

# Much ado about refugee entrepreneurship? Refugee vs economic migrants' entrepreneurial intention in Poland

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The objective of the article is to assess whether in Poland, Ukrainian war refugees exhibit more entrepreneurial intention than Ukrainian pre-war economic migrants.

**Research Design & Methods:** This article uses data from a panel study conducted in 2022 and 2023, encompassing 357 (1st wave) and 481 Ukrainian war refugees and pre-war economic migrants (2nd wave). The study employed decision tree analysis with the CRT (classification and regression) method on the 2023 sample data for data analysis.

**Findings:** Research findings indicate that regarding Ukrainians' entrepreneurial intention, their gender rather than the specific nature of their migration status holds significance – whether as an economic migrant or a refugee.

**Implications & Recommendations:** We suggest that intersectionality and the associated gender gap require close examination rather than setting the sole focus on the migrant or refugee status. An increased emphasis should lie on providing entrepreneurship guidance that is human-centred and, in so doing, female- and family-centred.

**Contribution & Value Added:** Prior research has not thoroughly explored the differences between pre-war economic migrants and refugees regarding their engagement in entrepreneurship and their achievements within this domain. This article taps into this research gap by conducting a comparative analysis of two distinct cohorts of migrants from Ukraine in Poland.

**Article type:** research article

**Keywords:** refugee entrepreneurship; migrant entrepreneurship; entrepreneurial intention; Ukrainian refugees vs economic migrants

**JEL codes:** L26, O15, F22

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## INTRODUCTION

We undertook a comprehensive comparative analysis of entrepreneurial intention within the Ukrainian refugee and pre-war economic migrant communities in Poland – a topic that has received limited attention in existing research. According to McMullen *et al.* (2021), we define entrepreneurial intention as a key predictor of entrepreneurial activity (Obschonka *et al.*, 2010). It refers to the conscious state of mind guiding behaviour towards planned entrepreneurial action in the future, which may be imminent, indeterminate, or never realised (Thompson, 2009). Beliefs and perceptions regarding starting a new venture shape entrepreneurial intention, converting into behaviour unless hindered by environmental or context conditions or conflicting intentions (David & Terstriep, 2023; McMullen & Shepherd, 2006). This is commonly achieved by recognising and capitalising on fresh opportunities. Such activities span a spectrum that includes but is not restricted to, pinpointing opportunities, acquiring resources, embracing risk, and fostering innovation (Wei & Duan, 2023; Burger-Helmchen, 2008). The

focus on Poland, a primary destination for both groups alongside Germany, adds significant relevance to the study (Borkowski *et al.*, 2021; Andrejuk, 2019).

The main motivation of our research was to discern variations in entrepreneurial initiation tendencies between two cohorts, challenging the traditional classification that differentiates migrant (mainly referring to economically driven migration) and refugee entrepreneurship in the existing literature. In alignment with recent studies on refugee entrepreneurship, as exemplified by Newman *et al.* (2023), our investigation emphasised the limited exploration of differences in entrepreneurial tendencies and success between refugees and economic migrants. A critical knowledge gap exists concerning whether refugees demonstrate higher levels of entrepreneurial intention compared to economic migrants and the investigation of underlying determinants (Newman *et al.*, 2023).

Insights from the scarce literature on Ukrainian refugees contribute to a compelling narrative. On the one hand, literature on Ukrainian business activity in Poland before the full-scale Russian invasion (Andrejuk, 2019) suggests a surprisingly low entrepreneurial intention among those individuals. On the other hand, Ukrainians relocating to Poland after February 24, 2022, exhibited substantial entrepreneurial experience before their relocation, as evidenced by studies like Kohlenberger *et al.* (2023), resulting in an ‘entrepreneurial boom’ post-2022 attributed to the transformative impact of the special Polish law on assistance to Ukrainians enacted in 2022 (Act of March 12, 2022, on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine in Connection with the Armed Conflict on the Territory of that State). This legislation significantly enhanced the legal framework for both Ukrainian pre-war economic migrants and refugees. Notably, Ukrainians can now establish self-employment from 2022 onwards, providing a unique context for many individuals previously hindered by legal barriers to embark on entrepreneurial ventures. However, the question of whether there are differences in entrepreneurial intention between these two groups largely remains unanswered.

Therefore, and against this background, we posed the following research question:

**RQ1:** Do Ukrainian refugees show higher entrepreneurial intentions in Poland than Ukrainian pre-war economic migrants?

In recent years, research on refugees’ engagement in entrepreneurial activities has become a more prominent topic in academic discourse, mainly referred to as ‘refugee entrepreneurship’ (Newman *et al.*, 2023; Abebe, 2023; David & Zaghaw, forthcoming; Freiling *et al.*, 2019). The European refugee crisis (which in the general understanding refers to the Syrian war and the movement from the Middle East), now colliding with the refugee movement from Ukraine, explains the increased interest. A scoping review conducted using Google Scholar with the terms ‘refugee entrepreneurship’ for 2015 to 2023 resulted in 62 reviewed articles. Of these, only three were issued before the refugee crisis of 2015-17, while 58 were published from 2018 to 2023. These findings align with the observations of Heilbrunn and Iannone (2020) and Abebe (2023), who highlight the escalating academic interest and a notable expansion of scholarly research on refugee entrepreneurship.

