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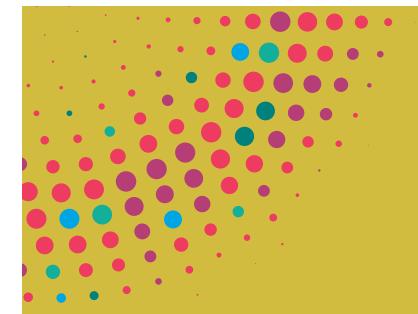


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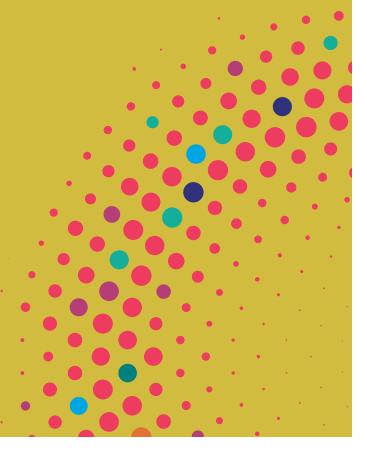
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TARAS ROMASHCHENKO

# Ukrainian Refugees in Germany: A Hidden Conflict of Interests is Inevitable but Solvable

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The full-scale war that Russia after more than 1.5 years still hasn't announced to Ukraine has changed the lives of Ukrainians forever. Since the end of February 2022, the peaceful country in the heart of Europe and its citizens have witnessed at large scale the ugly deaths, horrific injuries, unimaginable suffering and unbelievable destruction of numerous cities, towns and villages. There hasn't been anything like this on the European continent since World War II.

Moreover, the Russian invasion has forced millions of Ukrainians to flee their homes in search of salvation, including abroad. According to recent estimations, Europe took the majority of them – 5.8 million out of 6.2 recorded globally.

In this context, Germany's role can hardly be overestimated. Until now, the country has provided shelter for almost 1.1 million Ukrainians. Among EU countries only Poland can boast more – 1.6 million. (UNHCR 2023).

Today, during the ongoing war, official Berlin like Kyiv's other Western allies continues to actively support Ukraine not only in military and financial challenges but also in humanitarian agenda. In particular, in terms of hosting and meeting the urgent needs of Ukrainian refugees on its territory. Most of them are women with children – 80 percent of their total number in Germany (*Brücker et al.* 2022).

# **The Economic Context of Forced Migration**

It is important to realise and keep in mind that among other fatal consequences, the war initiated by Russia has led to a drastic economic crisis in Ukraine. It has dramatically affected all kinds of businesses either small or big, private or state-owned. Lots of firms, companies and enterprises, especially from regions that suffered from the Russian invasion the most, were forced to shut down entirely. Those that had survived, later on faced various challenges trying to find new ways to operate with or without relocation throughout the country. One recent research indicates that about 78 percent of all businesses fully or partially lost the production capabilities they possessed before the full-scale aggression in February.

Surely, today businesses are slowly coming back to life, but the overall negative impact of the war on the Ukrainian economy remains critical. For instance, in 2022 the country's export shrank by almost a quarter, mainly due to the loss of the sea trade in agricultural as well as industrial products. The latter wasn't possible anymore because of the constant Russian terrorist attacks

on the southern regions of Ukraine with a developed network of seaports (*Romashchenko* 2023).

Besides, the economic disaster in Ukraine has also officially devalued hryvnia (Ukraine's national currency) by 25 percent against the US dollar and as a result caused an acceleration of consumer inflation to almost 22 percent. To top it all, in 2022 Forbes estimated the war has caused \$108 billion in damage to Ukraine's infrastructure. In 2023 this figure is even higher reaching almost \$150 billion as long as the Russian aggressor fiercely continues to destroy the remaining Ukrainian infrastructure (KSE 2023). These and other economic challenges caused by the invasion, according to the Ministry of Economy of Ukraine estimates, have led to a 30 percent drop in the Ukrainian economy (in fact - its GDP) by the end of 2022. That said one should bear in mind that the loss of one-third of the whole economy during such a short period is a real shock for any country even from G7, not to mention Ukraine.

