

Dimensions and Effects of Poland's Socio-Economic Support for Ukrainian Women in the Face of the War in Ukraine

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Abstract: *The article explores Poland's socio-economic support for Ukrainian women during the war in Ukraine, emphasising how this assistance has enabled their integration into the workforce. The article explores Poland's socio-economic support and presents the socio-economic dimension of Poland's support for Ukrainian women amid the war in Ukraine, highlighting how this support has facilitated their participation in the workforce. The aim of the article is to analyse the decisions of the Polish government and local authorities, as well as the actions of employers, nongovernmental organisations and the Polish public in providing assistance to Ukrainian women who fled the war in Ukraine. It addresses the following research questions: What actions have the Polish government and other entities taken to provide socio-economic support for Ukrainian women? What factors have influenced the establishment of sole proprietorships in Poland by Ukrainian women? Were there any barriers hindering the professional activity of Ukrainian women in Poland? The research reported in this paper covers the years 2022–2023 and focuses on Ukrainian women, who represented the largest demographic group among refugees. Due to various barriers, most were employed below their qualifications. However, some demonstrated significant creativity by establishing their own businesses.*

Keywords: *refugees, labour market, entrepreneurship, Poland, Ukraine*

Introduction

After 24 February 2022, following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, Ukrainian citizens seeking refuge have begun arriving in Poland. The majority of these refugees were women and children. Men of conscription age (18–60 years) were prohibited from leaving Ukraine, with exceptions granted to men with three or more children, single fathers or those unfit for military service (Centre for Documentation and Counter Extremism 2024). Those Ukrainian War refugees joined the Ukrainian migrants already residing in Poland, who had arrived primarily for work-related reasons.

The Polish government, local authorities, nongovernmental organisations, employers and Polish citizens provided support to the new arrivals. Assistance for Ukrainian women focused on helping them adapt and integrate into the society and the labour market in Poland.

This article explores Poland's socio-economic support for Ukrainian women during the war in Ukraine, emphasising how this assistance has enabled their integration into the workforce. It asks the following research questions: What actions have the Polish government and other entities undertaken to provide socio-economic support for Ukrainian women? What factors influenced the establishment of sole proprietorships in Poland by Ukrainian women? Were there barriers hindering the professional activity of Ukrainian women in Poland?

The article proposes and tests the hypothesis that Ukrainian women, who made up 77% of war refugees, demonstrated strong career aspirations and integrated relatively quickly into the Polish labour market in 2022–2023. Support from the Polish government and local authorities contributed to increasing the professional activity of Ukrainian women, although most of them worked below their qualifications. To verify this hypothesis, the study employed dogmatic, decision-making and comparative methods, along with analysis of desk research and statistical data. The dogmatic method was applied in the analysis and interpretation of the Act of 12 March 2022 on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine in Connection with the Armed Conflict on the Territory of that Country, including its amendments from 2022 to 2023. This method enabled an illustration of the institutional support provided to Ukrainian women. Subsequently, the decision-making method was used to analyse the outcomes of decisions made by the Polish government, local authorities, employers, nongovernmental organisations and citizens regarding assistance offered to Ukrainian women fleeing the war.

Comparative analysis was employed to assess and compare the scope and quality of support provided by local authorities, employers, Polish citizens and NGOs. This included an evaluation of the diversity of forms of assistance and their effectiveness. Through a desktop-based qualitative analysis, the participation of Ukrainian women in the Polish labour market was examined, including

their involvement in various economic sectors and the establishment of sole proprietorships. At the same time, descriptive and numerical data on Ukrainian war refugees were obtained from reports and documents published by the National Bank of Poland, the Polish Economic Institute, Statistics Poland, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the International Organisation for Migration.

The analysis of these sources focused on the professional activity of Ukrainian women in the Polish labour market and identified barriers limiting their potential for professional engagement. To illustrate the situation of female war refugees from Ukraine in Poland – taking into account their family circumstances, age structure and the impact of these factors on employment in 2022–2023 – a quantitative data analysis was also conducted.

The selection of this research period is justified by the observed increase in the professional activity of Ukrainian female refugees in Poland during that time. It was during this period that many of them entered the labour market, launched sole proprietorships and became actively involved in economic life. This timeframe also witnessed intensified support efforts from the state, local governments, employers, nongovernmental organisations and citizens. As such, it enables a comprehensive analysis of the outcomes of this support and an assessment of the degree of professional integration of Ukrainian women.

