



Key findings from the Event on: Promoting labour inclusion for refugees from Ukraine: good practices, challenges and lessons learnt

The Regional Socio-Economic Inclusion Working Group (RIWG), co-chaired by UNHCR and UNDP, established under the Regional Refugee Coordination Forum chaired by UNHCR, provides technical and policy guidance on the socio-

economic inclusion of refugees, stateless persons, third-country nationals, and other forcibly displaced persons from Ukraine in countries covered under the [Regional Refugee Response Plan](#).

About the event

The event was organized by the Regional Socio-economic Inclusion Working Group (RIWG) as part of its efforts to raise awareness of the challenges and opportunities that refugees from Ukraine face in terms of socio-economic inclusion. The event particularly focused on their inclusion into the labour market and aimed at gathering perspectives of different actors on the barriers that refugees from Ukraine might face in finding decent jobs and collecting good scalable practices.

The online event gathered over 200 participants from national and local governments, the private sector, social partners, employers and workers organizations, NGOs, academia, Ukrainian refugees' associations, diaspora organizations, UN agencies, and other actors working to provide support to refugees from Ukraine and facilitate their inclusion into the economies and societies of their host countries. The agenda of the event was designed to cover the latest data and trends in terms of labour inclusion for refugees from Ukraine in host countries as well as the specific role of national and local governments, and other key stakeholders in

fostering the inclusion of refugees into host countries' labour markets, zooming into good practices and lessons learnt. This report aims to review the main findings and highlights from the discussions, as well as, good and emerging practices, and inclusive and gender-responsive recommendations.



Key findings from Session 1: Ensuring labour inclusion for refugees from Ukraine: where do we stand?

The full-scale war in Ukraine has had a significant impact on the labour market within and outside Ukraine. Out of the total number of Ukrainians fleeing the country, about 1.7 million, mostly women, were employed, accounting for 11% of Ukraine’s total workforce. This resulted in labour shortages in Ukraine, especially in certain sectors like trade, education, health and social services in which about 40% of the refugees worked, prior to the conflict. For the first time in its history the EU invoked the Temporary Protection Directive, and its passing into national legislation, has allowed Ukrainians to enjoy immediate access to labour markets in host countries, hence preventing a number of risks associated with informal labour including exploitation and abuse. It has enabled the quick integration of refugees into the labour market as well as into the host societies and communities.

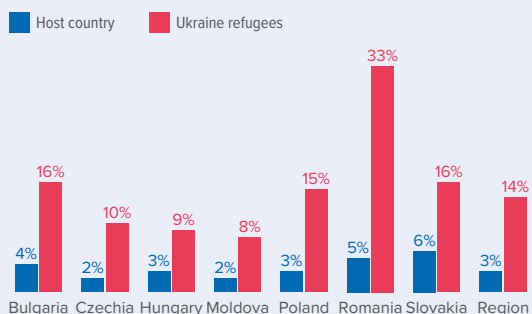
The labour inclusion for refugees from Ukraine is not a standalone issue, and it requires concerted efforts from the governments (both local and national), CSOs, IOs, UN agencies, the private sector, Trade Unions and refugees themselves. A variety of actors provide support for the successful integration of refugees into the labour market, with

various tools in place to harness these efforts. A lasting and successful integration into the labour market relies, in particular, on gender-responsive public policies oriented towards inclusive access to labour markets and decent work, language acquisition, education, skills recognition and upskilling, entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, and social protection.

Most of the refugees from Ukraine are young people of working age, often filling the labour gaps in tight host labour markets in EU and Moldova, hence reconfirming the long-term benefits of integrating refugees into the local labour markets. Still, integration is not happening without challenges. Many refugees accept to work below their skill level and overqualification can have a negative impact on inclusion in the medium term. Jobs, where the language matters, non-transferability of qualifications particularly in regulated professions, lack of childcare support, the need to take care of other family members, and concerns about schooling, education, and housing prospects – all act as obstacles to refugees’ access to decent jobs.

