

The determinants of economic integration among Ukrainian forced and economic migrants in Poland

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The article aims to analyse the key determinants of multiple dimensions of economic integration among Ukrainians in Poland, including employment status, job quality, skill matching, job satisfaction, and perceived financial situation, with a comparison between forced and economic migrants.

Research Design & Methods: The study draws on a large cross-sectional CAWI survey of Ukrainians living in Poland (1 082 observations), conducted between March and April 2025. We designed the survey to enable comparisons of the economic performance of individuals across economic/forced migration status and urban/central/rural/remote areas. We constructed post-stratification weights to enhance representativeness and reliability of the study results according to voivodship, sex, and age based on the Polish PESEL register. The econometric analysis employed logit models.

Findings: In line with the expectations, the study demonstrates that the Ukrainian forced migrants exhibit lower levels of integration than economic migrants. Employment is particularly constrained for women with young children, despite overall high participation rates. Social networks exert positive effects: Polish contacts enhance employment prospects and job-skill matching.

Implications & Recommendations: The evidence underscores that women with young children face particular barriers to entering the labour market. Therefore, expanding access to preschools and maintaining child benefits are essential policy measures for fostering economic mobility and supporting refugee employment.

Contribution & Value Added: This study provides new insights into the economic integration of Ukrainians in Poland, an increasingly important destination country within the EU. It contributes to the literature by comparing economic migrants and forced migrants from the same ethnic group within a single national context, while explicitly incorporating the urban-rural settlement dimension.

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INTRODUCTION

Before 2015, Poland, with less than 150 thousand registered immigrants, was a largely homogeneous country with one of the lowest numbers of immigrants in the European Union (UDSC, 2025). Foreign-born individuals represented less than 0.05% of its total population (Brzozowski & Pędzwiatr, 2014). However, after the Revolution of Dignity in 2014 and the subsequent Russian military aggression in the Donetsk, Luhansk and Crimea regions, the economic situation in Ukraine began to deteriorate. Consequently, in the following years, Poland began receiving substantial inflows of predominantly economic migrants from Ukraine, complemented with some persons formerly internally displaced by the Russian invasion. The situation intensified after the Russian full-

scale invasion on Ukraine on 24 February 2022, which triggered a mass influx of Ukrainian forced migrants. Currently, Poland hosts approximately 2.1 to 2.3 million Ukrainians (Duszczuk *et al.*, 2023; Wiśniewski *et al.*, 2024), comprising both economic migrants who arrived before 2022 and forced migrants displaced by the full-scale invasion of Russia on Ukraine.

The successive arrival of two distinct migrant groups (*i.e.*, including voluntary and forced migrants) from the same country represents a highly unusual experience worldwide. Most of the host countries have typically received either economic migrants or refugees, but rarely both groups in such close succession (Jasemi & Gottardo, 2023). For Poland, this situation is entirely unprecedented. Historically, Poles have been a nation of emigration, with the most recent large-scale emigration occurring after accession to the European Union (circa 2004-2015, cf. Anacka & Fihel, 2016). As a result, Poland has not yet developed a coherent framework for immigration and integration. Therefore, authorities have managed the large-scale inflow of Ukrainians largely on *ad hoc* basis and continue to rely on temporary legal arrangements (Kubiciel-Lodzińska & Solga, 2023). The recent decision to extend legislation concerning support for Ukrainians under temporary protection in Poland only until March 2026 illustrates this trend. The welfare measures introduced in spring 2022 by the Polish government are now regarded as outdated, at least by right-wing political actors, also with the growing support of the radicalising Polish society (Cap, 2018; Czapnik & Mazurkiewicz, 2024). On the other side, at the time of writing this article, the violent conflict in Ukraine continues, and the aggressor shows little if any signs of halting the invasion and starting peace negotiations. Therefore, the establishment of a more stable, long-term strategy to host and integrate Ukrainians in Poland and other EU countries has become an urgent political challenge.

This study contributes to the ongoing public debate on the economic integration of immigrants in Europe (Dorn & Zweimüller, 2021; Fasani *et al.*, 2022; Kubiciel-Lodzińska *et al.*, 2024) by examining the recent large-scale influx of Ukrainians and the determinants of economic integration of newcomers. It also contributes to the emerging field of research on Poland's (lack of) preparedness and long-term vision in response to becoming an immigration country beyond the Ukrainian forced mobility (Ślęzak & Bielewska, 2022). The study distinguishes between two phases of their international mobility: the predominantly voluntary, economically motivated migration before 2022, and the more forced displacement triggered by the full-scale Russian invasion of 24 February 2022. We relied on a large, cross-sectional CAWI survey conducted in Poland between March and April 2025. The main aim of the study was to identify the factors that facilitate the successful integration of both economic and forced migrants from Ukraine.

