



# CMR Working Papers

134/192

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**NEW (IM)POSSIBILITIES FOR AGRICULTURE AND DOMESTIC SERVICES IN POLAND AND ITALY? NAVIGATING LEGAL SOLUTIONS AND SOCIAL ORGANISATIONS' SUPPORT FOR UKRAINIAN WOMEN DISPLACED BY THE FULL-SCALE INVASION OF UKRAINE IN 2022**

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this report is to analyse the support provided to Ukrainian women in Poland and Italy displaced as a result of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The analysis focuses on the actions taken by social actors in the agriculture and domestic services sectors. Both countries have been facing labour shortages in these sectors for some time, with the gaps traditionally filled by migrant workers, including a significant number of Ukrainian workers. The main research question is: what forms of support have been provided to forced migrant women from Ukraine in the agriculture and domestic services in Poland and Italy, and has the presence of this new group of migrants contributed to addressing the labour shortages in these sectors? The analysis is based on analysis of secondary sources and the authors' own research findings. We argue that the needs of fleeing Ukrainian women (especially those with children and other dependents) differ significantly from the opportunities available in the agriculture and domestic services in Poland and Italy, characterised by such structural problems as the irregular and seasonal nature of work and working hours, substandard accommodation available for the workers and a lack of work–life balance opportunities. Consequently, there is a need for a more diversified approach to integrating Ukrainian migrant women into the labour markets of the receiving countries. Additionally, it is crucial to adapt legal solutions and implement deeper structural reforms in both sectors to ensure that migrants are protected effectively from exploitation.

**Keywords:** war in Ukraine, forced migration, women, Poland, Italy, support, agriculture, domestic services

## ABSTRAKT

Celem niniejszego raportu jest analiza wsparcia udzielonego przesiedlonym ukraińskim kobietom w Polsce i we Włoszech w wyniku pełnoskalowej rosyjskiej inwazji na Ukrainę w 2022 roku. Analiza koncentruje się na działaniach podejmowanych przez podmioty społeczne w sektorze rolnictwa i usług domowych. Oba kraje od pewnego czasu borykają się z niedoborem siły roboczej w tych sektorach, tradycyjnie wypełnianym przez pracowników migrujących, w tym w dużej mierze pracowników ukraińskich. Główne pytanie badawcze brzmi: jakie formy wsparcia zostały zapewnione przymusowym migrantkom z Ukrainy w rolnictwie i usługach domowych w Polsce i we Włoszech oraz czy obecność tej nowej grupy migrantów przyczyniła się do rozwiązania problemu niedoboru siły roboczej w tych sektorach? Analiza opiera się na analizie źródeł wtórnych i własnych wynikach badań autorów. Twierdzimy, że potrzeby uciekających ukraińskich kobiet (zwłaszcza z dziećmi i innymi osobami na utrzymaniu) znacznie różnią się od możliwości dostępnych w rolnictwie i usługach domowych w Polsce i we Włoszech, charakteryzujących się takimi problemami strukturalnymi, jak nieregularny i sezonowy charakter pracy i godzin pracy, substandardowe zakwaterowanie dostępne dla pracowników, brak możliwości godzenia życia zawodowego i prywatnego. W związku z tym istnieje potrzeba bardziej zróżnicowanego podejścia do integracji ukraińskich migrantek na rynku pracy w krajach przyjmujących. Ponadto kluczowe jest dostosowanie rozwiązań prawnych oraz przeprowadzenie głębszych reform w obu sektorach, aby zapewnić skuteczną ochronę migrantów przed wyzyskiem.

**Słowa kluczowe:** wojna w Ukrainie, migracja przymusowa, kobiety, Polska, Włochy, wsparcie, rolnictwo, sektor usług domowych

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The arrival of millions of Ukrainians fleeing the war to the EU has happened on the backdrop of a significant history of labour migration. In particular, Poland and Italy have witnessed significant labour migration from Ukraine with two sectors in focus: agriculture and domestic work. This means that both receiving countries tend to view people fleeing Ukraine as potential workers for these sectors and that already existing labour migration networks would pull the newly arrived to these sectors.
- However, the demographic profile of those fleeing the war, as well as their needs and capacity to join the labour market, diverge dramatically from those of ‘typical’ labour migrants. As mostly women with dependents with high levels of education and from urban environments came to seek refuge in Poland and Italy, their current care obligations and reliance on infrastructures for long-term housing, child care and transport prevent them from joining the domestic and agriculture work sectors, which are characterised by intense irregular working hours, seasonality and poor housing conditions.
- The agricultural sector in both Poland and Italy is characterised by three main problems: the seasonal and temporary nature of the work, the informality of the sector and poor housing. This leads to channelling mobile short-term migrants into this sector: they come for a short period of seasonal work and after maximising the time they may work and their earnings leave for their home or seek another similar employment. In the case of Ukrainians fleeing the war with dependents, these conditions entrenched in the sector present a particularly strong mismatch with their need for stability and institutions of support.
- In the care and domestic work sector, the main problems are linked to excessively long and flexible working hours that are characterised by night shifts and irregular hours, lack of privacy at work and frequent live-in housing arrangements. In the case of women fleeing the war with dependents, the issue of flexible working hours and night shifts prevents them from taking these jobs, while a lack of accommodation and the need to provide care for their own dependents prevents women from considering this sector.
- Poland and Italy have implemented general legal solutions that allow Ukrainian women access to their labour markets. However, in the case of the agriculture and domestic services sectors, more detailed legal solutions and deeper reforms are needed to protect workers from abuse and exploitation in the first place. Existing laws and practices are insufficient to ensure decent working conditions and protect the rights of foreign workers in these sectors.
- Social organisations working on behalf of Ukrainians seeking refuge often do not offer specific support for workers in these sectors, while general support organisations working in the sectors with all migrants often do not fully understand the situation of

Ukrainians fleeing the war. Most help related to consulting and assistance in finding housing and learning the language is located in large cities and does not reach smaller localities.

- Trade unions are often listed as important actors when migrant work is considered. Unfortunately, our analysis shows that their support has been very ad hoc and symbolic. Only in Poland did the Domestic Workers Committee of the Workers Initiative Union provide an ongoing wide range of support activities attuned specifically to the needs of those seeking refuge. Here, again, transnational personal, professional and solidarity networks proved to be a strong factor. We argue that it would be an important moment to see the emergence of more horizontal solidarity networks and organisations, linking old and new arrivals and local receiving communities.
- Ukrainian migration has had a significant impact on the Polish economy, contributing to meeting the demand for workers in sectors experiencing labour shortages, which have been characterised by flexible and just-in-time need in often seasonal or temporary work (Pawlak and Lashchuk 2020; Barmig 2022). However, the receiving countries should withhold themselves from forcing Ukrainians seeking refuge into these sectors and give them an opportunity to make a more diversified contribution to their economy, specifically by considering diploma recognition and providing vocational programs in other forms of employment and language courses.
- Unfortunately, we see a push and pressure from the receiving societies to join these sectors, despite the obvious mismatch with the needs of the newly arrived, mostly women-driven, migration flow. We also see that these sectors multiply inherent vulnerabilities within the sectors and in the lives of displaced people. We already see from existing reports that the combination of precarious, often unregulated employment with poor work and housing conditions leads to devastating effects on the quality of living, safety, health and work–life balance of the people seeking refuge as well as to devastating consequences for children’s access to education.

## **INTRODUCTION: Contextualising Ukrainian mobility to the EU post-February 2022**

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 shook the world by bringing war into the heart of Europe (Kulick 2022). Millions of Ukrainians fled in search of shelter in European countries, at least in the first few months of 2022. It also made the EU review its reception policies as well as change – at least for the time being – the way it responds to the influx of people fleeing their home countries. For the purpose of our report, which centres on the ways into employment and activities of social organisations (trade unions, NGOs, grassroots initiatives) supporting migrants in agriculture and domestic services in Poland and Italy, the legislative changes as well as changes in attitude paradigms in the reception perspective play an important role in the work of the already established organisations as well as in the emergence of the new actors.

This report is a part of a larger project that looks into legal and institutional solutions of entering the labour market by women forced into migration.<sup>1</sup> Within this project **our report's aim is to have an overview of what ways of labour market integration opened up for Ukrainians fleeing the war and how social organisations in Italy and Poland responded to this new challenge.** We ask which old and new actors became active in this time and, where possible, how they adjusted their activities to provide a better response to the specific needs of a war-driven, mostly women-dominated flow of people. We understand that, specific to each nation's development, the agriculture and domestic service sectors traditionally employ many migrant and displaced women in both countries, although in Poland, these sectors continue to employ many Polish women as well. Therefore, some well-established organisations have been working on the specific and regional needs of these ethnicised, racialised and gendered occupations. In our report, however, we have chosen to focus specifically on the case of activities related to Ukrainians fleeing the war as a momentum of recent solidarity mobilisation taking place in a particular localised, Euro-focused context of the (post-)Covid EU.

Our report is based on the review of secondary sources (research reports, scientific and journalistic articles, websites of social organisations from February 2022 to Summer 2023), websites designed to offer or seek assistance, posts from dedicated Telegram channels (from the same time frame) and, where relevant, it will rely marginally on the observations and personal analysis by the authors from their research and work in Poland and Italy between February 2022 and Summer 2023.<sup>2</sup> The report consists of a general introduction followed by the parallel review of the countries' case studies. We have also used text boxes to present

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<sup>1</sup> This publication is a part of project 'Accessing migration infrastructure and employment strategies in a time of crisis: Ukraine female war refugees and migrants in Poland and Italy', funded by the NAWA Urgent grant scheme. | Ośrodek Badań nad Migracjami (uw.edu.pl). Available at: <https://www.migracje.uw.edu.pl/projects/accessing-migrant-infrastructure-and-employment-strategies-in-a-time-of-crisis-ukraine-female-war-refugees-and-migrants-in-poland-and-italy/>

<sup>2</sup> **Olena Fedyuk** is conducting interviews and research in the framework of the MSCA project 'RightsLab' at UNIPD, Padua, Italy.

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information with important context or illustrate our findings with more empirical examples from the media or our own research. We then analyse both countries' findings in the joint comparative section and conclude with a call for action in the identified areas.

## General overview

Towards the end of 2022, UNHCR estimated that 7.8 million Ukrainians<sup>3</sup> sought shelter in European countries, a number which needs some serious contextualisation. In 2022, about two thirds of all Ukrainians fleeing the war left Ukraine in March (84% by the end of April), and only as little as 15% of Ukrainians left their country from May onwards (Riabchuk 2023). In the following month, the EU witnessed the return of Ukrainians to their home country, while from May onwards, the State Border Service of Ukraine reports that the number of border crossings into Ukraine began to exceed the number of crossings out of the country. Therefore, it makes more sense to talk of the approximately 5.9 million Ukrainian refugees,<sup>4</sup> namely 'people with granted refugee status, temporary asylum status, temporary protection, or statuses through similar national protection schemes, as well as those recorded in the country under other forms of stay (from 24 February 2022), as relevant/applicable'.<sup>5</sup> Among these, only 4 million have temporary protection status in the EU,<sup>6</sup> a status which the EU has activated for the first time as a response to the influx of people fleeing Ukraine. Dutchak (2022), in her analysis of enforced single motherhood and Ukrainian care networks, highlights one of the main characteristics of the refugee flow from Ukraine, that more than 80% are women, and two thirds have children. At the same time, among those Ukrainians returning to Ukraine, only one third are with children (UNHCR research at the border with those returning to Ukraine, carried out 3–27 April) (Riabchuk 2023). This is quite expected: mothers with children are more hesitant to return to Ukraine while the war is still ongoing, fearing for their children's safety. Younger single people who feel they will be able to adapt to the new war reality, as well as the elderly, who find it difficult abroad and miss their homes, are more likely to return at this stage.

