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**OSW REPORT**

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# **MIGRATION FROM UKRAINE TO POLAND THE TREND STABILISES**

Marta Jaroszewicz

WARSAW  
OCTOBER 2018

# **MIGRATION FROM UKRAINE TO POLAND**

## **THE TREND STABILISES**

Marta Jaroszewicz



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CONTENT EDITOR

Adam Eberhardt

EDITOR

Halina Kowalczyk

CO-OPERATION

Małgorzata Zarębska, Anna Łabuszewska

TRANSLATION

Jim Todd

FIGURES

Wojciech Mańkowski, Piotr Bogdański

GRAPHIC DESIGN

PARA-BUCH

PHOTOGRAPH ON COVER

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DTP

GroupMedia

PUBLISHER

**Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia**

Centre for Eastern Studies

ul. Koszykowa 6a, Warsaw, Poland

Phone + 48 /22/ 525 80 00

Fax: + 48 /22/ 525 80 40

osw.waw.pl

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## THESES

- The increased wave of migration from Ukraine to Poland which began in 2014 is slowly beginning to decelerate. This migration is still mainly temporary in nature, and it is difficult to assess to what extent it may become fully residential. Probably over the passage of time, the current circular migration model will stop attracting new people. However, Poland remains the main EU country in which Ukrainians work, because of several competitive advantages: extensive migration networks, a liberal procedure for legalising residence and work (for short periods). In addition, despite the fact that the salaries migrants earn in Poland are small compared to countries in the west of the EU, the low living costs allow for regular and relatively high remittances to Ukraine.
- Due to the predominantly temporary character of the migration, it is difficult to estimate the exact number of Ukrainian migrants resident in Poland. According to data from the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy (MRPiPS)<sup>1</sup>, the number of Ukrainian citizens who had obtained valid declarations of intent to employ a foreigner by 31 December 2017 numbered 517,000 people, whereas 208,000 Ukrainians had a work permit. To this number should be added the group of around 100,000 Ukrainian citizens who are permanently resident in Poland and do not need a work permit, or who are studying or living in Poland for reasons other than work. In total, this gives a number of around 900,000 migrants from Ukraine resident in Poland at the end of 2017. By the end of 2018, these numbers are likely to be lower due to the introduction of new rules for the employment of foreigners.
- Poland's neighbouring countries have started to open up their labour markets to citizens of Ukraine to a limited degree; for example, the Czech Republic has increased its quotas for labour migrants, and Hungary has introduced an easier procedure for acquiring citizenship. Only in Germany do Ukrainians remain marginal among groups of foreign workers. No further rapid increase in migration from Ukraine is possible, due to the country's dramatic demographic situation, the problems on local labour markets in western Ukraine, and the falling numbers of people of working age.

<sup>1</sup> The author thanks the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy's Labour Market Department for the statistics provided.

## I. A GLOBAL PHENOMENON, BUT A PERMANENT ONE?

According to the latest *International Migration Outlook 2018*, published annually by the OECD, in 2017 Poland became a global leader in the inflow of foreign, seasonal, short-term workforces (to a greater degree than the United States)<sup>2</sup>. This is unusual because Poland has never been a country of immigration, and indeed still remains a country of emigration. The current influx of short-term migrants has been possible due to the specific confluence of ‘pull’ factors (a very liberal system for the employment of foreigners in Poland geared to one geographical direction – the Eastern Partnership countries) with ‘push’ factors: the situation of shock in Ukraine after the outbreak of war and economic collapse in 2014-15. In addition, many Ukrainian migrants left Russia for Poland due to the Russian aggression. Other important factors attracting Ukrainian citizens to Poland are the low travel costs, the ability to maintain family ties in Ukraine, extensive migration networks, and similarities of language and cultural closeness. For this reason, one of the terms given to the current wave of migration from Ukraine to Poland is ‘local mobility’, meaning a specific system of frequent short-term journeys to Poland, and where at the same time spending within the country of residence is limited, and living activities are concentrated in Ukraine, as opposed to migration in the classical sense, which assumes a permanent change of the centre of life activities. This conglomerate of factors has resulted in a noticeable worldwide boom in the short-term migration sector.

