



Industrial relations and social dialogue
**Working lives of displaced people
from Ukraine: First insights into their
employment situation, national
policies and working conditions**

Barriers to employment of displaced Ukrainians

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Introduction

With the unprecedented invasion of Ukraine by Russian military forces, the largest refugee movement since the Second World War has occurred within Europe, with almost one third of the Ukrainian population having been displaced (UNHCR 2023a, b).

The EU acted quickly by activating the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) for the first time since its adoption 2001 in March 2022, thus providing the EU member states with the rights to provide displaced persons most importantly with a residency permit, access to employment, suitable accommodation, social welfare and medical care, and education.

According to the UNHCR, over 5 million persons fleeing from Ukraine have registered for Temporary Protection or similar national protection schemes in Europe (i.e. the EU and beyond) as of 28 March 2023, and almost 8.2 million displaced persons from Ukraine have been recorded across Europe.

This article provides an insight into the employment situation of displaced persons from Ukraine within the first year of the war. It is based on information provided by Eurofound's Network of European Correspondents. In the country reports on developments in working life 2022, more details on the situation in individual countries can be found.

- European Union: [Council Directive 2001/55/EC](#)
- European Commission: [Temporary protection](#)
- United Nations Refugee Agency: [Ukraine Refugee Situation](#)
- Eurofound: Developments in working life 2022 – [Country reports](#)

Displaced persons from Ukraine in the EU member states

As of early April 2023, over 4.7 million fleeing from the Ukraine (including Ukrainian, as well as third country nationals) have been recorded within the EU-27 countries and Norway. In only three countries, over 3 million refugees have arrived: almost 1.6 million in Poland, over 1 million in Germany and over half a million in Czechia, as the table below shows. With close historical ties to Ukraine and a long border, Poland has become the main hosting countries for displaced persons from Ukraine. The high per capita rates of refugees in Czechia is reported to be due to the large Ukrainian pre-war diaspora, but also the country's dynamic economy, showing one of the lowest unemployment rates within the European Union.

Table 1: Persons from Ukraine registered in the EU-27 and Norway

Country	Persons from Ukraine registered for Temporary Protection or similar national protection schemes	Persons from Ukraine recorded in the country	Date to which data refer to
AT	94,984	94,984	20 March 2023
BE	69,557	70,307	3 April 2023
BG	155,883	48,974	4 April 2023
CY	21,842	16,281	12 March 2023
CZ	504,107	504,352	2 April 2023
DE	922,657	1,056,628	25 March 2023
DK	39,338	41,419	2 April 2023
EE	44,588	68,930	3 April 2023
ES	172,682	172,682	3 April 2023
FI	52,790	47,067	27 March 2023
FR	118,994	118,994	31 October 2022
GR	20,955	20,955	6 December 2022
HR	21,352	21,352	20 March 2023
HU	34,248	34,248	3 April 2023
IE	78,025	78,462	19 March 2023
IT	173,213	173,213	17 March 2023
LT	76,309	76,309	31 March 2023
LU	6,756	6,756	25 October 2022

Disclaimer: This working paper has not been subject to the full Eurofound evaluation, editorial and publication process.

LV	46,976	32,488	3 April 2023
MT	1,744	1,744	19 February 2023
NL	89,730	89,730	10 February 2023
NO	44,798	44,798	3 April 2023
PL	1,581,148	1,581,148	3 April 2023
PT	58,242	58,242	26 February 2023
RO	125,316	107,706	2 April 2023
SE	53,755	53,755	30 March 2023
SI	8,990	9,222	2 April 2023
SK	113,253	113,253	2 April 2023
EU-27 plus NO	4,732,232	4,743,999	

Source: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine> (data retrieved on 11 April 2023)

Data collected by the Eurofound Network of Correspondents shows a predominance of women and children among displaced persons from Ukraine, with shares of between 60 to 80% females as provided by national data sources. Data on the share of persons of working age is only available in very few countries and lies between 50 and 60% (Austria, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Slovenia).