This empirical study contributes to the economics of international migration in several important respects. Firstly, it enables direct comparisons between forced and voluntary migrants from the same national group who arrived in the same destination within a relatively short time frame. This is an approach that remains uncommon, as most studies focus exclusively on either economic or forced migrants. Secondly, it examines the recent mobility of Ukrainians, who currently constitute one of the largest and most consequential migrant populations in the European Union and globally. Thirdly, we situated the analysis in the Polish context, a newly emerging yet highly significant destination country in Central and Eastern Europe. Fourthly, in contrast to much of the existing literature on economic integration (Naseh *et al.*, 2024), we adopted a multidimensional perspective by incorporating both objective indicators of economic performance (*e.g.*, full-time employment) and subjective outcomes (*e.g.*, job satisfaction). This approach frames economic integration as a multifaceted and inherently complex process. Finally, the study explicitly examines the role of place of residence, enabling systematic urban-rural comparisons of economic integration.

The findings show that the recently arrived Ukrainian forced migrants exhibit lower integration scores than the economic migrants. This result is not surprising, as the economic immigrants were mostly favourably self-selected and were able to prepare in advance to move. On the other hand, for forced migrants, the international mobility was imposed, but also unexpected. Still, there are also some additional, less evident findings. Firstly, the health of migrants, both mental and physical, matters a lot in their subsequent integration. In this regard, policymakers tend to overlook the fact that migrants often come with family members, some of whom may not be healthy enough to sustain themselves in a new environment. Secondly, the traditional family model in Ukraine, where women

are mostly responsible for care obligations, greatly impacts the integration prospects (Andersson, 2021). Women living with children under 18 in the same household are less likely not only to be full-time employed, but to get any form of employment. Finally, the socio-cultural integration is very much connected to an economic one. Fluency in Polish and the share of Polish acquaintances or friends are two of the most important predictors of success in economic integration.

The article is structured as follows. Section 2 outlines the theoretical foundations and formulates the hypotheses. Section 3 describes the data collection process, presents summary statistics, and introduces the main variables of interest. Section 4 reports the results of the empirical analysis and discusses the findings in a broader context. Finally, Section 5 concludes the article by highlighting key policy implications and identifying avenues for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

In this section, we examine the key theoretical and empirical literature on the economic integration of immigrants and forced migrants in host countries, providing the foundation for formulating hypotheses.

Economic research on immigrants and refugees employs a wide range of measures and indices of economic integration, ranging from standard indicators such as income and employment to broader measures including subjective well-being (Kubiciel-Lodzińska *et al.*, 2026). However, as highlighted in a recent literature review (Naseh *et al.*, 2024), most empirical studies remain limited in their use of integration indicators and rely on a narrow set of outcomes. Only a small number adopt a more nuanced, multidimensional approach that simultaneously includes both immigrants and refugees and incorporates multiple dimensions of economic integration. In response to these limitations, the present study contributes to the literature by analysing both forced and economic migrants from the same ethnic group and by employing a set of heterogeneous yet complementary indicators, including employment status, job quality, skill matching, job satisfaction, and perceived financial situation.

Górny and van der Zwan (2024) analysed the forced migration of Ukrainians to Poland following the Russian invasion after 2014 and did not find evidence of less successful integration of forced migrants into the Polish labour market. They attributed this to the interconnectedness of economic and humanitarian reasons for moving to Poland. As Stonawski and Brzozowski (2025) demonstrate, a mix of political and economic factors influenced the international mobility of Ukrainians before 2022: while most of them came to Poland voluntarily, some individuals were internally displaced due to the Russian aggression within Ukraine, and then decided to move to Poland.

As for the case of the post-2022 Ukrainian migration to Poland, these motivations are still intermingling, but the two cohorts (*i.e.*, pre-2022 economic migrants and post-2022 forced migrants) differ starkly in terms of gender, age, family status, and ways of searching for and aspiring to employment (Kubiciel-Lodzińska *et al.*, 2024). According to the study by Kubiciel-Lodzińska *et al.* (2024), two-thirds of the forced migrants had completed tertiary education. However, fewer than one-third of them speak Polish, which makes their labour market integration more difficult. Early research on post-2022 migration also found that Ukrainian forced migrants tend to self-select when it comes to the choice of the host country. Those with higher skills (including previous work experience and foreign language competences) and thus a greater likelihood of labour market integration tend to move to Western EU countries rather than stay in Poland (Kohlenberger *et al.*, 2023). Conversely, Poland's temporary yet productive migration infrastructure, including the efforts of NGOs, INGOs, labour intermediaries, and central and local governments, has facilitated the transition of forced migrants to employment (Matuszczyk & Kowalska, 2024). Economic integration seems to be more challenging in smaller Polish towns than in big cities. The stakeholders in the smaller towns arguably perceive the presence of Ukrainian forced migrants as temporary, focusing on providing *ad hoc* humanitarian aid. In contrast, urban centres tend to engage in more comprehensive integration efforts, including job-seeking assistance (Bielewska *et al.*, 2025). Consequently, we formulated hypotheses 1 and 2:

H1: The forced migrants from Ukraine are less successfully integrated in the economic aspect than economic migrants.

