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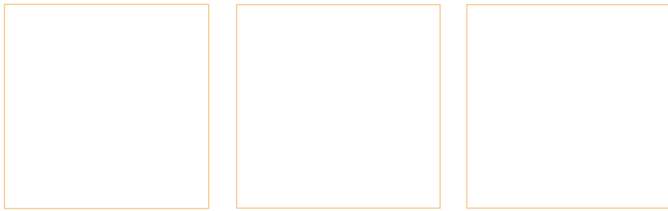
## *Ukraine's key migration challenges and opportunities*

### *Abstract*

*In the past twenty years Ukraine's population decreased. Emigration has only contributed to the negative population dynamics and also resulted in the 'brain drain', where many specialists whose skills are in global demand have left Ukraine. Nevertheless, the post-Soviet Ukraine has had some positive developments in the migration sphere. The government was able to address several challenges, including creating migration legislation from scratch, establishing the State Border Guard Service as well as working with the EU in negotiating, adopting and implementing the Readmission Agreement. One of the key issues on the EU-Ukraine agenda concerning migration is an agreement that would allow Ukrainians to travel for short-term visits to Europe without visas. Researchers do not expect that such visa-free travel would lead to a substantial increase in illegal migration. To the contrary, it is expected that a visa-free regime will stimulate greater tourism and business links between Ukraine and EU Member States.*

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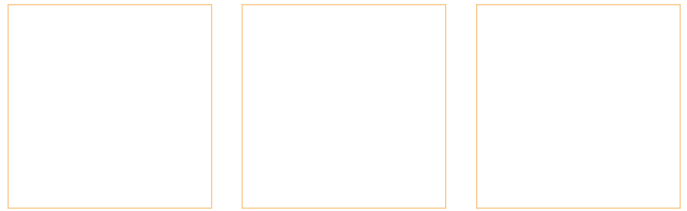
One of the biggest challenges for Ukraine is a significant outflow of population and labour force, including highly skilled professionals

Since 1993, Ukraine has experienced a decrease in the total population. The current total fertility level (1.5 in 2012) does not ensure a reproduction of the population. A significant portion of the population die prematurely. The life span of Ukrainians is shorter than that of those from more developed countries. Especially significant is the difference between Ukraine and EU countries in the level of mortality among men of working age. According to United Nations data, life expectancy of Ukrainian females and males is 74.6 and 63.5 respectively.<sup>1</sup>

The combination of low fertility, high mortality and emigration reinforce the population decline. Between 1993 and 2012, Ukraine's population declined by nearly 6.5 million. In 2013, Ukraine had 45.4 million people. It is important to note that these figures do not take into account external labour migration. Ukraine is one of the largest donor countries of workers in Europe.

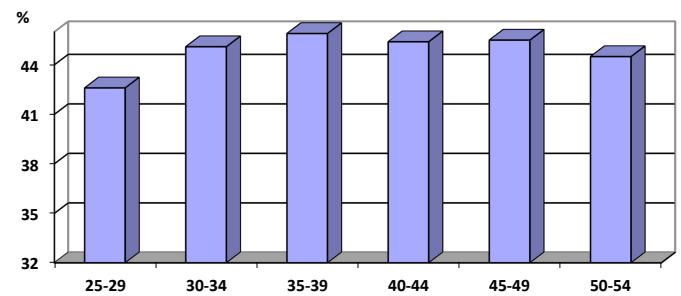
Emigration from Ukraine not only contributes to a decrease in population, but contributes to a 'brain drain'. People who leave Ukraine primarily fall into the age group between 20-49 years, thus reducing the working-age population. A serious problem is emigration of highly skilled specialists. At the beginning of the 21st century, the share of Ukrainian immigrants with higher education has been more than 1.5 higher in Western countries as opposed to the CIS and Baltic countries.

The 2001 population census also pointed to a deterioration in the level of education of young people. The level of education of those aged 24-29 years (the age cohort that includes recent university



graduates) is lower when compared to the older cohort (see Figure 1). This is despite the fact that there has been an increase in education programmes and training in Ukraine during this period. Between 1990/1991 and 2010/2011 academic years, the number of issued university diplomas of different types has risen by 15.5%, with the number of full-time degrees increasing by 37.5%. The discrepancy between the greater number of diplomas and the decline in the level of education indicates an increase in the outflow of highly skilled youth abroad.

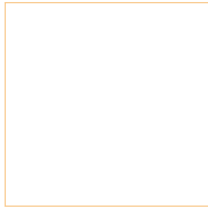
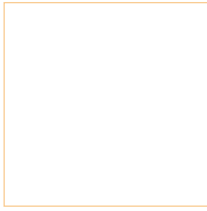
**Figure 1.** The share of people with higher education (all types) among the different age groups of 5.12.2001



Source: Author's calculations based on data from the Ukrainian Government Office of Statistics

More than a thousand postgraduates and 200 persons holding PhDs left Ukraine in the period between 1998 and 2012. With the stabilisation of the economy (between 2001 and 2008), there has been the first signs of improvement in the living standards and more opportunities to earn higher salaries for the highly skilled employed in Ukraine. Consequently, during this period, the number of PhD holders leaving Ukraine has declined. Despite this, emigration remains almost the only way for young scientists to improve their welfare while remaining in their field. After 2008, the upward trend in the highly skilled leaving Ukraine has again become dominant. Most of the specialists leave for the United States.

