

Debate: “Labor Mobility and Integration of Workers between Poland and Ukraine: Challenges and Opportunities.” 20 November 2025

The debate, jointly organized by the Warsaw Enterprise Institute (Poland) and the Institute of Economic Research and Policy Consulting (Ukraine), is part of a series of events under the project “*A Common Future. Poland and Ukraine in the European Single Market.*” The discussion focused on the challenges and opportunities arising from labor mobility between the two countries. Participants examined labor market challenges, migrant integration, and future economic needs in the context of Ukraine’s accession to the EU.

The debate gathered representatives of business, financial institutions, business-support organizations, and public administration from Poland and Ukraine:

- **Bartłomiej Potocki** – Director, Department of Social Integration, Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy of Poland;
- **Aleksandra Wróbel** – Forum of Labor, Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers (ZPP);
- **Sylvia Krasoń-Kopaniarz** – Director of Foreign Markets, Impel Group; Vice-President, International Association of Polish Entrepreneurs in Ukraine (MSPPU);
- **Kateryna Glazkova** – Executive Director, Union of Ukrainian Entrepreneurs (SUP);
- **Olga Makogon** – Project Manager, Reform Office of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine;
- **Alena Kavka** – Human Resources Development Specialist, ROSHEN Corporation.

The debate was moderated by **Oleksandra Betliy**, Institute of Economic Research and Policy Consulting.

1. The Role of Ukrainian Workers in Poland: Foundation or Temporary Support?

Łukasz Wojdyga (WEI) opened the debate by presenting data on the number and economic potential of Ukrainian workers in Poland. War-related migration from Ukraine has become one of the most significant stabilising factors for the Polish labor market. Currently, 850,000 Ukrainians legally work in Poland, accounting for 5% of the labor force. Ukrainian citizens have registered 55,000 sole proprietorships and 28,000 companies in Poland. Their contribution to Poland’s GDP already exceeds 2.7% annually. These are not just statistical curiosities, but a foundation supporting the Polish economy in 2025. Without these workers, large sectors—logistics, services, agriculture, parts of construction—would operate at a critical level. Bartłomiej Potocki (MRPiPS) noted that Ukrainian migrants have undergone a gradual transformation, progressing from seasonal work to long-term integration and upward mobility. They are motivated, development-oriented, and a large share plans to remain in Poland for many years—distinguishing them from many other migrant groups. He stressed that Poland cannot treat Ukrainian workers merely as a source of cheap labor. Not only is this short-sighted, but it also contradicts reality: increasing numbers of Ukrainians aspire to work in regulated, technical, and specialist professions.

2. Skills Mismatch and Systemic Barriers in Poland

Aleksandra Wróbel (ZPP) noted that a growing share of Ukrainians in Poland work below their qualifications—68% in 2024. The reason is not a lack of competence, but systemic barriers: insufficient access to sector-specific language training (e.g., medical or technical), complex procedures

for recognising education and experience, and legal uncertainty. From the perspective of the Polish labor market, this is entirely illogical: Poland lacks thousands of specialists, yet legal regulations significantly hinder the effective use of the skills of Ukrainian workers already in the country. Sylwia Krasoń-Kopaniarz (Impel) expanded this with insights from day-to-day operations in a large Polish firm. Contrary to common myths, the cost of employing Ukrainians is often higher than that of employing Polish employees, due to the extensive and time-consuming onboarding and legalisation processes. She emphasized that Ukrainian workers typically have a positive impact on team morale, contributing to higher workplace standards.

3. The Ukrainian Perspective: Demography, Security, and Human Capital

Olga Makogon emphasised that Ukraine is facing the most severe demographic crisis in its history. It lacks nurses, doctors, teachers, technical workers, and candidates for vocational schools. Labor migration during wartime has become a mechanism that is difficult to halt, yet it poses a serious threat to Ukraine's future reconstruction. To encourage returns, Ukraine must—beyond achieving military and political stability—build systems for retraining workers, recognizing skills acquired abroad, and creating a centralized job database for returning migrants. Kateryna Glazkova (SUP) stressed the need to integrate women and veterans into the labour market, as well as the vast potential of the 50+ population. She also pointed to the rising costs of vocational training and shortages of candidates, particularly in technical fields. Ukraine must not only retain people but also mobilize groups that have so far remained outside the labor market.

4. The Business View: Polish and Ukrainian Perspectives

In labor market terms, Poland has become a beneficiary of the ongoing war, as Ukrainian migration has supported key parts of its economy. Sylwia Krasoń-Kopaniarz highlighted the strong motivation and willingness of Ukrainian employees to integrate and develop professionally. Ukrainian labour migration differs from migration from Asia or Africa due to cultural proximity and similar work ethics.