Alongside this phenomenon, migration movements that were previously concentrated in Western Europe are progressively expanding to Eastern Europe (OECD, 2023). Consequently, Poland is witnessing significant changes in its immigration landscape and has emerged as a newly developed country of residence (CoR). Notably, in 2021, Poland issued over 790 000 first residence permits, constituting 27% of all permits granted within the EU during that period (Statista, 2023). By February 2022, approximately 2 million foreigners were estimated to reside in Poland, with the majority – around 1.35 million – of Ukrainians (Duszczuk & Kaczmarczyk, 2022; Statista, 2023). We may categorise them into two groups: the first comprises pre-war migrants who arrived in Poland before February 24, 2022, mainly for employment purposes (hereafter referred to as *pre-war economic migrants*). The second group comprises forced migrants who sought refuge in Poland to escape the warfare in Ukraine (hereafter referred to as *refugees*). We refer to the group of Ukrainians before February 24, 2022, as pre-war economic migrants, but we are aware that the conflict, started in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and the rebellion in Donbas. Consequently, some of the respondents who arrived as ‘economic’ migrants to Poland had been internally displaced due to the military conflict in Ukraine. However, since they were not yet considered refugees at that time, we will continue to use the same designation as pre-war economic migrants.

Both economic migrants and refugees seeking to integrate into the labour market find initiating a business a viable option (Abebe, 2023). In 2022, Ukrainians established nearly 16 thousand one-person companies in Poland, which accounted for 6% of all established businesses last year. In the first six months of 2023, nearly 14 thousand of them arrived, which is almost as many as in the whole of last year. As a result, almost every tenth company established in Poland was Ukrainian. From the outbreak of war in Ukraine until the end of June 2023, 29.4 thousand Ukrainian sole proprietorships were registered in the CEIDG database (PIE, 2023). Despite these facts, it remains unclear whether scholars' interest in refugee entrepreneurship is triggered and results from the growing public discussion on refugee integration or whether it originates from observations that refugees display particular entrepreneurial behaviour (Betts *et al.*, 2017).

In what follows, we will depart from the theoretical discourse on refugee entrepreneurship, aiming to refine the concept and raise queries about its legitimacy as a distinct research area (section 2). Following this, we will outline our chosen research methodology (section 3). To gain a more comprehensive understanding, we will present the decision tree analysis using the CRT method, which enabled us to scrutinise variables pertinent to the phenomenon (section 4). In section 5, we will present and discuss the study's findings. Finally, we will conclude by acknowledging specific limitations and delving into the implications (section 5).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Reviews by Heilbrunn and Iannone (2020), Abebe (2023), and Newman *et al.* (2023) contribute to the rapidly evolving field of refugee entrepreneurship. As indicated by Newman *et al.* (2023), the literature suggests that as self-employed individuals displaced from their country of origin (CoO), refugee entrepreneurs differ from other minority entrepreneurs, such as economic migrants (Abebe, 2023). Various factors, including individual and business characteristics, underpin this distinction (cf. Kunz, 1973). Scholars like Hartmann and Philipp (2022) and Hugo (2013) argue that the migration process distinguishes refugee and migrant entrepreneurs, emphasising the potentially traumatic, alienating, and isolating aspects of refugee migration (Wauters & Lambrecht, 2006). Bakker and McMullen (2023) explore cultural diversity factors through inclusive entrepreneurship, while Yeshe *et al.* (2022) and Desai *et al.* (2021) highlight challenges faced by refugee entrepreneurs in countries of resettlement including identifying opportunities, acquiring resources, and overcoming structural barriers like discrimination and segregation in local entrepreneurial ecosystems. Ranabahu *et al.* (2022) and Heilbrunn (2019) have identified structural advantages and disadvantages specific to refugee entrepreneurship compared to other migrant groups.

However, despite these studies, there is still a need for a more nuanced understanding of this phenomenon (David & Zaghaw, forthcoming). Before the surge in research after 2018, refugee entrepreneurs were typically grouped into publications on migrant entrepreneurship based on shared characteristics, such as nationality or common CoR (*e.g.* Haghghi & Lynch, 2012; Ram *et al.*, 2008), or included in broader groups of migrants, such as new migrants in the UK (Jones *et al.*, 2010) or in the Netherlands (Kloosterman *et al.*, 2016). Such studies assumed that refugees were part of the study population, leading to implicit rather than explicit inclusion of refugee entrepreneurs in migrant entrepreneurship research over the years.

To better differentiate refugee entrepreneurs, we will delve into the distinctions between migrant and refugee entrepreneurs.

### Structural Advantages and Disadvantages of Refugee vs Economic Migrant Entrepreneurs

Forced and disruptive separation from family and community life, strenuous mobility journeys, and unplanned country resettlement are some identified challenges refugees face (Yeshe *et al.*, 2022; Sossou *et al.*, 2008). These experiences often lead to forced resource scarcity, including losing financial and physical assets during flight and limited finances before leaving the CoO (David & Terstriep, 2023; Bizri, 2017; Gold, 1992). Psychological trauma resulting from war exposure, threats to physical safety, violence, prolonged family separation, and the destruction of homes and properties can also

limit refugees' cognitive capacity thus impacting their ability to engage in self-employment or other economic activities (Gold, 1992). Consequently, when they participate in entrepreneurial endeavours, they recognise a potential short-term or enduring decline in material assets and social capital, along with a devaluation of resources tied to their CoO contexts.