<sup>1</sup> See UN Data 'Ukraine' <http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=UKRAINE> (accessed March 26, 2013).



## Ukraine as a destination and a transit country for illegal migrants

From the first years of independence, Ukraine has become a country of transit for illegal migrants trying to reach Western Europe. The newly established borders among the former Soviet republics, the lack of immigration legislation and reliable visa and border control contributed to the development of illegal migration.

With a marked improvement in Ukrainian border control, there has been an improvement in addressing the issue of irregular movements. In particular, between 2001 and 2008 there has been a decrease in the number of illegal migrants identified by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA). The State Border Guard Service of Ukraine has also become more efficient, whilst reducing the pressure from the MIA. The streamlining of work has also been the result of co-operation with the EU, especially the Readmission Agreement that came into force in 2010. With the Agreement in force, 60% of the illegal immigrants deported to Ukraine were citizens of Ukraine.

Most of the illegal immigrants detained in Ukraine are citizens of the former USSR who enjoy visa-free entry but then overstay the 90 days they are permitted to be in Ukraine without registration. In 2012, 92% of illegal immigrants detained at the borders of Ukraine included citizens of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Moldova, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan. Among the illegal immigrants identified in the country, 84% were citizens of Russia, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and, to a lesser extent, Moldova, Georgia and Armenia. Citizens from Afghanistan and Somalia were also among those detained in Ukraine as illegal immigrants.

## What may be the impact of the visa-free regime on the travel patterns between Ukraine and the EU?

The EU is an attractive destination for many labour migrants from Ukraine. The results of the first and second national surveys on labour migration held in 2008 and 2012 respectively, show that there has been an increase of Ukrainian workers going to the EU at the same time as there were fewer of them travelling to Russia. The visa facilitation agreement has also contributed to the increase in the number of Ukrainians who travel to the EU for business and pleasure purposes.

During 2012, EU member states issued 1.3 million Schengen visas to Ukrainians, an increase of 16% compared to 2011. Compared with 2011, visa denials in 2012 have decreased by almost 1.5 times and amounted to 2% of all visa applications. Almost two fifths of all visas issued in 2012 were multiple Schengen visas.

Poland issued 34.9% of the total number of Schengen visas received by Ukrainians. A substantial percentage of the remaining visas issued to Ukrainians came from Hungary (10.6%), Greece (10%), Germany (7.8%), Spain (6.1%) and the Czech Republic (5.8%).

Allowing for visa-free travel by Ukrainian citizens to the EU would promote tourism and strengthen opportunities for business collaboration. This is also likely to facilitate the circular migration where Ukrainian labour migrants travel to the EU for shorter periods and migrants who travel to the EU for longer are able to travel back to Ukraine more frequently. This would strengthen the ties between Ukrainian labour migrants working in the EU and their home country. At the same time, there is no evidence that would point to an expected sharp increase in the numbers of labour migrants from Ukraine as a result of the visa-free regime.



At present, the pool of Ukrainian labour migrants working abroad is practically exhausted. It is expected that those who are already labour migrants will carry on as before, while the number of new labour migrants is not likely to substantially increase. According to a study titled 'The Views and Opinions of Citizens of Ukraine' conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIIS) in 2010, 45.9% of the respondents noted that in the case of unemployment, they would look for a job in their local area, 12.1% stated that they could travel to another town in search of employment, but staying close to their local area. Only 9.7% of respondents stated that they would be willing to travel abroad in case of unemployment in Ukraine. But out of this 9.7%, the number of potential labour migrants is expected to be small, as the realisation of the actual intention may be limited as well as the potential unemployment may not impact all those who stated this intention.

Even among young people who are just entering the labour market, their preference for immigration is limited. According to the 2011 study - 'Gender aspects of the migration behaviour of the population of Ukraine' conducted by the Institute of Demography

and Social Studies M.V. Ptukhi - 5.6% of recent graduates plan to leave Ukraine for permanent residence elsewhere, and 13.7% plan to work abroad. Although when asked about more distant plans, more than half of the respondents stated their intention to travel abroad. But the nature of such response does not demonstrate a stable intention, as with time it tends to change.

### Concluding remarks

Overall, Ukraine's population dynamics have been negative, with the population steadily declining and emigration also changing its characteristics. Many Ukrainian specialists with advanced degrees left the country in search of better opportunities. Nevertheless, Ukraine has also experienced some positive trends in addressing challenges of illegal migration. Establishing the State Border Guard Service contributed to this trend. Among the future opportunities for Ukraine and its closer ties with the EU is a visa-free regime. Enabling Ukrainian citizens travelling to the EU without visas is expected to strengthen tourism and business ties.

## Migration Policy Centre

The Migration Policy Centre at the European University Institute, Florence, conducts advanced research on global migration to serve migration governance needs at European level, from developing, implementing and monitoring migration-related policies to assessing their impact on the wider economy and society. The Migration Policy Centre is co-financed by the European Union.

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