On the individual level, all said above has led to a fast-moving impoverishment. Ukraine has already faced a tenfold increase in poverty which means that 1 in 4 would have been living in poverty by the end of 2022. Furthermore, the number of those who live in poverty in Ukraine, as the World Bank predicts, could even exceed 50 percent by the end of 2023. This will depend on the duration of the war, its intensity, spatial coverage and, without any doubt, financial assistance from abroad. Such support only from the EU and the USA (key donors), as the Kiel Institute for the World Economy estimates, is huge, exceeding \$100 billion as of July 2023 covering only the basic socio-economic needs of the invaded country (IfW Kiel 2023).

Thus, the situation in which Ukraine has found itself after an unprovoked invasion resembles to some extent an old market axiom when demand always gives birth to supply. On the one hand, the Ukrainian government, as a victim of Russia's devastating aggression, has lost its legal ability to reliably protect and economically support millions of its citizens, especially those from the regions in the north, south and east of the country. In such hopeless conditions, official Kyiv began to generate direct and indirect external demand for diverse help, including migration, humanitarian, socio-economic, and integration assistance as well as other types of support for Ukrainian refugees. The logic here is quite expected: if we, because of force majeure fail to fully safeguard and sustain our people, then perhaps our partner countries can lend a helping hand in times of war?! And they do lend that hand by creating a supply of various assistance and survival possibilities for the Ukrainian refugees abroad. As stated above, the German hand was among the first and remains the strongest.

# **Germany as a Safe Haven for Ukrainian Refugees**

The escape of the Ukrainians to Germany from the very beginning was facilitated by visa-free entry and temporary residency with no asylum procedures. The latter became possible due to the activation of the "Temporary Protection Directive" and inclusion in the basic security system under the Code of Social Law II (Sozialgesetzbuch II), at least until 4 March 2024 (Brücker et al. 2022). As a result, the legal conditions for the integration of Ukrainian refugees are quite complimentary, including, perhaps, the main advantage of not being subject to employment bans. Even staying outside the labour market at first, they receive higher social benefits and are also directly integrated into the support structures of the job centres. Such "welcome support" along with the fact that many Ukrainian refugees have relatives and/or friends in Germany created favourable conditions for more dynamic integration in the receiving country if compared to the arrival of other forced migrants in the past.

That can be proved by the first wave of nation-wide IAB-BiB/FReDA-BAMF-SOEP survey that

took place among thousands of Ukrainian refugees in Germany from August to October 2022, conducted by the Institute for Employment Research (IAB), the Federal Institute for Population Research (BiB), the Research Centre of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF-FZ), and the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) at the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW) within the recently initiated study "Ukrainian Refugees in Germany" (Brücker et al. 2022). Its results show that already a few months after their arrival, most Ukrainian refugees had found decent housing in the private sector. They tried to actively participate in the German labour market, with 18 percent of them already employed. Every second had attended or completed language courses. In addition, the children of Ukrainian forced migrants attended either German schools or, in the case of kindergarten age, daycare centres.

Of course, some problems for Ukrainian refugees in Germany still remained at the initial stage and were primarily related to the language issue, the need for faster integration into the local labour market through the transfer of educational qualifications obtained in Ukraine, better housing conditions and affordable medical as well as child care. All these and similar challenges are gradually being solved thanks to the assistance of the German government and the inherent persistence of Ukrainians. In our opinion, this can be evidenced again by the progress of recently arrived in the national labour market. According to the results of the second wave of the survey, which took place in the first quarter of 2023, one year after arrival the employment rate among Ukrainian refugees is already estimated at 28 percent (*Kosyakova et al.* 2023).

# **Outlines of a Probable Conflict of Interests**

Observing how Ukrainian refugees are integrating quite actively into German society and the labour market in particular, realising the scale of assistance in this on the part of the German authorities, it's about time to wonder - what will happen next, when the war in Ukraine is over? As we know from history, all military conflicts come to an end sooner or later. This one also will. But what's next? Will the end of the war lead to the automatic end of support of Ukrainian refugees in Germany? After all, will the absence or significant decrease in the aforementioned "demand" affect "supply"? We are convinced that the answer to all these and similar questions is negative. And it is this very fact that will lead to a hidden conflict of interests between Kyiv and Berlin after the war is over. See for yourself...