The post-February movement of people, drastic and unprecedented as it is, needs to be contextualised within the history of mobility, especially labour migration, from Ukraine. Ukraine has an extensive history of migration throughout the late 19th and 20th century (Shybko et al. 2006) and a rich experience of inter-USSR mobility for work (Vollmer and Malynovska 2016) before 1991 and of post-1991 transnational labour migration, particularly to the EU. Thus, before February 2022, the Institute of Demography of Ukraine estimated in total 4 million people employed abroad, with about 2.7–3.0 million working abroad at any given time (Лібанова, 2018). Since the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 and the

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<sup>3</sup> UNHCR. Data for November 2022. 'Operational Data Portal: Ukrainian refugee situation'. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>.

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR data for July 2023. 'Operational Data Portal: Ukrainian refugee situation'.

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR Explanatory note, 14 June 2023. <<https://data.unhcr.org/en/working-group/437?secret=unhcrrestricted&geo=0&sv=65#target-one>>

<sup>6</sup> Data up to March 2023

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/ukraine-refugees-eu/#:~:text=Rights%20under%20the%20temporary%20protection,from%20the%20temporary%20protection%20mechanism.>



beginning of the war in the east of Ukraine, Ukraine has had 1.5 million internally displaced people from the war zones (numbers for November 2020, see: Vakhitova and Fihel, 2020). This large-scale experience of displacement and related challenges to livelihood, social reproduction, employment and dealing with war-related traumas remained overwhelmingly invisible to the EU public (also see Slobodian, 2019). Meanwhile, military actions in the east of Ukraine triggered some of the displaced people to search for work in the EU as early as 2014. They failed to see equally attractive opportunities within Ukraine, and considering the decreasing migration volume to Russia, they became part of the larger outward, mostly labour-based migration flows (Vakhitova and Fihel, 2020). Displacement through war massively transformed mobility flows from Ukraine, a country which since its independence in 1991 became one of the key sending countries of the labour force to the EU (Fedyuk and Kindler 2016). February 2022 brought a dramatic change in the volume of mobility but also to the demographic characteristics of people on the move, their needs and intentions, the way they move and integrate and the way they plan their (non-)return.

Historical contextualisation of these flows is important as both Poland and Italy have been among the top-five destination countries for Ukrainians for the last three decades (Kindler, Fedyuk 2016). Practically speaking, this means that both Poland and Italy had sizable Ukrainian communities, which provided social and economic networks essential for support or even enabling the initial move of many after February 2022. As informal and loose as they are, these communities of trust provided initial economic, social, as well as informational support to those who were on the move, channelling the integration of those who stayed on the paths that already had been tested by years of labour migration experience. It also means that both receiving countries had already had a history of Ukrainians present in their social, economic and cultural landscapes, in particular in the labour market, especially in often ethnicised and gendered immigrant work. We will describe each country's case separately in the following sections, but at this point, it is important to note that in the last decade, migration from Ukraine was leaning towards short-term, temporal and seasonal patterns, implying that many Ukrainians came for work, leaving their families – and social reproduction – at home. It is important to mention that from this perspective, the arrival of mostly women with dependents presents a very different set of challenges for the receiving countries.

Another important general note should be made about the EU's umbrella response to the war in Ukraine and specifically to the activation of the temporary protection status. Temporary protection is an exceptional and time-limited form of protection applied to the displaced people from Ukraine. This directive was activated for the first time since its coming into existence in 2001 and has been applied by all EU countries in cases of Ukrainians fleeing the war. Temporary protection (or some similar national protection scheme) comes into force immediately upon registration and is based on belonging to a group rather than on a complex screening of the individual cases, as with asylum seeking procedures. With various minor national variations, it gives access to residence, free travel within the EU, the right to work, education and social protection as well as to family reunification. It is this directive that initially and most comprehensively laid the foundation of the reception principles in both case

countries, allowing for Ukrainians to join the workforce in the countries where there was already a long history of labour migration.

## **COUNTRY CASE: Poland**

### **General background on Ukrainian migration trends and the situation in the sectors in focus**

After Ukraine regained its independence in 1991, Ukrainian immigration to Poland began to increase. Ever since, Poland has become an important destination country for various forms of migration. During the first decade of Ukraine's existence as a sovereign state, migration to Poland was relatively small and had a temporary, labour-oriented character. According to the 2011 Polish national census, there were approximately 100,000 foreigners residing in the country. The majority of them were citizens of former-Soviet Union countries, including Ukraine (Polska Szkoła Pomagania 2023).

This trend has only intensified since Poland's accession to the EU, primarily due to Poland's stable economic development, greater employment opportunities (offering the most liberal access to the labour market among all EU countries) and the opportunities that have arisen as an EU member state. Ukrainian immigrants have found employment in sectors such as construction, agriculture, domestic services, gastronomy, tourism and services. Work in the agriculture and domestic services sectors was conducted in the grey area and therefore was not formally regulated. The main goal for female migrants who took up jobs in these sectors was to earn enough money to support or improve the financial situation of their households in Ukraine.

The significant increase in migration from Ukraine to Poland has occurred over the past decade. This is primarily associated with the deterioration of the economic situation in Ukraine, characterised by high unemployment rates and low wages. This state of the economy has been influenced by the unstable political situation, including the Revolution of Dignity, the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the onset of the war in eastern Ukraine. All of these events have contributed to an increase in the number of immigrants and, most importantly, a shift in the direction of their labour migration from the east (to Russia) to the west (primarily to Poland). According to the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, in 2008, 48.1% of labour migrants went to Russia, while only 8% went to Poland. In 2012, the respective figures were 43.2% and 14.3%. However, by 2017, the percentage of labour migrants heading to Russia decreased to 26.3%, while those going to Poland increased to 42.4% (State Statistics Service of Ukraine 2017).

The introduction of the visa-free regime between the EU and Ukraine for tourist purposes in 2017 further simplified mobility (90 days in Poland, 90 days in Ukraine). This is related to the fact that Poland is the only EU country that allows for employment within the framework of visa-free movement. The essential requirement is to possess a work permit. As a result of this implementation, the need to apply for a visa to engage in employment in Poland has been eliminated. Moreover, it has enabled prospective workers from Ukraine to search for employment after their arrival. Prior to the introduction of visa-free movement, economic

migrants from Ukraine had to first secure a job, obtain a work permit and then apply for a visa that would grant them entry to Polish territory for employment purposes.

By the end of February 2020, the number of Ukrainians in Poland had reached 1,390,978, while the total number of foreigners from all other countries combined was 822,616 (GUS 2020). Before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the majority of Ukrainian migrants to Poland were men, 56%, while women constituted 44%. The majority of migrants, 67%, were of reproductive age (Czubkowska 2019).

Of the EU member states, Poland has the most liberal access to the labour market for non-EU foreigners. This is due not only to continued economic development but also because Poland, like the other EU member states, is facing serious demographic problems as a result of the ageing of its population, the general lengthening of the human lifespan and the significant emigration of working Poles after Poland's accession to the EU and the Schengen area. Poland cannot, like more developed EU countries, attract labour migrants from other economically less developed member states, because the level of Polish wages is not attractive to them. For this reason, Poland attracts foreigners from outside the EU. First among these are workers from the Eastern Partnership countries: Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia and Armenia – with the exception of Azerbaijan, which is different from Poland mainly religiously and culturally, but with the addition of Russia. Labour migration from these countries is prioritised due to linguistic and cultural similarities, which are expected to help migrants from these countries to integrate more quickly. Migrants from these countries can take up employment in Poland based on a declaration of entrusting work, which allows for non-seasonal work for a period of up to six months within a 12-month period, and from 2022, for a period of up to 24 months. Furthermore, in 2018, an additional work permit was introduced for all non-EU foreigners, namely for seasonal activities directly related to agriculture, forestry, hunting and fishing, or accommodation and food services. Before the escalation of the war in Ukraine, 1,979,886 declarations had been made (out of 2,065,416 applications), of which 1,635,104 were by Ukrainian citizens (out of 1,705,709 applications), and 401,843 seasonal work permits were registered for foreigners from these six countries in 2021, with 387,247 for Ukrainian citizens.

According to the provisions of the social insurance system, all persons who are, among others, employees, contractors or conducting non-agricultural activities are subject to mandatory pension and disability insurance. Foreigners who perform work in Poland are also subject to these insurances (except in special cases). As of 31 December 2021, the number of foreigners from non-EU countries recorded for insurance was 836,482, including 627,028 with Ukrainian citizenship. The other nationalities with the largest numbers are also those of non-EU countries, namely Belarusian (71,215), Georgian (23,373), Russian (13,887) and Moldovan (12,918) (ZUS 2021). The discrepancy between the number of permits issued for foreigners and those reported for insurance may indicate a grey area of employment.

## Legalisation context

Despite Poland's post-accession liberalisation of labour market access for non-EU foreigners (Ustawa z dnia 20 kwietnia 2004 r.), obtaining long-term residence permits on its territory remains highly challenging. Poland's migration laws and practices prioritise temporary work and residence for migrants while impeding long-term residence and work (Cope, Keryk and Kyliushyk 2021). The legalisation of the stay and work of foreigners in Poland is associated with various problems and challenges: (1) **Bureaucracy**. The process of legalising stay in Poland is often complex and involves numerous bureaucratic formalities. Depending on the purpose of the stay, the list of required documents varies. Procedures related to work-based residency are particularly demanding. Foreigners must submit various documents, fulfil specific requirements and wait for administrative decisions, which can lead to lengthy and frustrating procedures. (2) **Lack of clear procedures**. Clear and unambiguous procedures regarding the legalisation of stay are often lacking. Rules and interpretations of the law may differ depending on the office, causing uncertainties and difficulties for foreigners seeking legal stay. (3) **Long waiting times**. The process of legalising stay in Poland can be time-consuming, especially in cases of high workload for immigration authorities (Najwyższa Izba Kontroli 2019). Foreigners often have to wait for several months for their applications to be processed, which can create uncertainty and hinder future planning. (4) **Language barrier and lack of support**. The absence of available support in other languages can hinder the understanding of requirements, procedures and communication with relevant authorities, thus complicating the process of legalising foreigners' stay.

## *Agriculture*

Poland, as one of the largest food producers in Europe, has a diverse agricultural sector (small and larger enterprises), which relies heavily on the seasonal migrant labour force.

Work in the agricultural sector is difficult and demanding and is described in the English-language literature with the 3 Ds – dirty, demanding, dangerous (Matuszczyk 2023). Among the main problems associated with work in agriculture are: (1) seasonal nature and temporality; (2) informality of work relations; and (3) accommodation and housing problems.

Employment in the agricultural sector is primarily characterised by its unstable and seasonal nature. Therefore, the main challenge faced by migrants who take up work in this sector is unstable employment. Farmers often require additional labour only for a specific period, such as during harvests and planting seasons or for crop maintenance. After the season ends, the number of available job opportunities can significantly decrease or even disappear entirely. Employment in the agricultural sector in Poland often involves internal migration, where workers need to seek employment in different locations once their work in one place is over.

