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The impact of the migration of Ukrainian citizens on demographics in Poland in terms of security

Wpływ migracji obywateli Ukrainy na demografię Polski w kontekście bezpieczeństwa

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Abstract:

Research objectives and hypothesis/research questions

The study outlines the research problem: how does the migration of Ukrainian citizens impact the Polish demographic situation in cities and rural areas in terms of state security? The aim of the study is to conduct a multidimensional comparative analysis of the number of Ukrainians in Poland, including those in cities and rural areas under temporary protection. The article presents a research hypothesis: it is assumed that migrants from Ukraine are of significant importance for the current and future demographic situation of Poland, both in cities and in the countryside, and those aged 0 to 19 will strengthen the economic sector of the country in the future.

Research methods

The research method used in the study was source analysis.

Main results

The demographic structure of that population stands out from the general Polish community – it is dominated by young, working-age individuals (20–49 years old), with a considerable number of children and adolescents. In total, people under 20 constitute over a million refugees, demonstrating significant educational and future professional potential. At the same time, the exceptionally low share of older people (60+) indicates that migrants from Ukraine do not pose a significant burden on the pension or healthcare systems. On the contrary, the vast majority of them are active, able to work, and ready to settle on the long-term basis.

Implications for theory and practice

In conclusion, the influx of Ukrainian citizens under temporary protection could be an impetus for the sustainable reconstruction of Polish demographic structure. Given the irreversible trends of aging and depopulation in many regions, such an opportunity should be used wisely, benefiting both refugees and Polish society as a whole.

Keywords: migration, Russia-Ukraine war, demography, security, number of Ukrainian migrants in rural and urban Poland

Abstrakt:**Cel badań i hipotezy/pytania badawcze**

W opracowaniu sformułowano problem badawczy: w jaki sposób migracja obywateli Ukrainy wpływa na sytuację demograficzną Polski w miastach i na wsiach w kontekście zapewnienia bezpieczeństwa państwa? Celem badań jest przeprowadzenie wielowymiarowej analizy porównawczej liczby Ukraińców w Polsce, w tym w miastach i na wsiach objętych ochroną czasową. W artykule postawiono hipotezę badawczą: przypuszcza się, że migranci z Ukrainy mają istotne znaczenie dla aktualnej i przyszłej sytuacji demograficznej Polski zarówno w miastach, jak i na wsiach, a ci z przedziału wiekowego od 0 do 19 lat w przyszłości wzmocnią sektor gospodarczy kraju.

Metody badawcze

W pracy zastosowano metodę badawczą w postaci analizy źródłowej.

Główne wyniki

Struktura demograficzna tej populacji wyróżnia się na tle ogółu społeczeństwa polskiego – dominują w niej osoby młode, w wieku produkcyjnym (20-49 lat), a także bardzo liczna grupa dzieci i młodzieży. Łącznie osoby w wieku poniżej 20 lat stanowią ponad milion uchodźców, co świadczy o dużym potencjale edukacyjnym i przyszłym zawodowym. Jednocześnie bardzo mały udział osób starszych (60+) wskazuje, że migranci z Ukrainy nie stanowią istotnego obciążenia dla systemu emerytalnego ani opieki zdrowotnej. Przeciwnie, w zdecydowanej większości są to osoby aktywne, zdolne do pracy i gotowe do osiedlenia się na długi czas.

Implikacje dla teorii i praktyki

Konkludując, napływ obywateli Ukrainy objętych ochroną czasową może być impulsem do trwałej odbudowy struktury demograficznej Polski. W obliczu nieodwracalnych trendów starzenia się i wyludnienia wielu regionów ta szansa powinna zostać wykorzystana mądrze z korzyścią zarówno dla uchodźców, jak i całego polskiego społeczeństwa.

Słowa kluczowe: migracja, wojna Rosji z Ukrainą, demografia, bezpieczeństwo, liczebność migrantów z Ukrainy na wsiach i w miastach w Polsce

Introduction

The migration of Ukrainian citizens to Poland significantly impacts the demographic structure of the country, which directly impacts diverse types of security (Kozicki, 2022, pp. 15-24; Latosiewicz, Kozicki, Tomaszewski, 2025, pp. 11-84), including social and economic aspects. Ukrainian migrants are primarily young, working-age individuals, with a large group of children and adolescents. Such a demographic profile helps reverse negative trends, such as population aging, declining birth rates, and staff shortages in key economic sectors. The presence of migrants in rural areas and smaller towns additionally supports the stabilization of local communities, counteracting their depopulation. The study outlines the research problem: how does the migration of Ukrainian citizens impact the Polish demographic situation in cities and rural areas in terms of state security? The aim of the study is to conduct a multidimensional comparative analysis of the number of Ukrainians in Poland, including those in cities and rural areas under temporary protection. The article presents a research hypothesis: it is assumed that migrants from Ukraine are of significant importance for the current and future demographic situation of Poland, both in cities and in the countryside, and those aged 0 to 19 will

strengthen the economic sector of the country in the future. The research method used in the study was source analysis.