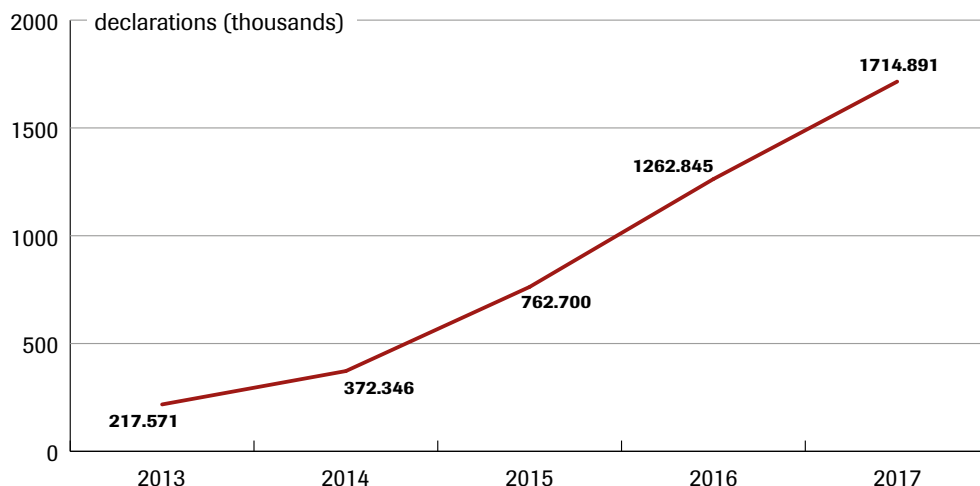
The largest inflow of Ukrainians to Poland (as manifested in the number of employers’ declarations permitting short-term work<sup>3</sup> and work permits) was recorded in 2014-16, when the rate of increase in the number of documents issued rose by a factor of several dozen, often by 100% or more annually. However in 2017, in comparison to the previous year, there was already a smaller, albeit still significant increase of 40% in the number of employers’ declarations issued (from 1.3 million to 1.8 million, see Figure 1). A slightly greater increase in the number of work permits issued was visible, although the share

<sup>2</sup> *International Migration Outlook 2018*, OECD, [https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/international-migration-outlook-2018\\_migr\\_outlook-2018-en#page1](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/international-migration-outlook-2018_migr_outlook-2018-en#page1)

<sup>3</sup> Since 2008, the so-called employers’ declaration system has been in effect, under which a Ukrainian citizen who wants temporary employment in Poland (i.e. for a period not exceeding 6 months over the next 12 months) is exempt from having to obtain a work permit. It is enough to have a declaration of intent to employ, which the future employer registers in the district labour office; the work will be carried out on the basis of a written contract on the terms specified in the declaration. The number of declarations does not equal the number of migrants; one person can have several declarations.

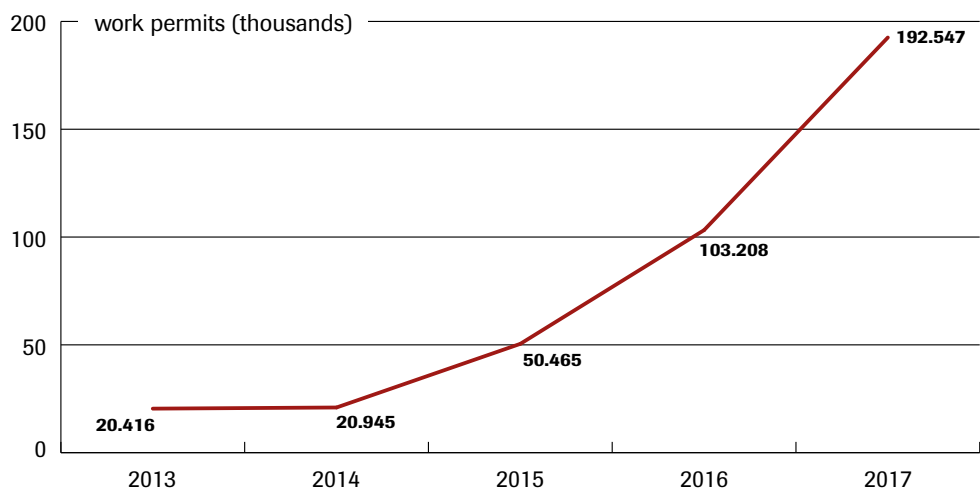
of Ukrainian citizens among the foreigners who obtained work permits in Poland (which had been rising for five years) has been halted (see Figure 2)<sup>4</sup>. 2018 will probably see a further slowdown in the pace of growth, although due to significant changes in the legal regulations, this data will be difficult to compare with the statistics from previous years (see below).