Low wages and widespread informal employment are another major set of problems in Poland's agricultural sector. Very often, as a consequence, workers are not subject to health insurance. This is especially problematic as work in this sector is physically demanding and

exposed to dangers, with many reported accidents (including fatal ones). Farmworkers are subject to long hours of strenuous work in harsh weather conditions, work with heavy machinery and are exposed to agricultural chemicals without adequate protective equipment (Fiałkowska, Matuszczyk and Szulecka, 2022). The crucial risk factor relates to the lack of adequate training, including training in an understandable language (Fiałkowska et al. 2022).

Finally, accommodation and housing conditions pose a significant problem for mobile workers. Many cases demonstrate that workers have to share a single room or apartment with numerous other individuals, sometimes as many as seven or more. Further, the rooms are often mixed-gender, meaning that men and women are forced to reside together in the same quarters.

In recent years, a significant number of Ukrainians have constituted a large workforce in this sector, harvesting fruits, vegetables and other crops, thus driving the numbers of short-term and seasonal migration instances from Ukraine. The number of employed Ukrainian citizens in agriculture can be made estimated based on the number of issued declarations of entrusting work to a foreigner and permits for seasonal work. An employer can apply for a seasonal work permit for both a foreigner already residing in Poland with a residence permit allowing them to work, who entered for a purpose other than seasonal work, as well as for a foreigner applying for entry into Poland for the purpose of seasonal work. In the years before 2022, we see that Ukrainians almost entirely dominated this sector among the non-EU workers and that there was a steady increase in seasonal worker recruitment (see Table 1).

Table 1. Number of permits for seasonal work issued to non-EU nationals, 2018–2021

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>UKRAINIANS</b>
2018	138,334	133,953 (96.8%)
2019	183,941	179,466 (97.6%)
2020	293,611	287,271 (97.8%)
2021	401,843	387,247 (96.4%)

Source: Ministerstwo Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej, Departament Rynku Pracy, 2022

### *Domestic services*

Paid domestic work in Poland is a relatively new phenomenon as compared to other countries. The activities mentioned above have traditionally been considered as part of family obligations, primarily performed by women within the private sphere. However, with the recognition of domestic work as legitimate employment, there has been a process of commercialisation (Kindler 2007) in which migrants are often replacing or supplementing the unpaid work traditionally performed by women in households. Commercialising these services creates tension between the necessity of employing someone for domestic work and the desire to

maintain the intimate nature of the private sphere. As a result, efforts are made to make paid domestic work ‘invisible’ in order to ‘protect’ the privacy of the private sphere (Kindler 2008).

The domestic sector encompasses a wide range of activities, such as child care, elderly care, cleaning, laundry and cooking, among others, and it traditionally relies heavily on the immigrant workforce. As Poland, like many developed countries, faces an ageing population, caregiving for elderly individuals has become a crucial area within the domestic service sector that also requires a significant workforce. The shortage of workers in this field is primarily due to low wages, challenging informal working conditions and the low social prestige associated with the occupation. Consequently, domestic workers from immigrant backgrounds are in demand (Kałuża-Kopias 2018).

Poles often refuse to acknowledge caregiving as work, claiming that they do it for themselves and the people they love (Kindler 2007). Consequently, different job descriptions do not include the term ‘work’ but rather ‘household help’ or ‘childcare/elderly care’. The so-called ‘care myth’ is constructed based on the belief that care does not require physical and mental labour but only emotional involvement. Thus, migrant women are perceived through the lens of the role of a wife and mother rather than as employees, undermining the recognition of the paid care provided by migrants as work (Kindler 2007).

However, treating domestic workers ‘like family members’ by employers is quite problematic. By assisting or taking care of a migrant, the employer exerts power over them, which can lead to various forms of exploitation (Kindler 2009). This negative trend in the domestic service sector in Poland is facilitated by the fact that it operates in the grey area, and due to the work being conducted within the private sphere, it is not subject to labour inspections. Both employers and employees accept this informality. The costs and bureaucracy associated with formalising the employment relationship between migrant domestic workers and their employers seem to hinder the work of both parties. Accommodation and meal costs are often deducted from wages, and there is also a lack of protection against injuries, such as when lifting elderly clients.

The informal and personal nature of the work means that various forms of abuse are widespread (Cope et al. 2021). The most common abuse is the exploitation of migrants, sometimes working 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with blurred responsibilities. For example, if a migrant is hired for elderly care, their duties may also include housekeeping, cooking and shopping (Kubiciel-Lodzińska 2019). Living with the employer, the migrant’s free time is filled with additional unpaid services because the migrant is constantly ‘available’ (Kindler 2007).

To determine the number of people working in domestic services, it is best to examine the data on the declaration of entrusting work to a foreigner. However, even then, available statistical data may be limited and may not reflect the full picture of foreign workers’ employment in this sector (see Table 2).

Table 2. Amount of the declaration of entrusting work to a foreigner, 2018–2021

YEAR	TOTAL	UKRAINIANS	TOTAL IN DOMESTIC SERVICES	UKRAINIANS IN DOMESTIC SERVICES
2018	1,582,225	1,446,304 (91.4%)	3,736	3,626 (97.0%)
2019	1,640,083	1,475,923 (90.0%)	3,441	3,341 (97.1%)
2020	1,519,599	1,329,491 (87.5%)	5,243	5,100 (97.3%)
2021	1,979,886	1,635,104 (82.6%)	4,620	4,375 (94.7%)

Source: Ministerstwo Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej, Departament Rynku Pracy, 2022

### **Main institutional actors in Poland responsible for supporting migrants in agriculture and domestic work**

**Trade Unions.** In Poland, there is the *Inter-Enterprise Trade Union of Ukrainian Workers in Poland* (Międzyzakładowy Związek Zawodowy Pracowników Ukraińskich w Polsce (MZZPUP) as a part of OPZZ – the All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions. The union aims to protect the dignity, rights, and interests associated with the employment of its members. However, this trade union does not focus on agriculture. Ukrainian migrants working in agriculture are not formally affiliated with trade unions due to various factors, including the temporary nature of their employment. There are several trade unions that represent Polish workers in the agricultural sector.

*Trade Union of Agricultural Workers in the Republic of Poland* (Związek Zawodowy Pracowników Rolnictwa w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (ZZPR w RP). It is a free, independent and self-governing organisation of people working in agriculture and its related services, established to represent and defend their rights, professional interests and social welfare.

*All-Poland Agreement of Trade Unions of Individual Farmers and Agricultural Workers* (Ogólnopolskie Porozumienie Związków Zawodowych Rolników Indywidualnych i Pracowników Rolnych (OPZZ-RIiPR). It is the largest organisation that unites agricultural workers. It works to protect workers' rights and improve working conditions in the agricultural sector.

*Independent Self-Organized Trade Union of Agricultural Workers in Rural Areas* (Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy Rolnictwa i Obszarów Wiejskich 'Regiony' (ZZRiOW 'REGIONY'). It is a trade union representing the interests of agricultural workers, including farmers, gardeners, forestry workers and other sectors related to rural areas.



*Independent Self-Organized Peasants' Union* (Towarzystwo Kółek Rolniczych), a trade union primarily representing individual farmers. It works to protect their rights and interests, including improving working conditions and access to the market.

Until 2021, there was no organisation in Poland specifically dedicated to supporting female Ukrainian workers in the domestic services sector. In 2021, an initiative called the *Domestic Workers Committee* of the Workers Initiative Union was established. The union represents Ukrainian migrants working in this sector and advocates for their rights, including formalisation and legalisation of employment, clear definition of duties, fair working conditions and wages, leisure time, protection against sexual harassment and access to legal and psychological assistance.

### **Migration of Ukrainians to Poland after 24 February 2022**

After the escalation of the war in Ukraine, according to the data from the Polish Border Guard, from 24 February 2022 to 30 April 2023, a total of 11.151 million Ukrainians, mainly women and children, crossed the Polish–Ukrainian border. The Border Guard estimates the total number of Ukrainian citizens who returned from Poland during the period from 24 February 2022 to 30 April 2023 at 9.569 million (Ilu Ukraińskich uchodźców wróciło do Ukrainy 2023).

Poland opened its borders and allowed Ukrainians fleeing the war to enter, even in cases where they lacked any documents verifying their identity. While temporary protection status was activated by the EU on 4 March 2022, Poland further adopted the Act of 12 March 2022, on assistance to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the armed conflict (Ustawa z dnia 12 marca 2022). The Act regulates a number of key issues related to the stay of Ukrainians fleeing the war and provides facilitations in terms of employment and the legalisation of stay. According to the Act, the stay of persons fleeing the war in Ukraine is considered legal for a period starting from 24 February 2022 until 4 March 2024, and in some cases until 31 August 2024 or 30 September 2024. Ukrainians seeking refuge are treated as persons enjoying temporary protection within the meaning of the Act on Granting Foreigners Protection on the Territory of the Republic of Poland and may benefit from the associated rights, but it is necessary to submit an application for the assignment of a PESEL number<sup>7</sup> with the annotation ‘UKR’. This annotation distinguishes it from a regular PESEL number and indicates that the person is under temporary protection in Poland, allowing them full access to public services. Ukrainian migrants residing in Poland before 24 February 2022 had to re-cross the Polish–Ukrainian border in order to obtain such a PESEL number and identical access to public services. Based on PESEL data, as of the end of summer 2022, approximately 1.5 million people who fled the

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<sup>7</sup> PESEL stands for ‘Powszechny Elektroniczny System Ewidencji Ludności’, which translates to ‘Universal Electronic Population Register System’. It is a unique identifier assigned to every person residing in Poland. The PESEL number consists of 11 digits and contains information such as the date of birth, gender and control digits. PESEL is widely used in Poland in various sectors, including public administration, healthcare, the pension system and social insurance. The special PESEL number assigned to Ukrainian citizens seeking refuge in Poland after the escalation of the war is one way to verify their eligibility for legal stay and social benefits.

war had arrived in Poland, but only about 950,000 of them remained by the end of 2022 (Ministerstwo Cyfryzacji 2023). Under this Act, Ukrainians fleeing the war have also been granted the right to work in Poland, the right to register with district labour offices and be recognised as unemployed or seeking employment, the right to engage in economic activity on Polish territory on the same terms as Polish citizens, the right to social benefits paid in Poland, cash and non-cash benefits from the social assistance system, including allowances, meals, essential clothing and material assistance, and the right to medical care.

The PESEL data allows us to determine the gender and age of individuals who arrived in Poland after 24 February 2022. While previous migration from Ukraine to Poland had traditionally exhibited a strong male bias, following 24 February, women constituted the dominant group among individuals with refugee experiences (44% of the total and nearly 80% of adults). The majority of Ukrainians seeking refuge possess a higher education, with 53% claiming to have a university degree and 8% to have an incomplete higher education. Hence, in total, 61% have or are in pursuit of a higher education (Uchodźcy z Ukrainy w Polsce 2022). Additionally, for the first time in recent Polish history, there has been a massive influx of children and elderly individuals. Available data from the Ministry of Education and Science shows that at the end of 2022, there were 191,000 Ukrainian children in the Polish education system, accounting for about 65% of all children covered by compulsory education, while other children studied distantly in the Ukrainian system (Polska Szkoła Pomagania 2023).