1. Analysis of the literature on the subject of research

Migration, in the Polish Language Dictionary (PWN, 2025), denotes a mass movement of people usually in search of better living conditions. Migration can be caused by distinct reasons, both voluntary and, for example, natural disasters or wars.

One example demonstrating the large scale of this phenomenon was the influx of migrants from Ukraine to Poland following the outbreak of war in February 2022. That was an unprecedented event in recent European history (NBP, 2022). It is estimated that Poland accepted over 3 million refugees, of whom over a million stayed for longer periods (Urząd do Spraw Cudzoziemców, 2025). Such a mass phenomenon had a significant impact on the functioning of various sectors of the economy, particularly the labour market (PAP, 2025), public services, as well as the social and spatial structure of the country.

The presence of Ukrainians has contributed to the increase in gross domestic product – according to the Polish Economic Institute report, the increase amounted to approximately 2.7% in 2024 alone (UNHCR, 2025). Ukrainian refugees have largely entered the labour market, filling gaps in sectors such as construction, logistics, elderly care, catering, and agriculture (Otwarty Kraków, 2025). Legalization of their stay and employment was made easier, allowing for rapid adaptation. The median of salary among Ukrainians in Poland increased from approximately PLN 3100 net to PLN 4000 over two years, and the employment rate reached almost 70% (Biznes, 2025).

Eastern voivodeships, including the Podkarpackie, Lubelskie, and Podlaskie, were particularly vulnerable to migratory pressure due to their geographical location. Cities such as Rzeszów, Lublin, and Przemyśl served as the first point of contact – both logistical and humanitarian (Radio Plus, 2022). Significant population growth (up to 30-50% in some localities) posed enormous challenges for local governments: in terms of housing (Kozicki, Mitkow, Sowa, 2021), education, healthcare, and transportation. On the other hand, the increased presence of young and able-bodied people improved local demographic prospects, accelerating the modernization of public services.

The process of accepting and accommodating migrants required a coordinated response from multiple institutions. The Polish government played a key role, adopting a special law regulating the legal status of Ukrainian citizens in March 2022 (Ustawa, 2022). The ministries (Ministry of Interior and Administration, Ministry of Education and Science and others) coordinated activities related to the legalization of stay, children's education and professional activation.

It is also worth noting the attitude of Polish society toward migrants from Ukraine. In the first months of the war, widespread solidarity prevailed, with as many as 90% of Poles declaring a willingness to help refugees. However, this picture changed in the following years. Social exhaustion and rising living costs began to influence perceptions of migrants. By the end of 2024, only about 57% of Poles declared a willingness to continue supporting them, while according to a CBOS survey from early 2025, as many as 38% of respondents admitted to prejudice against Ukrainians. The mood was particularly chilly in large cities and among younger people, who viewed migrants as competition in the job and education markets. In smaller towns, opinions were more positive, especially where migrants provided real support to local communities (CBOS, 2022; CBOS, 2025).

Despite growing tensions, the balance of Ukrainian migration to Poland remains positive. The Polish state has demonstrated institutional efficiency and the willingness of civil society to act in crisis situations. Migrants have become not only beneficiaries of aid but also active participants in socio-economic life. Long-term integration poses a challenge for the future: language learning, recognition of professional qualifications, housing policy, and countering disinformation that deepens prejudice (Polski Instytut Ekonomiczny, 2023). How Poland manages that task will determine whether the potential arising from the migration will be fully utilized not only as a response to the crisis but also as an opportunity to strengthen the demographic and development potential of the country (BGK, 2025).

The migration of Ukrainian citizens to Poland, particularly in 2022, had a significant impact on the functioning of the Polish state and society (Polski Instytut Ekonomiczny, 2025). Such a phenomenon affected millions of people seeking refuge, work, and stability in Poland. Such a massive influx of people impacts various spheres of national security. When analyzing that topic, it is worth considering several key dimensions: social, economic, internal, health, cultural, and political security.

The first and most noticeable area impacted by Ukrainian migration is social security. Poland, as a country hosting hundreds of thousands of refugees, has had to rapidly adapt its social welfare, education, and healthcare structures (Lurka, 2022; Rynek Zdrowia, 2025; Demagog, 2023) to the increased demand. The burden on schools, clinics, and care institutions has increased. At the same time, however, migrants, especially those who take up employment and integrate into local communities, contribute to strengthening the system by paying taxes, social security contributions, and supporting domestic consumption. In the long term, that could contribute to increased social stability if integration proceeds smoothly (Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej, 2022).

Equally important is the aspect of economic security. The Polish economy, grappling with labour shortages, has benefited from the presence of migrants from Ukraine. They often take up jobs in scarce professions: construction, agriculture,

logistics, and elderly care. While that brings tangible economic benefits, it also poses certain risks, such as unfair salary competition and the growth of the grey economy. Furthermore, rapid population growth in some regions could lead to pressure on local housing and service markets, which also poses a challenge for economic security and spatial planning (PulsHR, 2025; Gibała, 2025).