**Figure 1.** Number of declarations of intent to employ issued to Ukrainian citizens in 2013-17



**Source:** Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy

**Figure 2.** Number of work permits issued to citizens of Ukraine in 2013-17



**Source:** Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy

<sup>4</sup> Data from the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy.

## II. MIGRATION FROM UKRAINE IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW RULES ON EMPLOYING FOREIGNERS

On 1 January 2018, significant legal changes concerning the employment of foreigners in Poland came into force. First of all, the category of work that can be performed on the basis of the declaration of intention to employ a foreigner has been narrowed. This currently covers all types of work that are not seasonal, and can be carried out by citizens of EaP countries for up to six months within a 12-month period. There have also been changes to the system of granting declarations: a fee for their issue is now being charged, and the employer must provide notification that the employee to whom he issued the statement has actually taken up a job. A new type of work permit has also been introduced: this is a seasonal work permit which entitles any foreigner (and not just nationals of EaP countries) to work for a period of no more than nine months per year.

According to MRPiPS data for the first half of 2018, the number of declarations received by district labour offices was 820,000, although only about 756,000 were entered in the appropriate register. These covered about 687,000 foreigners (92% of whom are citizens of Ukraine). However, the number of people who actually took up work on the basis of the statements was smaller because, according to the verification system, in the case of about a third of the declarations issued and registered the foreigner had not taken up the position. In addition, some of the statements could already have been issued but not yet come into effect. This means that the real number of Ukrainian citizens working in the first half of 2018 on the basis of the declarations of employment amounted to over half a million. At the same time, around 157,000 applications for seasonal work permits were submitted to district labour offices; these covered about 147,000 foreigners (98% of whom were Ukrainian citizens). However, only 58,000 permits were issued, which is probably due to the fact that this is a new type of permit in administrative use, to which both offices and migrants must become accustomed. By the end of June 2018, over 110,000 'classic' work permits had also been issued to Ukrainian citizens. This shows that there was a slightly higher level of interest in obtaining this type of permit than last year.

The new regulations make it difficult to compare the current data on the number of declarations issued with those granted before 1 January 2018. The previous procedure (which did not have a proper verification system) did not indicate the number of Ukrainian citizens actually working in Poland, but rather showed the scale of their interest in taking up employment. Interpreting and comparing the data for 2018 may also be difficult because a new type of seasonal



work permit has been created, and also because the ‘new’ statements have different validity periods. Nevertheless, a preliminary analysis of the data currently available shows that the number of employers’ declarations and permits for seasonal work issued in the first half of 2018 does not exceed the number of declarations given in the first half of 2017 (948,000), and is in fact clearly lower (about 600,000).

### III. MIGRANT STOCKS

Because the types of administrative data collected in Poland show a high level of complexity, it is necessary to make use of available data concerning international migrant stocks (i.e. on the number of migrants resident in the country at a given point in time). According to MRPiPS data, as of 31 December 2017, the number of Ukrainian citizens who held valid declarations of intention to employ a foreigner was 517,035, and the number of Ukrainians with a work permit was 207,927. If the number of Ukrainian citizens who are resident in Poland for business purposes or who do not need a work permit is taken into account, it turns out that the estimates by the National Bank of Poland from December 2017, that the average number of Ukrainians staying in Poland at any given time in 2017 is about 900,000<sup>5</sup>, well reflects the scale of Ukrainian migration.