Table 3. Age structure of Ukrainians seeking refuge in Poland (as of the end of 2022)

	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>Children</b>			432,621 (45.57%)
<b>Productive age (%)</b>	361,145 (38.04%)	94,689 (9.97%)	455,834 (48.01%)
<b>Post-productive age (%)</b>	52,019 (5.48%)	8,907 (0.94%)	60,926 (6.42%)
<b>TOTAL</b>			949,381 (100.00%)

Source: Polska Szkoła Pomagania, 2023

## Poland's post-February 2022 response

### *Reception and housing*

The arrival of several million Ukrainians to Poland in a short period of time created an immediate and urgent need related to **housing** and food. Many Ukrainians fleeing the war found temporary shelter almost immediately, largely thanks to the tremendous mobilisation of private volunteers, efforts of national and local governments, NGOs and, importantly, Ukrainian diaspora residing in Poland. Among various types of accommodation, collective housing centres proved to be of immense help and were established in places such as trade halls and shopping malls. Local governments and private owners provided hotels, guesthouses,

sanatoriums, and other lodging facilities. Assistance was also offered by large corporations, including Airbnb and other short-term rental firms ('Ukraińcom nie chcą wynajmować' 2023).

This form of assistance was particularly effective and needed in the immediate aftermath of February 2022. In the long run, the influx of Ukrainians seeking refuge highlighted the weakness of the housing sector in Poland, which largely relies on private resources. In major cities, which are the primary destination for those fleeing the war, there has been a significant reduction of available rental properties and a simultaneous sharp increase in prices (Milert, Nowak and Sroka 2022). According to Amnesty International, only about 200,000 apartments are currently available for rent on the market to Ukrainians fleeing the war, mainly in major cities ('Ukraińcom nie chcą wynajmować' 2023). The report by the Migration Consortium indicates that many people, after a year of full-scale war in Ukraine, were still residing in collective housing centres, especially in large cities, despite their temporary nature (Polska Szkoła Pomagania 2023). The situation with access to accommodation was dramatically worsened by the novelisation of the so-called Aid Act on 13 January 2023 (Ustawa z dnia 13 stycznia 2023). According to this amendment, Ukrainians seeking refuge are required to cover a portion of their costs for staying in collective accommodation centres. It is set at 50% of the costs but not exceeding 40 PLN per day after 120 days of arrival in Poland or 75% but not exceeding 60 PLN per day after 180 days. Although this obligation is not supposed to apply to certain groups of people, such as pregnant women, persons with disabilities and the elderly, it still affects the majority of individuals currently residing in the centres, and the bed fee can reach up to 1,800 PLN per month per person. Although collective housing facilities are supposed to provide humanitarian assistance and therefore should be free, the government has decided to introduce fees for the residents of these centres to 'motivate' them to seek employment and rental housing. However, this is not easy due to the very high and unaffordable rental costs. In some situations, there are also cases where Polish landlords are reluctant to rent apartments to individuals fleeing the war. During the monitoring conducted by Amnesty International, numerous reports have emerged of unwillingness to rent apartments to individuals from Ukraine with refugee experience due to the belief that evicting such tenants for non-payment of rent would be impossible, although this is not true ('Ukraińcom nie chcą wynajmować' 2023).

People arriving from Ukraine primarily sought shelters in large cities. The reason for this was and is the wide access to public services (important for pre-school and school-age children), accommodations and a labour market with more opportunities. Another reason was that they also came from large Ukrainian cities and lacked experience living in the provinces. Around 69% of Ukrainians fleeing the war had lived in cities with populations of at least 200,000 inhabitants or more in Ukraine (Uchodźcy z Ukrainy w Polsce 2022).

The population growth in Polish cities, coupled with increased assistance responsibilities, challenged the local government administration. It affected housing, services and labour-market integration. Discussions about relocating Ukrainians fleeing the war to smaller towns emerged, but no concrete actions have been taken. Relocation raised concerns among authorities, organisations and those who were to be moved. Significant disparities exist

between big cities and provincial areas in terms of services and opportunities. Resettling Ukrainians in smaller towns may pose long-term difficulties. Integration challenges arise based on lifestyle and career differences for those from large Ukrainian cities. As a result, a considerable number of Ukrainians seeking refuge expressed a desire to reside in the largest Polish cities (Polska Szkoła Pomagania 2023).<sup>8</sup>

It is important to have a temporal perspective on the forms of changing needs of the people fleeing the war. Once the needs of the first rank were met and the understanding that the war in Ukraine would last for an extended period of time had settled in, there was a need for assistance in **finding work** and learning the Polish language (Kyliushyk and Jastrzębowska 2023). Of Ukrainians seeking refuge, 45% state that they do not speak Polish at all and 45% that their biggest concern is finding employment (Uchodźcy z Ukrainy w Polsce 2022).

### *Employment (with the focus on the two sectors)*

Due to housing issues and the need to find employment, agricultural and domestic services could become an opportunity for Ukrainians fleeing the war to address these two major challenges while also improving the situation in these continuously in-demand sectors of the Polish economy.

When it comes to the **agricultural sector**, the provisions of the Act on Aid to Ukrainian Citizens in Connection with the Armed Conflict on the Territory of Ukraine have been in force since 24 February 2022. These provisions allow for the possibility of entering into assistance agreements with agricultural assistants who are Ukrainian citizens for a longer period than before, that is, for the duration of their legal stay in Poland (Ustawa z dnia 12 marca 2022). Farmers also offered assistance related to housing and food.

Just as agriculture has been suffering from a significant labour shortage for years and has a large presence of Ukrainian workers, the influx of a new million-strong group of migrants from Ukraine has been seen by employers' union leaders as a great opportunity to fill these gaps.

#### *Ukrainian Refugees as an Opportunity for Polish Agriculture (29 March 2022)*

It is not only an opportunity to provide aid to refugees from Ukraine but also to ensure their opportunities for assimilation and employment as well as a **significant boost to the labour market, including the agricultural sector**. Many Ukrainian refugees will remain in Poland even after the war ends. This can be an important support for the Polish labour market, which continually signals a demand for workers. According to estimates, **the Polish labour market is capable of employing half a million new workers within the next six months, and an**

<sup>8</sup> Exceptions occurred when collective accommodation facilities were being closed down and the residents had to choose a new place from a list, usually in a smaller locality. Such a situation took place, for example, in Poznań, when the largest facility at the International Poznań Fair was scheduled to be closed for two weeks due to necessary reorganisation and renovations. The temporary nature of relocations from the fairgrounds to smaller towns was theoretically communicated to volunteers, but the fairgrounds were never reopened. Many were apprehensive about being transferred to provincial areas, resulting in some of them independently seeking shelter in the city or choosing to return to Ukraine (Polska Szkoła Pomagania 2023).

**additional 200,000 after that period. [...]**

Work would accelerate the **assimilation process**. The business sector is also prepared for this. Last year, employment offices received a staggering 1.63 million statements of intent to employ Ukrainians from Polish entrepreneurs. **It can be confidently stated that Ukrainians are the most ‘trusted’ immigrants.**

Source: <https://www.farmer.pl/produkcja-zwierzeczka/trzoda-chlewna/uchodzcy-z-ukrainy-szansa-dla-polskiego-rolnictwa,117520.html>

A number of job advertisements in Ukrainian can be found in the District Labour Offices (see, for example, the District Labour Office in Płońsk).<sup>9</sup>

The problem, however, lies in the fact that it has not been recognised that the people who came to Poland after the escalation of the war in Ukraine are not the same seasonal workers that farmers had encountered before. Economic migration is significantly different from forced migration. People came to Poland who had not experienced living and working abroad before this and had worked in Ukraine in professions requiring higher skills. Among these, 82% of Ukrainians seeking refuge state that they have not worked in Poland before; 17% worked in Ukraine as higher skilled professionals, 15% as teachers and education professionals, 14% in the service sectors, and 13% in sales and trade but only 7% as manual and technical employees (Uchodźcy z Ukrainy w Polsce 2022). In addition, 93.5% of adults are women with children (Uchodźcy z Ukrainy w Polsce 2022), who, for this reason, are highly dependent on public infrastructure (nursery, school, medical services, etc.). Furthermore, they primarily come from large cities, which Russia began bombing first, and have experienced neither rural life nor agricultural work.

Another problem that was not immediately recognised was that men also worked in the agricultural sector, as it is a job requiring considerable physical exertion; men, however, were not permitted to leave Ukraine after 24 February 2022 due to the widespread mobilisation of men into the army.

As a result, in 2022, only 106,573 work permits (79.7% of the total of 133,744) were issued to Ukrainians for seasonal work. Individuals arriving in Poland and possessing a PESEL UKR have unrestricted access to the Polish labour market. This means that to employ them, there is no need to obtain a work permit; it is sufficient to notify the relevant employment office about their employment. From the escalation of the war until the end of 2022, only 46,358 Ukrainians with PESEL UKR numbers were registered in the agricultural sector in this manner (Powiadomienie o powierzeniu wykonywania pracy obywatelowi Ukrainy 2022).

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<sup>9</sup> Information - seasonal work 2022, <https://plonsk.praca.gov.pl/praca-sezonowa-dla-obywateli-ukrainy>

Therefore, the influx of Ukrainians after 24 February 2022 not only failed to fill the gaps in agriculture but, on the contrary, the situation has caused even greater shortages in this sector (Matuszczyk 2023).

*No Workers for Apple Harvest (23 September 2022):*

‘There is a dramatic shortage of people for apple picking, and a portion of the harvest will likely remain in orchards, according to Mirosław Maliszewski, the president of the Association of Polish Fruit Growers. The Association estimates that this year’s yields will reach 4 million tonnes. [...] Ukrainian refugees who came to Poland **are not interested in taking up agricultural work**. Maliszewski explained that they are mainly women with children, residents of cities, and fruit picking is physically demanding work. According to the president of the Association of Polish Fruit Growers, residents of Ukrainian villages who could work in orchards face difficulties obtaining visas. [...] “We lack workers, especially men”, emphasised the head of the fruit growers’ association. The Association is trying to recruit workers from other countries such as Uzbekistan, Nepal and India, but there are visa issues.’

Source: <https://www.farmer.pl/fakty/polska/nie-ma-pracownikow-do-zbioru-jablek,123484.html>

In the report on foreign workers in the agri-food sector in Poland, Kamil Matuszczyk concludes that the working conditions for Ukrainians in the agri-food sector did not experience sudden improvement after 24 February 2022. His research revealed the emergence of new challenges related to forced migration, such as the presence of Ukrainian workers’ children in rural areas who remain outside the education system and assist in seasonal work. As a result, these children do not attend any school, are not part of the Polish education system and do not participate in remote Ukrainian education due to ‘infrastructural-technical’ reasons. Instead, they engage in seasonal work to earn money, which involves child labour (Matuszczyk 2023).

**The domestic services sector**, similar to agriculture, is suffering from significant shortages. However, unlike agriculture, this sector is present in large cities and is predominantly occupied by women. Another important aspect to consider is that taking up work in this sector often involves living under the same roof as the employer. This becomes a significant advantage in case of housing difficulties. Particularly because, due to increased demand after 24 February 2022, rental housing markets in large cities have little to offer. High demand and inflation have led to a significant increase in rents, making them unattainable for women with children.