In terms of internal security, it is important to emphasize that despite the massive scale of migration, there has been no significant increase in crime related to the influx of Ukrainian citizens in Poland (Polskie Radio 24, 2025; UW, 2025). State and local government agencies quickly took preventive measures, and cooperation with migrants in this regard has yielded positive results. However, new challenges have emerged, such as threats related to disinformation, primarily Russian, which attempts to fuel antipathy towards refugees and manipulate public opinion. In such a situation, strengthening social resilience to information manipulation and supporting narratives based on facts and empathy is crucial.

Health security is another area where migration has left its mark. Particularly during the first year of the war in Ukraine, the Polish healthcare system faced the challenge of providing medical assistance to hundreds of thousands of new arrivals (NFZ, 2022). Although the initial burden was significant, many institutions coped with the situation thanks to their flexibility and the support of non-governmental and international organizations. The importance of systemic preparedness for crisis situations related to migration and public health (Serwis Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 2022) was previously demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Kozicki, Bryczek-Wróbel, 2020).

Equally important, though less tangible, is the dimension of cultural and identity security. The mass presence of another nationality, even one culturally close to the Ukrainians, may raise concerns among some sections of society. Those concerns include the preservation of national identity, language, and historical events (such as the Volhynian Massacre) (Motyka, 2019). The lack of appropriate integration and educational initiatives may lead to increased social tensions and xenophobia (Bendyk, 2023). However, with a properly implemented integration policy, migration can be an opportunity to strengthen multiculturalism, openness, and social solidarity.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the political security aspect. Polish response to the migration crisis after 2022 was positively assessed by the international community and contributed to strengthening the image of the country as a responsible and solidary partner (WNP, 2025). At the same time, the topic of migration has also become a subject of internal disputes, exploited by various political forces to mobilize the electorate. In the long term, that could lead to social polarization and hinder a coherent, evidence-based migration policy.

This study attempts a multidimensional analysis of the number of migrants from Ukraine under temporary protection in Poland.

2. Multidimensional analysis of the number of Ukrainians in Poland under temporary protection

The research began by presenting data on the number of Ukrainians in Poland covered by temporary protection in 2023, broken down into men and women and by respective voivodeships, in Figure 1. As of December 31, 2023, a total of 944,745 Ukrainian citizens under temporary protection resided in Poland, of whom 597,883 were women and 346,862 were men (see Fig. 1). Temporary protection is granted to individuals who fled Ukraine due to Russia's armed aggression and cannot safely return to their home country. Poland, as one of the neighboring countries, has become a major refuge for Ukrainian refugees.

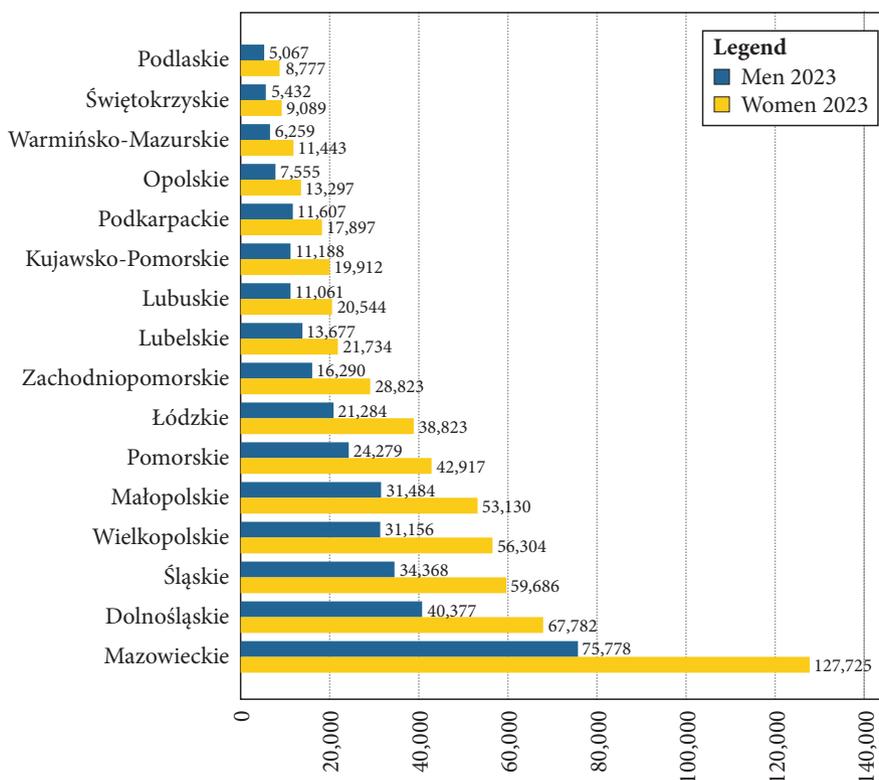


Fig. 1. Pyramid chart of the number of Ukrainians in Poland under temporary protection in 2023, broken down by men and women and by voivodeship (as of December 31, 2023)

Source: own study based on: GUS, 2025

By far, the largest number of Ukrainian citizens under temporary protection resides in the Masovian Voivodeship – 75,778 men and 112,725 women, for a total of 203,503 people. That is no coincidence, as Warsaw and its surrounding areas offer better access to jobs, public institutions, institutions responsible for international support, and many non-governmental organizations. Furthermore, the capital has a convenient transportation system and offers better opportunities to find housing.