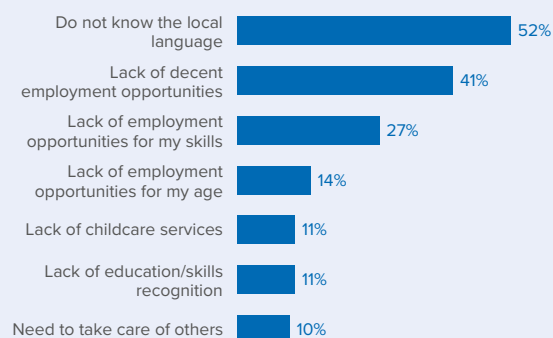
But the unemployment rate is very high

UNEMPLOYMENT: REFUGEE POPULATION VERSUS HOST COUNTRY, %



- Employment barriers for specific groups:
- Lack of childcare: 17 % of adults living in households with young children
 - Skills recognition: 15% for healthcare and education professionals

TOP EMPLOYMENT BARRIERS REPORTED BY UNEMPLOYED REFUGEES, % OF RESPONDENTS



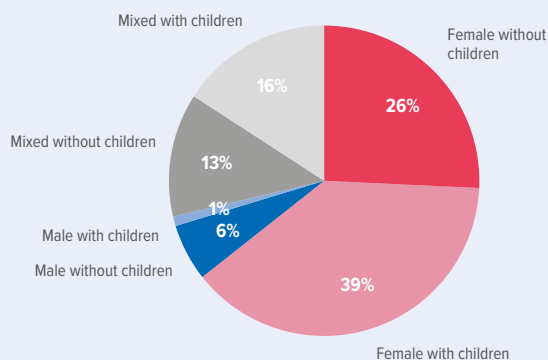
Source: Results the socio-economic data analysis of the multi-sector needs assessment (MSNA)

Refugees still face a high degree of economic vulnerability, as compared to the host community. Providing support with accommodation expenses is crucial in helping them rebuild their lives in a new country and avoiding poverty. Hence, regular and formal employment is imperative for staying out of poverty. Labour force participation of refugees is almost on par with nationals, this demonstrates that refugees have a strong desire to work. Nevertheless, the unemployment rate for refugees

is still very high compared to host communities, pointing to many barriers impeding this access. The key obstacles reported by unemployed refugees in accessing a job are lack of local language knowledge, lack of decent employment opportunities that would match their skills and age, lack of childcare services, lack of education and skills recognition mechanism, and the need to take care of other family members.

The gender divide: female - led households are 65% of the total sample across the region

DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLDS BY GENDER OF ADULTS, %



- The share of households that are composed of female only adults without children represent 65% of the total sample across the region
- From the point of the view of employment, the share of women is even higher, as women represent 73% of all working age adults

Source: Results the socio-economic data analysis of the multi-sector needs assessment (MSNA)

Women represent the majority of the refugees. Devising tools to conduct gender analysis is critical to provide more insights into the specific challenges faced by women refugees in accessing the labour market. Data collected so far confirmed that the gender divide is still an issue: The share of households that are composed of female-only adults with or without children represents 65% of the total sample across the region. From the point of view of employment, the share of women is even higher, as women represent 73% of all working age adults. Additionally, female-led households are more vulnerable than their male-led counterparts. Households with female only adults are 1.5 times more likely to be below the poverty line compared to households with male only adults (mainly without children). The same trend is noticed for women

labour force participation that is significantly lower as compared to men: 59% vs. 71%. From the gender perspective, several aspects impede women access to work. One of them is access to education of children or their enrolment in online education, also confirmed by other regional analysis developed. Additionally, there are a number of risks associated with the GBV, human trafficking, sexual and labour exploitation, including of domestic workers. On a positive note: displacement can be an opportunity for gender transformative outcomes, and that is the case of many Ukrainian women who were not in the labour market before the war or were not the main providers, and are now economically independent, leading businesses and being role models for their children.