Like economic migrants, refugees face discrimination, segregation, loss of identity and legitimacy, and power (Yeshi *et al.*, 2022; Desai *et al.*, 2021). Strict regulatory regimes and institutional voids – incredibly shortly after refugees' arrival – can further hinder their economic participation (Heilbrunn, 2019). Often there exists a structural mismatch between refugees' skills and the CoRs' labour markets in forced migration contexts. The percentage of employees with culture/country-specific skills, who would not have left their CoO under normal circumstances, tends to be higher among refugees than among economic migrants (Gold, 1992). Moreover, blocked labour market mobility due to the limited transferability of professional degrees, especially when moving from less to more regulated CoRs, presents another barrier (Gold & Kibria, 1993). As mentioned, refugees also experience a loss of connection to their resource base in the CoO, as social links to their home country cannot be easily activated (Wauters & Lambrecht, 2006). Moreover, compared to economic migrants, scholars argue that refugees often have smaller social capital in the CoR (Gold, 1992; Wauters & Lambrecht, 2006).

On the contrary, some scholars identified the advantages of refugee entrepreneurs. They identified resilience, encompassing individual, relational, and institutional aspects as a critical factor in refugee entrepreneurship (Heilbrunn, 2019; Shepherd *et al.*, 2020; Shepherd *et al.*, 2022). Alongside resilience, the bricolage attitude, which involves utilising limited resources creatively to engage in entrepreneurial activities, has also been recognised as a crucial skill for refugee entrepreneurs (Heilbrunn, 2019; Kwong *et al.*, 2018). Interestingly, trauma and psychological impacts resulting from the refugee experience may potentially foster entrepreneurial thinking, as evidenced by the emergence of 'venture ideal novelty' and 'entrepreneurial rigour' (David & Terstriep, 2023; Wauters & Lambrecht, 2006). Moreover, refugee entrepreneurs often create blended value, complementing economic value with social and cultural outcomes in ethnic/co-ethnic and local host communities (Ranabahu *et al.*, 2022). A further characteristic of refugee entrepreneurs which they share with migrant entrepreneurs lies in their potential for transnationality. Transnationality involves establishing social and economic connections within CoR and CoO, as well as tapping into diaspora networks around the world as valuable resources (Ram *et al.*, 2022; Halilovich & Efendić, 2019; Sandberg *et al.*, 2019; Williams & Krasniqi, 2018). These factors highlight the multifaceted aspects that shape refugees' entrepreneurial endeavours.

When comparing refugees to migrant entrepreneurs, there are differences. Refugees are individuals who have been forced to flee their home countries due to persecution, war, or violence and did not decide actively to change the CoR. They typically have a specific legal status as refugees (at least at the beginning of their refugee journey) granted by the CoR or international organisations, based on the recognition of their need for protection. This can also affect refugee resources, which seem to be limited and may initiate entrepreneurial activities as a means of survival and integration into their new communities. However, the comparison shows that refugee entrepreneurs share more rather than less similarities with migrant businesspeople. Thus, to gain more insights into the entrepreneurial endeavours of both groups we hypothesised in the study's context:

- H1:** There is a difference between Ukrainian refugees and Ukrainian pre-war economic migrants regarding their entrepreneurial intention in Poland.
- H2:** The status of being a refugee has an impact on individuals' entrepreneurial intention.

Aligned with the findings of Newman *et al.* (2023), employing a quantitative methodology to examine refugee entrepreneurship may reveal heightened entrepreneurial intention. This approach has the potential to elucidate and substantiate the rationale behind considering refugee entrepreneurship as a distinct and independent research field.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Design and Sampling

This study adopted a quantitative research design for two reasons. Firstly, we aimed to present structured quantitative evidence that identifies differences in migrants' and refugees' entrepreneurial intentions. For this purpose, we divided respondents into two groups based on their declared date of arrival in Poland. We designated individuals present in Poland before February 24, 2022, as pre-war economic migrants, while those arriving after this date – as refugees based on their official status according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). As defined by the UNHCR, a refugee is someone forced to flee their country due to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons such as race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Refugees typically seek safety and protection in another country, meeting criteria that make the term appropriate for describing individuals compelled to leave their home country due to conflict, persecution, or other hardships. However, it is crucial to approach this terminology with sensitivity, considering the experiences of those affected and ensuring language that upholds their dignity and humanity. In cases of uncertainty about legal status or individual preferences, using more general terms like 'displaced persons' or 'individuals who have fled conflict' is advisable. Moreover, we are aware that in the Polish context, Ukrainian forced migrants who entered Poland after the Russian invasion are not officially referred to as refugees but as forced migrants. Nonetheless, we decided that the priority here was on the term 'refugees' to make both groups more distinctive, while also acknowledging the importance of using language that is respectful and considerate of the experiences of the individuals being referred to.

The survey inquired about the type of employment in Poland with none of the respondents in the surveyed group indicating business ownership at the time of the survey. Consequently, we queried participants regarding their entrepreneurial intentions in Poland. This question aimed to capture the future aspirations of both refugees and economic migrants. Identifying factors underlying possible differences necessitates thorough quantitative examination. Secondly, the decision to employ a quantitative approach stems from the specific research inquiries being addressed, as they inherently pertain to matters of change. As Bono and McNamara (2011) put forward, a quantitative approach, including panel data or experimental designs, is vital for queries involving changes. As migration flows a subject to change, measurement over an extended timeframe – challenging to gather through qualitative methods – is necessary. Hence, we consider a quantitative approach more appropriate for our study.