The consecutive voivodeships with the largest number of refugees are Dolnośląskie (108,159), Śląskie (94,054), Wielkopolskie (87,460), and Małopolskie (84,614). Those regions share large urban agglomerations (Wrocław, Katowice, Poznań, Kraków) and a well-developed labour market in both services and industry. Those are also areas with good infrastructure, accessible public transportation, and a wide range of educational opportunities, which is particularly important for children and young people.

On the other hand, the fewest Ukrainians settled in the eastern and northeastern voivodeships, such as Podlaskie (13,844), Świętokrzyskie (14,521), and Warmińsko-Mazurskie (17,702). Those regions have a lower level of urbanization, limited access to the labour market, weaker infrastructure, and fewer organizations supporting refugees. Although the proximity of the border might suggest a larger influx of refugees from the East, in practice most of them headed further west and south, where it was easier to find work and housing.

A substantial proportion of Ukrainians residing in Poland are women with children and elderly people who left the country in the first months of the war. They find employment primarily in the service sector: in restaurants, trade, hotels, and elderly and childcare. Some work in industry and construction, especially men, while those with specialized education pursue jobs in skilled professions such as IT, education, and healthcare. A large number of children and young people continue their education in Polish schools, integrating with their local peers.

The presence of such a large group of refugees from Ukraine has a significant impact on Polish society, bringing both benefits and challenges. On the one hand, Ukrainians are filling gaps in the labour market, particularly in scarce professions, increasing domestic consumption, and contributing to economic growth. Their professional activity generates revenue from taxes and contributions to the state budget and the social security system. Polish society demonstrated tremendous solidarity and openness, especially in the first months of the conflict, which resulted in closer relations between those two nations.

On the other hand, such a rapid influx of people creates challenges, including pressure on the education system, healthcare, the housing market, and public administration. Not everywhere has it been possible to secure an adequate number of teachers, translators, and psychologists to support children with war trauma. Social tensions are also emerging due to competition for limited resources, especially in less affluent regions.

The presence of Ukrainians in Poland brings many economic and social benefits, but it also requires long-term integration efforts, systemic support, and investment in education, labour market, and local communities. It is a historic challenge that, in the long run, could bring mutual benefits to both Poland and the Ukrainian citizens seeking safe haven here.

Figure 2 analyzes data on the number of Ukrainians in Poland covered by temporary protection in 2024, broken down into men and women and by respective voivodeships. As of December 31, 2024, the number of Ukrainian citizens under temporary protection in Poland was 978,099, an increase of 33,354 compared to 2023 (944,745). The data presented in the chart show that the largest increase in the number of refugees occurred among men – from 346,862 in 2023 to 381,054 in 2024, an increase of over 34,192. The number of women remained at a similar level – 597,883 in 2023 compared to 597,045 in 2024, indicating a minimal decrease of 838.