Data on migrant stocks are also used by the Office for Foreigners (Urząd ds. Cudzoziemców). As of mid-August 2018, 168,000 Ukrainian citizens held documents entitling them to temporary or permanent residence in Poland<sup>6</sup> (including uniform permits for residence and work, temporary residence permits issued for other reasons, and permanent residence permits issued *inter alia* on the basis of possessing the Polish Card [Karta Polaka]). 77% of these individuals were staying in Poland on the basis of a temporary residence permit, 21% had permanent residence permits, and fewer than 3% were long-term EU residents. Permits related to some form of protection (refugee status, subsidiary protection, tolerated residence, humanitarian residence) were held by about 850 persons<sup>7</sup>. This data, in a nutshell, illustrates the scale of long-term migration from Ukraine to Poland.

The data from the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) on the number of foreigners in Poland making contributions to health and pension insurance is potentially very valuable. Until recently, the majority of Ukrainian citizens were employed in Poland on the basis of contracts for specific jobs (which do not require contributions), which is why the data from ZUS is not very reliable

<sup>5</sup> *Obywatele Ukrainy pracujący w Polsce. Raport z badania*, National Bank of Poland, Warsaw 2018, [https://www.nbp.pl/aktualnosci/wiadomosci\\_2018/obywatele-Ukrainy-pracujacy-w-Polsce-raport.pdf](https://www.nbp.pl/aktualnosci/wiadomosci_2018/obywatele-Ukrainy-pracujacy-w-Polsce-raport.pdf)

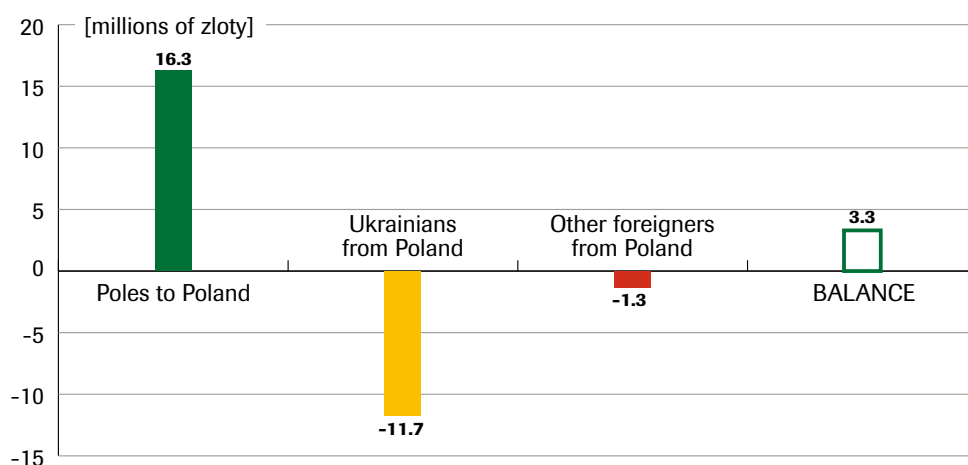
<sup>6</sup> Not including national D-type visas, which entitles holders to remain (on one or more occasions) in Poland for up to three months in a year.

<sup>7</sup> *Informacja o działalności Urzędu w okresie 10.08.2018–16.08.2018*, Urząd ds. Cudzoziemców [Office for Foreigners].

when it comes to the total migration inflow. As of July 2018, 403,000 Ukrainians were insured by ZUS<sup>8</sup>.

Another source of information on the numbers, but principally on the migration strategies and the impact of Ukrainian migration on the Polish and Ukrainian economies, is the data from the National Bank of Poland (NBP) on the financial transfers migrants carry out. These remittances amounted to 11.7 billion zloty in 2017 (see Figure 3 in more detail) and 2.9 billion zloty in the first quarter of 2018 (an increase of 500 million zloty compared to the same period last year). The transfers included in international statistics are those which are made through banks or specialised companies providing financial services, whereas – as is shown by research into Ukrainian migrants – the circulation of the migrants means that they bring back their earnings personally to their country of origin. That is why, for now, the NBP’s data provides us with only a very narrow picture of Ukrainian migration.