We conducted the panel study in 2022 and 2023 on the same population cohorts: Ukrainian (voluntary) pre-war economic migrants and Ukrainian refugees (who came to Poland after the war began). In 2022, the research sample (n=357) included 162 pre-war economic migrants and 195 refugees. In 2023, the research sample (n=481) included 214 pre-war economic migrants and 267 refugees. Respondents lived all over Poland. Table 1 presents the sample's structure.

Most of the sample consisted of women, constituting over 90% of the respondents, particularly among refugees. In a specific study in Kraków (Cracow), the proportion of women among Ukrainian refugees reached 97%, with an average respondent age of 39 (Kohlenberger *et al.*, 2023). Another Polish survey, conducted through social media, reported an approximate 80% representation of female respondents among refugees (Górny & Kaczmarczyk, 2023). In a broader context, according to Statistics Poland (SP), about 65% of protected migrants from Ukraine are women, with approximately 52% falling within the working-age bracket (SP, 2023). We selected the participants in both waves through a purposeful sampling method using a research panel. This panel invites registered respondents to participate, and upon completion, they receive points that can be exchanged for monetary rewards. The sample consisted of registered users who found the offered rewards satisfactory for their participation. We chose this approach because of the challenges in recruiting participants for research purposes (migrants are considered a hard-to-survey group). The research is challenging in terms of sampling, identifying people to survey, reaching respondents, and implementing the survey (convincing them to take part in the survey and carrying it out (Tourangeau, 2014). While the results cannot be statistically generalised, we believe they still provide valuable insights for the population under study.

**Table 1. Economic migrants vs refugees in Poland between 2022 and 2023**

Variables			1st wave (2022)		2nd wave (2023)	
			Economic migrants	Refugees	Economic migrants	Refugees
Gender	Female	Number	125	189	159	252
		%	77.2	96.9	74.3	94.4
	Male	Number	37	6	55	15
		%	22.8	3.1	25.7	5.6
Age	18-29	Number	46	35	71	72
		%	28.4	17.9	33.2	27.0
	30-44	Number	70	111	111	161
		%	43.2	56.9	51.9	60.3
	45-59	Number	44	38	28	32
		%	27.2	19.5	13.1	12.0
	< 60	Number	2	11	4	2
		%	1.2	5.6	1.9	0.9

Source: own study.

### Data Analysis

We conducted the statistical analysis using IBM SPSS, employing decision trees with the CRT method on the 2023 sample data. Decision tree analysis proves helpful in identifying groups' characteristics. The dataset used had explicit comebacks from respondents regarding their willingness or unwillingness to initiate a business. Unfortunately, we could not perform a similar analysis for the 2022 sample due to many ambiguous answers, making it unsuitable for decision tree analysis. Instead, we used descriptive statistics for the 2022 sample. Consequently, the dataset used for the decision tree analysis was relatively small, with 307 respondents, resulting in a relatively low-risk level of 0.235. The created model achieved a 76.5% accuracy in correctly predicting responses. However, it was notably more effective in predicting declarations of reluctance to initiate a business (93.5%) than readiness to create one (35.6%). Consequently, the model was better at diagnosing barriers rather than facilitators for initiating a business.

**Table 2. Classification matrix (tree construction algorithm: CRT; dependent variable: REC\_FIRMA)**

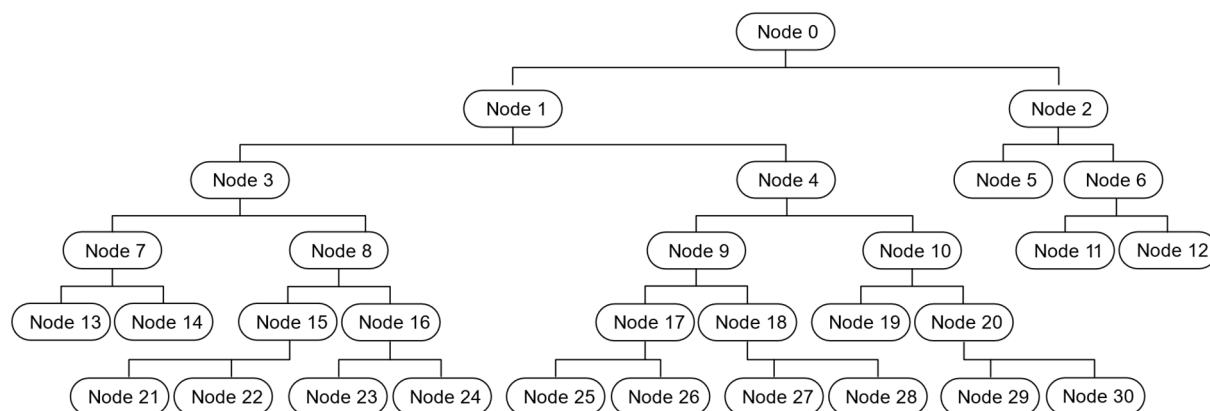
Observed	Predicting		
	Yes	No	% of correct
Yes	32	5	35.6%
No	14	203	93.5%
Total percentage	15.0%	85.0%	76.5%

Source: own study.

The model incorporates several variables, including:

1. *Gender*: Categorized as male or female.
2. *Language competencies*: A quantitative variable rated on a scale of 0 to 6, indicating self-assessed language proficiency in Polish (speaking, writing, and reading).
3. *Early parenthood*: A binary variable indicating whether respondents have children younger than three years (yes/no).
4. *Age*: The age of respondents at the time of the study.
5. *Residence*: A dichotomous variable representing the desire for permanent settlement in Poland or other situations, such as return to Ukraine, further migration, or unspecified plans.
6. *Societal climate (Poles' opinions about Ukrainians)*: An ordinal variable with three categories reflecting the generalised attitude of Poles toward Ukrainian citizens, *i.e.* positive, neutral, or negative.
7. *Education*: An ordinal variable with three categories, indicating respondents' educational level – higher, secondary, or vocational/lower education.
8. *Migrant type*: A dichotomous variable distinguishing voluntary economic pre-war migrants (who arrived before February 24, 2022) from displaced people (refugees who arrived after February 24, 2022).