The issue of refugees – particularly Ukrainian women – has attracted the attention of numerous researchers both in Poland and internationally. Notable among them are Jane Freedman (2016), who examines the gendered dimensions of migration; Monika Chmielewska and Krzysztof Pawłowski (2022), who focus on refugee integration policies; and Karolina Sowińska (2020), who explores the challenges of migration-related trauma and its effects on women. However, there is still a limited body of research specifically addressing the support provided by Poland to Ukrainian women in the context of the war in Ukraine. Therefore, the subject explored in this article is both timely and relevant, contributing to the ongoing academic discussion and offering an opportunity for further exploration of this critical issue.

The article is divided into the following sections: Characteristics of war refugees from Ukraine, Socio-economic support for Ukrainian women in Poland resulting from the legal basis, Professional activity of Ukrainian women in the Polish labour market.

Characteristics of war refugees from Ukraine

According to Eurostat, Poland was an attractive destination for foreigners, particularly Ukrainians, as early as 2019. It admitted the highest number of non-European Union (EU) nationals among all member states of the EU. In 2019, approximately 3 million residence permits were issued to non-EU citi-

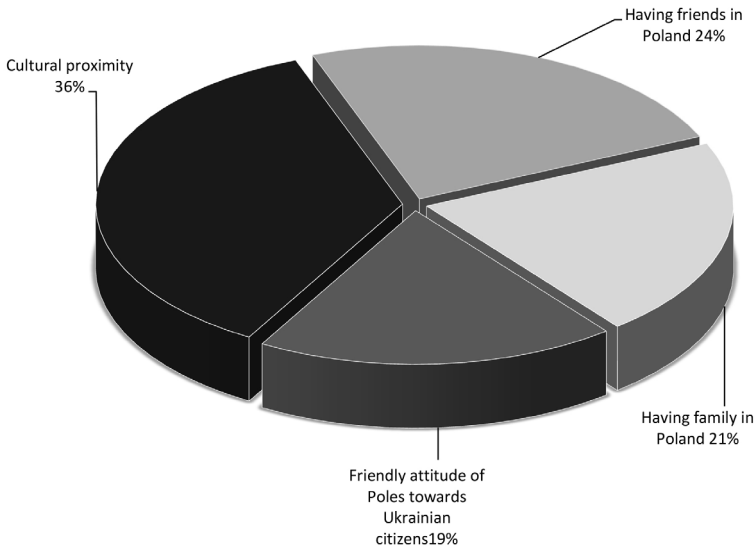
zens across the EU, with Poland granting 724,000 permits. Of these, 551,000 were issued to Ukrainian citizens. The next leading EU countries issuing the most residence permits to non-EU nationals were Germany (460,000), Spain (320,000) and France (285,000) (Eurostat 2022). The choice of Poland by labour migrants from Ukraine was influenced by cultural, linguistic and geographical proximity between the two nations. Ukrainian labour migrants had a positive impact on the Polish economy. Between 2013 and 2018, they mitigated Poland's labour shortage problem and thus contributed to generating a 13% growth in Poland's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

By the end of 2021, approximately 1.5 million Ukrainian citizens were working in Poland, of whom 55% were women (National Bank of Poland 2023a). Poland had not previously experienced an influx of war refugees on a scale as massive as that of 2022. Among all countries worldwide, Poland hosted the largest number of war refugees from Ukraine. It is important to emphasise that, unlike labour migrants, war refugees did not leave Ukraine voluntarily but were compelled by circumstances, including violations of their universal rights (Duszczek & Kaczmarczyk 2022).

According to data from the Polish Border Guard Headquarters, from the beginning of the war in Ukraine until 30 September 2023, 16 million people crossed the Polish-Ukrainian border. During the same period, 14.2 million people traveled back to Ukraine. Between 2022 and 2023, over 1.7 million Ukrainian war refugees received a Polish PESEL (Universal Electronic System for Registration of the Population) number, granting them access to employment as well as social, healthcare and family benefits. As of October 2023, approximately 957,000 Ukrainian war refugees (mostly women) were residing in Poland under the Special Act on Refugees, holding active PESEL numbers (Huczko 2023). An important factor influencing Ukrainian women's choice of Poland as a refuge from the war was cultural proximity (36%) between the Ukrainian and Polish nations. This, along with other reasons for choosing Poland as a host country, is illustrated in Figure 1.

