

Responding to the challenges of integration. Activation policies towards Ukrainian refugees in Poland. A case study based on participatory research.

Poland has for several years become a destination country for an increasing number of labour migrants. They provide a very important support to the Polish labour market, allowing to fill the growing shortage of human resources in many industries and professions. It is very important to integrate them into the Polish labour market and Polish society in order to make the most of the potential of labour migration.

One of the biggest challenges in recent years related to migration has become Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the resulting influx of refugees from that country. Since the beginning of the war, the Polish government, local governments, non-governmental organizations and Polish society have worked together with great commitment to support Ukrainian citizens seeking refuge.

A special law was passed - the Law of March 12, 2022 on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine in Connection with the Armed Conflict on the Territory of that State (Journal of Laws of 2024, item 167) - regulating in detail the legal situation of Ukrainian citizens in Poland, including the possibility for them to take up employment on the basis of a notification on the assignment of work to a citizen of Ukraine. The provisions of this law also regulate, among other things: education, insurance and medical care and other public services.

Between 2022 and 2024, a total of 3,863,000 documents legalizing the work of Ukrainian citizens (along with notifications of assignment of work) were issued. The opening of the labor market for Ukrainian citizens through the introduction of a solution allowing them to perform work legally on the basis of a notification, without the need to obtain other permits (or a statement of entrustment to perform work) resulted in Ukrainian citizens largely taking advantage of this very procedure.

From the beginning of 2022 until today, according to the documents legalizing employment, 2/3 of Ukrainian citizens performed work in Poland on the basis of a contract of mandate, and almost 1/3 on the basis of an employment contract, other forms of employment accounted for 4%. At the same time, 3/4 of the issued documents legalizing the work of a foreigner (not including notifications that do not specify the date of the end of employment) are issued for a period of more than 1 year.

During the aforementioned period, Ukrainian citizens were most often employed in the following industries: manufacturing - 29%, transport and storage - 18%, Administrative and support service activities - 17%, Construction - 10%. They were mainly employed as: Laborers performing simple industrial work -16%, Material records and transportation workers - 8%, Transportation and simple warehouse workers - 7%, Other workers performing simple work - 6%, Domestic, office and hotel helpers and cleaners - 5%, Truck and bus drivers - 4%, Construction workers of rough and related work - 4%, Workers performing simple food preparation - 3%.

On the labour market in Poland, people with refugee status, those with subsidiary protection, tolerated stay or humanitarian protection, have the same rights as Polish citizens - they do not need any permit to work. Refugees can also register at a labour office and enjoy the same rights and obligations as Polish citizens seeking work, including, among other things, unemployment benefits.

In Poland, a number of measures have been taken to facilitate the acquisition of skills and qualifications needed for employment in, among other things, deficit occupations by third-country nationals. This includes facilitating the financing of the costs of group training in the Polish language and the costs of nostrification proceedings and proceedings to confirm the completion of studies at a certain level. In addition, the Minister of Labor subsidizes from the Labor Fund the costs of training in the Polish language for Ukrainian citizens performing medical professions of doctors and nurses and midwives. Support for these trainings is granted to district chambers of doctors and district chambers of nurses and midwives at their request.

In the framework of supporting activities in the field of professional and social integration of foreigners legally residing in Poland, on February 25, 2022, the Polish Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policy announced the Competition entitled "Together We Can Do More - First Edition of the Activation Program for Foreigners 2022-2023". "Together We Can Do More - First Edition of the Activation Program for Foreigners for 2022-2023," which was the first instalment of the Ministry's Activation Program for Foreigners envisaged for 2022-2025. The program specifically considered foreigners who came to Poland from countries in crisis situations, such as those related to military operations on their territory, including evacuation from war zones in Ukraine. The first edition of the Program was completed in December 2023. Within its framework, 112 projects were implemented, in which the main target group was women and children from Ukraine. Most of the projects provided language and vocational training, job search assistance, psychological and legal support and integration into Polish society. Some of the projects, responding to needs, offered childcare opportunities, thus enabling caregivers to participate in courses, training and other activities. More than 73,000 foreigners were covered by the assistance measures (more than 70% more people than originally planned). An amount of approximately PLN 102 million was allocated for the implementation of projects from the Labor Fund reserve. It was also the largest - to date - integration program for foreigners carried out with national rather than European funds.

The purpose of the paper is to analyse the effectiveness of the activation policy towards Ukrainian refugees in Poland, with a particular focus on integration challenges, such as the language barrier, recognition of professional qualifications or social integration. The paper will present the results of research participating in the "Together We Can Do More" Program. An evaluation of the practical solutions introduced by Poland will also be shown, the results of the surveys will be presented, and recommendations will be made for future measures to support migrants.

The author of the paper participated in the preparation, implementation and conclusion of the program.