Even before the full-scale invasion, Ukraine was in a deep demographic knockdown: for many years, the mortality rate significantly exceeded the birth rate, and millions of Ukrainians left to live and work in other countries. In conditions where the population of the country has decreased by 20 percent – from 52 million people in 1991 to 42 million in 2022, it was impossible to speak positively about the prospects for its sustainable socio-economic development.

Obviously, the barbaric attack by the north-eastern neighbour has worsened the situation many times over, and one can only guess at the horrifying demographic hole in which Ukraine will find itself as a result of this war, having lost a part of the able-bodied and reproductive male population who died and were seriously wounded on the battlefields with the Russian invaders. The case of women and children – the future of any country – fleeing and settling abroad is no less painful for Ukraine. According to the latest estimates by the Ptoukha Institute for Demography and Social Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, the number of Ukrainians within the country may fluctuate between 26–35 million people by 2033. In the opinion of the Institute's director, Ella Libanova, the forecast of 35 million people, unfortunately, looks very optimistic. (*Vons* 23). That means, in the next few years Ukraine risks getting into a demographic crisis that no European country has ever seen before.

Given the above, the probable large-scale depopulation may threaten not only the prospects of Ukraine's recovery after the war but also the very existence of the country in the future. It is no secret that there are no states without people. Without them, the "Ukrainian economic miracle" we all hope for cannot happen either. After the end of hostilities, it is unlikely that there will be lots of foreign companies willing to invest in the reconstruction of the war-torn country, knowing that there is a catastrophic shortage of labour force in addition to all the other challenges existing in Ukrainian society (e.g. corruption, imperfect legislation, etc.).

It is therefore clear that for official Kiev, one of the first priorities after the war will be to try to bring back home the majority of refugees who fled to other countries. And here we come as close as possible to the mentioned conflict of interests between Ukraine and the countries receiving its citizens during the bloody war. Germany's case, in this sense, is quite illustrative.

Without any doubt, Germany provided, provides and will continue to provide diverse assistance to Ukrainian forced migrants on humanitarian grounds. But not solely on them. We can assume that by helping Ukrainians, Germany is also pursuing its national interests. The latter among others are related to the significant shortage of labour force in the local market. Nearly two million jobs in Germany were vacant in the last quarter of 2022. There was an acute shortage of healthcare workers, carpenters, butchers, and other labourers. Even the IT sector is experiencing difficulties with personnel, with the shortage of staff here estimated at 100 thousand workers. The country's authorities have already openly recognised that a lack of skilled workers could permanently hamper Germany's economic growth. Moreover, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, speaking at the East German Economic Forum in July 2023, argued that the country will not be able to cope with the existing labour shortage at the expense of its own employees (Rampe 2023).

This leads to the obvious conclusion that in the foreseeable future, Berlin and Kyiv will be on opposite sides of the barricades in the hidden struggle for Ukrainian refugees. Having invested so much in all respects in the integration of forced migrants, it is unlikely that Germany will give up on them overnight. Especially if we take into account the positive qualities of the Ukrainian labour force. Both waves of the IAB-BiB/FReDA-BAMF-SOEP survey unveiled that Ukrainian refugees have a high level of education with 72 percent obtaining a university degree. These people are young and feel quite healthy. Almost every second frequently spends time with Germans, not only with their countrymen. Of the unemployed Ukrainian refugees, 93 percent plan to find a paid job in Germany as soon as possible. The fact that 70 percent of these still unemployed migrants from Ukraine attend various language (integration) courses, as well as German educational institutions, may indicate the seriousness of their intentions to enter the labour market (Kosyakova et al. 2023).

Besides, every fourth of all Ukrainian refugees would like to stay in Germany forever. Given this, it would be very strange if Germany in its demanding situation were to abandon human capital with such potential and such an attitude.

Taking into account all of the above, the conflict of interests between Germany and Ukraine around refugees is quite expected or even inevitable. Now, the question is how to make sure that it doesn't go from hidden to open one with complaints voiced at the highest level? That is, how to guarantee that each of the parties at the end of the war receives its dividends from the situation that has developed?