Employment of displaced persons from Ukraine

National statistics on the employment situation of displaced persons from Ukraine in the EU member states is quite scarce and patchy. In some countries, like Poland, the employment level is relatively high, displaced persons from Ukraine often relying on migrant networks of fellow citizens who have come to Poland before the onset of the Russian aggression. Employment was greatly facilitated by Polish authorities; teachers from Ukraine could be hired without obligatory university degree recognition. Furthermore, workers were supported indirectly thanks to enabling Ukrainian companies to operate from Polish territory. In Czechia, almost 160,000 Ukrainian citizens with temporary protection had secured employment between the onset of the war and October 2022 and almost 100,000 were in employment in November 2022, due to many having returned home or migrated elsewhere. In Estonia, a high share of 40% of the age group of the 20- to 64-year-olds were in employment according to a survey from early 2023. In Germany, around 17 to 19% (according to different sources) of Ukrainians of working age were in employment in October 2022, and according to a survey, 70% of them held qualified jobs. In Spain, 14% were in employment, around 10% in France as of November 2022, 20% in Luxembourg (which is fewer than 500 in absolute numbers, though), 35% in the Netherlands. In some countries, only absolute numbers of employed Ukrainians are available – Slovakia has a very high number with around 30,000 Ukrainian employees (including those having migrated to the country before the war). According to specific legislation, healthcare workers from Ukraine have been allowed to work in their specialisation in hospitals and in outpatient healthcare facilities at internship positions under the supervision of healthcare employees. The applicants are required to speak either Slovak or English and submit a copy of the documents proving their qualification. Knowledge and skills of applicants without the required complete documentation can be approved by an employer. In Romania, around 5,000 Ukrainians are employed, 6,200 in November 2022 in Norway (showing an increase from 4,000 in January 2022), over 10,000 in Latvia in early 2023 (up from 5,000 in May 2022), 9,800 in Ireland as of November 2022, over 8,000 in Austria and 7,000 in Denmark and an estimated 5,000 to 8,000 in Croatia. In Lithuania, over 20,000 persons were employed between February and November 2022, of which 75% have been working in qualified jobs with a good salary. This success can be attributed partially to the positive attitude of employers towards war refugees, the willingness and motivation of Ukrainians to work, the possibility to use the Russian language, and the Ukrainian Diaspora already established in Lithuania.

Predominant sectors and educational level

When looking at the sectors in which displaced persons from Ukraine tend to be employed, it becomes evident that there is a focus on low-qualified jobs in the services sector, and often in those with a high share of females. High employment in the HORECA sector is reported in several countries, including Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Spain, France, Croatia (mostly in summer in tourism spots on the coast), Hungary, Luxembourg, Latvia, Netherlands, Romania, Portugal and Slovenia. Often, they also work in retail (HR, IE, LV, NL, RO, PT, ES) or in the cleaning industry (AT, DK, SI, IT, PT, ES, LV). Further sectors in which Ukrainians are often employed include the industry/manufacturing sectors (FR, HU, LV, RO, PT, SI, SK), construction (HU, RO, PT, ES) and logistics/transport (HU, IE, NL, PT). Often, workers are employed through temporary work agencies (NL, FI, PL, ES).

At the same time and despite the fact that employment mostly concentrates on low-qualified jobs, several countries report a comparatively high level of educational attainment of Ukrainian refugees. In Germany, 70% are reported to have obtained a tertiary degree, Austria reports that almost a third holds an academic degree. In Estonia, refugees are mostly highly educated younger women with 51% having higher education and 25% vocational education. In Hungary, the majority of jobseekers have higher education, and typically used to work in white-collar jobs in Ukraine.

Working conditions of displaced persons

Similar to employment figures, there are no official data on working conditions of Ukrainians in Europe, but some survey evidence is provided (FRA, 2023). There is a tendency to short-term and part-time employment, according to reports from several countries (see also Eurofound 2023b). The sectors in which Ukrainians are often employed generally relate to difficult working conditions and rather low pay. In Portugal, an analysis has shown that job offers for refugees from Ukraine show an average salary of €884 per month (gross income), which is above the national minimum wage, but below the average salary in Portugal. The underutilisation of skills, i.e., employment under the educational level a worker has gained, seems to be quite common as well. In Romania, among women aged between 35 and 59 years, 62% reported not having the same professional status as before their displacement.

