation of the economic and social situation can be seen, including, for example, the successful re-negotiation of part of the country's external debt or the indexation of salaries and raising of the minimum wage, the current trends suggest that complete recovery from the crisis will take a considerable time. The unemployment rate in Ukraine has been relatively low (approximately 9% if calculated according to ILO methodology). This results from the fact that state-owned companies maintain excessive numbers of employees whom in turn they can offer low salaries to. Considering the dramatic decline in Ukraine's industrial production, this rate of unemployment is unlikely to be maintained at its current level over a long-term perspective. Other factors include the security situation in the region affected by the conflict and Russia's policy towards Ukraine. It is still likely that fighting could resume in October 2015 in connection with local elections in Ukraine. Other issues which should also be borne in mind include economic deterioration in Russia and announcements by Russia's leadership that social benefits granted to Ukrainian refugees will cease to be paid out in 2015.

**The Continued migration of Ukrainians will mainly depend on the development of the economic situation in Ukraine.**

The presence of such a large group of internally displaced persons is frequently mentioned as the major factor to boost the likelihood of mass refugee movement from Ukraine. This fact should not be overestimated, however. Although internal displacement often inspires the person affected to migrate further, this is not always the case (as confirmed by the example of IDPs in Azerbaijan or individuals dis-

placed from South Ossetia as a result of the Russian-Georgian war of 2008). It should also be remembered that 60% of Ukrainian IDPs are elderly retired people<sup>14</sup>, who are not particularly willing to take risky migration decisions. Moreover, the fact that displacements are most often carried out to nearby towns seems to confirm that the major motivation of some of IDPs is to continue to receive financial benefits from Ukraine's budget, rather than the necessity of fleeing their previous place of residence. If IDPs begin to emigrate to the EU, a snowball effect can be expected. Residents of eastern Ukraine will gain migration experience (so far practically absent), migration networks in destination countries will be created, and migration itself as a way of life will become widely accepted by this society.

Regardless of the characteristics of Ukrainian migration, one should not lose sight of the fact that, in the context of the current migration crisis in the EU, migrants are increasing-

ly being treated by EU societies as a burden. Similarly, anti-immigration political movements have been gaining ground. Moreover, states such as Italy and Germany, which are popular with Ukrainians as migration destinations, have been coping with the challenge of integrating hundreds of thousands of refugees from the Middle East and are unlikely to be interested in a greater opening of their job markets to citizens of Ukraine. It is not known, however, in which direction the migration policy of the Visegrad Group countries will evolve. These countries fear migration from the south but at the same time they openly state that they prefer migrants from Ukraine due to their cultural affinity. So far, however, no change in this policy has been observed. The V4 countries apart from Poland have pursued a rather restrictive migration policy towards citizens of Ukraine. However Hungary who is restricted in its labour migration policy at the same time enables ethnic Hungarians from Ukraine to be granted Hungarian citizenship in a simplified procedure.

<sup>14</sup> Data compiled by the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine.

## APPENDIX

**Table 1. The number of applications for refugee status submitted in the EU 28 and in specific destination countries by citizens of Ukraine (January 2014–June 2015)**

	Apr 2014	Jun 2014	Oct 2014	Dec 2014	Mar 2015	Apr 2015	May 2015	Jun 2015
<b>EU 28</b>	680	1,020	2,235	1,495	1,850	1,965	1,560	1,685
<b>Czech Rep.</b>	45	35	65	45	90	80	45	-
<b>Germany</b>	65	110	575	435	395	460	505	635
<b>Spain</b>	25	40	185	105	35	25	70	-
<b>France</b>	50	115	260	145	160	185	125	130
<b>Italy</b>	70	135	400	230	445	540	360	350
<b>Poland</b>	-	135	235	195	245	205	155	220
<b>Sweden</b>	70	110	175	140	165	135	115	160

*Eurostat data*

Table 2. The number of declarations regarding the intention of employing a foreigner (a citizen of Ukraine) registered with employment offices in Poland in the first half of 2015

Total	January	February	March	April	May	June
402,674	49,620	75,316	81,895	64,429	62,994	68,420

Map. Distribution of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ukraine



EDITORS: Adam Eberhardt, Wojciech Konończuk,  
Halina Kowalczyk, Katarzyna Kazimierska  
TRANSLATION: Magdalena Klimowicz  
Co-operatin: Timothy Harrell  
DTP: Wojciech Mańkowski

Centre for Eastern Studies  
Koszykowa 6a, 00-564 Warsaw  
phone: +48 | 22 | 525 80 00  
e-mail: info@osw.waw.pl

**The views expressed by the authors of the papers do not necessarily reflect the opinion of Polish authorities**

Visit our website: [www.osw.waw.pl](http://www.osw.waw.pl)