The graphical representation of the decision tree (Figure 1) does not include the education level due to the CRT algorithm's selective approach, which prioritises variables that provide the most significant benefits in constructing the tree structure. However, education remains relevant and interacts with other variables in the model.



**Figure 1. Exemplary decision tree structure**  
Source: own elaboration.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As illustrated in the literature review, few studies examine whether refugee entrepreneurship warrants being considered a distinct research field due to refugees exhibiting a higher intention to entrepreneurship leading to business creation. Hence, we tapped into this research gap by investigating the potential differences between Ukrainian pre-war economic migrants and Ukrainian refugees regarding their entrepreneurial intentions.

Our results show that in 2022, approximately 60% of the surveyed refugees and 33% of pre-war economic migrants had no intention to initiate a business. Among pre-war economic migrants, more than 47% were undecided about starting a business in the future, and nearly 36% of refugees shared a similar view. A small group of respondents expressed their desire to initiate their own business. Notably, the response 'no' was more prevalent among pre-war economic migrants (19.1%) than refugees (7.2%).

**Table 3. Ukrainian migrant and refugees' desire to initiate a business: The comparison of 2022 and 2023 results**

Answers		1st wave (2022)		2nd wave (2023)	
		Economic migrants	Refugees	Economic migrants	Refugees
Yes	Number	31	14	52	38
	%	19.1	7.2	24.3	14.2
No	Number	54	111	77	140
	%	33.3	59.9	36.0	52.4
I don't know	Number	77	70	85	89
	%	47.5	35.9	39.7	33.3
Total	Number	162	195	214	267
	%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: own study.

The 2023 survey revealed significant changes in the entrepreneurial intention among pre-war economic migrants and refugees. The percentage of pre-war economic migrants expressing a positive response increased slightly more than 24%, while among refugees, 14.2% indicated a willingness to start their own business. However, it is essential to note that the proportion of pre-war economic migrants not intending to start a business also slightly increased. On the other hand, the percentage of refugees with 'no' answers decreased slightly to 52.4%. A considerable portion of undecided respondents accounted for

around 40% of pre-war economic migrants and over 33% of refugees. Having a social network in terms of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) seems also an important factor that may influence the decision to set up a business. In the surveyed group in 2023, more than 73% of the pre-war economic migrants and slightly more than 65% of the refugees had close family, distant relatives, or friends in Poland. The research methodology employed decision trees and included all relevant variables, but the graphical representation in Figure 1 omitted the education level. Despite its correlation with the willingness to stay in Poland, education had little impact on entrepreneurial intention. Instead, gender, language competence, and having young children were more influential in explaining the results. Furthermore, the model considered the categorisation of migrants as either pre-war economic migrants or refugees. However, it was determined to be the least impactful factor among the variables analysed.

**Table 4. Weights of variables included in the analysis**

Independent variable	Validity	Standardised validity
Gender	0.034	100.0%
Language	0.032	94.4%
Early parenthood	0.021	62.6%
Age	0.019	55.4%
Residence plans	0.019	55.3%
Societal climate	0.007	21.4%
Education	0.004	10.8%
Type of migrant	0.003	9.6%