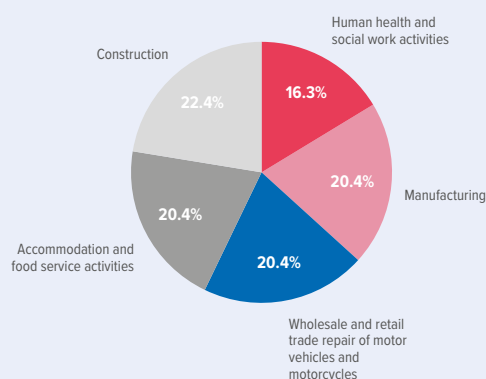
Key findings from Session 2: The role of national governments in fostering the inclusion of refugees into host countries' labour markets: good practices and lessons learnt.

Lithuania and Czechia are implementing a successful model of Ukrainian refugees' integration into their labour markets, addressing significant local labour shortages. Lithuania, for instance, saw a reduction in refugees employed in unqualified jobs due to coordinated efforts between government, NGOs, private sector, and development partners, as well as awareness-raising campaigns with the private sector. This integration not only filled critical gaps in sectors like healthcare and education but also positively impacted the local economy, with over 500 Ukrainian specialists working in healthcare and over 700 working in education. Similarly, Czechia faced challenges in matching refugees' skills with appropriate jobs but is actively developing new systems to improve skills recognition and job placement. Across all three sessions, common challenges faced by national governments emerged, including issues with accommodation, childcare services, language barriers, and access to healthcare. These challenges were particularly pronounced for women refugees who often faced job offers that did not

match their qualifications. Efforts are underway to address these challenges, such as providing childcare facilities and improving job matching systems. Additionally, there's a growing focus on combating the exploitation of refugee labour, ensuring that refugees are protected and fairly treated in the workplace.

The policy perspective emphasized the rapid integration of refugees from Ukraine into European labour markets, due to the Temporary Protection Directive, transposed into national laws. Numerous host countries have invested a lot in upgrading the employment infrastructure and services to ensure the integration of refugees. The success of refugee integration into the labour market was due to the combination of responding to the strong interest of refugees to work, the engagement of employment agencies, and the cooperation with the private sector and CSOs. Also, the "dual intent integration" approach was discussed, highlighting the need to prepare for long-term integration in the host country. Zooming into the private sector, the motivations behind businesses' engagement with refugees are

UNEMPLOYMENT: REFUGEE POPULATION VERSUS HOST COUNTRY, %



Source: Results from the Eurochambres Survey and interviews with Chamber organisations from 16 EU countries

The business background: skills needs

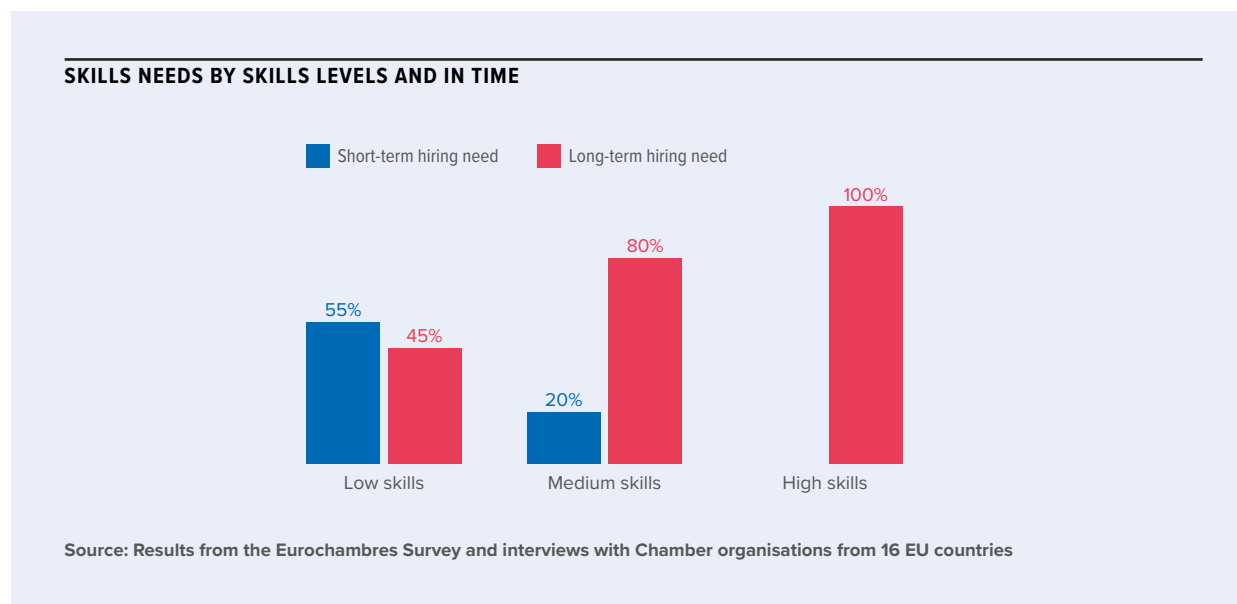
- In all but one of the participating countries, business hiring need in the preceding 6 months