H2: Both economic and forced migrants from Ukraine living in larger cities are more successfully integrated in the economic aspect than individuals living in small cities and rural areas.

Another important dimension of our study is the role of gender in economic integration. The positive reception of Ukrainian forced migrants after 2022 likely resulted from the gender composition of the group. Women with children tend to generate more ‘promising victimhood,’ which results in the attribution of ‘deservingness’ of assistance (Welfens, 2022). However, this same gender dimension can cause structural issues that reception policies may not address, such as mental health, violence, stable housing, and general integration into society (Szpakowicz *et al.*, 2025). Furthermore, the lack of oversight in the integration of labour market strategies for migrant women in Poland, or the informalization of these strategies, could lead to the exacerbation of their vulnerability and result in their marginalisation (Slany *et al.*, 2024). Recent studies on Syrian refugees (Hannafi & Marouani, 2023) and economic immigrants in Germany (Brzozowski & Lasek, 2019) consistently demonstrate that both female gender and having children in the host country (implying care obligations) are associated with a negative likelihood for obtaining full-time employment. Respectively, we formulated hypothesis 3:

H3: Ukrainian women are less successfully integrated economically than males.

Studies on migrant capital and the circulation of intangible remittances in the transnational spaces demonstrate that individuals with higher initial resources, ranging from education and networks to cognitive skills and psychological resilience, can acquire and enhance capital through migration (Saksela-Bergholm *et al.*, 2019; Winogrodzka *et al.*, 2025). In the case of Ukrainian women forced to migrate, Grabowska (2025) has found that they show a high propensity to acquire ‘intangible remittances’ (knowledge, norms, competences), thus benefiting from the ‘cumulative advantage effect.’

However, previous studies have shown that Ukrainian migrants in Poland usually tend to lack social ties and capital (Kindler & Wójcikowska-Baniak, 2019). Once they gain such access to social ties in the host country, they benefit from both weak and strong ties. They have access to diverse job opportunities through weak ties and jobs that match their competencies through strong ties (Górny *et al.*, 2025). Kyliushyk *et al.* (2025) analysed the mobility capital of Ukrainian forced migrants and demonstrated the ambivalence of the factors affecting capital conversion. Factors such as personal resources, existing capital, free access to the labour market, the ability to start and run a business, and financial support can increase mobility capital (Kyliushyk *et al.*, 2025, p. 15). However, other factors may hinder the conversion of mobility capital. For instance: ‘The experience of trauma, language barriers, lack of support for working mothers caring for their children alone, systemic barriers preventing people from working according to their skills, and lack of long-term integration policies’ (Ibidem, p. 15). Consequently, we formulated hypothesis 4 and 5:

H4: Ukrainians with access to social and cultural capital in Poland exhibit higher economic integration outcomes.

H5: Ukrainians with poor mental and physical health exhibit lower economic integration outcomes.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We utilised data from our own survey of Ukrainians residing in Poland. We conducted the survey within the Horizon Europe project entitled ‘Policy Recommendations to Maximise the Beneficial Impact of Unexplored Mobilities in and beyond the European Union’ (PREMIUM_EU, Grant Agreement number: 101094345). The University Ethics Committee for Scientific Research at the Krakow University of Economics [decision no. KEBN/71/0044/D40/2024] and The Ethics Review Committee of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) [project coordinator] [decision no. FAO/AKo/149], approved the survey in accordance with ethical principles, data protection regulations and good practice in scientific research.

We conducted the fieldwork between 15 March and 17 April 2025 among Ukrainian citizens aged between 18 and 64 years residing in Poland using the individual Computer Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) method. We collected the interviews in the form of an online survey, with the script

prepared in the QUALTRICS software (available languages: Ukrainian, Russian, and English). The sample reached 1 082 respondents. The research team commissioned fieldwork at the Centre of Migration Research (CMR) at the University of Warsaw. The sampling for our study was based on the CMR representative panel of Ukrainian migrants in Poland, 'Between Ukraine and Poland,' established originally in 2022, using quotas related to:

- migrant status: economic migrants – those who arrived in Poland before 24 February 2022, forced migrants – those who arrived on 24 February 2022 or later;
- place of residence in Poland: large cities – those with a population over 100 thousand inhabitants, small and medium-sized towns – those with a population below 100 thousand.