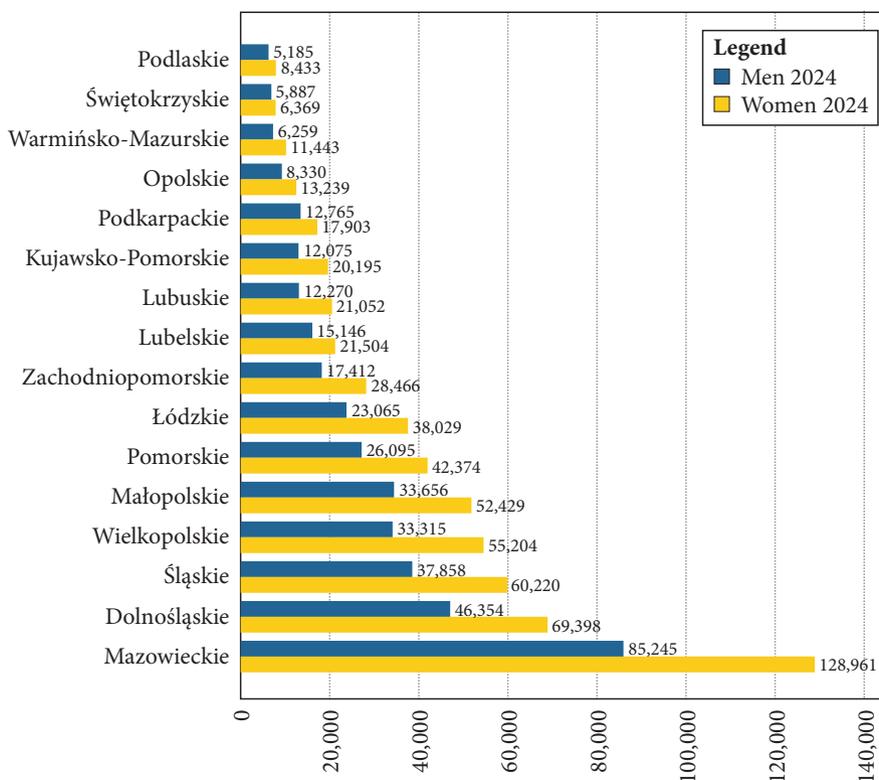


Fig. 2. Pyramid chart of the number of Ukrainians in Poland under temporary protection in 2024, broken down by men and women and by voivodeship (as of December 31, 2024)

Source: own study based on: GUS, 2025

Such a distribution may indicate a shift in the demographic structure of war refugees from Ukraine. In the first year of the war, women with children, fleeing direct hostilities, predominated, while men often remained in the country due to mobilization. However, over time, more and more men have been arriving in Poland, both as a result of changes in regulations and the prolonged war, which forced many to seek long-term refuge abroad. The influx of men not only represents a shift in gender proportions but also the growing importance of that group in the Polish labour market.

From a voivodeship perspective, the largest increase in the number of Ukrainians under temporary protection was recorded in regions with developed economic infrastructure and a strong labour market. The Mazowieckie Voivodeship maintained its leading position, increasing the number of Ukrainians from approximately 203,503 to 214,206 (85,245 men and 128,961 women). That is a natural consequence of the attractiveness of the capital, which offers the widest selection of job offers, a well-developed housing base, access to education, and extensive institutional support. Significant growth also occurred in the Dolnośląskie Voivodeship (an increase of 7593), Śląskie Voivodeship (an increase of 4,024), and Wielkopolskie Voivodeship (an increase of 4,024). Those are areas with strong urban centers, dynamically developing economies, and a need to address staff shortages.

On the other hand, voivodeships with weaker economic potential (Gazeta Prawna, 2024), those less urbanized, such as Podlaskie, Świętokrzyskie, and Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeships (Obserwator Gospodarczy, 2022), have shown either symbolic growth or stagnation. Jobs are harder to find in those regions, and access to public services and migration support is limited. It means that even though some Ukrainians initially move to those voivodeships, they subsequently migrate to larger cities and more developed parts of the country.

The growing number of refugees, especially working-age men, has a direct impact on the Polish labour market. Ukrainians are increasingly entering sectors with significant labour shortages, such as construction, manufacturing, transportation, logistics, and municipal services. That is a natural response to the growing demand in those industries and the ongoing aging of the Polish population. Many employers value Ukrainian workers for their diligence, flexibility, and willingness to take on jobs where labour is scarce. Women, on the other hand, continue to find employment primarily in retail, catering, and child and senior care.

In the long term, the presence of Ukrainian citizens in Poland is no longer purely temporary. Many are learning the language, taking up long-term employment, sending their children to Polish schools, and some are opting to apply for permanent residence. That creates a need not only for short-term support but also for effective social and professional integration. The labour market is becoming increasingly multicultural and requires new tools – from teaching Polish, through the recognition of professional qualifications, to supporting migrant entrepreneurship (Doba.pl, 2024).

The growing number of Ukrainians in Poland also brings challenges. Housing policy, ensuring access to education and healthcare, as well as anti-discrimination measures and preventing social tensions are becoming increasingly important. Integrating that group responsibly and sustainably can bring mutual benefits not only to Ukrainians themselves, but also to Polish society and the economy. Given the shortage of staff, an aging population, and the outflow of young Poles abroad, the presence of a motivated and work-ready migrant group can be not only a support but also a development stimulus for the country.

Furthermore, data on the number of Ukrainians in Polish cities under temporary protection in 2023 was analyzed, broken down by men and women and by voivodeship (see Fig. 3). As of March 31, 2023, there were 739,338 Ukrainian citizens under temporary protection in Polish cities, of whom 465,603 were women and 273,735 were men. The data demonstrate a clear predominance of women among Ukrainian urban refugees, a direct result of the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the mandatory mobilization of men, which significantly limited their ability to leave the country. Women, children, and the elderly were the first to seek refuge in Poland, particularly in larger urban areas, which guaranteed better living conditions, access to services, and greater integration opportunities.

The analysis of the graph presenting the distribution of urban refugees by voivodeship and gender shows that the largest number of Ukrainians lived in large cities in the central and western voivodeships. The most visible concentration was recorded in the Mazowieckie Voivodeship, where the number of Ukrainians in cities reached over 165,331. It is primarily due to presence of Warsaw, which is not only the Polish largest city but also the administrative, economic, and educational center of the country. The capital offers the most jobs, flats, schools, and assistance programs, making it the most popular destination for refugees.