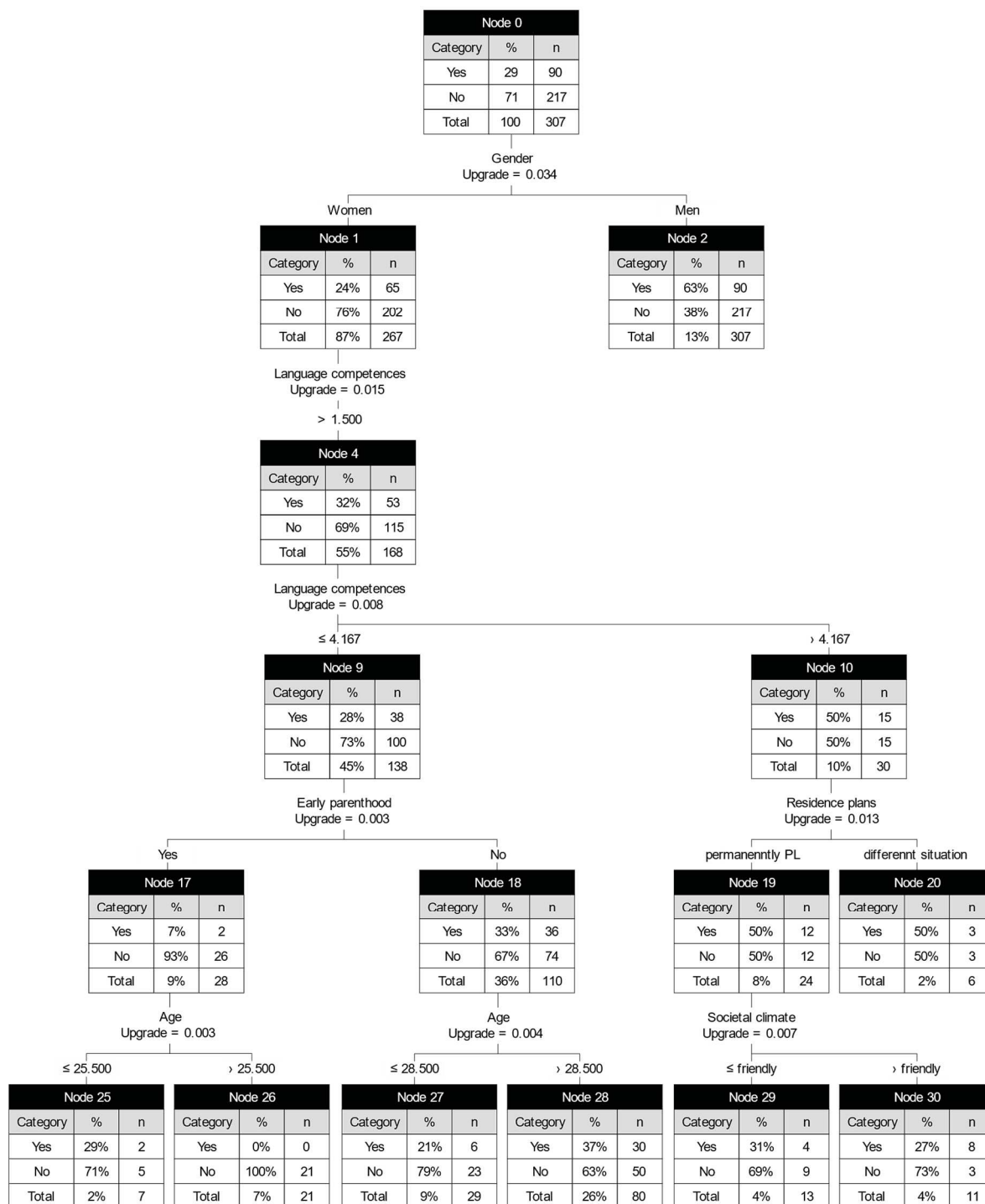
Source: own study.

We analysed factors influencing entrepreneurial intention among Ukrainian citizens considering the independent variables outlined in Table 4. We divided the decision tree outlined in the methodology section into three smaller parts for clarity of presentation. However, it is essential to note that these sections are interconnected and collectively form a unified analysis rather than three separate and distinct analyses.

The study revealed that gender significantly impacted the groups' entrepreneurial intention (Figure 2 and Figure 4). Men showed a significantly higher interest in becoming entrepreneurs than women (nodes 1 and 2). Moreover, the model supported the feminist perspective, showing that having children reduced the likelihood of women wanting to start a business (nodes 17, 18). This finding is particularly noteworthy in the context of the influx of refugee women from Ukraine, who are often accompanied by their children and in the context of intersectionality studies (Carastathis, 2016). The highest proportion of individuals interested in initiating a business consists of men with children under three (node 2) – Figure 2. These individuals seem to experience pressures related to household responsibilities. However, the research does not definitively answer whether this is connected to their current occupational position. It is possible that some of them might be unemployed or dissatisfied with their earnings. Due to the limited number of cases and the lack of detailed exploration of their employment quality, this remains a matter of speculation.

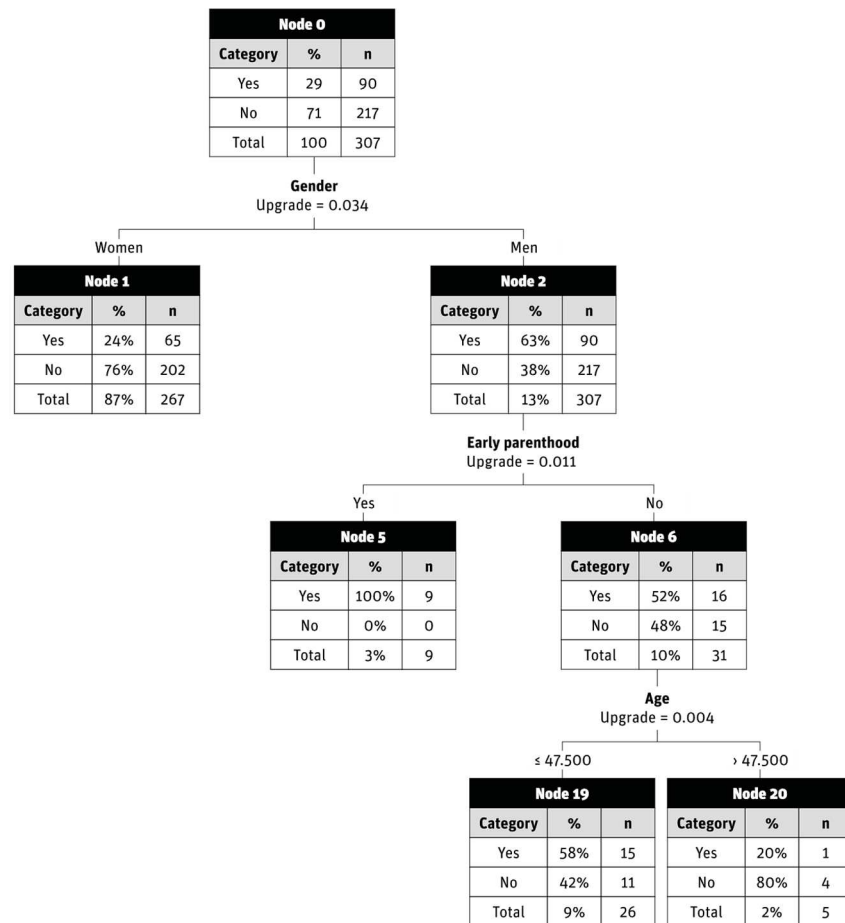
Noteworthy, we observed a relatively high interest in entrepreneurship among men without offspring, particularly those in their prime working years, typically before age 50. We could attribute this to their higher intention for risk-taking, which tends to be more prominent among younger individuals. Unexpectedly, language competence emerged as another crucial variable for entrepreneurial declarations. The age of migrants and their plans for permanent settlement in Poland also played a significant role in the entrepreneurial intention. However, we found the division between pre-war migrants and refugees showing a relatively strong relationship in entrepreneurial intention to be linked not only to the nature of residence but also to language competence. Refugees with better language skills were likelier to engage in entrepreneurship (node 21, 22).