Thus, there were four subgroups. The participants were randomly selected to participate in the study and received invitations to complete the questionnaire via SMS and e-mail. To complete the established quotas, CRM conducted additional web-based recruitment to complement the panel-based sampling. Post-stratification weights were constructed to enhance representativeness and reliability of the study results according to voivodship, sex and age based on the central Polish PESEL register, which is used to keep the population records.

To present the sample and economic integration of Ukrainian migrants, we employed descriptive statistics and constructed several logistic regression models to verify the importance of chosen characteristics on the economic integration of the group under consideration.

To verify the hypotheses put forward in this study, we selected four dependent indicator variables that are widely accepted measures of economic integration:

- employment on the labour market – describing labour force status of the respondent at the moment of the interview, included in two specifications: (a) some employment (variable: somemp) coded as 1 if the respondent is either full-time, part-time, self-employed or works occasionally, and 0 otherwise, (b) full employment (variable: fullemp) coded as 1 if he/she has a full-time employment, and 0 otherwise;
- occupational skills matching (variable: skill matched) – respondent's self-assessed match between own qualifications and requirements of a current job, coded 1 when the respondent declares that one's skills or competences are well matched with current occupation (ranked from 6 to 10 on 0-10 scale);
- satisfaction from respondent's job (variable: job satisfaction) – measure of the respondent's overall satisfaction with their present employment, based on self-assessment, coded 1 when the respondent declares that is satisfied with their current occupation (ranked from 6 to 10 on a 0-10 scale);
- financial situation of respondent in Poland (variable: good financial situation PL) – measure of the respondent's perceived financial well-being in Poland, based on self-evaluation of current economic situation, coded 1 when the respondent declares good or very good financial situation in Poland (ranked 4 to 5 on 1-5 scale).

By applying these measures, we could exploit the heterogeneous dimensions of economic integration, including both objective factors as employment and more nuanced and subjective ones, based on self-assessments of respondents. The main independent variables related to the formulated hypotheses were:

- refugee status (variable: refugee) – indicator variable measured using date of arrival to Poland, coded as 1 when the individual arrived in Poland on 24 February 2022 or later, and 0 otherwise;
- respondent's sex (variable: female) – coded as 1 when the respondent was female;
- presence of children in household in Poland (variable: child in household) – coded as 1 if the respondent was accompanied by his own children or children under the age of 18 years in his/her household in Poland;
- education (variable: years of education) – level of respondent's education measured in years of formal education;
- Polish language proficiency (variable: proficient in Polish) – indicator variable indicating that the respondent had a high level of proficiency in Polish, coded as 1;
- English language proficiency (variable: proficient in English) – indicator variable indicating that the respondent had a high level of proficiency in English, coded as 1;

- Polish friends (variable: share of Polish friends) – categorical variable representing a share of Polish friends among all friends in Poland (None=1, 1–25%=2, 26–50%=3, 51–75%=4, 75+=5).
- remittances (variable: receives remittances) – indicator variable showing if the respondent or respondent’s household received any cash remittances, coded as 1.

Furthermore, we included a set of individual-level control variables to enhance the comparability of individuals with disparate socio-economic backgrounds. These variables encompassed age, marital status, health condition, labour status in Ukraine before migration, economic situation in Ukraine before migration, size of place of residence in Ukraine before migration, and size of place of residence in Poland at the moment of interview.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Economic migrants					
fullemp	447	0.694	0.462	0	1
female	447	0.718	0.450	0	1
childhousehold	447	0.353	0.479	0	1
partnerHD_PL	447	0.644	0.479	0	1
otherperson18HD_PL	447	0.199	0.400	0	1
age	447	39.629	10	19	64
married	447	0.450	0.498	0	1
yearsedu	447	14.734	3.744	2	30
goodPolish	447	0.680	0.467	0	1
goodEnglish	447	0.208	0.406	0	1
bad health condition	447	0.179	0.384	0	1
Forced migrants					
fullemp	635	0.398	0.490	0	1
female	635	0.847	0.360	0	1
childhousehold	635	0.620	0.486	0	1
partnerHD_PL	635	0.471	0.5	0	1
otherperson18HD_PL	635	0.298	0.458	0	1
age	635	42.398	9.472	18	64
married	635	0.535	0.499	0	1
yearsedu	634	15.309	3.356	2	30
goodPolish	635	0.381	0.486	0	1
goodEnglish	635	0.187	0.391	0	1
bad health condition	635	0.293	0.455	0	1

Source: own study.