Legislation generally provides for the prevention of a worse treatment of third-country nationals in several countries. For example, in Austria, the same wages (and working conditions) apply to foreigners as for Austrian nationals. Employed Ukrainian refugees in Bulgaria receive at least the same minimum wage as Bulgarian employees. In Czechia, the issue of the conditions and state of the employment of refugees from Ukraine is monitored by all the social partners and discussed on a regular basis by the Inter-ministerial Body for Combating of Illegal Employment. In Estonia, an employer is obliged to pay an alien whose short-term employment in Estonia has been registered, a remuneration in the amount at least equal to the average gross monthly wages last published by Statistics Estonia, multiplied by a coefficient of 1.5. A tripartite declaration was published in March 2022 encouraging all employers, trade unions and employees to treat Ukrainian refugees equally. In Croatia, in order to guarantee equal rights in the labour market, tripartite meetings on the issue were held at the state and also at the local level (where measures are implemented).

While around 60% of displaced people from Ukraine working in Europe have stated that they have not encountered exploitation at the workplace (cf. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2023: 45), n, there are nonetheless various examples of malpractice throughout Europe as reported by media. In Belgium, for example, there were some cases of refugees being employed at very low rates at improvised jobs such as gardening within the community of Ukrainian migrants. There was uncertainty on whether this was illegal under labour law, or rather a kind of community service that was well-intended and compensated as volunteer work, framed as community service. In Lithuania, the Caritas has documented instances of refugees not being paid on time; being paid less than agreed; and not being provided with adequate working conditions. In Sweden, incidences of exploitation of refugees have been reported primarily in three sectors, the construction sector, the cleaning sector and in the agricultural sector. Some issues include the lack of protective equipment, long working hours, and low wages. The issues of illegal migrant labour and poor conditions in the construction sector has gotten attention since before the war, but with the increased number of Ukrainian refugees, the situation has become worse. In the Netherlands, the unions detected transnational malpractice with regards to the posting of workers: Ukrainian refugees, who were employed by a Polish employment agency, were forced to work for a plant grower. Their employment contracts included notions of fines and prohibitions, and threatened with 'deportation'. To overcome further incidents of abuse, a bill for mandatory certification of employment agencies is to be sent to parliament in 2023.

Some good-practice examples have also been reported. In Lithuania, salaries for Ukrainians range from the minimum wage to almost €2,000 a month, depending on the type of work. In June, a Ukrainian working in Lithuania earned around €1,032 gross per month on average. In Poland, employers are obliged to notify the regional employment office when hiring a Ukrainian person and they further need to guarantee that the migrant worker is offered working hours and payment as declared in the job ad. This was implemented after it was detected that Ukrainians often obtained decreased salaries compared to Polish citizens.

Obstacles and hindrances for labour market participation

The lack of language skills, mostly in the national language, but also in English, has been identified as the major obstacle to participating in the labour market. In Slovakia, a survey conducted among 450 Ukrainian job applicants and 300 employers in late spring 2022 by the job portal ISTP.sk shows that the biggest barrier is language. English language proficiency has been identified as a barrier in obtaining employment in Ireland for over two thirds of Ukrainian refugees (69%) attending job searching events organised by the Department of Social Protection. According to a survey in Germany, only 4% of the Ukrainian respondents stated to speak good or very good German, for example. In Denmark, it is reported that the lack of language skills makes communication with employers hard. In Estonia, highly educated refugees mostly cannot realise their education potential due to poor language skills. The same is reported in Austria and Hungary, where Ukrainians cannot typically get a similar (qualified) job on the Hungarian labour market. In Romania, low participation in available Romanian language and entrepreneurship courses is reported.

Besides language barriers, problems with the recognition of qualification and diplomas present another large obstacle for employment. In Slovakia, for example, Ukrainian medical doctors, especially paediatricians, face obstacles in the recognition of their education gained in Ukraine due to a difference in the length of study. The Ministries of Education and Healthcare are searching for a solution.