**Figure 3.** Remittances in 2017



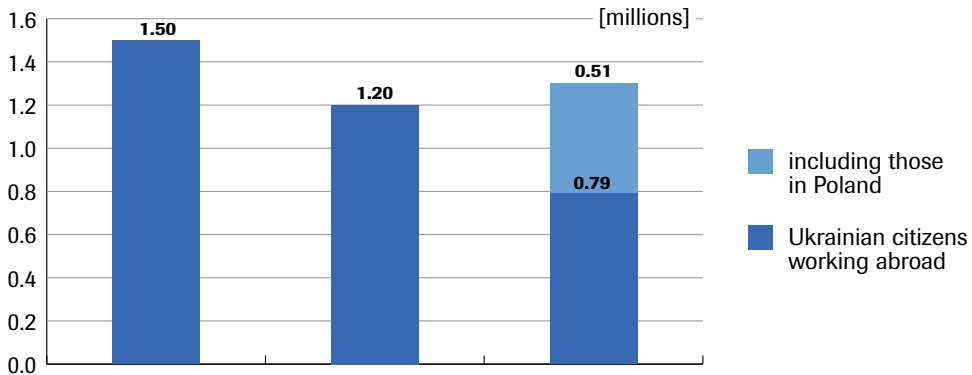
**Source:** National Bank of Poland

<sup>8</sup> L. Kostrzewski, A. Rozwadowska, *Obcokrajowcy ratują ZUS. Składki na ubezpieczenie społeczne płaci już 403 tys. Ukraińców*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 30 July 2018.

## IV. MIGRATION TO POLAND IN THE LIGHT OF UKRAINIAN RESEARCH

New light on the most recent wave of migration from Ukraine to Poland is being shed by a representative survey – the first since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine – carried out by the State Statistical Committee of Ukraine (SSCU)<sup>9</sup> on the subject of external labour migration by Ukrainian citizens. The principal aim of the survey, which was conducted in 2015-17, was to estimate the number of economic migrants resident abroad in this period, and to compare the data obtained with previous research carried out according to the same methodology. It seems that the result obtained, that there have been 1.3 million citizens of Ukraine working abroad in the last two years, is something of an underestimate, especially when compared with the Polish data and previous surveys.

**Figure 4.** Citizens of Ukraine working abroad, according to SSCU research results from 2008, 2012 and 2017



**Source:** State Statistical Committee of Ukraine

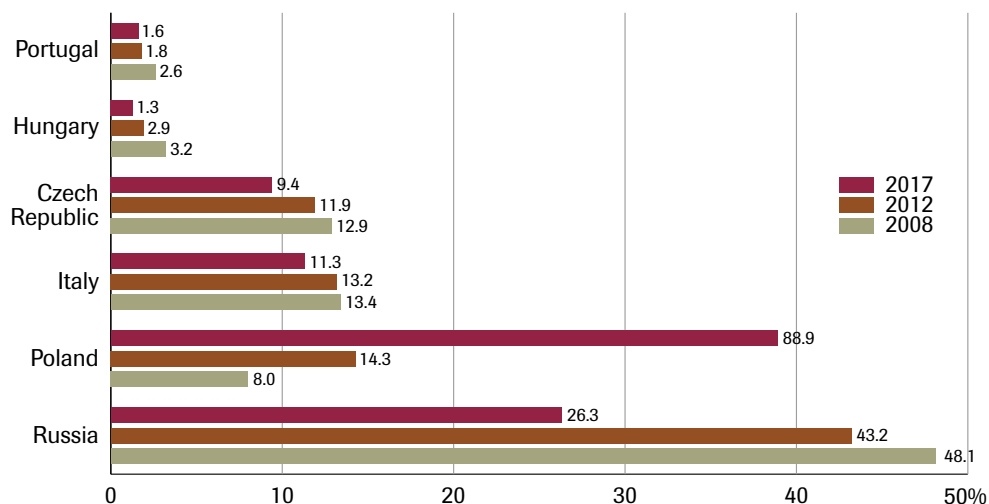
This is probably due to the specific nature of Ukrainian migration after 2014, which the latest study was unable to take into account. The Statistical Committee only considered those economic migrants who had returned to their homeland, or the families of migrants working abroad. Permanent migration when entire families went abroad was not considered. Estimating the figures for this group in Ukraine is particularly difficult, as at least 1 million Ukrainians (according to the data Russia provided to the Minsk contact group at the OSCE, between April 2014 and February 2018 as many as 1.7 million Ukrainians asked the Russian authorities to grant them refugee status or other forms of protection, as

<sup>9</sup> *Зовнішня Трудова Міграція Населення (за результатами модульного вибіркового обстеження)*, Державна Служба Статистики України, Київ 2018.

well as applications for citizenship)<sup>10</sup> left the Donbas war zone to go abroad, and the appropriate research could not take place under war conditions.