As Table 1 demonstrates, female respondents comprised 84.7% of refugees and 71.8% of economic migrants, which is much above the share in the general UKR PESEL register (approximately 58.8% of women). Unfortunately, as in many previous surveys on Ukrainian populations in Poland, but also other countries (Kohlenberger *et al.*, 2023), the share of men willing to participate was much smaller than for women. From the descriptive statistics table, we can also see that in the case of the most typical measure for economic integration, full-time employment, the differences between forced and economic migrants were indeed substantial (69.4% for economic migrants and 39.8% for forced ones). To make our findings more robust and representative, we applied post-stratification weights according to voivodship, sex, and age based on the Polish PESEL register in our empirical analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Employment

Regarding labour market indicators of economic integration, the results are quite straightforward and robust for all model specifications. Forced migrants are consistently less likely to have full-employment

status; the same holds true even for some form of employment (somemp variable). Therefore, the refugee status is associated with some penalty when it comes to the entry on the Polish labour market. As most of the forced migrants are women, we also wanted to investigate what role gender plays in economic integration. Interestingly, it is not the gender *per se* that matters in this aspect, but rather that the female individuals with small children are in the most difficult situation (see the interaction term female x child in the household). This effect is partially offset by the presence of other adult members of the household, probably because such individuals can help women in reconciling work with childcare obligations (Lutz & Palenga-Möllenbeck, 2012).

Table 2. Economic integration outcomes (1): Employment on the labour market (logistic regression, outcomes, some form of employment, and full-employment status)

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	somemp	fullemp	somemp	fullemp	somemp	fullemp
refugee (dummy)	-1.046***	-0.828***	-1.014***	-0.709***	-0.849***	-0.839***
	-0.24	-0.197	-0.265	-0.211	-0.205	-0.161
female (dummy)	-0.36	-0.295	-0.306	-0.198	-0.535*	-0.285
	-0.332	-0.257	-0.331	-0.262	-0.3	-0.233
child in household (dummy)	0.621	0.073	0.666	0.169	0.528	0.036
	-0.527	-0.369	-0.542	-0.381	-0.472	-0.356
female=1 # childho~1	-0.994*	-0.983**	-1.028*	-1.110***	-0.76	-0.803**
	-0.553	-0.393	-0.567	-0.408	-0.488	-0.377
partner in household (dummy)	-0.039	0.078	-0.077	0.07	-0.377*	-0.26
	-0.24	-0.217	-0.239	-0.221	-0.199	-0.17
other person aged 18+ HD (dummy)	0.573**	0.047	0.568**	-0.001	0.453**	-0.017
	-0.244	-0.205	-0.237	-0.211	-0.191	-0.168
age	0.225***	0.299***	0.216***	0.302***	0.261***	0.295***
	-0.073	-0.063	-0.071	-0.065	-0.062	-0.059
age squared	-0.003***	-0.004***	-0.003***	-0.004***	-0.003***	-0.004***
	-0.001	-0.001	-0.001	-0.001	-0.001	-0.001
married (dummy)	-0.594**	-0.115	-0.565**	-0.075	-0.418**	-0.043
	-0.235	-0.218	-0.237	-0.218	-0.2	-0.177
years of education	0.012	-0.036	0.012	-0.037	0.014	-0.022
	-0.025	-0.023	-0.025	-0.023	-0.026	-0.022
proficient in Polish (dummy)	0.494**	0.322*	0.493**	0.311	0.117	0.231
	-0.217	-0.187	-0.221	-0.192	-0.196	-0.162
proficient in English (dummy)	-0.504*	-0.813***	-0.359	-0.668***	-0.437*	-0.741***
	-0.276	-0.242	-0.266	-0.244	-0.241	-0.195
bad health condition (dummy)	-0.857***	-0.715***	-0.883***	-0.777***	-0.712***	-0.481***
	-0.225	-0.216	-0.227	-0.225	-0.18	-0.17
worked in UA (dummy)			0.352	0.285		
			-0.238	-0.23		
self-employed in UA (dummy)			0.106	-0.171		
			-0.342	-0.335		
entrepreneur in UA (dummy)			0.344	-0.008		
			-0.685	-0.575		
bad economic situation in UA (dummy)			0.462*	0.614***		
			-0.27	-0.214		
comes from oc. territories (dummy)			0.453*	0.208		
			-0.24	-0.228		
comes from large city in UA (dummy)			-0.282	0.215		
			-0.255	-0.242		
comes from small city in UA (dummy)			-0.25	0.254		
			-0.308	-0.277		

lives in Eastern PL (dummy)					-0.474*	-0.466*
					-0.256	-0.24
lives in city500k+ (dummy)					0.570*	0.574**
					-0.308	-0.274
lives in city 100_499k (dummy)					0.167	0.44
					-0.334	-0.306
lives in city 50_99 (dummy)					0.296	0.115
					-0.335	-0.305
lives in a small city (dummy, ref. rural areas)					0.332	0.750***
					-0.315	-0.291
share of Polish friends					0.254***	0.201***
					-0.091	-0.068
receives remittances (dummy)					-0.510*	-0.139
					-0.263	-0.247
Constant	-1.503	-3.845***	-1.669	-4.642***	-3.054**	-4.626***
	-1.472	-1.298	-1.454	-1.368	-1.269	-1.216
Observations	1081	1081	1081	1081	1081	1081

Note: post-stratification weights according to voivodship, sex and age based on the Polish PESEL register have been applied. Source: own study.