A third major obstacle for employment is the lack of childcare and/or (child)care duties and other caretaking duties e.g., for ill family members, as reported in several countries. In the Netherlands, an adjustment to the childcare law was made, allowing refugees to make use of the childcare subsidies provided by the government. In Slovakia, a lack of school capacities was reported. In Spain, many refugees with children have problems to reconcile work and family life, and in order to provide support to their children, decide not to work.

Further obstacles reported are a lack of (suitable) employment opportunities, as reported in Romania (main reason for males), Slovakia (lack of suitable job offers on job portals) and partially Estonia, where most of the jobs in tourism e.g., on the island of Saaremaa are seasonal and there are not enough job postings. Furthermore, a mismatch between the available employment opportunities and the skills and experience of Ukrainian refugees is reported e.g., in Estonia. In Slovakia, it is reported that job seekers often do not meet the requirements of employers. In Hungary, there is a mismatch between demand and supply, as the state can only provide accommodation in remote small villages, with no employment opportunities. Employers who hire and house Ukrainian refugees are thus reimbursed by the state for half of their accommodation costs. It remains to be seen, however, how sustainable this practice will be. Also, limited awareness of employment opportunities is reported as a further hindrance to work; in Romania, a limited community awareness to promote employment opportunities and in Slovakia, a lack of information about the job search possibilities are reported.

Furthermore, the intent to return to the Ukraine soon, i.e. the feeling of being only provisionally in the host country have been named as obstacles in a few countries like BE, RO and ES; also, incapacity

to work due to trauma or illness have been named in some countries (BE, DK, RO), as well as the lack of a driving licence or car (DK) or additional administrative burdens for employers (DK).

In France and Austria, the choice of refugees of taking on a (low-paid) job while risking the loss of benefits is reported as another obstacle to employment. In Austria, those who earn more than €110 per month (plus €80 for each family member) lose entitlement to the basic care scheme, meaning that neither accommodation nor benefits are provided by the state anymore. Thus, this is a major disincentive especially for women with children who would only be able to work part-time – they would not be able to pay for their living. Furthermore, refugees who receive basic benefits have no compulsory contact to the PES (i.e., to job placement and counselling). These obstacles are considered to be major reasons why many displaced persons from Ukraine are not actively seeking jobs in Austria. Negotiations on increasing the threshold or on granting Ukrainian nationals the regular social assistance scheme have been going on for months, with no solution as of April 2023.

Social partner initiatives to support Ukrainian refugees

In virtually all countries, the social partners have voiced their solidarity to Ukraine and often were involved in humanitarian support, especially those countries which are geographically close, and which saw a comparatively large influx of refugees. Reception centres were opened, accommodation was provided, but also material support both to the people in Ukraine (humanitarian convoys) as well as those having left the country. Fundraising was initiated; in Italy, a social partner solidarity fund was installed, often also through union partnerships (national unions supporting Ukrainian unions). In Slovakia, the Confederation of Unions (KOZ SR) coordinated the supplies of food, essential supplies and medicines for colleagues from trade unions in Ukraine. It also cooperated closely with the European and International Trade Union Confederations regarding further assistance at the border to Ukraine.

Social partners were also broadly involved in providing information material or job platforms targeting Ukrainians planning on finding employment. This includes information on national labour markets, pay and employment conditions, labour and social security law, as well as general information about living in the host country. Often times, this information has been provided in several languages, including Ukrainian (e.g., BE, DK, FI, SK). The four umbrella organisations of German businesses jointly set up a platform to provide information for employers and Ukrainians affected by the war alike: The platform provides information on many topics, reaching from making donations of money and goods, providing suitable medicines and medical equipment, federal support measures for German companies affected by the war, labour market integration and related legal information when employing Ukrainian refugees to such topics as job searching portals for refugees, company networks for sharing experiences or best practice examples. In Norway, the largest employer organisation NHO provided practical information for employers who wish to offer jobs to refugees from Ukraine. In some countries (e.g., RO, SK), administrative authorities provided this information.