Unfortunately, this crisis exposes women who arrived from Ukraine after 24 February 2022 to even greater abuses and exploitation in the domestic services sector. Employers exploit their difficult life situation under the pretext of ‘help’ by offering a room in exchange for unpaid work, whether cleaning, caring for children or an elderly person or even all of these tasks combined.

## Job advertisements

Finding such advertisements is not difficult. Poles even post them on platforms that were created to help people fleeing from war. An example of this is the '[Platforma Pomocy Ukrainie](#)' (Platform for Helping Ukraine). Here are a few examples of such advertisements posted on this platform:

÷ J g n n q . " K " y c t o n { " y g n e q o g " c " W m t c k p k c f p r ä  
t q q [" u g t f g e / p k g . " r t / f l o " r c p k " / "](#)

÷ J g n n q . " o { " y k h g " c p f " K " n k x g " c n q p g " y k v j  
am willing to help a Ukrainian lady in exchange for assistance with cooking and cleaning.  
K h " c p { q p g " k u " k p v g t g u v g f . " r n g c u g " e q p v c  
D g u v " t g i c t f u [Y.k"v9c;o:"4o8k7gZuZ|Znøc"o\\*{ " / " q p " u c  
y q n p f " / " v g n g y k | q t g o " e j v p k g " r q o q i " r c  
u r t / v c p k w " l g n k " l g u v " m v q " e j v p f " / c  
798265XXX\)](#)

Source:

[https://sospark.pl/noclegi/noclegi\\_i831](https://sospark.pl/noclegi/noclegi_i831)

[https://sospark.pl/noclegi/noclegi-in-poland-slask-katowice\\_i910](https://sospark.pl/noclegi/noclegi-in-poland-slask-katowice_i910)

Some employers take advantage of the vulnerable and difficult situation of Ukrainian women. They see them as a cheap and determined workforce. They force them to work in poor and low-paid conditions, threatening that there are tens of thousands of eager candidates waiting for their positions (Theus 2022). They lower the rates for caregivers, presenting it as assistance for a person from Ukraine who fled the war. However, offering such work to them is not justified. The expectation of round-the-clock care and unpaid labour under the guise of assistance cannot be acceptable in any way.

A significant problem in this sector was the failure to understand that the situations faced by Ukrainian women who arrived after 24 February 2022 are different from those who come specifically to earn a living in this field. As a result, there are numerous cases of offering highly qualified women seeking employment as domestic workers. Such offers from employers are presented as 'help', and any refusal is often perceived as 'ingratitude'.

As a result, in 2022, only 610,824 declarations of entrusting work to foreigners were issued to Ukrainians (58.8% of the total of 1,038,316). In the domestic services sector, 1,404 declarations were issued to Ukrainian citizens (85% of the total of 1,651). From the escalation of the war until the end of 2022, only 488 notifications of employment of Ukrainians with PESEL UKR numbers were registered at the Polish employment offices in households employing workers and in households producing goods and providing services for their own needs (Powiadomienie o powierzeniu wykonywania pracy obywatelowi Ukrainy 2022). As with the agriculture sector, we argue that due to high dependency, informality and precarity of the domestic sector, very

few Ukrainians fleeing the war could join the sector and provide their own families with needed level of stability and care.

### *Main actors in supporting Ukrainians post-February 2022*

With the emergence of a number of new problems in agriculture and domestic services, it would be appropriate to look at the support for Ukrainian workers in these sectors provided by various organisations.

Poland has a number of civic organisations working for refugees and migrants that have provided various forms of assistance to Ukrainian women after 24 February 2022. For example, the *Ukrainian House* has opened a Ukrainian school for refugee children and created a support network called Ukrainian Women's Clubs. They have expanded their activities with a helpline and consultation point, offer Polish language courses, support refugee women in integrating into the Polish job market and assist with finding accommodation. The *Polish Migration Forum*, among other things, has launched an advanced system of psychological consultations, case workers and other initiatives targeting women, such as the School of Motherhood. Detailed information about the assistance provided by these organisations can be found in the report 'Polish School of Helping' (Polska Szkoła Pomagania 2023), published by the Migration Consortium. Therefore, we do not describe their initiatives in this report.

As noted in the introduction, we are interested in organisations and initiatives that are directly aimed at Ukrainian women working or considering employment in the agricultural and domestic services sectors. Our analysis focuses solely on observation, checking the websites of potential actors and analysing existing literature. Unfortunately, our analysis revealed a lack of initiatives specifically supporting Ukrainian women in agriculture.<sup>10</sup>

We were only able to uncover that members of the Polish Association of Sustainable Agriculture 'ASAP' became involved by providing housing for the refugees, helping them adjust to their new conditions, helping them find jobs and organising schools for their children. Further, hundreds of farms have taken under their roof thousands of people from across the eastern border fleeing the war, mostly women and children.<sup>11</sup>

Our analysis for this report is built solely on the basis of desk research and observations, without interviewing the organisation's leaders. Therefore, more in-depth research (including field research) would be needed to verify our analysis but also to give visibility and critical review to the initiative that emerged post-February 2022 in the agricultural and domestic services sectors.

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<sup>10</sup> Seem for example the websites of the Polska Federacja Rolna (Polish Agricultural Federation); Związek Zawodowy Pracowników Rolnictwa w RP (Trade Union of Agricultural Workers in the Republic of Poland); Ogólnopolskie Porozumienie Związków Zawodowych Rolników i Organizacji Rolniczych (All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions of Farmers and Agricultural Organisations) and others.

<sup>11</sup><https://www.agropolska.pl/aktualnosci/polska/rolnicy-przyjmują-uchodźców-powinni-być-objęci-pomocą,12732.html>



When it comes to domestic services, the situation is similar, but some issues are highlighted by the Domestic Workers Committee of the Workers Initiative Union, which encourages women who want to work in the domestic services sector to join the union. They also create informational flyers in Ukrainian, hold informational meetings, provide psychological training and intervene where necessary. Therefore, migrant workers who were already working in this sector before 24 February 2022 have become a support system for the new arrivals.

As a result of our analysis, we observed the need to create or support initiatives that directly target Ukrainian women who work or are considering working in agriculture and domestic services. This need becomes particularly important in light of the fact that work in these sectors is informal and exposes women to insecurity and exploitation.

Particular care must be taken for those most vulnerable to exploitation. Those on the margins of communities – the under-privileged and the vulnerable – are at greater risk of suffering throughout the refugee process, despite the significant mobilisation of support from different levels of Polish society (Matuszczyk et al. 2023).

## **COUNTRY CASE: Italy**

### **General background on Ukrainian migration trends and the situation in the sectors in focus**

Italy has a significant immigrant population, estimated to be around 5 million people as of 2021, 50.9% of whom are women (Istat 2023). Immigrants in Italy come from diverse backgrounds, including North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Eastern Europe. They contribute to Italy's labour market, economy and cultural diversity. However, the integration of immigrants has been a challenge that contributes to ongoing social tensions and debates.

Italy became a new destination country for Ukrainian migrants after the 1990s; however, migration to Italy significantly differed because of its gender component and gendered labour. It is worth noting that Ukrainians came to occupy the domestic sector networks that had already been established by the Polish female workers in the late 1980s. Italy, described as having a 'migrant in the family' welfare model (van Hooren 2010), relied heavily on monetary payments for care and facilitated outsourcing elderly care and domestic work into the private sphere (also through migration management). Since late 1990s and for decades, Ukrainians have been among the five largest immigrant groups in Italy, and consistently, around 80% of this group have been composed of women. At the beginning of 2022, Ukrainian women represented 79% of legal residents and work has always been a central reason for migration, compatible with the policies on flows implemented in Italy (Istat 2022). Initially, Ukrainian women came to Italy with short-term migration projects. Later, however, there has been greater stabilisation, which is also reflected in an increase in the number of long-term residence permits (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy 2018).

On 1 January 2022, Italy had 230,373 Ukrainian citizens legally residing in its territory, the majority (81.2%) of whom were in possession of a long-term residence. In addition to those staying in Italy with a residence permit, a total of 28,422 Ukrainians have obtained Italian citizenship (Istat 2022). And yet, the history of female Ukrainian migration to Italy is a history of irregular migration. Despite the growing need for workers, especially in the care sector, the Italian state has always been very cautious and selective in its migration policy, and Ukrainian women were forced to resort to irregular employment. The situation of irregular stay that put those women in a very vulnerable situation was first addressed by the Bossi-Fini Law in 2002, which allowed thousands of Ukrainian women to legalise their stay in Italy. However, this was a very important but one-time solution that did not solve the problem of irregular migration as the process of employment and legalisation was not simplified.

Another immigration policy instrument that regulated the entry and temporary stay of foreign workers (including Ukrainian women) in Italy for specific sectors and purposes was called the *Decreto Flussi* or the Decree on Flows. It is a governmental decree issued annually by the Ministry of Interior. Its main objective is to manage and control the inflow of foreign labour into Italy to meet the country's labour market needs while ensuring legal and regular migration. It establishes quotas and specific requirements for different categories of foreign workers,

including seasonal workers, domestic workers and workers in other specific sectors. It is important to note that the Decreto Flussi sets quotas for the number of permits available for each category, and these quotas can vary from year to year. Once the quota for a particular category is filled, further applications for that category may not be accepted until the following year.

In 2017, Ukraine concluded a visa-free regime with the EU countries, including Italy. It meant that Ukrainian citizens with biometric passports could travel to the EU for up to 90 days in any 180-day period for tourism, to visit relatives or friends or for business purposes but not for work. Although access to a job market was not granted, this agreement has opened a possibility for many women to come to Italy legally and to start working informally. Because of the 90-day limitation, Ukrainian female migrants developed a rotating shift type of employment that allowed them to stay 90 days in Italy and 90 days in Ukraine. Obviously, this was not regulated by law in any way and those women were living and working in a grey zone.

It is worth noting that the migration of Ukrainian women to Italy has always contained both a risk and an emancipatory component. Women who migrated on their own often suffered exploitation or violence, but self-migration was also a way for Ukrainian women to regain their subjectivity through economic independence (Lashchuk 2020). On their part, Italian families could rely on a cheap migrant labour force particularly suitable for working with elderly people full time, since women were coming to Italy alone and thus without any family obligations (Vianello 2009). The latter became an important issue and created tensions between female migrants and their employers after February 2022, when many Ukrainian women welcomed in Italy their families fleeing the war.

### *Agriculture*

The agriculture sector in Italy holds significant importance in the country's economy and cultural heritage. The Italian government issues seasonal work permits, the Decreto Flussi, to facilitate the legal employment of migrant workers in the agricultural sector among others. These permits allow workers to be employed during specific seasons and for specific durations. They provide a legal framework for migrants to work in the sector and access their rights as workers. However, unequal pay in the agriculture sector, including disparities affecting migrant workers, has been a concern in Italy. Seasonal workers, including many migrants, may face challenges in obtaining fair wages due to the nature of their employment. The piece-rate system, where workers are paid based on the amount they harvest, can result in variations in earnings and potentially lead to inequalities. In some cases, migrant workers may be employed informally, without proper contracts or legal protections. Informal employment makes it more difficult to ensure fair wages and can leave workers more vulnerable to exploitation.

Trade unions, such as the agricultural branch of Coldiretti and Confagricoltura and others, advocate for the rights and welfare of workers in the sector, including migrant workers. They negotiate labour conditions and provide legal assistance.