Regarding the role of human capital, it turns out that the formal education does not matter much for economic integration. On the other hand, the proficiency in the host country language (in this case: Polish) is crucial. This result is consistent with the previous studies conducted in other host countries, for instance study of Brzozowski and Lasek (2019) for Germany that demonstrates the importance of the acquisition of host country language. Bojarczuk and associates also claim that there are serious obstacles in successful human capital transfer between Ukraine and Poland (Bojarczuk *et al.*, 2025). However, the results of the study by Stonawski and Brzozowski (2025) on Venezuelan migrants in Peru demonstrates that in the case of countries with quite similar educational systems and the same language, the higher/post-secondary education helps in economic integration, at least when it comes to full-time employment. Unfortunately, this is not a case for Ukrainian immigrants and forced migrants living in Poland, as Poland and Ukraine have very different educational systems (Herbst & Sitek, 2023), and language proximity creates significant obstacles regarding expectations of understanding, resulting in de facto miscommunication and exclusion (Wanke *et al.*, 2026). English proficiency is negatively associated with employment probability. This likely reflects both the low demand for English in jobs available to Ukrainian migrants and the fact that foreign language skills proxy middle-class status in Ukraine, which reduces the likelihood of accepting low-prestige employment.

In contrast to what we expected, the previous experience when it comes to economic activity in Ukraine does not matter much for employment prospects in Poland. Only those who were in a poor economic situation in Ukraine are more likely to work full-time in Poland, which is probably influenced by sheer necessity, as those individuals might not have any other source of income, nor savings left.

Finally, the place of residence in the host country matters a lot in economic integration. Those individuals living in Eastern Poland, historically peripheral economic region, are less likely to find employment. For Ukrainians, it is obviously easier to find employment when living in the largest metropolitan areas. However, regarding full-time employment, we found a positive and strong effect of small cities (with population below 50 thousand). We may explain this effect by the fact that in more local labour markets the employee is a scarcer good, therefore the likelihood to work full-time instead of occasional or part-time employment is higher. Another competing explanation for this effect could be the fact that in small cities reside only those Ukrainians who were able to obtain full-time employment. On the other hand, Ukrainians residing in larger cities have greater opportunities to learn Polish and acquire additional skills or knowledge.

Skill Match and Job Satisfaction

Another dimension of economic integration involves individuals who are already economically active. Consequently, we analysed the determinants of occupational skills matching (variable: skill matched) and job satisfaction (variable: job satisfaction). Surprisingly, the forced migrants are not significantly different from economic ones when it comes to skill match, which implies that the peculiar characteristics of the Polish labour market where most of the vacancies are available in unskilled occupations might be the decisive factor. Men do not experience a higher likelihood of skill matching than Ukrainian females. However, when it comes to the case of satisfaction derived from the respondent's job, the effects of refugee status and gender are significant: forced migrants from Ukraine and Ukrainian women are less satisfied with their performed economic activity than economic migrants and Ukrainian men, *ceteris paribus*.

Regarding formal human capital (measured by years of education), it is not significantly associated with either outcome. Surprisingly, the importance of language skills: both proficiency in Polish and English was statistically insignificant for job satisfaction. However, poor health status played a vital (negative) role both for skill match and job satisfaction.

Table 3. Economic integration outcomes (2): Self-perceived skill match and job satisfaction