We should admit that this conflict around refugees is unlikely to turn into an acute phase, as it did with Ukrainian grain. It should be recalled that in September 2023 Ukraine initiated the World Trade Organisation (WTO) dispute complaints against Poland, Slovak Republic and Hungary regarding the continued imposition of import bans by the three countries on certain agricultural products. Ukraine's aspiration to freely export its grain within the WTO rules has not found proper support in these countries, the governments of which are expected to take care of the interests of their agrarians first. As a result of this unnecessary trade conflict, relations between Kyiv and Warsaw (one of the main allies in the current war) have cooled somewhat, especially after harsh statements from both sides at the highest level.

No such proceedings should be expected in the case of forced migrants from Ukraine in Germany, as there are no interstate agreements on their sending and hosting. Of course, it is conceivable that at some stage the Ukrainian government might ask its German colleagues, but far from demanding, that Ukrainians should return home. This would require not much: the restriction of the Temporary Protection status to Ukrainian forced migrants in the host country, along with the cancellation of existing social support and integration programmes for them. However, it is easy to guess how official Berlin will behave in the event of such an appeal. National interests always remain a priority, so

Germany will continue to promote the deep integration of Ukrainian refugees into its society and labour market. We can only predict that those Ukrainians who fail to do so will leave the country after a while and perhaps return home.

By the way, the Ukrainian authorities have already started consulting with their EU partners on the possibility of extraditing and prosecuting the men who illegally left the country during the announced mobilisation. Even though no official request from Kyiv to Berlin on this issue has been received yet, authoritative German experts say that it is unlikely that such a probable request from the Ukrainian side will be satisfied (*Nedilko* 2023). This fact confirms our assumptions that Germany will not mass expel Ukrainian refugees for the benefit of Ukraine after the end of the war on its territory. On the contrary, the government will do everything in its power to keep for a long time in the country those Ukrainians who were able to integrate qualitatively into various spheres of German society.

# **Ways Out of a Possible Tension**

Does this mean that Ukraine must resign itself to the inevitability of losing the most valuable resource – its people? Unfortunately, we cannot do without the loss of human capital. The longer the war lasts and the longer Ukrainian refugees stay abroad, the more of them will be left behind forever. Despite this, it is vital for Ukraine to compete for every refugee. Strange as it may seem, Germany can help Ukraine in this.

Firstly, we believe that German investment in Ukraine not only after, but also during the war can have a positive impact on the return of Ukrainians home. Moreover, Berlin itself may be interested in this. Direct investments in Ukraine to restore and support its socio-economic potential along with the defense industry will increase the expansion and influence of German capital in Eastern Europe, as well as help to save on the wage bill and boost corporate profits. Obviously, wages at enterprises with German investments in Ukraine will be high by Ukrainian standards, but still lower than if such enterprises were opened and operated in Germany itself. We can even assume that in such a situation the German government would go so far as to encourage some Ukrainian refugees to return home to secure employment at its enterprises in Ukraine. But even if this does not happen, the establishment of modern German production facilities in Ukraine with the prospect of decent wages will bring back Ukrainian refugees from other less wealthy European countries. Without

any doubt, Kyiv will also be very interested in this. And it should be noted that Germany is already taking the first steps in this direction. In particular, German concern Rheinmetall announced in May 2023 its intention to set up a joint venture with Ukrainian state-owned conglomerate Ukroboronprom to manufacture and repair armoured vehicles in Ukraine (*Murray* 2023). A majority stake of 51 % in the new company will belong to Rheinmetall and the German producer will also provide management of the newly established joint venture on the territory of Ukraine.

