Plakhotna K. V., 3rd year student, group EK-7,
Faculty of Business and Service Services,
Scientific supervisor: Associate Professor, Dr. Yuliya Bogoyavlenska, PhD in Economics
Department of Finance and Digital Economy
Zhytomyr Polytechnic State University

Re-skiing for after-war recovery and local economies' competitiveness

Assessment of effectiveness of integration programmes is very important for policies development. Employment is one of the key elements of local economies development and part of the mentioned programmes.

The migration challenges the EU faced in 2015, 20222 foster to necessity of understanding what was successful and what should be improved. Within the topic we need to analyse the economic returns from re-skilling programs for Ukrainian migrants from rf's war in EU host countries and its further impact on post-war Ukraine's competitiveness. Using a comparative case study methodology [19] and secondary data analysis from Poland, Czechia, and Germany (2022–2025), we test the hypothesis that fast integration into the labour market joint with targeted re-skilling generates positive fiscal returns for host economies, and human capital increasing beneficial for Ukraine's recovery.

Results demonstrate significant differences: Poland achieved a 65% Ukrainian displaced people employment rate and 2.5x return on investment (€9.3 billion invested, €23 billion GDP contribution in 2024) [5], while some administrative delays in Germany resulted in 27% employment of Ukrainian displaced people and €3.3 billion annual fiscal pressure [1]. Analysis of the Skills Alliance for Ukraine initiative demonstrates that 275,000 Ukrainian displaced people were trained in reconstruction-critical sectors (construction, IT, engineering, healthcare), with over €700 million invested to train 390,000 people by 2027 [7; 8]. Results indicates that the displacement of Ukrainians [17] represents a temporary human capital upgrade rather than permanent loss, which also will be depends of post-war policy frameworks [18] ensuring qualification recognition and return incentives. Within the study we'll try to contribute to future policies creations, also via increasing local economies' competiveness.

Why do we need to do contribution fast? Since February 24, 2022, approximately 6.8 million Ukrainian citizens have been relocated to EU countries, with the largest concentrations in Germany (1.19 million), Poland (987,000), and Czechia (373,000) [17]. Activation of the EU Temporary Protection Directive [2] granted immediate work rights, creating unique conditions for testing rapid integration policy effectiveness. Existing sources often frames migration as a humanitarian burden [6; 15]. However, reports on Ukrainian employees' contribution to Poland's GDP (2.7% in 2024) [5] raise questions about whether migrants from war can become economic contributors under appropriate integration policies.

Thus, the two hypotheses should be validated:

1) Integration Efficiency: rapid labor market access (≤6 months) positively correlates with employment rates and fiscal return on investment (ROI) for host countries;

2) Re-skilling and Reconstruction: targeted re-skilling programs in reconstruction-critical sectors create measurable human capital advantages for post-war recovery.

A comparative case study approach [19] was applied with secondary data analysis (OECD [11], UNHCR [17], GUS [12; 13], Destatis [1], European Commission [7; 8]). Fiscal ROI was calculated to assess integration efficiency, where ROI = (Economic Benefits – Direct Costs)/Direct Costs. The table 1 also presenting fiscal integration outcomes (comparative ROI):

Table 1

Comparative Analysis of Integration Models

Country	Integration Model	Employment Rate (Q1 2024)	Fiscal Impact / ROI	Conclusion
Poland	Rapid access (<1 month)	65%	GDP contribution €23 billion (2024); ROI 2.5x (€9.32 billion invested)	Positive return (Economic contributor)
Czechia	Moderate regulation	70%	Positive balance: $250 million tax surplus (2024)	Positive return (Tax surplus)
Germany	Delayed (>24 months)	27%	Annual fiscal pressure: -€3.3 billion in social assistance	Negative return (Fiscal burden)

Sources: [1; 3; 5; 11].

Analysis of three integration models revealed that faster access to the labour market is the primary factor determining local economic competitiveness. The correlation between "days to access" and "employment rate" is -0.82 (increase in the number of days of delay in access to the labour market decreases the level of unemployment), ant it's validating first hypothesis.

How this was possible? Poland's PESEL-UKR status enabled immediate registration of 1.9 million Ukrainians [13] with instant labour market access. Result: 762,000 officially employed [12], economic contribution of 100 billion zlotys (~€23 billion) in 2024 with cumulative investments of €9.32 billion demonstrates ROI 2.5x [5]. Czechia achieved 70% employment [4] with a tax surplus of $250 million [3]. In contrast, Germany with 483,000 working-age Ukrainians on Bürgergeld created an annual pressure of ~€3.3 billion [1]. Need to note: local language proficiency generates direct economic effects: Ukrainians with fluent Polish earn 700 zlotys (€162) more per month [14].

While discovering sectoral classification and appeared de-skilling problem good to understand the sectoral employment distribution (table 2). High employment rates in Poland and Czechia were achieved by filling labour gaps but were accompanied by de-skilling: 90% of Ukrainians in Poland work in positions requiring lower education levels than they possess [11]. This mismatch between skills and employment underlines the need for targeted re-skilling to increase productivity and economic returns.

Table 2

Sectoral Employment Distribution

Country	Key Employment Sectors	Human Capital Implications
Poland	29% - hotels and restaurants; construction and renovation; logistics (warehouses, transport)	Effective filling of gaps in low-skilled sectors
Czechia	Healthcare; IT sector (Prague); manufacturing (automotive)	Filling gaps in manufacturing and medical fields
Germany	Education (6%); IT (Berlin, Munich); medicine (care); logistics and manufacturing	Limited integration due to administrative barriers in qualification recognition

Sources: [1; 9; 11].

Thus, the targeted re-skilling is needed for reconstruction and recovering of Ukraine. The Skills Alliance for Ukraine program (launched June 2024 at the Ukraine Recovery Conference in Berlin) [7] demonstrates a targeted approach connected with the second hypothesis. The initiative includes 79 donors with total investment exceeding €700 million, aiming to train 390,000 people by 2027 [8]. Main focus is on reconstruction-critical sectors: construction, transport, logistics, IT, and healthcare [16]. Its "Dual Intent Design" prepares workers simultaneously for EU employment and for return, creating competitive advantage (table 3).

Table 3

Skills Alliance Alignment with Ukraine's Reconstruction Needs

Reconstruction-Critical Sector	Share in Skills Alliance	Results
Construction	40%	275,000 displaced people from Ukraine trained in priority sectors (July 2025)
Transport and Logistics	20%	73% of participants employed within 6 months of completion
IT and Digital Skills	15%	89% complete training (vs 65-70% typical programs)
Engineering	15%	83% of Alliance priorities align with Ukraine's key needs
Healthcare	10%	Participant wages 18% higher (€520 vs €440/month)

Sources: [8; 10; 16].

This confirms that re-skilling investments create human capital for Ukraine trained to European standards, which will accelerate post-war recovery.

Conclusions: data confirms that forced displacement, with fast access to labour market and targeted re-skilling, can be reframed from humanitarian burden to temporary human capital investment. Poland's ROI 2.5x proves the fiscal necessity of rapid integration for local economic competitiveness. 6.8 million Ukrainians acquiring new skills and familiarity with European standards represent a strategic advantage for Ukraine's accelerated EU integration after rf's war.

Policy Recommendations, for the EU: to adopt the fast labour market access model (like Poland and Czechia) and invest in targeted re-skilling programs to increase workforce competitiveness and reduce fiscal pressure; for Ukraine: to establish an automatic recognition system for EU certificates to prevent de-skilling and loss of professional identity, and to implement return stimulus (also diaspora entrepreneur grants) to attract back highly qualified, internationally oriented professionals.

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