Olena Kavka (Roshen) noted that Ukrainian companies are beginning to invest in employees by offering housing programs, technical training, and cooperation with vocational schools. Despite growing interest in recruiting workers from outside Ukraine (India, Bangladesh, Central Asia), most Ukrainian companies are still not culturally or organizationally prepared for large-scale employment of foreigners. The priority remains the employment of Ukrainian citizens.

5. Legal Aspects: Status, Regulations, Shortage Occupations

In Poland, Ukrainians are not considered a *national minority*, a status reserved for groups that have resided in the country for at least 100 years. Migrants may acquire such status only after obtaining Polish citizenship. Bartłomiej Potocki explained that Poland maintains a national list of shortage occupations, a key tool for directing funds into training and reskilling. Ukrainian workers are particularly needed in technical, medical, care-related, logistics, and transport professions.

6. Social Relations and Integration

Kateryna Glazkova highlighted rising social tensions in Poland, border issues, and deteriorating relations between some Poles and Ukrainians. These factors may significantly influence decisions on returning to Ukraine—negative social experiences reduce migrants' willingness to integrate further. Bartłomiej Potocki stressed that integration must be holistic: it should include access to public services, education for children, and healthcare. Lack of access to these services may lead to decisions to return to Ukraine or move to Western Europe.

7. Key Conclusions and Recommendations

The debate confirmed that Poland and Ukraine face one of the most significant socio-economic challenges in Europe: creating a migration system that not only responds to current labor market needs but also forms the basis for long-term economic security for both countries. Although the two states

have different migration interests—Poland needs to attract workers, while Ukraine seeks to bring them back—their future is inseparably linked. Labor markets operate transnationally, and demographic challenges are complementary, making cooperation a necessity rather than a political choice. Poland is entering a period of chronic labor shortages, particularly in medical, technical, care-related, and high-tech sectors. Meanwhile, Ukraine faces the enormous challenge of post-war reconstruction, requiring the rapid return of qualified specialists. These conflicting interests do not have to generate tension; they can serve as an impulse to build shared migration mechanisms that benefit both sides. This requires breaking down administrative barriers that currently hinder integration, limit mobility, and slow economic development. One of the most pressing issues is the recognition of academic and professional qualifications. The existing system is slow, opaque, and misaligned with modern labor market needs, creating obstacles for both Polish employers and Ukrainian workers. Additionally, there is inadequate support for groups that could significantly increase labor force participation, including women, veterans, and people aged 50+. Their potential is enormous; yet, without tailored activation programs, it remains underutilized. Business already leads in some areas—companies provide integration mechanisms, language courses, onboarding, and motivational pathways—but these remain fragmented. To fully harness the migration potential, systemic solutions at the national level are necessary. Migration, as stressed during the debate, is not a temporary phenomenon. It is a strategic pillar of economic resilience and regional security, as well as a foundation for Ukraine's future reconstruction.

Recommendations

1. Establish a Joint Polish-Ukrainian Qualification Recognition Centre

Such an institution would dramatically shorten procedures and increase transparency. A fast-track system should be applied to key professions, including medical, technical, and care-related fields. Assessment should be based on practical skills rather than bureaucracy. A central database of regulated professions would enable easy verification of requirements.

2. Synchronize the Lists of Shortage Occupations in Poland and Ukraine

Regular joint labor market forecasts would help avoid competition for the same specialists. Strategic professions should be prioritized, and mechanisms should be introduced to enable the predictable and transparent management of sector-specific migration.

3. Launch the “Work in Poland / Work in Ukraine” Platform

A bilingual hub containing job offers, retraining tools, and professional migration and reintegration counselling. This would allow citizens of both countries to make informed career decisions.

4. Strengthen Social Integration in Poland

Integration means more than employment. Support programs for migrant families, sector-specific language courses, and public campaigns highlighting the contribution of Ukrainians to the Polish economy can improve social relations and reduce tensions.

5. Support the Ukrainian Labor Market

Strengthening vocational education, establishing returnees' programs (e.g., grants for returning specialists), and promoting flexible employment forms—especially for women and veterans—would help Ukraine rebuild its human capital and increase its economic resilience.

6. Deepen Business–Education Cooperation

Patronage classes, practical modules in vocational schools, and joint internship programs can better prepare young people for employment in both Poland and Ukraine. Firms gain a skilled workforce, while students receive clear career pathways.

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