Secondly, it cannot be ruled out that Germany, even though there is a constant need for a foreign labour force, will still have to encourage a certain part of Ukrainian forced migrants to return home after the end of the war. The country has its own experience with voluntary return programmes for Turkish migrants in the 80s of the 20th century. But as for the more recent Ukrainian case, we can advise to turn to the plans of Switzerland. The Swiss government is already developing a strategy for the return of Ukrainian refugees (SWI 2023). It foresees a departure window of between six and nine months once the S status (Temporary Protection) is lifted. Among other things the concept worked out by the State Secretariat for Migration in collaboration with cantonal authorities assumes the voluntary return of the majority (80 %) of Ukrainian refugees. To encourage that process initial financial assistance is considered. The possible amounts vary between CHF1000 and CHF4000 (EUR1050 and EUR4200) francs per person depending on the departure time the earlier you leave, the more money you get. A similar repatriation programme, albeit with its peculiarities, has recently been introduced in Norway. The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration provides Ukrainian refugees with NOK17500 (EUR1500) to return home and resettle there again (UDI 2023). However, if the Ukrainian eventually wants to return to Norway, she or he will then have to repay all or part of the repatriation grant received from the Norwegian authorities. Likely, over time the German government will also start developing a similar repatriation strategy, the implementation of which would be welcomed by Ukraine.

It is certainly good to hope for partners in the return of Ukrainian refugees, but we are convinced that the initiative in this matter should belong first and foremost to Ukraine itself. At the moment, we see several key incentives that, if used efficiently, could activate a reverse wave of migration of Ukrainians after the war. And in our opinion, the Ukrainian government could implement these incentives as part of nation-wide voluntary return programmes for refugees. On that basis, may we suggest just a few of the possible programmes of this kind.

Land and housing (real estate) upon return. The war, which is turning flourishing cities and towns into a post-apocalyptic wasteland, has deprived hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians of their homes. Obviously, with no place to return to, no one will. Consequently, refugees should be offered a real, not hypothetical, chance to get a new home again soon after returning to Ukraine. In this situation, providing yesterday's forced migrants with a free right to own a plot of land to build their own house could be a strong incentive for return. The land spoiled by the Russian invaders is now very plentiful in Ukraine. Sooner or later it will have to be re-developed, so why not involve the refugees themselves? Similarly, the state's guarantee to provide refugees with their own flats in new apartment blocks built

after the end of the war may also be a decisive factor in coming back home.

Within the framework of this programme, the possibility for refugees to obtain preferential (interest-free) loans should be developed and implemented separately. Such mortgages for the purchase of own housing should have the longest possible repayment period and offer some additional bonuses. For example, a family that has a child or several children during the mortgage period will be entitled to pay a lower amount on the loan.

One-off repatriation payments. In this case, the Ukrainian government can act similarly to its Swiss colleagues (see above) but instead of paying for leaving the country do the opposite – pay to return to it. At the same time, the amount of financial assistance may differ depending on the category of refugees who wish to become participants in the programme. Let us assume that one payment will be for family reunification (return of mum and child to dad) and another when only one person without family returns. The development of this programme could involve multiple payments to refugees over a period of time while they are looking for housing, employment, etc.

Investment boom as a prerequisite for homecoming. Implementation of various investment projects with large-scale attraction of foreign capital to Ukraine will help not directly, but indirectly to increase the flow of returning refugees in the medium and long run. Of course, gaining the support of foreign investors for Ukraine's postwar reconstruction will be a serious challenge for official Kyiv. For those willing to invest serious money in a war-torn country with a missing population, the government will need to find special arguments and guarantees. But if it succeeds, the possible "Ukrainian economic miracle" following the war will also imply a mass return of Ukrainians to their homeland.

On this path, the Ukrainian authorities can be given some, in our opinion, important advice. First, it is not worth postponing the development of ambitious investment programmes until after the war. It should be started right now (if not yesterday) when the outlines of the end of the invasion are not yet visible.

Second, in the search for the most courageous foreign investors at the initial stage, Kyiv should turn its attention to the numerous Ukrainian diaspora around the world. The existing ethnic, cultural and historical roots that any diaspora possesses concerning the country of origin very often cause a strong desire to invest back against all odds. Therefore, diaspora representatives often disregard objective risks and threats related to the socio-economic and

military-political situation in the country. Consequently, the diaspora can become a pioneer in the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine.

And in conclusion, the third. It will be incredibly difficult for Ukraine to cope with the complex reconstruction and implementation of the proposed repatriation programmes without the help of international financial organisations and partner countries. Germany can and should be among the leaders of this process. As mentioned above, it is also in its national interest to do so. After all, it will not only strengthen the strategic partnership between Berlin and Kyiv for many years to come but also establish Germany's creative leadership in Europe and a world on the threshold of global change.

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