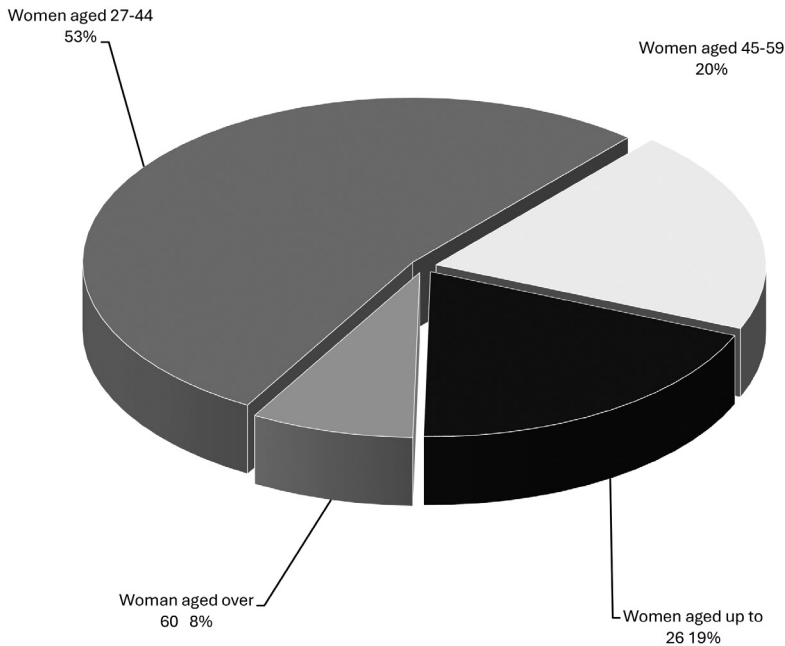
Between 2022 and 2023, the Ukrainian refugees in Poland were predominantly women (77%), with the remaining portion consisting of children (12%) and men (11%). Considering the age structure of the refugees, the dominant group among Ukrainian women were those aged 27–44 (53%). War refugees over the age of 60 accounted for 8%, which was higher than in the same age group among labour migrants in 2021 (National Bank of Poland 2023b). The family situations of Ukrainian women in Poland also varied. The majority were single mothers raising children alone (26%) (National Bank of Poland 2023a). The age structure of Ukrainian female war refugees residing in Poland between 2022 and 2023 is illustrated in **Figure 2**, while **Figure 3** presents the family situations of Ukrainian women in Poland during the same period.

Figure 1: Reasons Influencing Ukrainian Women’s Choice of Poland as a Refuge from the War in Ukraine in 2022



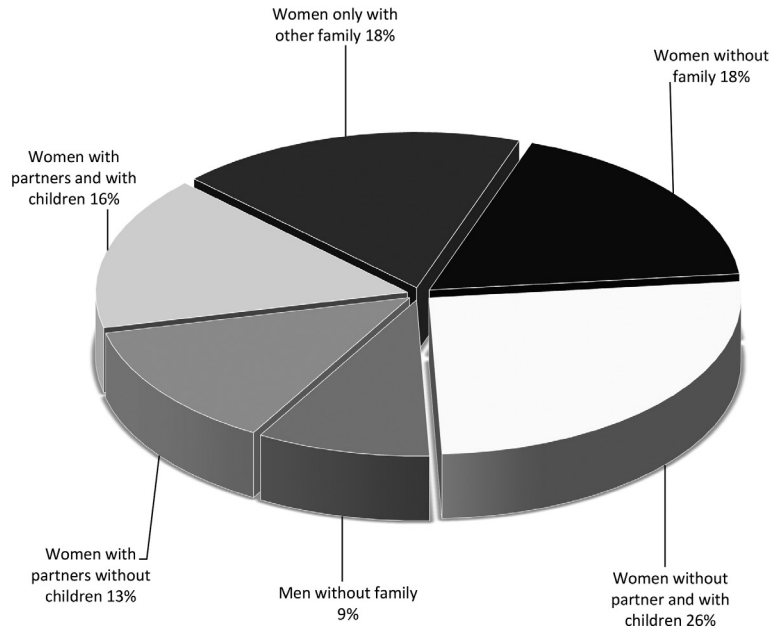
Sources: Authors’ own compilation based on ELW & Centre for East European Studies at the University of Warsaw (2022)

Figure 2: Age Structure of Ukrainian Female Refugees in Poland in 2022–2023



Sources: National Bank of Poland (2023b)

Figure 3: Family situation of Ukrainian women in Poland in 2022–2023*



**From 24 February 2022, to December 2023*

Sources: National Bank of Poland (2023a)

According to the 2023 report of the National Bank of Poland, the presence of family and children in Poland had a significant impact on the professional activity of female refugees during the initial months of their stay. As of July of that year, 62% of Ukrainian refugees were employed, with men more likely to hold permanent jobs (44%) than women (33%). Stable employment among Ukrainian women was less common, partly due to childcare responsibilities, which increased the risk of unemployment. One of the responses to this challenge was the introduction of flexible working arrangements by employers, particularly in professions such as teachers, translators, administrative staff and nurses. It is worth noting that women rarely filled positions in sectors traditionally occupied by Ukrainian men.