Support for start-ups has been provided in Denmark with the initiative “WeStart Ukraine”, which was initiated by Danish Entrepreneurs and Google Success Online. It is a six-week programme for Ukrainian female entrepreneurs, providing support, motivation and competencies to help them rebuild their lives by starting a new business and in the long term possibly rebuild some of Ukraine’s business industry and social cohesion when the war is over. Through the initiative, 60 Ukrainian refugees were to receive training, one-to-one feedback, mentoring and networking. In Luxembourg, the Ukraine-Luxembourg Business Chamber launched Biz4ukraine.org, a website for companies ready to support Ukraine. The initiative aims to support Ukrainian refugees looking for a job in Luxembourg and to incite Luxembourg-based companies to support Ukrainian refugees wanting to found start-ups in Luxembourg through mentoring and help with the administrative procedures. In Poland, Ukrainian workers have indirectly been supported thanks to enabling Ukrainian companies to operate from Polish territory. The Polish Investment and Trade Agency (PAIH), a body providing advisory services for any entrepreneur who wants to establish a company in Poland, has provided funds for this purpose.

In Italy, a tripartite protocol in the construction sector was signed for the social and occupational integration of at least 3,000 persons (including refugees from Ukraine) in training courses of construction schools. Furthermore, two agreements were signed between two employer organisations and the trade unions of the staff leasing industry with the aim of facilitating the reception, inclusion and occupational integration of Ukrainian refugees, identifying special training paths to facilitate their job transitions and reduce the mismatch of skills.

In Sweden, the social partners reached an agreement on establishing jobs (Etableringsjobb). The measure is available for refugees who arrived in Sweden during the last three years and long-term unemployed people. The measure incentivises employing people from these categories by having the state pay a part of the total salary, thereby matching the lowest wage levels according to the collective agreement. The wage burden is split approximately evenly between state and employer. After the establishing phase of employment, the worker should be offered a regular job, where the employer pays full wages. The agreement has been in force since 2023.

Job matching platforms and events

In all countries, job matching platforms were initiated, in some cases like Finland or Spain, with social partner participation. In Finland, the Confederation of Finnish Industries EK launched a “Security through work” project in collaboration with a temporary work agency in March 2022. The aim is to gather Finnish companies willing to employ refugees that hold a working permit, and thus assisting refugees to enter the labour market in Finland. In Spain, the CEOE Foundation affiliated to the most representative employer organisation, prepared an online platform that aims to centralise all job offers aimed at Ukrainian refugees on one website. It started with nearly 2,000 vacancies already available, offered by 450 companies from all sizes, sectors and regions. The platform has three modules: one with information (which includes practical content of interest in Spanish and Ukrainian from the European Union, the Government of Spain, the Autonomous Communities and NGOs), a second one for training (in collaboration with the National online University UNED, aimed especially at acquiring language skills in Spanish, but which also includes training modules provided by collaborating companies) and finally, the employment portal. The employment portal contains information on job vacancies and is offered in Spanish, English and Ukrainian. Some of the largest temporary employment agencies operating in Spain collaborate in this portal.

In Denmark, job matching events were held throughout the country. At these events, there was a focus on teaching refugees how they communicate their competencies in a CV. In Ireland, the PES was running employment support events for refugees from Ukraine. As of 11 December, these events had been attended by 24,164 arrivals. In Greece, support was provided in the framework of the HELIOS programme by the International Organization of Migration IOM, with individualised job counselling including the identification of needs and interests, recording of skills under the EU Skills Profile Tool, covering the cost of obtaining various certificates (e.g., a certificate proving knowledge of the Greek language, professional driving licence, English language degree, ECDL, etc.), organisation of “career days,” liaison with employers, the definition of objectives and professional guidance, information on the services of the PES and the rights and obligations of employees and employers in Greece. From 15 July to 11 November 2022, 4,215 Ukrainians were included in the programme, of which 73% were women, 60% belonging to the 26-49 age group, and 30% to the over 50-year-olds. Regarding their professional profile, 20% are teachers, 14% have worked as administrative or commercial managers, and 11% have engaged in legal, social or cultural professions. In few cases, transnational cooperation was initiated: In Latvia, the employer organisation LDDK made contact with their Ukrainian counterpart and two experts from the Ukrainian Employers Federation have started to work for LDDK.