**Figure 2. Decision tree structure: Section 1**  
Source: own elaboration.

At the same time, pre-war economic migrants with lower language competence were also inclined to do so (node 23, 24), possibly due to established social connections – Figure 3. Furthermore, the study indicates that migrants' perception of a positive societal climate reflected in Poles' positive attitudes towards them was influential. Positive emotions related to the openness of the host society were particularly significant, especially for women with excellent language skills who aimed to stay permanently in Poland (node 30), possibly including students or graduates of Polish universities. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of how foreigners perceive the attitudes of Poles in their decision-making process.

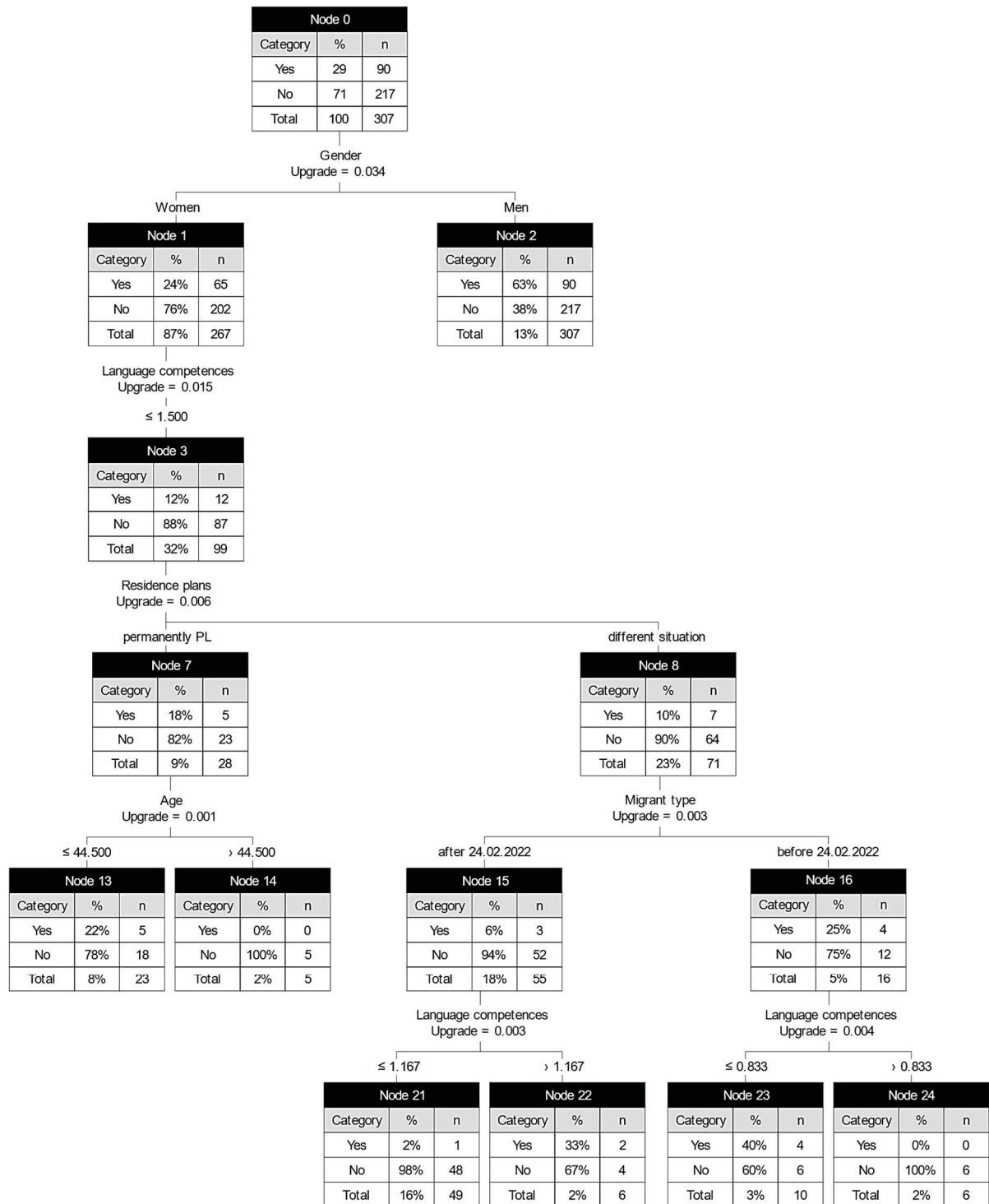


**Figure 3. Decision tree structure: Section 2**

Source: own elaboration.