In June 2022, the minister responsible for social integration, Agnieszka Ścigaj, stated that the government would encourage Ukrainians to move from large cities to rural areas, as housing and jobs are available there, and there are significant needs, given that the Polish countryside is experiencing some depopulation (Bankier 2022a). The minister emphasised that ‘it is easier to find work in smaller towns than in large cities. Ukrainian women who came to us have great potential to be utilized, for instance, in social services or elder care, where there is a shortage of workers’ (Bankier 2022a). Between 2022 and

2023, nearly 75% of female refugees who arrived in Poland from Ukraine did not speak Polish. According to Polish employers, the language barrier was the greatest obstacle preventing Ukrainian women from quickly integrating into the Polish labour market.

In their report *Refugees from Ukraine in the Polish labour market: opportunities and obstacles*, experts from the Polish Economic Institute recommended, among other measures, Polish language courses combined with childcare support and programmes promoting employment aligned with the refugees' qualifications (Polish Economic Institute 2024a). Consequently, support from the government and local authorities in the form of free Polish language courses and vocational training proved crucial for Ukrainian women during the initial months of their stay in Poland. At both the national and local levels, specific integration measures were implemented to enhance the employability of Ukrainian refugees, particularly women, through free language instruction and childcare provision. According to the Polish Economic Institute (2024), approximately 32% of Ukrainian women in Poland participated in language courses funded by public institutions or delivered by nongovernmental organisations.

For instance, in Warsaw, programmes organised by the City of Warsaw in cooperation with the Ocalenie Foundation enabled participants to simultaneously access language courses, psychological support and childcare (Fundacja Ocalenie 2023). In Gdańsk, as part of the 'Gdańsk Helps Ukraine' initiative, the Immigrant and Immigrant Women Support Center was established, offering comprehensive integration services – from language education to career counseling – which has benefited over 3,000 women (*Gdańsk Helps Ukraine* 2024). In Kraków, the Municipal Social Initiative Support Center launched the 'Together at Work' programme, in which around 800 Ukrainian women took part in vocational and language training. According to data from the Ministry of Family and Social Policy, more than 60% of refugees who entered legal employment in 2023 had previously benefited from at least one of the support programs available in Poland (Polish Agency for Enterprise Development 2024).

Socio-economic support for Ukrainian women in Poland resulting from the legal basis

In Poland, support for Ukrainian refugees involved the government, local authorities, nongovernmental organisations, employers and citizens. Utilising his powers, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki initiated actions to ensure the conditions for implementing tasks aimed at supporting Ukrainian citizens even before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. On 18 February 2022, the Polish prime minister established two interministerial teams to manage the reception of people from Ukraine (Polish Monitor Official Journal of the Republic of Poland 2022a) and to develop a programme for accommodating injured and

affected individuals arriving from Ukrainian territory (Polish Monitor Official Journal of the Republic of Poland 2022b). The teams were tasked with, among other things, monitoring the readiness of public administration to receive Ukrainian citizens, proposing solutions for transportation and relocation, and analysing the needs and capabilities to provide essential assistance to Ukrainian refugees on Polish territory. Additionally, Prime Minister M. Morawiecki appointed a Government Plenipotentiary for Refugees (Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland 2022a; Zalewski 2022). The position was assumed by Deputy Minister of Administration and Internal Affairs Paweł Szefernaker. The primary responsibilities of the plenipotentiary included coordinating the activities of government and local administration bodies aimed at assisting Ukrainian citizens. The plenipotentiary was authorised to propose amendments to legal regulations for consideration by the government. These proposals were intended to streamline the provision of aid to Ukrainian citizens and to adapt support measures to the evolving needs of refugees.

The Polish government, aiming to regulate the situation of people fleeing Ukraine, prepared a draft of a special law concerning assistance to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the ongoing armed conflict. On 12 March 2022, the Polish Parliament passed the Act on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine in Connection with the Armed Conflict on the Territory of that State. Colloquially, this legislation is referred to as ‘the special law on Ukrainian refugees’. The act was subsequently signed by President Andrzej Duda.

The legislation introduced a range of rights for Ukrainian citizens, including women, who sought shelter in Poland from the war. It has since been amended several times, resulting in changes to the scope of rights granted to Ukrainian nationals. One of the key provisions of the 2022 special act was the introduction of an 18-month residency permit in Poland, with the possibility of extension – currently valid until 30 September 2025. Additionally, Ukrainians were entitled to obtain a PESEL number, which enabled them to access various benefits, such as employment without the need for an additional work permit, access to family benefits, free public healthcare and education, and the ability to register a business. Ukrainian refugees were also granted the right to obtain a trusted profile, allowing them to handle administrative matters online (Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland 2022b). Analysing the forms of support provided by the Polish government to Ukrainian women, it is important to note the financial assistance and childcare support offered to them. Under the special law on refugees, Ukrainian women were entitled to a one-time financial benefit of PLN 300 to cover living expenses, particularly for food, clothing, footwear, personal hygiene products and housing costs. This provision was repealed by an amended special law on refugees as of 1 July 2024.