Nevertheless, the latest study provides a great deal of valuable information; first and foremost, it helps us to better understand where the Ukrainians who arrive in Poland have come from. Some are new people who have no previous experience of migration, as indicated by a representative survey of Ukrainian migrants working in the agricultural sector which the National Bank of Poland carried out in 2017<sup>11</sup>. On the other hand, thanks to Ukrainian data, it is possible to prove for the first time that a certain number of the new migrants to Poland are people who have changed their destination from Russia to Poland. A comparison of studies from 2008, 2012 and 2017 clearly shows how this reorientation from Russia to Poland took place. In 2017, 39% of respondents migrated to Poland (14.3% in 2012) and only 26% of the people surveyed went to work in Russia (43% in 2012) (for more, see Figure 5).

**Figure 5.** The most popular countries for Ukrainian migrants to work, according to SSCU research results from 2008, 2012 and 2017 (in percent)



**Source:** State Statistical Committee of Ukraine

This study also confirms and develops some of the hypotheses already established in the Polish studies. Among other things, it shows that migrants to

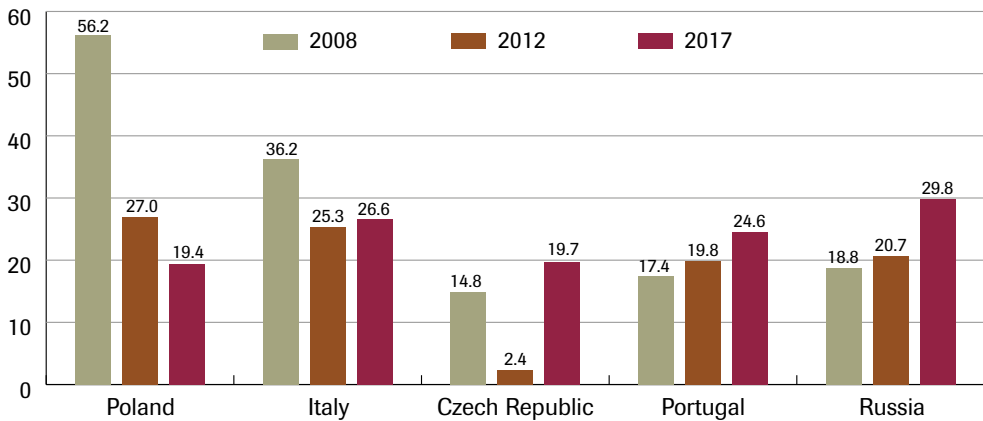
<sup>10</sup> С начала конфликта в Донбассе убежище в РФ попросили 1,7 млн украинцев, „Российская газета”, 8 February 2018, <https://rg.ru/2018/02/08/s-nachala-konflikta-v-donbasse-ubezhishche-v-rf-poprosili-1-7-mln-ukraincev.html>

<sup>11</sup> National Bank of Poland, *op. cit.*

Poland mostly arrive from western Ukraine (73.7%), and the geographical area from which migrants are recruited has mainly been expanded by the integration of central (11%), north (7.7%) and southern (6.9%) Ukraine, while the scale of migration from the eastern part of the country still remains very small (0.9%). The study also confirmed the circular and short-term nature of Ukrainian migration to Poland. 70% of the migrants surveyed stayed in Poland for one to six months, and over 50% had made more than one trip during the year.

The survey also showed the positive impact of the liberal Polish legislation regarding the temporary employment of foreigners; only 19% of Ukrainian respondents indicated that they did not have a regulated legal status in Poland (for more, see Figure 6).