Our results suggest the type of migrant status – pre-war economic migrant vs refugee – is subordinate when it comes to the entrepreneurial intention. Thus, we rejected **H1**: There is a difference between Ukrainian refugees and Ukrainian pre-war economic migrants regarding their entrepreneurial activities in Poland. This is because no significant differences became evident. Instead, surprisingly, we found a significant positive relationship between linguistic competence and entrepreneurial intention. These competencies tend to be higher among economic migrants. Economic migrants often have a shuttle migration pattern connected to legal regulations, and they gradually become familiar with the language during their subsequent visits to Poland. In contrast, refugees never had to deal with the Polish language, and their relatively short period of stay does not allow for a thorough acquaintance with it. The language barrier prevents them from fully capitalising on their resources, making them dependent on diaspora communities, intermediaries, and support institutions.

Finally, we also rejected **H2**: The status of being a refugee has an impact on the entrepreneurial activities of individuals to initiate a business. The status of a migrant, whether it be an economic migrant or a refugee, seems not to play a role in entrepreneurial intention. Instead, our study unintentionally exposed that the family status quo and the connection to intersectionality are more influential factors. In detail, the study revealed that individuals in the phase of early parenthood, *i.e.* those with children under the age of three, exhibited a favourable inclination towards entrepreneurial intention among men. Conversely, among analysed women, those without children displayed a higher tendency to venture into entrepreneurship. In line with earlier studies (Naldi *et al.*, 2021), we can attribute this to the care work obligations of women in early parenthood, which starkly contrasts with their male counterparts.



**Figure 4. Decision tree structure: Section 3**  
Source: own elaboration.

Summing up, the study identified three main factors for the entrepreneurial intention among the analysed groups, which are gender, societal climate, and migrants' age. The legal framework is also important when deciding to set up a business. We examined only entrepreneurial intention. Therefore, we could not determine whether the intention has resulted in the actual establishment of businesses. However, further studies have demonstrated that, due to the new law, Ukrainians, in general, have established more ventures after 2022 in Poland (Kohlenberger *et al.*, 2023). A special law (introduced in 2022, after

the war in Ukraine) gives Ukrainians the possibility to pursue self-employment without any constraints (Act of March 12, 2022, on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine in Connection with the Armed Conflict on the Territory of that State). This legal evolution represents a notable departure from past limitations and also provides opportunities for numerous pre-war economic migrants previously impeded by regulations.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study's initial question was: Do Ukrainian refugees show higher entrepreneurial activities in Poland than Ukrainian pre-war economic migrants?

In general, our finding reveals no substantial differences between the two groups. Instead, the results reveal that it is rather a gender that impacts entrepreneurial intention. Distinct entrepreneurial inclinations emerge between pre-war economic male migrants, who often gravitate towards sectors like construction, and female migrants, particularly refugees, displaying a heightened propensity for personal service domains such as beauty care and catering. Customisation of advice and support is imperative for effective assistance. It is crucial to note that this disparity does not imply equal market access for refugees compared to other entrepreneurs, emphasising the need for tailored, context-specific assistance when warranted. Consequently, in formulating programmes aimed at supporting migrant and refugee entrepreneurs, policymakers should prioritise considerations of gender dynamics and adopt an intersectional perspective, avoiding an exclusive focus on migration status. In detail, the findings suggest the following policy implications:

(1) **Gender-tailored programmes:** Policymakers should create targeted programmes for male and female migrant and refugee entrepreneurs, addressing distinct preferences, challenges, and opportunities based on gender. (2) **Intersectional policies:** Policymakers are advised to adopt an intersectional policy approach that considers both gender and migration status, recognising diverse experiences among migrants. (3) **On-demand advice and assistance:** An on-demand, tailored advice and assistance considering the diversity in entrepreneurial preferences might be offered. This may involve customising support services, training programmes, and funding opportunities for different migrant groups. (4) **Empowering female migrants:** Future initiatives should prioritise promoting female migrant and refugee entrepreneurship, addressing gender imbalances. Efforts should focus on overcoming intersectionality challenges and fostering an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem empowering migrant and refugee women and families with children. (4) **Digitalisation:** Policymakers should promote digital literacy and create an environment conducive to online business growth, enabling refugees and female entrepreneurs to access broader audiences and expand market reach through cost-effective digital platforms and social media.

Our study was limited to entrepreneurial intent rather than actual business establishment. Furthermore, there is a gender imbalance in the study, and we are aware that some of the pre-war economic migrants arrived in Poland before 2022 also for political reasons. However, we found no evidence that Ukrainian refugees exhibit a higher entrepreneurial intention than the Ukrainian pre-war migrant group. – on the contrary. Therefore, scholars need to conduct more research in the future in this area to gain further insight into the phenomenon of refugee and migrant entrepreneurship, their similarities and differences as business initiators and business leaders. Therefore, future research should gather comprehensive data on migrants, including social capital, for deeper analysis. The observed gender imbalance, with a higher representation of women, warrants further investigation. Future studies might explore reasons for the underrepresentation of men in entrepreneurship and examine intersectionality within male-dominated markets. This research agenda would enhance our understanding and support female refugee entrepreneurship. Moreover, a comparison between different ethnicities in entrepreneurship might be of interest – for instance, Ukrainian refugees and Syrian refugees. Moreover, technological advancements and digitalisation are transformative for levelling the entrepreneurial playing field, especially for minorities and refugees. Leveraging these advances can empower refugees and female entrepreneurs to operate businesses efficiently, even remotely.

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**Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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