According to data from Statistics Poland (GUS), by the end of 2022, this benefit had been granted to 1,070,300 individuals. Further data from the Ministry

of Family and Social Policy, as of August 2023, indicate that a total of 1,066,453 people received this support – approximately 84% of those registered in Poland with a PESEL number and ‘UKR’ status. Although Statistics Poland does not provide gender-disaggregated data on recipients of this benefit, it can be reasonably assumed that the majority of beneficiaries were women with children, as they constituted the dominant group among war refugees from Ukraine (Statistics Poland 2023a; Ministry of Family and Social Policy 2023).

In addition to the one-time support of PLN 300, Ukrainian students continuing their education in Poland were eligible to apply for low-interest student loans, disbursed in monthly installments, with repayment starting no earlier than two years after graduation. These benefits were available regardless of gender. However, according to data from the Office for Foreigners, approximately 63% of Ukrainian nationals under temporary protection in Poland are women, and among adults, women account for as much as 75%. Moreover, studies indicate that Ukrainian refugees in Poland are primarily well-educated women with children. Therefore, it can be assumed that a significant portion of student loan recipients were women who arrived in Poland following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine (Statistics Poland 2023b).

They could apply for low-interest student loans disbursed in monthly installments, with repayment starting no earlier than two years after graduation. Ukrainian students demonstrating excellent academic performance could also qualify for partial loan forgiveness. These support measures remain in effect. Although detailed statistics on the number of Ukrainian female students who benefited from low-interest loans or university assistance are not publicly available, data from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education indicate that 1,280 student loan agreements were concluded in 2022 among students and doctoral candidates who met the income criteria, suggesting that the programme continues to be utilised (Ministry of Science and Higher Education 2023).

Moreover, most universities in Poland introduced aid programmes enabling Ukrainian students, including women, to apply for full or partial tuition waivers or reductions in dormitory fees. Refugee women were also eligible for grants and scholarships. The Ministry of Education and Science prepared a guide to assist Ukrainian women in applying to Polish universities and submitting the required documents. In addition, the Polish legislator ensured that Ukrainian women caring for a child under the age of 18 (as a parent or temporary guardian) could receive a childcare benefit of PLN 500 under the Family 500 Plus programme. As of January 2024, the amount of this benefit was increased from PLN 500 to PLN 800. Additionally, from September 2024, Ukrainian children residing in Poland were subjected to compulsory education, which was tied to the payment of family benefits under the Family 800 Plus programme (Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland 2022b). Furthermore, refugees who were parents or temporary guardians were granted access to family allowances and supple-

ments, special caregiving benefits, a one-time birth allowance, parental benefits and educational allowances. The Ministry of Education and Science prepared resources for teachers and educators to provide psychological and pedagogical support to Ukrainian mothers and students currently studying in Poland. Until the end of June 2024, Polish citizens who provided accommodation and meals in their homes to Ukrainian nationals received a monetary allowance of PLN 40 per day. According to data from the Polish Economic Institute, 77% of adult Poles participated in aid efforts for Ukrainian citizens. They engaged in volunteer work and, in some cases, offered housing to Ukrainians left without shelter (Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland 2022b).

In the first weeks of the war in Ukraine, aid for refugees was funded by the state budget, the EU, private businesses, international organisations and the generosity of Polish citizens. In 2022, Poland spent approximately PLN 20 billion on aid for Ukrainian refugees, and in 2023, around PLN 5 billion. During the same period, the state budget received revenue from taxes paid by Ukrainian refugees in Poland, amounting to approximately PLN 15 billion in 2022 and PLN 22 billion in 2023 (Demagog 2025).

Support for Ukrainian women: Governments, citizens, employers and NGOs

The burden of the refugee crisis was most acutely felt by municipalities that received thousands of Ukrainian refugees, particularly in the first weeks after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. Local governments in Poland provided Ukrainian women refugees with various forms of assistance, establishing information points. Women with children, who constituted the vast majority of refugees from Ukraine after the outbreak of the war in 2022 (about 63% of all beneficiaries of temporary protection in Poland and 75% among adults), were the main recipients of assistance at information points (Office for Foreigners 2025). At these points, they received information regarding procedures for legalising residence in Poland, obtaining a PESEL number, locations for collecting and distributing donations, psychological support, hotlines for foreigners, accommodation options, Polish language courses, vocational activation programmes and rules for running a business. However, this support was available to all refugees – regardless of gender, age or disability – and was primarily provided by local governments, nongovernmental organisations and state institutions.