In many cases, the Public Employment Service or other state actors were initiators or partners in the establishment of job matching platforms, like in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, France, Poland. In other countries like Romania, private initiatives facilitating Ukrainian citizens' access to the labour market were identified. Business accelerator InnovX-BCR and Romanian start-up Joblo launched a recruitment platform (Jobs for Ukraine), with both ads and information in Ukrainian useful for Ukrainian citizens who want to find a job. The largest recruitment portal eJobs launched a special section of its platform with ads (in Ukrainian language) from companies looking to hire refugees from Ukraine. In Sweden, a matching system was set up for Ukrainian ICT workers to be matched up with a Swedish tech company, in order to tackle labour market shortages in the sector. In April 2022,

there were about 142 interested companies, and 102 applicants who were to be matched by an AI tool. The idea is that Ukrainians would be able to move back to Ukraine after the war had ended and keep their job in Sweden if they are interested.

Labour market policies for Ukrainian refugees

Training initiatives have been set up in several countries. In Belgium, sectoral organisations including social partners launched the Matching Talent project in September 2022. Concretely, the aim is to aid companies and employees in improving their match (with regards to skills and work experience). The project provides relevant training and information to Ukrainian jobseekers, in order to improve their chances on the labour market and maintain sustainable employment. At the same time they aid employers who are willing to hire Ukrainian refugees.

In Czechia, employers are entitled to receive subsidies for employee training of up to 85% of the costs and subsidies for wages during the retraining of workers (up to 100% of the amount spent, including contributions to social and health insurance).

In Estonia, the Unemployment Insurance Fund covers the costs of training of Ukrainian refugees for employers. This includes a one-time mentorship payment for employers, reimbursement of training costs, translation services and obtaining qualifications. The labour market training consists mostly of Estonian language training, supporting job search and career counselling.

The Malta Chamber Foundation aided refugees in Malta to learn English to facilitate their integration. This was carried out in conjunction with Malta's Federation of English Language Teaching Organisations, with schools from this Federation offering a sizeable discount on their courses, or offering them entirely for free. The Chamber stated in December, that on completing their studies, the Chamber would work with their members to identify employment initiatives for these refugees. Language courses, often for free, were offered in virtually all countries, in order to provide the displaced persons from Ukraine with the necessary language skills in order to better participate in the labour market.

Conclusions

The labour market integration of the displaced persons from Ukraine in the EU-27 and Norway has been quite successful so far and proven to be challenging in only few countries. The largest obstacles in obtaining employment are a lack of skills of the languages spoken in host countries, problems with the recognition of diplomas and a lack of childcare or care duties of potential employees.

Furthermore, a mismatch between employment opportunities and the skills and experience of jobseekers, as well as limited awareness of employment and job search possibilities are named.

Furthermore, the risk of losing social benefits when employment is taken up is a further hindrance for employment reported in some countries.

Where employment is taken up, workers are often employed below their educational level and in rather low-paying services sectors. On the other hand, there is only anecdotal evidence of maltreatment of Ukrainian workers and malpractice does not seem to be very widespread. In some countries, comparatively good earnings and employment in qualified jobs are also reported. The social partners have been very active not only in humanitarian support, but also in providing aid through international partnerships and supporting refugees in the Ukraine, as well as in host countries. Social partners were often involved in providing information material on national labour markets, pay and employment conditions and social and labour law (often in several languages including Ukrainian), but also in setting up job matching platforms or agreements on training initiatives. Governments have naturally also been quite active in setting up training initiatives in several countries. Some of the measures have only come into force recently, when it became clear that a quick return to Ukraine will not be enforceable for many Ukrainians. It remains to be seen how far labour market integration will improve as the war continues and how far this will support national labour markets to tackle their quite widespread labour shortages.

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