Other voivodeships with high urban Ukrainian populations include Dolnośląskie (57,491 women and 34,762 men), Śląskie (49,423 women and 28,884 men), Wielkopolskie (45,061 women and 24,887 men), and Małopolskie (37,335 women and 22,670 men). Those regions include large urban agglomerations such as Wrocław, Katowice, Poznań, and Kraków – with well-developed social and economic infrastructures that have long been magnets for migrants. Thanks to the diversity of job offers, housing availability, and local government efforts to integrate foreigners, those voivodeships attract both women with children and men who have been able to cross the border.

The lowest number of urban refugees was recorded in the Podlaskie Voivodeship (6,563 women and 3936 men), Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship (7,304 women and 4,421 men), and Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship (8,476 women and 4,719 men). Those regions have a lower degree of urbanization, a weaker labour market, fewer large urban centers, and limited institutional support. Although geographically

located closer to the Ukrainian border, they do not offer the same employment, housing, and education opportunities available in larger cities in the western and central voivodeships. Therefore, even if some refugees initially arrive in those regions, they soon move further afield in search of better living conditions.

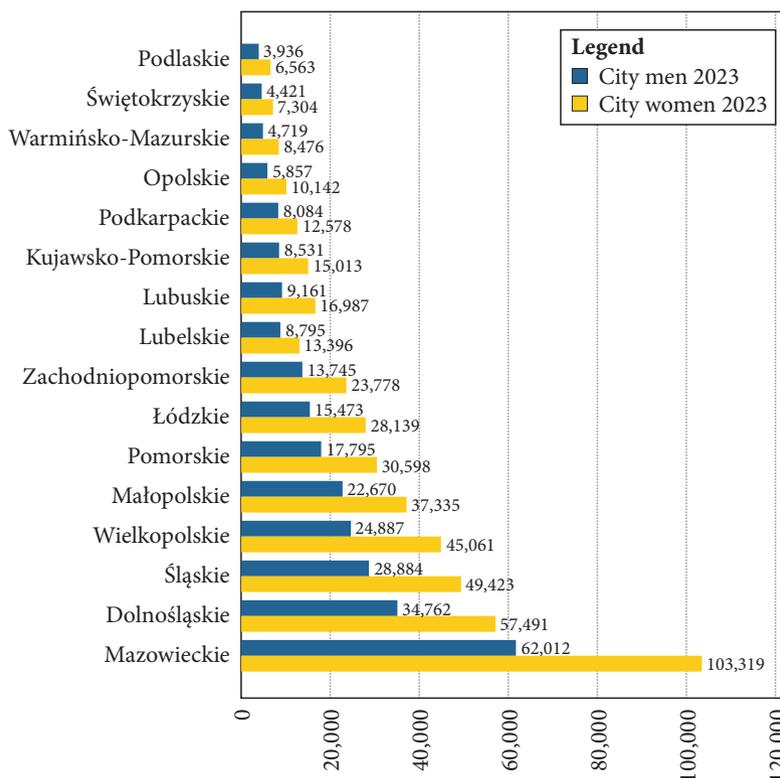


Fig. 3. Pyramid chart of the number of Ukrainians in Polish cities under temporary protection in 2023, broken down by men and women and by voivodeship (as of December 31, 2023)

Source: own study based on: GUS, 2025

The predominance of women in the urban refugee population stems not only from restrictions on men in Ukraine, but also from the role women play in crisis situations – they are most often the ones who decide to evacuate with children, organize family life in exile, and take the first steps of adaptation. Men, though in the minority, are increasingly joining families or arriving individually in search of work. In cities, they find employment primarily in the construction, transportation, warehousing, and manufacturing sectors, while women take up jobs in trade, catering, care services, education, and healthcare.

The spatial distribution of refugees in Polish cities in 2023 shows clear regional variation and reflects general migration processes driving populations to places with higher economic and social potential. Large cities are natural integration hubs, home to aid organizations, offices supporting foreigners, and the Ukrainian diaspora, which facilitates the acclimatization of newcomers. At the same time, however, such a concentrated influx of refugees poses new challenges for cities: pressure on infrastructure, schools, public transport and the housing market (Business Insider, 2023).

The situation of refugees from Ukraine in Polish cities in 2023 demonstrates not only the scale and structure of the migration, but also regional variations resulting from the socio-economic capabilities of respective voivodeships. The migration has a significant impact on urban social environments and requires continued integration efforts and strategic planning that will ensure both the security and development of refugees and the stability and social cohesion of local communities.