### *Domestic services*

In Italy the domestic sector refers specifically to caregivers for the elderly and household cleaners. The term ‘badanti’ refers to caregivers or personal assistants who provide assistance to the elderly or disabled individuals in their homes (usually those are live-in caregivers), while ‘colf’ refers to domestic workers who perform cleaning and household chores.

The domestic sector in Italy has been significant due to various factors but especially because of the ageing population and therefore increased demand for care services.

The sector is regulated by specific laws and regulations to protect the rights of domestic workers and ensure fair working conditions. The most significant legislation in this regard is Law 183/2010, also known as the ‘Biagi Law’, which sets out rules for domestic work, including hours of work, minimum wage, holidays, social security contributions and other employment rights. The law provides a legal framework that applies to all domestic workers, regardless of their nationality or migrant status.

Table 4: Domestic workers by nationality (2020)

<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Domestic workers</b>	<b>Distribution</b>	<b>Caregivers %</b>
Total	920,722	100.0%	47.5%
Italians	287,610	31.2%	41.4%
Foreigners	633,112	68.8%	50.3%
<b>Top 5 foreign nationalities</b>	<b>Domestic workers</b>	<b>Distribution</b>	<b>Caregivers %</b>
Romania	156,855	24.8%	63.5%
Ukraine	92,160	14.6%	64.4%
Philippines	66,867	10.6%	16.0%
Moldova	39,202	6.2%	60.0%
Peru	33,988	5.4%	48.6%

Source: Domina Osservatorio nazionale sul lavoro domestico, Annual report on domestic work 2021

While the Biagi Law takes steps to address the needs of migrant domestic workers, there are still challenges in its implementation and enforcement. Migrant workers, due to their specific circumstances, face additional hurdles in accessing their rights and protections. While some Ukrainian domestic workers have formal contracts and legal protections, informal employment is a very common form of employment, especially in the south of Italy. This often leads to vulnerability, lack of legal rights and potential abuse and exploitation.

## **Main organisational actors in Italy responsible for supporting migrants in domestic work and agriculture**

The most noticeable organisations that work to protect the right of migrant workers in agriculture sector are:

*Federazione Lavoratori Agroindustria* (FLAI-CGIL) is a trade union within the CGIL confederation that represents workers in the agro-industrial sector, including agricultural workers. It advocates for the rights of agricultural workers, negotiates collective bargaining agreements and provides support and legal assistance to workers.

*Unione Italiana del Lavoro Agricolo* (UILA) is a trade union that represents agricultural workers and professionals. It works to protect the rights and welfare of agricultural workers, including migrant workers, through advocacy, negotiation and support services.

*Associazione Ricreativa e Culturale Italiana* (ARCI) is a cultural and recreational association that also provides support and assistance to migrant workers. It offers services such as legal advice, integration programs, language courses and social support to help migrant workers in various sectors, including agriculture.

Casa del Contadino is an organisation that provides support and assistance to agricultural workers, including migrant workers. It offers information, legal advice and training programs to ensure the rights and well-being of agricultural workers.

*Rete Lavoratori della Terra* (RLT) is a network of organisations, including trade unions and civil society groups, working to protect the rights of agricultural workers, including migrant workers. Its members advocate for fair working conditions, promote awareness about labour rights and provide support services.

The most visible organisations and associations in Italy that work to support domestic workers and advocate for their rights are:

*Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori* (CISL) is one of the largest trade union confederations in Italy and represents the interests of workers across various sectors, including domestic workers. CISL works to protect the rights and improve the working conditions of domestic workers through advocacy, negotiation and legal support.

*Federazione Italiana Lavoratori Commercio, Alberghi, e Servizi* (FILCAMS CGIL) is a trade union within the CGIL confederation that represents workers in the commerce, hotel and services sectors. FILCAMS CGIL is actively involved in addressing issues related to domestic work and advocates for the rights of domestic workers.

*Sindacato Pensionati Italiani* (SPI-CGIL) is a trade union specifically focused on protecting the rights and welfare of retired individuals. SPI-CGIL works to address the rights and working conditions of domestic workers caring for elderly individuals.

*Associazione Lavoratori Cobas* (ADL Cobas) is an independent labour association that supports various workers' rights causes, including domestic workers. The group engages in advocacy, campaigns and legal assistance to improve the conditions of domestic workers and combat exploitation.

Casa delle Badanti is an organisation that provides assistance, support, and information to domestic workers, particularly badanti. It offers legal advice, training programs and resources to ensure the rights and well-being of domestic workers.

### **Migration of Ukrainians to Italy after 24 February 2022**

This previous and stable presence of Ukrainians in Italy explains why so many people have chosen Italy as their country of destination while fleeing Ukraine after the Russian invasion. According to data from the Ministry of the Interior, applications for temporary protection received from people fleeing war numbered 177,257 as of 20 June 2023 (Civil Protection Department). The peak of requests was recorded between February and May, while only 26.7% of these applications were submitted from June onwards. In 39.4% of the cases, children and young people under the age of 18 were involved, while women accounted for 71.6% but close to 86% when considering only those over the age of 18.

The applications were distributed evenly across the territory – 28.2% in the North West, 25.9% in the North East, 20.7% in the Centre and 25.2% in the South – basically following the geography of the stabilised Ukrainian presence. In other words, in most cases it seems that the Ukrainians seeking refuge have already been joining friends and relatives in Italy for some time. Among the regions, Lombardy recorded 17.5% of protection requests, Emilia Romagna 11.7% and Campania 10.5%.

On 28 March 2022, the Italian government adopted a decree to apply the EU decision at the national level and clarified the eligibility criteria and other details about the temporary protection. Although Italy was the last EU country to adopt the EU's Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), it is worth noting that the access to a labour market in Italy was granted to Ukrainians by l'ordinanza 872-2022 della Presidenza del Consiglio (Civil Protection Department), even before the temporary protection directive was adopted by the government. However, at the moment, temporary protection status cannot be exchanged for residence permit for work purposes. This puts significant pressure on Ukrainian women as their future (also professional future) is unclear and depends entirely on the state's decision as soon as the temporary protection is over.

After the Covid-19 pandemic, Italy, like many other countries, experienced significant labour shortages in the care work sector, traditionally dominated by the female Ukrainian migrants.

The pandemic resulted in travel restrictions and mobility challenges, making it difficult for Ukrainian workers to enter or leave Italy. Restrictions on international travel and border controls affected the recruitment of new workers from Ukraine and limited the options for those wishing to return home temporarily. That is why although receiving Ukrainian women seeking refuge was an act of solidarity, it was also seen as an opportunity to fill in employment shortages in the care sector.

Ukraine, for refugees a job in agriculture: in Taranto the proposal of organisations and trade unions. ‘This is how we guarantee them solidarity and dignity’ (9 March 2022):

‘Ukrainian citizens could become Puglia’s new farmers. Employing the Ukrainian refugees who will arrive in the region in agricultural businesses is, in fact, the proposal of the bilateral agricultural organisation of the province of Taranto, Faila Ebat, and the trade unions and category organisations of Taranto, Cia agricoltori, Flai Cgil, Coldiretti, Fai Cisl, Confagricoltura and Uila Uil. The presidents and secretaries of the unions wrote to Taranto Prefect Demetrio Martino, explaining the initiative, which falls on the eve of the new harvesting campaign for the fruit and vegetable and table grape sector, in which more labour, including seasonal labour, will have to be employed in the fields’.

Source: [https://bari.repubblica.it/cronaca/2022/03/09/news/ucraina\\_profughi\\_agricoltura-340796142/](https://bari.repubblica.it/cronaca/2022/03/09/news/ucraina_profughi_agricoltura-340796142/)

According to the research, Ukrainians in Italy face a very difficult financial situation as compared to other countries. It was reported that two thirds of households (66%) face some or great difficulties to make ends meet. At the same time, the most common sources of income for those staying in Italy are savings (39%) and support from relatives in Ukraine (36%), and only 24% mention an income from work in the current country (FRA 2022). Therefore, it is not surprising that many people want to go back to Ukraine (40%) even despite hostilities or they are undecided (27%) or want to move to another country (7%) where social support is more stable (FRA 2022).

The situation on the Italian labour market, which, however, has much to gain from the presence of Ukrainians, depends on how many of them will return and how many will stay. Currently, it is difficult to predict the future of forced migrants from Ukraine in Italy. The number of those who will stay – as well as the number of those who will return to Ukraine – depends on the development of events as well as the ability to find jobs and integrate into a new society. According to a UNHCR study from September 2022, 81% of respondents declared that they would like to return to Ukraine one day, and only 4% had no plans to do so. In February 2023, only 66% expected to return. And although the number of those who do not want to return has hardly changed (5% in the new study), the number of undecided respondents has increased significantly – as much as 19%. (UNHCR 2022, 2023). We can also see that the number of employed people from Ukraine in the EU has increased from 37% to 46% (UNHCR 2023).

This allows them to rent apartments and generally become more independent, which in turn has a positive effect on integration. This generally positive situation in the EU is slightly different in Italy as women report difficulties with finding jobs and independent housing in this country. Ukrainians are expected to take so-called ‘Ukrainian jobs’ that nationals do not want to take because of the low pay. Research shows that Ukrainian women in Italy face very precarious situations, and it is difficult for them to survive relying just on the jobs they are able to find, especially when they are the only breadwinner for their families.

### **Disappointment**

Ukrainian women who do not manage to find a job in line with their skills and had to undertake ‘simple jobs’ feel disappointed, highlighting the utilitarian nature of Italian hospitality.

‘It seems to me that they are even happy that Ukraine is in trouble. In terms of the fact that we have closed a bunch of vacancies for them that none of the locals want to take. The service sector in hotels, restaurants, badante<sup>12</sup>, apartment cleaning, etc. Italians are not very eager to work for such money. What will they do when things get better in Ukraine and people leave these jobs and return home?’ (Source: Telegram channel)

## **Italy’s post-February 2022 response**

### *Reception and housing*

The **housing** situation for refugees in Italy has faced challenges due to the large number of arrivals in recent years and limited resources. There have been concerns about overcrowded reception centres, inadequate living conditions and delays in the asylum process. Efforts are ongoing to improve the reception system and promote more sustainable and inclusive housing solutions for refugees in Italy. Housing for Ukrainians fleeing the war in Italy was provided at a level of cooperation between the prefecture, the Caritas network, national and international NGOs and initiatives (such as Refugees Welcome Italia, IOM, UNICEF, ActionAid, Conflavoro and so on) and private individuals who wanted to welcome refugees into their homes. Those who hosted Ukrainian nationals directly were obligated to communicate their presence within 48 hours of their entry into Italy by presenting a declaration of hospitality.

For now, there are three official types of housing provided:

1. in CAS and SAI centres run by the Ministry of the Interior, and by local authorities, for which there are contributions of 33 euros per person per day;

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<sup>12</sup> Badante (plur. badanti) - is an Italian term for elderly carer, caregiver.



2. so called ‘diffused hospitality’ managed by third-sector organisations and associations, again with a reimbursement of 33 euros per day for each refugee hosted;
3. so called ‘autonomous accommodation’ with relatives and friends: direct monthly reimbursement per person of 300 euros/150 euros for children.

In July 2022, Italy had the highest share (around 85%–90%) of displaced persons in private accommodation, provided both by private hosts and volunteers (OECD 2022). At the beginning of September 2022, there were fewer than 15,000 Ukrainian displaced persons in institutional care, or 9% of the total eligible (Bassoli and Campomori 2022). The majority of women were accommodated by their Ukrainian relatives or friends that live in Italy, and many were offered accommodation in Italian houses, especially during the first weeks of the full-scale invasion. As a short-term solution, during the first weeks of war, local governments and private owners also provided hotels, guesthouses and other options for the needs of Ukrainians.