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	skill matched	Job satisfaction	skill matched	Job satisfaction	skill matched	Job satisfaction
refugee (dummy)	-0.149	-0.406**	-0.136	-0.409**	-0.129	-0.572***
	-0.212	-0.187	-0.22	-0.194	-0.17	-0.161
female (dummy)	-0.292	-0.485**	-0.274	-0.438*	-0.460**	-0.436**
	-0.251	-0.24	-0.256	-0.244	-0.233	-0.222
child in household (dummy)	0.073	0.407	0.06	0.459	-0.313	0.238
	-0.369	-0.36	-0.375	-0.368	-0.352	-0.336
female=1 # childho~1	-0.435	-0.62	-0.438	-0.684*	0.085	-0.342
	-0.393	-0.381	-0.396	-0.389	-0.375	-0.36
partner in household (dummy)	-0.087	-0.155	-0.095	-0.191	-0.106	-0.127
	-0.221	-0.207	-0.22	-0.206	-0.176	-0.169
other person aged 18+ HD (dummy)	0.271	0.487**	0.262	0.510**	0.242	0.428**
	-0.236	-0.21	-0.235	-0.211	-0.183	-0.168
age	0.077	0.094	0.073	0.07	0.088	0.126**
	-0.069	-0.062	-0.071	-0.064	-0.058	-0.054
age squared	-0.001	-0.001*	-0.001	-0.001	-0.001*	-0.002**
	-0.001	-0.001	-0.001	-0.001	-0.001	-0.001
married (dummy)	-0.218	-0.175	-0.197	-0.132	0.108	-0.069
	-0.218	-0.21	-0.22	-0.214	-0.186	-0.175
years of education	0.034	0.005	0.038	0.004	0.032	0.016
	-0.029	-0.025	-0.029	-0.026	-0.024	-0.021
Proficient in Polish (dummy)	0.315	0.450**	0.316	0.447**	0.196	0.179
	-0.197	-0.186	-0.2	-0.189	-0.173	-0.161
Proficient in English (dummy)	-0.212	-0.224	-0.135	-0.199	-0.174	-0.194
	-0.247	-0.228	-0.248	-0.227	-0.198	-0.191
bad health condition (dummy)	-	-	-	-	-	-
	0.894***	1.133***	0.919***	1.158***	0.751***	-0.817***
	-0.249	-0.212	-0.245	-0.214	-0.201	-0.176
worked in UA (dummy)			0.055	0.460**		
			-0.239	-0.224		
self-employed in UA (dummy)			-0.152	0.427		
			-0.359	-0.321		

entrepreneur in UA (dummy)			0.238	0.383		
			-0.542	-0.605		
bad economic situation in UA (dummy)			0.195	0.211		
			-0.21	-0.194		
comes from oc. territories (dummy)			0.098	0.13		
			-0.248	-0.216		
comes from large city in UA (dummy)			-0.34	-0.509**		
			-0.247	-0.221		
comes from small city in UA (dummy)			-0.531*	-0.425*		
			-0.278	-0.254		
lives in Eastern PL (dummy)					-0.189	-0.442*
					-0.264	-0.232
lives in city500k+ (dummy)					0.112	-0.114
					-0.294	-0.262
lives in city 100_499k (dummy)					-0.291	-0.15
					-0.324	-0.288
lives in city 50_99 (dummy)					-0.174	0.013
					-0.339	-0.294
lives in a small city (dummy, ref. rural areas)					-0.113	0.234
					-0.304	-0.274
share of Polish friends					0.164**	0.178***
					-0.066	-0.065
receives remittances (dummy)					-0.132	0.048
					-0.281	-0.249
Constant	-1.988	-0.941	-1.806	-0.53	-2.542**	-2.164*
	-1.377	-1.24	-1.415	-1.275	-1.192	-1.13
Observations	1081	1081	1081	1081	1081	1081

Note: post-stratification weights according to voivodship, sex and age based on the Polish PESEL register have been applied. Source: own study.

In our sample, place of residence in Poland did not appear to play a significant role in skill matching or job satisfaction. However, the role of social capital was very important: individuals who had Polish friends and acquaintances exhibited better occupational skills matching and higher job satisfaction.

Financial Situation in Poland

The final dimension of economic integration that we scrutinised was the perceived financial well-being in Poland, as evaluated by individuals' assessment of their current economic situation. In this aspect, forced migrants were clearly in a significantly worse position than economic migrants from Ukraine. However, in this aspect, the gender did not play a significant role, even when controlled for women with (children) care obligations. Individuals with proficiency in Polish were better off than other individuals, albeit this effect was smaller and less significant than in previously analysed dimensions of economic integration. What remains consistent across all models and specifications was the health condition: those respondents who had reported bad (mental or physical, or both) health status were in a much worse financial situation than healthier counterparts. Surprisingly, the place of residence in Ukraine before moving to Poland was not associated in a significant way with the financial situation. This could be either explained by a higher economic resilience of Ukrainian forced migrants or by the inadequate representation of those individuals who have lost most of their wealth during the Russian invasion. Their current place of residence in Poland was not statistically significant. The role of social capital in Poland (having Polish friends) was mildly significant, but only at 10% level.