Initially, a significant problem for local governments was the language barrier between Ukrainian women and the aid providers. This barrier was overcome by appointing coordinators fluent in both Polish and Ukrainian. Another major challenge for local authorities was finding suitable conditions for the long-term accommodation of Ukrainian citizens. In response, city authorities in Poland

established residential centres specifically for women from Ukraine fleeing the war (Rynek Infrastruktury 2022).

In social assistance centres, women could benefit from psychological support, career counseling, Polish language lessons and activities for children aimed at supporting their development and mental health. Polish language courses were not immediately available following the first wave of refugees in February 2022 but were gradually introduced in the following weeks and months as the support system developed. Participation in these courses was voluntary but highly popular, especially among women for whom learning Polish was key to gaining employment and integrating into Polish society (Ministry of Education and Science 2023).

Local authorities also undertook various actions to facilitate the daily functioning of refugees. Free public transportation was organised to accommodation centres and support points, hygiene and cleaning supplies were purchased, and one-time financial aid and family benefits were provided (Infotrans 2022). Furthermore, the war in Ukraine prompted Polish local governments to offer broad assistance to refugees and led to business decisions by Polish companies supporting Ukrainian women. The charitable activities of these companies included organising fundraising campaigns, providing transport for refugees across Poland's eastern border, meals for people stranded at train and bus stations, and creating job opportunities.

As a complement to government programmes, local governments also allocated funds from local budgets for financial aid dedicated to women with children and families. Thus, support for Ukrainian refugee women was multifaceted and included formal and administrative assistance as well as social support and integration into the labour market.

In the first weeks of the war in Ukraine, financial support specifically targeted at female refugees was offered by the supermarket chain Biedronka, amounting to PLN 10 million (in the form of shopping vouchers) (Jeronimo Martins Polska SA 2022), and by Poland's largest meat producer, CEDROB SA, contributing PLN 3 million (Grupa CEDROB 2022). These funds were allocated to foundations and municipalities involved in assisting women and children from Ukraine. Among other examples of support provided by Polish companies to Ukrainian citizens was the deployment of 1,000 cars by Panek CarSharing to the Polish-Ukrainian border at the end of February 2022 to transport women and children to refugee information centres (PAP 2022).

At the same time, the courier company InPost supported the Package for Ukraine campaign by transporting around 200,000 parcels donated by individuals to Caritas warehouses, which were then sent to Ukraine. Meanwhile, LOT Polish Airlines offered discounted ticket prices specifically to newly arrived war refugees from Ukraine.

Adults received a 30% discount, children 50% and infants traveling on an adult's lap were granted a 99% discount. The offer applied to travel from Ukraine to Poland, Romania, Hungary and Slovakia and was valid from 25 February to 31 May 2022. Ukrainian passengers were also allowed to change their reservations free of charge, even in the case of a no-show (Rynek Lotniczy 2022). The initiatives described above demonstrate that the support provided by Polish companies to Ukrainian women and children was extensive. Assistance was also offered by the discount chain KiK, Sphinx restaurants and Poczta Polska SA. KiK stores donated a large number of clothing items from their inventory. Poczta Polska SA decided to provide seven armoured cash transport vehicles. Meanwhile, the Sphinx restaurant chain launched the Family Community Center programme, which offered Ukrainian women with children safe and quiet spaces for meetings, sharing experiences, play or learning. Additionally, Sphinx restaurants provided complimentary refreshments to their guests (Bankier 2022b).

The largest job portals in Poland, OLX and Pracuj.pl, created dedicated sections with job offers in Ukrainian to meet the needs of potential candidates from Ukraine. A similar recruitment solution was also implemented by the fast-food chain McDonald's.

By the end of 2022, more than 220,000 Ukrainian female war refugees had found employment in Poland. According to available data, women accounted for approximately 64% of all employed Ukrainian refugees who arrived in Poland after the outbreak of the war (Ukrinform 2025; Polish Economic Institute 2024b). It is worth noting that the assistance provided to Ukrainian women and children involved not only local authorities and employers but also citizens and nongovernmental organisations. Grassroots engagement by Polish society began even before formal procedures for aiding Ukrainians were implemented. In the first weeks of the war, Poles demonstrated significant commitment to helping war refugees. The support offered to Ukrainian citizens included financial and material donations, volunteering and sharing private homes or apartments. According to data from the Polish Economic Institute, 77% of adult Poles participated in aid activities for Ukrainian citizens.