Nevertheless, there is always another option, such as employer-provided housing, especially in the case of agriculture and the domestic service sector. The quality of these dwellings and their suitability in terms of safety (especially in the case of live-in housing for caregivers) is not controlled in any way. Therefore, it is not surprising that women in these places are often subjected to exploitation, harassment and gender-based violence (Lashchuk 2023). According to the OHCHR, limited access to a safe housing increases the vulnerability of women and girls to domestic violence and sexual abuse. Women’s rights advocates report that sexual exploitation occurs both in reception centres and host homes, but Ukrainian women often do not report sexual violence against them because of the fear of victim blaming and stigmatisation.

Another negative side was that many women were accommodated in small towns or villages where public transport is very limited. This in turn limited professional and integration opportunities for those women who did not have their own car. Many of them had to take jobs that were available locally (such as cleaning or agricultural work) regardless of their previous experience and qualifications.

### ***Employment***

Some women report abuse, claiming that they were treated as unpaid labour. Specifically, they were expected to perform domestic services (caregiving, cleaning and cooking) in exchange for the opportunity to live in their hosts’ homes. This had not been discussed before and was expected of them as something that came naturally. Women rights activists that work with Ukrainians seeking refuge in Italy also report cases in which Italian men fired their domestic workers in order to employ women arriving from Ukraine with a hope to pay them less using their vulnerable situation (Mladjenović 2003).

### **Exploitation**

The women report that they feel like unpaid badanti because they are expected to do a whole range of housework in addition to their primary work as a sign of gratitude for the free accommodation.

‘They seem to give us time. It’s been a week, nothing has been decided yet, they tell me, you haven’t decided anything, you have to move out. But where to, if we haven’t even received an answer yet [from Questura - aut.]. And so they keep pushing me behind my back so that I don’t relax. And I want to add that they are very selfish. For 7 months I fed them at my own expense, cooked for them, cleaned and had very little time for my little daughter because I always had to work. You work at work, come home, whether you are tired or not, you still have to work here, it’s like a free badante.’ (Source: Telegram channel)

Generally, in Italy, where there is a high level of unemployment, looking for a job is a challenge, even more so for those who do not speak Italian. Therefore, the most accessible form of employment is in domestic services (caregivers and cleaning), which have been dominated among others by Ukrainian women for the last 20 years, and agriculture where the presence of Ukrainians is rather unnoticeable. Because in Italy there are so called ‘Ukrainian jobs’, those are the only offer Ukrainian women fleeing the war automatically receive despite their plans and aspirations. The professional training and other forms of support offered by the main actors in Italy are also tailored rather for the specific spheres, where Ukrainian women are expected to work after their arrival.

### **Job situation**

Arriving into the countries with established labour migration networks, it seemed, often pushed Ukrainians seeking refuge to the same sectors and jobs as dominated by other Ukrainians, at times in a way that was experienced as forceful and denying personal circumstances.

**Case 1.** Olja settled with two teenage daughters in a mid-size town in Veneto in the north of Italy. She is 37 and before February 2022 had worked as a bank clerk in Ukraine. In Italy, she immediately started looking for jobs: Olja has used the services of a municipality voluntary organisation to help her create a good CV and translate it into Italian. She studies Italian and aims for any job in a supermarket or a shop. To advertise her CV, she has been using Italian Facebook groups for job search, Telegram channels and church notice boards, and has taken her CV in person to various places to introduce herself. However, the only jobs she managed to find so far were cleaning jobs and occasional night shifts, caring for the elderly. She said that for all her job ads with CV, the maximum she received were sex offers from Italian men. Olja says: ‘Here there are simply no other jobs for us except for badante or a cleaner.’ (Source: interviews by Fedjuk 2023)

**Case 2.** Nina, a mother of two teenage children who settled in the north of Italy, says that an organisation that provided accommodation for them for free exerted open psychological pressure on her, pushing her to search for a job ‘in a bar or as a badante’. Upon her arrival, however, Nina made a commitment to be what she calls ‘more useful’. She wrote a psychological help program for Ukrainian arrivals, which, with the help of a local volunteer, she translated into Italian and managed to get a local municipal grant for it. Despite her being employed in this program through this grant, as well as in an online platform of psychological help and volunteering the rest of her time, the manager of the refugee help organisation says that it’s ‘not a proper job’. Nina recalls:

They kept telling me that I do nothing and that I have to get a job. I kept repeating to them that I do have a job, I work in a program that provides psychological help, I also have an online job, I am happy to pay for my accommodation, but they just kept saying that I don’t have a right to sign a contract for accommodation and that I need to get a ‘proper’ job. They almost made me believe that I don’t do enough. At some point I even thought, okay, I can go and work in a bar, cleaning tables, if this is how it works here, but once I made that decision my whole self just revolted against this. I mean, I have three diplomas: I am an obstetrician, economist and psychologist. I have been studying for 20 years, I can be much more useful in a more skilled way, why should I do something useless? [...] Maybe because I am a psychologist and I have learnt to respect myself, I wouldn’t want to take any other job. It would feel really very sad to go and start cleaning, and if I did, I wouldn’t stop searching for a job more adequate to my skills.

Three factors seem to have collapsed in this excerpt from Nina’s story: 1) an expectation that Ukrainians would join the workforce, especially in those sectors that are already done by Ukrainian workers; 2) differentiated integration of the newly arrived people into the workforce; and 3) post-Covid drain of the ‘essential work force’ in Europe. (Source: interviews by Fedjuk 2023)

**Case 3.** Some free introductory language courses (such as Prima lezione – online school) are designed specifically for women who will undertake jobs as badante. Women report that courses are not useful for those not willing to work in this sphere (‘There is only vocabulary for badante, the course is not interesting for people who are not related to this profession’ (Source: Telegram channel, research by Lashchuk 2023)

The situation also changed significantly for the so-called female labour migrants from Ukraine who had lived in Italy for a long time. Their high professional efficiency and availability was caused by the fact that their family and social life remained in Ukraine, while in Italy they had almost exclusively a professional life. With the arrival of their families in Italy after February 2022, their professional and personal lives merged. This means that their time and responsibilities (including caring services for their grandchildren while their daughters looked for work) were shared between their families and their employer.

## Main actors in supporting Ukrainians post-February 2022

A significant role is played by church organisations, especially Caritas Italia, which has been providing help to Ukrainian women since the very beginning of female migration from Ukraine to Italy (from the late 1990s). Currently, Caritas Italia works to foster social and economic inclusion for Ukrainian women fleeing the war. It supports initiatives that promote employment opportunities, entrepreneurship and economic empowerment for refugees, enabling them to build sustainable livelihoods and become self-reliant. Moreover, Caritas Italia works closely with local branches, government agencies and other organisations to provide initial support, including accommodation, food, clothing and basic necessities. Many of the initiatives listed below are financed or co-financed by Caritas.

1. **MyColf Ucraina** offers certified courses for family carers through an innovative platform.
2. **Conflavoro PMI** is the main employers; association that protects and promotes the interests of small and medium-sized Italian enterprises. Since February 2022, Conflavoro PMI puts Ukrainians fleeing the war in touch with those who can give them accommodation and work.
3. **Acli – Associazioni Cristiane Lavoratori Italiani**, apart from fundraising for Ukraine, actively promotes decent working conditions, equal pay and a guaranteed pension for all (including for workers from Ukraine).
4. **La Fondazione Consulenti per il Lavoro** together with **l’Agenzia per il Lavoro del Consiglio Nazionale dell’Ordine dei Consulenti del Lavoro** operates the project of internships for Ukrainians based on profiling and matching professionals with their potential employers.
5. **Cassa Colf** provides a financial contribution of up to 300 euros for the expenses incurred for the family reunification of Ukrainian citizens forced to leave their country.

## Case studies

We present here some case studies that we find interesting; however, we must admit that to properly verify the effectiveness of support provided, there is a need for further field research.

### 1. MyColf Ucraina

MyColf Ucraina is a project that aims at welcome and integration, offering certified courses for family carers through an innovative platform. On the one hand, the course aims to facilitate access to the family care and caring professions labour market; on the other hand, it has the novelty of offering a series of important protections and guarantees by connecting workers with families and employers, building community networks of trust. Composed of a 40-hour basic module for general domestic helpers (housekeeping) and a 24-hour supplementary module for carers (personal care), the course for family caregivers is offered in a mixed mode: online

lessons are mixed with practical training and sharing sessions with psychologists, cultural mediators and specialised personnel.

The advantages of such courses are: knowledge about the duties and rights of employees, the development of social networks, connecting employees with trusted (or at least relatively trusted) families, online and blended learning, which made this course accessible to people from different cities, learning basic Italian and a useful terminology and support from psychologists and mediators. The downsides of this project, however, are: lack of time (time needed for training and urgent need to start working immediately), unsuitability of online training for all age groups, lack of computers (especially for women whose children study online in Ukrainian schools).

## **2. Hermes Formazione**

The course 'Assistente familiare domiciliare' (home family assistant) offered by the Hermes association of Palermo in Sicily is an example of local actions for Ukrainian refugee women. The course offered 250 hours of professional training from Monday to Saturday for 6 hours a day, with a scholarship of 3.50 euros per hour. Attendance at the course is possible with any level of Italian language skills.

The Hermes Onlus Association was founded in 2009 through the collaboration of professionals in the training sector and experts in the analysis and management of the labour market. Among the courses in the catalogue, there are courses on safety in the workplace, first aid courses, English and French language courses, social media marketing courses, business start-up, photography, courses for CAF operators and many others. Notwithstanding such a wide range of different courses offered by the association, the course offered for Ukrainian women was dedicated to a type of work that had been dominated by Ukrainian women in Italy for years. This shows a lack of knowledge of what kind of women come to Italy because of the war and supports the stereotypical idea of Ukrainian women as exclusively domestic workers. This stereotypical vision of the Ukrainian woman in Italy caused some tensions in the labour market when available offers were rejected by Ukrainian women as not matching their professional competencies. Ukrainian women often report that those of them who could afford not to take up available jobs in the domestic sector and continued online jobs or looked for suitable offers were often perceived as ungrateful and fussy.

While unequivocally acknowledging the efforts of Italian NGOs, companies, grassroots initiatives and individuals in seeking to provide Ukrainian women with a place to work and thereby offset possible social tensions, we must emphasise that most of these have relied on a stagnant perception of the career aspirations of Ukrainian women in Italy. Almost all job offers and the vocational training offered were related to so-called simple jobs.

## **3. Riviera Sicura**

Another interesting example of a local initiative for Ukrainian women comes from Rimini. Riviera Sicura is the name of a project launched by Emilia Romagna tourism operators in 2021

to urge Italian tourists to choose Romagna as a destination for the summer holidays. In early March 2022, right after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Riviera Sicura took care of welcoming Ukrainians seeking refuge in the facilities made available by the Romagna hoteliers. Riviera Sicura has sent a bus that delivered aid and brought those fleeing the war to Italy. Psychologists and interpreters, volunteers and collaborators of the Civil Protection also travelled on the bus to assist and take care of the Ukrainians seeking refuge on their return journey to Italy. The association had also announced that in the coming months (before Easter 2022), 300 Ukrainian women would be hired as seasonal workers in the structures. An initiative was offering a fixed-term employment contract – for a period ranging from three to six months, in hotels in Rimini and the surrounding area mainly as waiters, kitchen help and other hospitality jobs. The organisation also offered Italian language courses to allow for better integration. It is difficult to verify the effectiveness of this initiative without further field research; nevertheless, it has been a useful example of a very fast, complex and well-coordinated emergency response. An advantage of this short-term help was also the fact that the child care was provided for women who were accommodated by the initiative. The disadvantage of such assistance lies primarily in the fact that the type of help and work offered was of a temporary nature.