Table 4. Economic integration outcomes (3): The current financial situation in Poland

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)
	good financial situation PL	good financial situation PL	good financial situation PL
refugee (dummy)	-0.601***	-0.634***	-0.474**
	-0.226	-0.235	-0.201
female (dummy)	-0.079	-0.107	0.025
	-0.276	-0.278	-0.251
child in household (dummy)	0.59	0.566	0.304
	-0.376	-0.378	-0.367
female=1 # childho~1	-0.579	-0.54	-0.508
	-0.422	-0.425	-0.4
partner in household (dummy)	0.634**	0.652**	0.286
	-0.262	-0.258	-0.204
other person aged 18+ HD (dummy)	0.017	0.014	-0.145
	-0.273	-0.273	-0.235
age	-0.165**	-0.173**	-0.063
	-0.074	-0.075	-0.069
age squared	0.002**	0.002**	0.001
	-0.001	-0.001	-0.001
married (dummy)	-0.078	-0.121	0.049
	-0.262	-0.264	-0.214
years of education	0.024	0.021	0.018
	-0.03	-0.03	-0.024
Proficient in Polish (dummy)	0.451**	0.440*	0.265
	-0.229	-0.228	-0.211
Proficient in English (dummy)	1.125***	1.086***	0.763***
	-0.243	-0.247	-0.217
bad health condition (dummy)	-1.604***	-1.616***	-1.425***
	-0.304	-0.309	-0.279
worked in UA (dummy)		-0.009	
		-0.261	
self-employed in UA (dummy)		0.039	
		-0.383	
entrepreneur in UA (dummy)		-0.371	
		-0.731	
bad economic situation in UA (dummy)		-0.09	
		-0.237	
comes from oc. territories (dummy)		-0.231	
		-0.281	
comes from large city in UA (dummy)		0.21	
		-0.27	
comes from small city in UA (dummy)		-0.084	
		-0.324	
lives in Eastern PL (dummy)			0.116
			-0.276
lives in city 500k+ (dummy)			-0.062
			-0.334
lives in city 100_499k (dummy)			-0.103
			-0.359

lives in city 50_99 (dummy)			-0.059
			-0.382
lives in a small city (dummy, ref. rural areas)			0.097
			-0.361
share of Polish friends			0.136*
			-0.077
receives remittances (dummy)			0.343
			-0.308
Constant	1.063	1.353	-0.444
	-1.453	-1.476	-1.455
Observations	1081	1081	1081

Note: post-stratification weights according to voivodship, sex and age based on the Polish PESEL register have been applied. Source: own study.

CONCLUSIONS

Our study sheds light on the process of economic integration of a major group of immigrants in Europe: namely, economic and forced migrants from Ukraine. Based on the perspective of the second largest host country (after Germany), our findings demonstrate that forced migrants are less likely than economic migrants to become employed, experience high job satisfaction and good financial situation, which is in line with our hypothesis 1. We also provide some support for hypothesis 2 which suggests that big cities play a significant role in economic integration.

Ukrainians residing in the largest urban agglomerations exhibit higher employment probabilities than those living in rural areas. Simultaneously, the likelihood of obtaining full-time employment is also higher among individuals residing in smaller towns. Our findings did not support hypothesis 3, which posited a negative effect of gender on economic integration. Lower integration outcomes among women appear to be driven primarily by childcare responsibilities rather than gender per se. In contrast, we found strong support for hypothesis 4, highlighting the importance of social and cultural capital in economic integration. Ukrainians with higher proficiency in the Polish language and those who maintain social ties with Polish nationals demonstrated more favourable integration outcomes. Finally, the study confirmed hypothesis 5 concerning the role of health: both economic and forced migrants reporting poor health status exhibit significantly lower levels of integration across all dimensions examined in this study.

These findings have clear and straightforward policy implications. Firstly, countries hosting large refugee and immigrant populations need to provide support with childcare to enable women to successfully enter the labour market. Secondly, we should not forget that forced migrants often arrived traumatised by the war operations in their home country. Consequently, for many individuals, poor health may pose a serious obstacle to successful integration. Finally, despite these issues, our study demonstrates that most economic migrants and forced migrants are relatively well-integrated economically in Poland. Nevertheless, we should bear in mind the limitations of our study. It is quite probable that more integrated individuals demonstrate a high willingness to participate in the online survey. Simultaneously, people with an uncertain position in terms of the legality of stay (e.g., men) or psycho-emotional state are more reluctant to participate in our research project. Another important limitation is the cross-sectional nature of the survey, which precludes dynamic analyses and raises endogeneity concerns. For example, English proficiency may also capture pre-migration middle-class status in Ukraine, thereby reflecting individuals' financial situation before departure.

Regarding future research directions, the use of panel data would be highly valuable. In particular, analysing changes in outcomes following the modification of the legal framework governing the residence of Ukrainians from 4 March 2026 onward would offer important insights.

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Use of Artificial Intelligence

The authors declare that they did not use AI tools in writing this article and in data analysis.

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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