primarily driven by immediate labour needs in sectors such as healthcare, manufacturing, and construction. While short-term hiring needs of businesses mostly focus on low-skilled jobs, for long-term employment high skills prevail. The current experience shows that the private sector has a high interest in hiring refugees, as long as there is assurance that these efforts are justified and rewarded in time.

Challenges for businesses include uncertainty about refugees' stay duration, cultural and language barriers, difficulties in assessing refugees' qualifications and limited support structures for refugee hiring. Despite these challenges, businesses are actively supporting integration

through job matching, training programs, and community outreach initiatives aimed at comprehensive support for refugees (including housing, childcare, and health).

Overall, while significant progress has been made in integrating refugees into labour markets across EU and Moldova, challenges remain in ensuring sustainable, decent work that aligns with refugees' skills and aspirations. Coordinated efforts involving governments, NGOs, businesses, and international organizations are crucial to overcoming these challenges and promoting inclusive economic growth.



Key findings from Session 3: The key role of local governments and other stakeholders in supporting refugee's labour inclusion.

Local governments play a vital role in facilitating the social and economic integration of refugees by providing basic services, language courses, organizing job fairs, and meetings with local entrepreneurs to connect refugees with employment opportunities. They also promote social cohesion through joint events and camps for children and youth that foster interaction between refugees and host communities. Fundraising efforts

are made to support refugee needs, and connections with Ukrainian municipalities strengthen cross-border cooperation. Approval of legal frameworks at the local level ensures overall refugee and migrant integration by providing legal advice and collaborating closely with social services. Local community centres are important partners for local governments, offering refugees from Ukraine language classes, job guidance, and

psychological support, as well as Ukrainian cultural activities and youth councils to further contribute to social cohesion and integration efforts.



Boosting labour market participation of refugees from Ukraine in Kekava, Latvia: Planning a job fair with local entrepreneurs

At the local level, refugees encounter similar challenges as highlighted earlier, including accepting unqualified jobs despite higher education and lack of accommodation. The support received from civil society organizations and other local institutions is essential. Small incentives such as upskilling programs, business grants, and career guidance play a crucial role in empowering refugees. Stakeholder cooperation is emphasized to comprehensively address these challenges. Trade unions support refugees with job placement, access to childcare (particularly for women), and legal

empowerment. They provide guidance on labour rights, contract compliance, taxation, and the risks of informal employment through organized campaigns and consultation sessions.

Local employment agencies offer extensive services to refugees, including job vacancy information, mediation, career guidance, and professional development training. They conduct information sessions, group consultations, and job fairs to foster cooperation with employers and development partners. Partnerships with central and local authorities, NGOs, educational institutions, economic agents, and local forums facilitate dialogue on refugee labour market integration, leveraging partnerships to effectively address challenges.