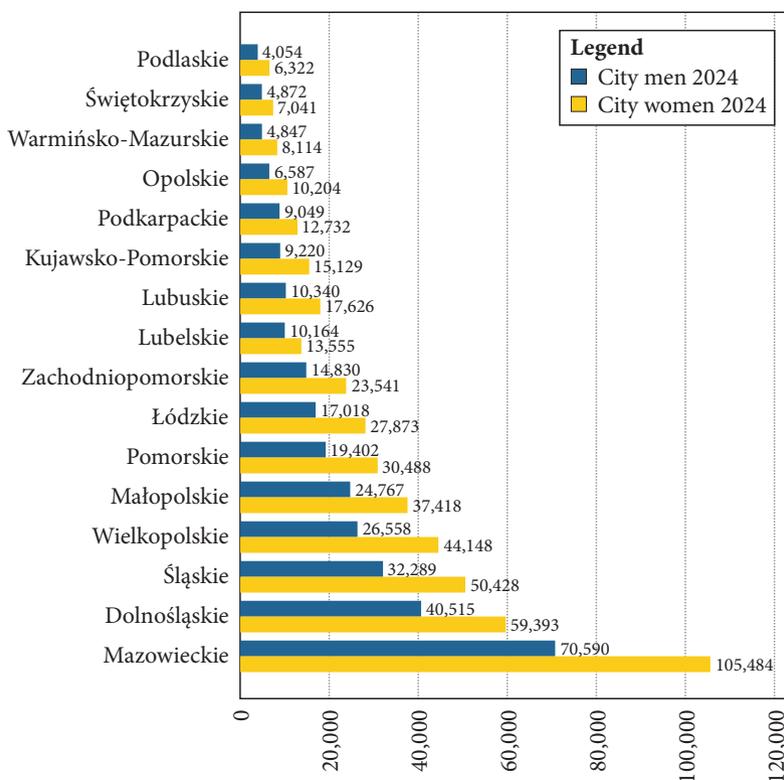


Fig. 4. Pyramid chart of the number of Ukrainians in Polish cities under temporary protection in 2024, broken down by men and women and by voivodeship (as of December 31, 2024)

Source: own study based on: GUS, 2025

Then, the study analyzed the same data for cities as of December 31, 2024 (see Fig. 4). The comparison of data from the charts showing the number of Ukrainian citizens under temporary protection in Polish cities in 2023 and 2024 reveals a small but significant increase in the number of refugees. As of March 31, 2024, 774,598 Ukrainians (469,496 women and 305,102 men) were residing in Polish cities, representing an increase of 35,260 compared to the same period in 2023, when the number was 739,338 (465,603 women and 273,735 men).

The largest increase was among men, with their number increasing by over 35,000, suggesting a shift in the refugee demographics. More and more men, previously unable to leave Ukraine due to mandatory mobilization, are joining their families or arriving for work. The number of women has increased slightly, by approximately 1,200, indicating a stabilization in the migration of women and children in Polish cities.

On a regional scale, the largest concentrations of urban Ukrainians are still found in voivodeships with strong urban centers, good infrastructure and a developed labour market:

- The Mazowieckie Voivodeship remains the leader: in 2024, the number of Ukrainians reached 176,074 (105,484 women and a staggering 70,590 men). That is a meaningful change, reflecting the visible influx of men to Warsaw and the surrounding areas, likely for work and family reunification purposes;
- The Dolnośląskie Voivodeship also recorded an increase: from 92,253 in 2023 to 99,908 in 2024. Such an increase was even among both women (from 57,491 to 59,893) and men (from 34,762 to 40,515);
- The Śląskie, Wielkopolskie, and Małopolskie Voivodeships maintained a high number of Ukrainians in cities, recording slight increases of several thousand people, with a significant increase in the number of men – for example, in Śląskie from 78,307 to 82,717;
- The Pomorskie, Łódzkie, and Zachodniopomorskie Voivodeships also recorded moderate increases, confirming their importance as regions with significant integration and employment opportunities.

In voivodeships with weaker urban and economic potential, such as Podlaskie, Świętokrzyskie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie, and Opolskie, the number of Ukrainians in cities remained almost unchanged or increased only marginally. Their share in the total number of urban refugees remains small, reflecting the smaller number of large cities, limited employment opportunities, and weaker integration infrastructure.

The significant increase in the number of men in 2024 has significant social and economic consequences. On one hand, it allows for a more gender-balanced development of the Ukrainian community in Poland and facilitates family stability. On the other hand, it increases the participation of Ukrainians in the labour market, especially in industries such as construction (Jobs4Ukraine, 2024), manufacturing, logistics, and transportation, which traditionally require manual workers.

The presence of men also increases demand for other services – housing, healthcare, and education, especially if they arrive with their families.

The year 2024 saw a clear continuation of the trend of Ukrainian citizens settling in Polish cities, with a shift in their demographic structure – the number of men increased, indicating the continued settlement of that community in Poland. Cities remain the main refugee-receiving centers, and their role as centers of integration, work, and everyday life will continue to grow. Therefore, further investment in public services, infrastructure, and integration programs is essential to ensure harmonious coexistence and development for both the Ukrainian and Polish communities.