A significant portion of this assistance was directed toward women with children, who accounted for approximately 77% of all Ukrainian refugees in Poland between 2022 and 2023. This support included, in particular, free accommodation, material aid (such as children's clothing, strollers and toys), psychological support and childcare services (Polish Economic Institute 2022a).

Polish nongovernmental organisations were significantly more active in supporting Ukrainian refugees in Poland (98%) than in Ukraine (7.8%). In the early weeks of the war, nongovernmental organisations were particularly involved in providing legal and psychological assistance to refugees, primarily women. Legal aid for Ukrainian citizens focused on issues related to the

documents required for entry, residency conditions, employment and education in Poland. According to the 2023 *Report on Polish non-governmental organizations' support for Ukraine* by the Polish Non-Governmental Initiatives Confederacy, the following organisations demonstrated notable engagement in providing legal support: the Legal Aid Coordination Center, the Halina Nieć Legal Aid Center, the Legal Intervention Association and Żyglicka & Partners Law Firm. Ukrainian women and children required psychological support to adapt to their new reality and cope with the trauma of war. Nongovernmental organisations such as the Polish Red Cross and the Polish Migration Forum Foundation provided psychological assistance and integration support. It is important to note that, in addition to psychological support, these organisations assisted Ukrainian women by providing food and hygiene packages, organising integration activities, offering employment counseling, Polish language courses and social assistance (Polish Red Cross 2022; Polish Migration Forum Foundation 2022).

One of the nongovernmental organisations providing assistance to Ukrainian women was the Ukraine Foundation, established in 2016 in response to the growing number of Ukrainians settling in Poland. In 2022, the Ukraine Foundation launched the 'Ukrainian Woman in Poland' project, aimed at supporting the integration of Ukrainian refugee women who arrived in Poland after the outbreak of the war. The project was exclusively dedicated to women, particularly those who had come to Poland due to the armed conflict, and included organising regular meetings in Lower Silesia. These meetings provided refugees with access to psychological support and sessions on topics such as 'first steps in Poland', 'crisis situations', communication with children in crisis conditions', 'adaptation', 'discovering personal potential' and 'personal development' (Ukraine Foundation 2022).

As part of the Ukrainian woman in Poland project, Ukrainian women were also offered support in areas such as legal advice, accounting, starting their own business and website development. On 8 March 2022, the Support Fund for Women and Girls from Ukraine was established as part of the Hi Girls! initiative launched by the Kulczyk Foundation. Funds raised for the initiative were allocated to urgent needs of Ukrainian women, such as medications, hygiene products, language lessons and career counseling. Dominika Kulczyk, president of the Kulczyk Foundation, contributed PLN 1 million to the Support Fund for Women and Girls from Ukraine Hi Girls!. In mid-April 2022, thanks to funds raised through the Support Fund for Women and Girls from Ukraine, the Hi Girls! Ukrainian Women's Assistance Center opened in Warsaw (Kulczyk Foundation 2022). The centre offered free Polish language lessons, group sessions with psychologists and stress management training.

Professional activity of Ukrainian women in the Polish labour market

Adaptation of Ukrainian women to the conditions of the Polish labour market posed a socio-economic challenge. Proficiency in the Polish language, access to childcare, and employment enabled Ukrainian women to become full-fledged and equal participants in public life in Poland. In 2023, the employment rate of war refugees in Poland reached 65%, the highest among the member states of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which can be considered a significant achievement for Poland in the integration of refugees (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2023). For women, the employment rate was slightly lower, at 61%, yet Poland remained a leader among OECD countries in integrating refugees into the labour market (Polish Economic Institute 2024a).

Furthermore, Poland has been and remains an attractive workplace for Ukrainian women in terms of safety and the employment conditions offered compared to their home country. According to research, most Ukrainian refugee women in Poland have found employment, which reflects successful labour market integration (Marczuk 2022). Additionally, a significant proportion of them rate working conditions in Poland as good and fair, likely in comparison to the situation in Ukraine (International Organization for Migration 2017).

It is worth noting that many refugee women from Ukraine who arrived in Poland had no previous experience working abroad, often held higher education degrees (about 50%), came from large urban areas, lacked financial resources and showed a strong interest in upgrading their skills. According to refugee labour market reports, approximately 46% of Ukrainian women worked in positions unrelated to their former professions and below their qualifications (Polish Economic Institute 2024b). To address this mismatch and improve their employability, around 60% participated in language, vocational or integration courses. While only 45% had knowledge of the Polish language, communication was sufficient for less demanding jobs, whereas more specialised positions required technical competencies and familiarity with professional terminology (National Bank of Poland 2023a).