## **ANALYSIS: Preliminary comparison of the post-2022 situation in Poland and Italy**

Comparing the situation in Poland and Italy in terms of the reception of Ukrainian women and their integration into the labour market in the agricultural and domestic service sectors, there are differences in approach and challenges, but the bigger picture is very similar. We would like to draw some analytical conclusions in the following areas, which we found most relevant for this report:

### **Receiving and housing/accommodation**

Poland has seen a large surge of solidarity among the citizens who participated in addressing housing-related issues, allowing the government time to develop long-term solutions and offer humanitarian assistance. Unfortunately, the government has not devised a mechanism for sustained support and has even further complicated the situation by introducing unaffordable accommodation fees in major reception centres. As a result, Ukrainian women have been pushed into a housing market that has little to offer, is heavily burdened and has seen rental prices soar to the point where even local residents cannot afford them. Another significant problem encountered by women in the Polish housing market is the refusal to rent them apartments, fuelled by concerns about their ability to pay rent and the difficulty of evicting them due to non-payment.

In Italy, the main form of reception was provided by private individuals, charity and church-related communities and organisations or, mostly, by Ukrainian relatives or friends and partly by families or individual Italians who offered their homes, especially in the first weeks of the full-scale invasion. Currently, it is almost impossible for Ukrainian women to gain any independence and move out, so they have to rely on their hosts or support organisations or move to other countries where social benefits and housing are provided. Employers in domestic services and agriculture often offer housing, but it is rather not suitable for women who came to Italy with their children or other dependent family members.

### **Job market: domestic services and agriculture**

Both Poles and Italians struggle to grasp the stark contrast between pre-24 February 2022 Ukrainian migration and the current situation. Previously, individuals who could not support themselves or their families in Ukraine sought better opportunities in Poland, attracted by higher wages and cultural similarities. The proximity of the two countries, coupled with affordable travel costs and seasonal demands in agriculture and domestic services, facilitated mobile migration. The situation differed slightly in Italy because of the cultural difference and complicated law procedures that forced many Ukrainians to work informally. However, the presence of Ukrainian female workers (mostly *badanti*) in Italy has been noticeable since the early 2000s. However, following the ongoing war in Ukraine, a wave of ‘unknown’ migrants arrived to both countries, mostly educated and from urban areas. Notably, this migration is predominantly female and often involves children, driven by the need for safety rather than economic reasons.

The failure to recognise these distinctions has led to a misguided focus on the benefits of this migration for sectors traditionally associated with Ukrainian workers, including agriculture and domestic services. In a short time, however, it turned out to be very problematic for the following reasons: lack of infrastructure for mothers with children in agriculture and, most importantly, adequate living conditions; the seasonal nature of work versus the need for stable employment; lack of experience working in these sectors, especially for people from large Ukrainian cities; long working hours versus the need for child care; competency mismatch requiring professional degradation; risks, personal work, abuse (also because of housing), lack of control and visibility; lack of support from NGOs and integration services (offer of free Polish/Italian language courses) in small localities; the informality of employment versus the need, after temporary protection, to legalise stay formally on the basis of a legally performed job; offering accommodation in exchange for performing work; and the desire of Ukrainian women to work in their profession or according to their competencies.

The problems with accommodations, lack of recognition of qualifications and social pressure to work in these sectors, among other things, contributes to the return of Ukrainian women home, where the war continues.

### **Care services**

A crucial characteristic of this migration is the presence of dependents and children. Ensuring their safety became a significant factor in the decision to flee. Providing care for the children is a crucial condition for entering the Polish and Italian labour market. Having children complicates the process of finding and affording housing, and most importantly, it restricts women to work only limited hours. In the case of work as a *badante*, where the job foresees 24/7 cohabitation between the employee and the employer and provides only one day off per week, looking after one's own children is impossible.

In the case of Poland, another issue is that the majority of Ukrainian children who arrived after 24 February 2022 are outside the Polish school system and receive online education from Ukrainian schools.<sup>13</sup> Online learning, which was often adopted during the Covid-19 pandemic, lacks social interaction, and upon arrival in Poland, these children face challenges in integrating with their Polish peers. Being 'confined within four walls' also contributes to mental health problems for them. Unlike in Poland, in Italy there is compulsory schooling for foreign minors arriving in Italy. But this does not solve the problem of mothers' access to work, especially in the two sectors described, where it is often not possible to reconcile working hours with school hours.

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<sup>13</sup> It is hard to have specific statistics about how many children (or how regularly) attend both online Ukrainian school and actual school in their reception country. In its analytical report on 'War and education', Ukrainian think tank CEDOS informs that as of December 2022, 13% of students and 3% of teachers were living abroad. At the same period in Ukraine, 36% of schools were reported to be teaching remotely, another 36% of schools were using a mixed method, and only 28% of schools had a classroom-based education. Source: <<https://cedos.org.ua/en/researches/war-and-education-how-a-year-of-the-full-scale-invasion-influenced-ukrainian-schools/>>



## **Other needs**

Both in Italy and Poland, Ukrainian women report a lack of access to information on their work rights, obligations and opportunities in agriculture and domestic services. In both countries, a significant issue is the lack of efficient transportation connections between smaller towns and big cities. Without owning a car, commuting becomes highly problematic and sometimes even impossible. This limits Ukrainian women's professional and integration possibilities and makes them dependent on their hosts.

## **Main actors: local actors and civil society organisations of various scales**

In both the Polish and Italian cases, there are various civic organisations that support migrants and refugees. However, they are often concentrated in large cities, and their assistance is usually of a general nature and limited in scope. In our analysis, we focused on identifying organisations that directly support Ukrainian women in agriculture and the domestic services sector. This proved to be a significant challenge because **our observations indicate a severe lack of such institutions in these sectors**, and the assistance provided by the existing ones is insufficient, inconsistent and highly localised.

Ukrainian migrants have not been included in trade unions representing agricultural workers in Poland and Italy. Trade unions in both countries mainly focus on representing the interests of domestic workers and taking action to improve their working conditions and protect their rights. Therefore, Ukrainian migrants working in agriculture are not formally affiliated with trade unions due to various factors, including the temporary nature of their employment. In the case of Italy, trade unions such as Coldiretti and Confagricoltura advocate for the rights of workers (including migrant workers), but their actions are rather declarative and do not in any way address the needs of Ukrainian women. Only in Poland can a good example be found in the Domestic Workers Committee, which represents Ukrainian migrants working in this sector and advocates for their rights, including formalisation and legalisation of employment, clear definition of duties, fair working conditions and wages, leisure time, protection against sexual harassment and access to legal and psychological assistance.

Therefore, Ukrainian migrants can receive some form of support from the aforementioned non-governmental organisations (like Ukrainian House in Poland or Caritas Italia in Italy), which most often employ migrants to help their compatriots or are run by them. However, it should be noted that these entities do not specifically specialise in assistance for these sectors, and most importantly, particularly in the case of agriculture, they are located in major cities. Most often, these actors offer information, consultation, legal, psychological and integration support (adaptation in Poland, learning the Polish language, integration into the labour market, cultural events and celebrations in both Italy and Poland).

## **Main actors: international organisations**

Large international organisations, such as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, International Organization for Migration, Norwegian Refugee Council, Danish Refugee Council and others, primarily have a humanitarian profile of activity. This is extremely

important in humanitarian crisis situations like the Russian full-scale aggression against Ukraine. It is worth noting that these organisations responded to the crisis very quickly, and their assistance became crucial in mitigating the crisis. International organisations provide financial support to civic organisations assisting Ukrainians fleeing the war but also carry out their own projects. However, their role is limited in terms of time (only during the crisis) and scope (meeting immediate needs). Responsibility for more long-term inclusion remains a structural challenge of the respective governments. Therefore, it is difficult to expect specific support from them for Ukrainian women in the agricultural and domestic services sectors in Poland and Italy.

### **Main actors: volunteers**

The escalation of the war in Ukraine has sparked social solidarity in both countries but especially in Poland. Volunteer help has become a tremendous support in dealing with the crisis. However, this aid was sometimes chaotic and driven by emotions, which ultimately led to quick burnout. Farmers also offered volunteer assistance by providing food and accommodation, but this aid was sporadic and not systematic. War fatigue has resulted in a decrease in volunteer engagement. Another issue is the societal understanding of the purpose of assistance and the exploitation of the vulnerable situation of women, which has led to cases in both Poland and Italy where assistance (housing) is offered in exchange for work.

### **Main actors: Ukrainian diaspora**

The Ukrainian diaspora played a significant role in receiving and supporting women fleeing the war in both Poland and Italy. In both Poland and Italy, many Ukrainians seeking refuge followed already established networks. As mentioned earlier in the text, Poland was the largest destination country for labour migrants and has received the largest wave of arrivals, while the distribution of Ukrainians seeking refuge in Italy clearly shows attraction to those regions heavily populated by Ukrainians.

In Poland, the group of over a million economic migrants who resided in Poland before 24 February 2022 became a buffer for the wave of Ukrainians seeking refuge following the outbreak of full-scale war. According to the EWL (2022), 27% of respondents stated that the main reason for choosing Poland was having friends or acquaintances there, and 24% mentioned having family in Poland. Additionally, this topic can become particularly acute in the post-war reconstruction effort of Ukraine but also matters for the reception efforts of EU states in the current situation.

Italy was also familiar with Ukrainian migrants even before February 2022. Moreover, the migration of Ukrainian women is not a new phenomenon in Italy. Since the late 1990s, the vast majority of Ukrainian immigrants in Italy were women, who have now taken on the burden of helping those fleeing war.

The Ukrainian diaspora in both countries showed extraordinary commitment. In the case of Poland, this was largely through organisational support, with organisations like the Ukrainian House or other bodies in which many Ukrainians were active even before 2022. In Italy, by

contrast, the diaspora provided more private support, with women who had already lived in the country for some time receiving their families and friends. In Italy, the diaspora showed institutional support more at the level of mediation between migrants and national and international organisations, rather than as an independent institutional actor.

### **Future challenges**

Assuming that the war in Ukraine continues for an extended period, we can anticipate that the cases of Ukrainian women deciding not to return to Ukraine and stay in Poland or Italy will become more frequent. Consequently, work will play a crucial role. In other words, ‘if I stay, where will I work?’ will become a question that requires a long-term strategy. This strategy may bypass the agriculture or domestic services sector or consider them as transitional stages. Educated women from Ukraine will likely want to invest in creating a suitable professional CV, having their qualifications recognised or considering alternative locations for settlement with better employment opportunities. For many, making the decision to change careers and invest in retraining will mean a much longer and significant commitment that must pay off. That is why we think that this wave of Ukrainians fleeing the war will prove to be another ‘impossibility’ in meeting the significant labour shortages in these two sectors of the economy.

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