**Figure 6.** The level of irregular migration among Ukrainian migrants working abroad according to the 2017 SSCU study



**Source:** State Statistical Committee of Ukraine

The popularity of Poland among Ukrainian migrants also results to a large extent from the enormous activity of employment agencies, which operate in virtually every region of Ukraine. It is one of the most dynamically developing sectors of the economy in both Poland and in Ukraine. However, as studies of the migrants show, this sector is still too poorly regulated and controlled, and too many migrants have become victims of dishonest agencies.

## V. OTHER TARGET COUNTRIES FOR UKRAINIAN MIGRATION

Just as the agricultural sector in Poland is the first place where Ukrainian migrants acquire migration experience before relocating to other areas of employment, Poland is often treated as a testing ground from which attempts are made to migrate to other EU countries. Ukrainian researchers emphasise that this migration takes place with the help of Polish migration networks, including Polish intermediaries. In Czech research in particular, the so-called 'Polish mark' clearly appears when Ukrainian migrants in the Czech Republic declare that they have arrived from Poland. The Czech press have repeatedly reported about checks on the legality of employment, during which migrants have been revealed to be in possession of certificates from Polish employers about their intention to employ a worker, even though these do not authorise them to work in the Czech Republic. Direct Ukrainian migration to the Czech Republic is difficult, as the country has been conducting a very restrictive migration policy since 2012, practically closing off any possibility of new economic migrants arriving there. A certain loophole in this practice arose with the launch in July 2016 of the government's *Režim Ukrajina* programme for qualified migrants, as part of which 13,300 Ukrainians work in the Czech Republic (within the quota of 20,000)<sup>12</sup>. Generally, it may be estimated – according to the state of affairs at the end of May 2018 – that about 85,000 Ukrainians are currently working legally in the Czech Republic<sup>13</sup>. This number is still small, but the Czech government has been treating the launch of the current quota program as a test for possible further liberalisation in the future.

Another country that could potentially be attractive to Ukrainian migrants is Hungary. However, this country applies a migration policy quite different from those of Poland and the Czech Republic. The main method for attracting migrants is the policy (liberalised in 2011) of granting Hungarian citizenship to those who feel bound by ethnic ties with the Hungarian state. According to data from July 2017, 845,000 citizens of other countries received Hungarian citizenship, and 145,000 were in the process of doing so. The number of those who have obtained citizenship includes about 100,000 Ukrainian citizens (mainly

<sup>12</sup> Bilanční TK ke dvěma letům od spuštění vládního Režimu Ukrajina, „Hospodářská Komora”, 30 June 2018, [https://www.komora.cz/files/uploads/2018/07/20180730\\_PODKLADY\\_Re%C5%BEim-Ukrajina\\_GRAFY.pdf](https://www.komora.cz/files/uploads/2018/07/20180730_PODKLADY_Re%C5%BEim-Ukrajina_GRAFY.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> According to estimates by the Czech Statistics Office; [https://www.czso.cz/documents/10180/67292846/29002717\\_t3-01.pdf/6b869934-2304-416f-baab-9e03d980be81?version=1.1](https://www.czso.cz/documents/10180/67292846/29002717_t3-01.pdf/6b869934-2304-416f-baab-9e03d980be81?version=1.1)

from Transcarpathia, which is inhabited by the Hungarian minority)<sup>14</sup>. Interestingly, as yet the Hungarian government has not sought to make the newly naturalised citizens move to Hungary; they have often used Hungarian citizenship to migrate to other EU countries. This situation is slowly beginning to change, as Hungary has also started to notice shortages on its labour market.

In many surveys carried out by companies involved in finding employment in Poland, there is a fear of an outflow of Ukrainian workers from Poland to Germany. For example, according to a recent survey conducted by Personnel Service in July 2018, as many as 60% of the Ukrainian migrants currently working in Poland would like to work in Germany<sup>15</sup>. Unless one thinks in terms of undocumented employment, the chances of a change in migration legislation for Ukrainians in Germany are negligible. At present, Germany has set itself the task of activating the 1 million refugees who arrived during the crisis of 2015-16. An additional priority is the professional activation of the Balkan migrants who came to Germany in 2009-12, as well as the possible preparation of special programmes offering jobs to migrants from African countries who have the most desirable professions from the point of view of the labour market's needs. On the other hand, Germany has been recently working on a new comprehensive migration policy which should facilitate the inflow of a qualified labour force originating from the non-EU countries, potentially including Ukraine. However this task is very difficult, because German regulations are very prohibitive and inflexible, and as a rule Germany does not recognise diplomas from universities or professional qualifications from non-EU countries<sup>16</sup>.