Interventions include dedicated online information platforms, direct job vacancy announcements at refugee centres, multilingual information materials, and success story campaigns. Agencies actively engage with employers to identify job opportunities and educate them on employing refugees. Challenges such as language barriers, vocational training needs, and uncertainties about residence status and future plans among refugees are addressed through close collaboration with employers, continuous information updates, and tailored support to match job opportunities with refugees' skills and experiences.

Services offered by the Local Employment Agency from Moldova for refugees from Ukraine

- Information and job vacancies
- Information on employment conditions
- Job mediation
- Career guidance
- Professional development training (donor-financed courses)
- Information sessions and group consultations with refugees
- Job fairs
- Information on services and opportunities provided by development partners
- Cooperation with and support to employers
- Referral (for solving problems other than employment)

Recommendations:

- Working in a multi-stakeholder approach involves bringing together different actors from the public and private sector, development actors, NGOs and RLOs and UN agencies, to create wider integration networks. To address the challenges faced, it is essential to implement early labour market engagement for refugees to tackle segmentation and exploitation.
- Providing access to the labour market and employment strategies, ensuring refugee coverage under social protection schemes, promoting financial inclusion and education, facilitating local language acquisition, skills development and recognition of prior learning, as well as maintaining labour rights and ensuring adequate labour conditions is key. Employers and workers' organizations play a proactive role in safeguarding workers' rights and promoting equality of opportunity and treatment. Trade Unions and employers' organizations also have a significant role in advocating for fair recruitment practices and reducing the risks of forced labour and human trafficking.
- Regular awareness campaigns are necessary to prevent forced labour and exploitation of refugees from Ukraine, as well as to address human trafficking. Capacity-building efforts should target both relevant authorities and refugees themselves.
- It is crucial to strengthen the capacities of public employment services in recognizing qualifications and transferring skills to ensure that these are not lost and can be utilized in the host country's labour market. Skills assessment tools are vital for understanding current skills levels and determining areas for further upskilling. These tools provide efficient methods for assessing skills, opening doors to professional training and employment opportunities.
- Integrating individuals into the labour market without jeopardizing their potential return is another topic to consider. Dual intent integration is a recommended modality, which allows for rapid inclusion without hindering long-term return prospects. Investment in human capital is crucial to help individuals maintain or acquire new skills that will be beneficial, especially for Ukraine in its recovery process, focusing on sectors such as health, construction, and IT.
- The recognition process for qualifications, both in host countries and in Ukraine upon return, needs to be streamlined. A good example are the bilateral agreements between Ukraine and a number of host countries for recognition of school education received by children, when they move to another country or when they return to Ukraine. Ukraine is also a member of the international ENIC-NARIC network on skills and diploma recognition..
- Prioritizing refugee labour market integration questions at the political level and allocating relevant financial resources with proper distribution to the local level is crucial. Supporting local municipalities and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to aid in refugee integration, such as language support and training, and organizing regular meetings with local actors for vertical coordination, are important steps to ensure successful integration processes.

Final remarks: Inclusion benefits all, host communities, forcibly displaced and stateless persons, and their countries of origin. While, as also highlighted by RIWG members, most refugees from Ukraine want to return home, their successful economic inclusion in host countries contributes to making the return more sustainable, allowing refugees to build and protect their assets and increase their resilience. The RIWG members and participants took note through the results of the MSNA and various panels that although the legal framework for inclusion is rather enabling, barriers remain for access to decent work, social protection, affordable housing, and education which require our concerted efforts in order to be addressed.

Ultimately, a fundamental step towards effective integration and inclusion, impactful policies and programmes, is enhancing and mainstreaming the systematic measurement of remaining barriers, needs and potentials of displaced and stateless people, including through their meaningful representation in national statistical systems, such as labour force or income and living conditions surveys, and analysis of administrative data, disaggregated by legal status.