Despite the language barrier and challenges related to understanding Polish regulations and procedures regarding employment, taxes and social insurance, Ukrainian women began entering the Polish labour market relatively quickly. Cultural proximity facilitated their integration, enabling them to participate in local communities and build lasting relationships with Poles. According to a 2023 report by the National Bank of Poland, 80% of Ukrainian refugee women supported themselves through work in Poland, while only 7% relied on funds provided by the Polish government. In addition to the language barrier, a significant challenge for these refugee women seeking employment in Poland was

arranging childcare, particularly for children under the age of three. Ukrainian refugee women also expressed concerns about interacting with Polish administrative systems, viewing procedures in Poland (such as opening a bank account or diploma recognition) as more complex than those in Ukraine.

In 2022–2023, the majority of Ukrainian women were employed in industry (22%), trade (12%) and the service sector (33%). A notable portion of refugees, more often than pre-war migrants, worked in high-skilled service roles such as healthcare, IT and finance. Ukrainian women frequently sought employment offering flexible working hours and childcare services to balance their professional and family lives (Bankier 2024). In 2022–2023, Ukrainian citizens established 44,500 sole proprietorships in Poland. During this period, women accounted for 17,000 of these businesses (6,500 in 2022 and 10,500 in 2023). Businesses founded by Ukrainian women differed in their industry structure from those established by men. This group constituted a significant portion of the 44.5 thousand businesses founded by Ukrainian citizens in Poland during this time. Ukrainian women most often operated businesses in the service sector (32%), information and communication (12%), trade, administrative services and support activities (10% each), as well as other sectors (26%) (W Gospodarce 2022; Polish Economic Institute 2022b).

Effective integration of Ukrainian refugee women into Polish society required not only the ability to communicate in Polish, but also access to employment aligned with their qualifications. However, many faced difficulties finding jobs that matched their skills. According to the Polish Economic Institute, nearly 46% of Ukrainian refugee women worked in positions below their qualifications in 2022–2023. This underemployment hindered their sense of professional fulfillment, slowed their social integration and represented a significant underutilisation of human capital from the perspective of the Polish economy.

Although only 45% of these women declared proficiency in Polish, as many as 90% were fluent in Russian and 55% in English (National Bank of Poland 2023a). This multilingualism improved their employment prospects, especially in sectors requiring foreign language communication, such as customer service, logistics, IT and healthcare. According to a 2023 report by the Polish Economic Institute, employers in these industries actively sought refugee women who spoke Russian and/or English to support international client relations, particularly in eastern regions of Poland and in large cities with diverse populations.

Their language skills and adaptability also contributed to the rise of female entrepreneurship. Out of the 44,500 sole proprietorships established in Poland by Ukrainian citizens in 2022–2023, 17,000 were launched by women – most of whom arrived after the outbreak of the war. Foreign language proficiency particularly supported self-employment in fields such as online marketing, translation, e-commerce and education.

Conclusion

The results presented in this article lead to several key conclusions regarding the socio-economic support provided to Ukrainian refugee women in Poland in 2022–2023, and their professional activity. First, in response to the first research question, the coordinated actions of the Polish government, local authorities, nongovernmental organisations, employers and civil society ensured effective support for women fleeing the war. The legal framework established through the special Act on Assistance to Ukrainian Citizens created favourable conditions for their rapid legal, social and economic integration, providing access to healthcare, social benefits, education and the labour market.

Second, in addressing the second research question, concerning the factors influencing the establishment of sole proprietorships (JDGs) by Ukrainian refugee women, the analysis indicates that these motivations went beyond just the economic desire for independence. A key factor was the mismatch between available job offers and the needs and qualifications of many refugees, as well as the necessity to balance work with childcare responsibilities – especially for young children. Entrepreneurship offered greater flexibility and autonomy compared to wage employment, making it an attractive solution in the context of post-war displacement. A high percentage of women with higher education and language skills (e.g. English, Russian) also facilitated their entry into sectors such as trade, services and IT.

Third, with regard to professional barriers, the main obstacles included limited knowledge of the Polish language, difficulties navigating administrative systems and challenges related to arranging childcare. These factors often hindered access to stable employment and qualified positions, leading some women to opt for self-employment as a more accessible solution.

In light of the conducted analysis, the hypothesis presented in the article is confirmed: Ukrainian refugee women demonstrated strong professional aspirations and relatively quickly integrated into the Polish labour market, particularly through establishing their own businesses. While some barriers remain, institutional support and their own initiative played a crucial role in the process of socio-economic integration.

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