A new country which had previously been absent from the map of Ukrainian migration in Europe is Lithuania. The numbers are still small, but during the space of one year the number of Ukrainian citizens who have been granted the right of residence in Lithuania has increased dramatically. While there were just 3600 such people in 2017, in the first quarter of 2018 the figure had already reached 11,300<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> J. Toth, *The curious case of Hungary: why the naturalisation rate does not always show how inclusive a country is*, European University Institute, Global Governance Programme, <http://globalcit.eu/the-curious-case-of-hungary-why-the-naturalisation-rate-does-not-always-show-how-inclusive-a-country-is/>

<sup>15</sup> *Barometr Imigracji Zarobkowej*, Personnel Service, 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2018, <http://personnelservice.pl/en/press-office/reports>

<sup>16</sup> For more see the *2018 MEDAM Assessment Report on Asylum and Migration Policies in Europe*, Kiel Institute for the World Economy 2018.

<sup>17</sup> *Трудовая миграция в Литву выросло вдвое за счет украинцев*, „Экономическая правда”, 21 May 2018, <https://www.epravda.com.ua/rus/news/2018/05/21/637005/>



## VI. PROSPECTS

All the factors presented indicate how difficult it is to make any further predictions about the dynamics of migration from Ukraine to Poland. It is not known whether the dynamics of circular migration will be maintained in the medium term (5–7 years), or whether this migration pattern will still be attractive to the inhabitants of western Ukraine. As a rule, in each target country, some of the migrants usually decide to settle for longer. At the moment long-term migration from Ukraine to Poland is also rising, albeit at a much slower pace. Whether the proportions between temporary and long-term migration will change depends on many factors, including Polish migration policy<sup>18</sup> and the migration policies of the other target countries. For the time being, no major geographical reorientation of Ukrainian migrants from Poland to other EU countries can be observed, but it is clear that in this respect Poland's main potential competitor is the Czech Republic. The average size of the savings that Ukrainian citizens can make while working in Poland is also of great importance. At the moment, due to the differences in the exchange rates and the relatively low costs of living in Poland, circular migration to Poland is definitely a more viable option than working in Ukraine or long-term migration, which would require more funds for bringing over and supporting a family.

It is worth remembering that at the macro level, the current migration wave from Ukraine to Poland is a social reaction to a situation of shock (the outbreak of armed conflict and the sudden deterioration of the economic situation), and should not be treated as a long-term trend. Ukraine, which is struggling with serious demographic problems and a deficit on its own labour market, may soon be unable to meet the demand of the labour market in Poland. The number of people of working age in Ukraine is systematically decreasing (as of mid-2017, this group numbered 17.2 million<sup>19</sup>), and moreover Ukraine has a relatively high employment rate (about 60% of the working-age population, not including the shadow economy). According to estimates by the National

<sup>18</sup> On 31 July 2018, the Council of Ministers adopted a document entitled 'Poland's migration policy - current status and postulated actions', which is aimed at formulating directions of action and systemic solutions & guidelines for the public administration in the field of migration. This new concept provides for the simplification of provisions regarding the rules of residence and work for foreigners in Poland, including preferential legal solutions in the scope of residence and work on the territory of the Republic of Poland for selected groups of foreigners, and the development & implementation of an effective programme for the integration of foreigners.

<sup>19</sup> Data from the State Statistical Committee of Ukraine.

Bank of Ukraine, labour migration has already reached such a high level (with declining population) that it is now hampering Ukraine's GDP growth, mainly due to a lack of manpower for work in construction, industry, agriculture and transport<sup>20</sup>.

**MARTA JAROSZEWICZ**

<sup>20</sup> Трудовая миграция тормозит рост экономики - НБУ, „Экономическая правда”, 5 August 2018, <https://www.epravda.com.ua/rus/news/2018/08/5/639329/>