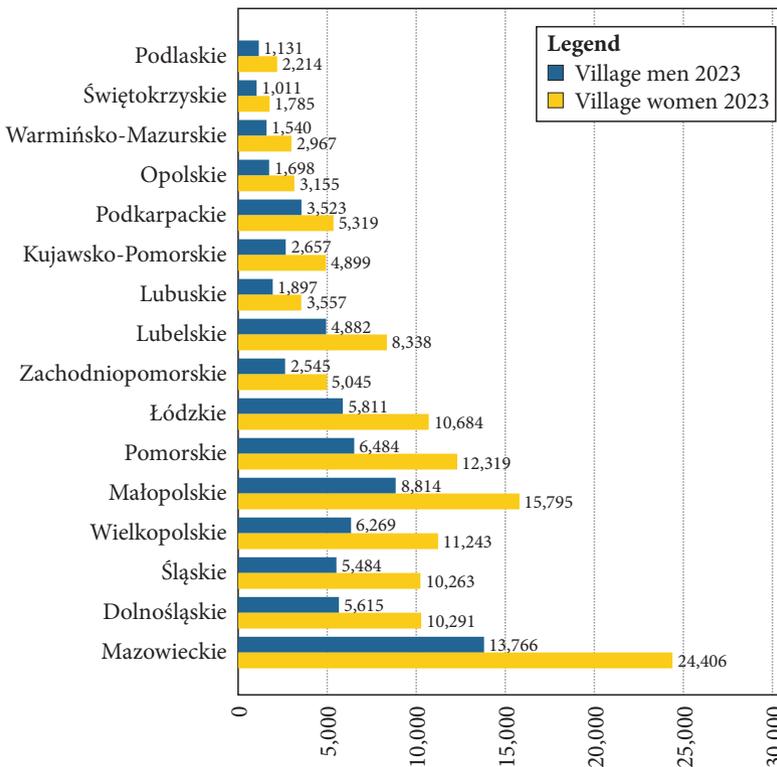


Fig. 5. Pyramid chart of the number of Ukrainians in rural Poland under temporary protection in 2023, broken down by men and women and by voivodeship (as of December 31, 2023)

Source: own study based on: GUS: 2025

Subsequently, data on the number of Ukrainians in rural Poland under temporary protection in 2023 was analyzed, broken down by men and women and by voivodeship (see Fig. 5). As of December 31, 2023, 205,407 Ukrainian citizens under temporary protection resided in rural areas of Poland. Of those, 73,127 were women and

132,280 were men. The data presented in the pyramid chart shows the distribution of Ukrainians in rural areas by voivodeship and gender, allowing for a detailed analysis of settlement preferences and factors influencing migration to rural areas.

The undisputed leader in terms of the number of Ukrainians living in rural areas is the Mazowieckie Voivodeship, with 24,406 women and 13,766 men – a total of 38,172 people, or almost the entire rural Ukrainian population in Poland, according to the chart. Such a high concentration is due to the specific nature of the region: Mazowieckie has the largest area among the voivodeships, numerous rural and suburban municipalities, and is adjacent to Warsaw, which offers extensive employment opportunities, access to public services, education, and housing. For many refugees, living outside the city but close to it is a compromise between the cost of living and the availability of infrastructure. Ukrainians often choose smaller towns and villages with good connections to Warsaw, where they work, study, or receive social assistance.

In the remaining voivodeships, the number of Ukrainians in rural areas was significantly lower. The second largest voivodeship in terms of migrant numbers was the Małopolskie Voivodeship, with 15,795 women and 8,814 men, indicating a clear female predominance. That phenomenon may be due to seasonal employment of men in agriculture, fruit growing, and agri-food processing, particularly in rural areas of southern Poland. A similar distribution is observed in the Pomorskie Voivodeship (12,319 women and 6,484 men), Wielkopolskie Voivodeship (11,243 women and 6,269 men), Dolnośląskie Voivodeship (10,291 women and 5,615 men), and Śląskie Voivodeship (10,263 women and 5,484 men). In those cases, the presence of Ukrainians in rural areas is largely linked to local labour demand – on farms, fruit growing, and in construction.

At the opposite point there are the eastern and northeastern voivodeships – Podlaskie, Świętokrzyskie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie, and Opolskie – where the average number of Ukrainians in rural areas was between 2,000 and 3,000. Although those regions are geographically closer to the Ukrainian border, they have not recorded a substantial number of rural refugees. That is due to several reasons. First, the voivodeships have a lower level of economic development, lower housing availability, and limited employment opportunities. Second, many people who initially arrived in those regions have moved further towards large cities or developed rural areas in central and western Poland, where finding work and living conditions were easier.

It is also worth noting the disparity between women and men in the Ukrainian population living in rural areas. It is directly related to the nature of the rural labour market, which is often based on manual, seasonal work performed primarily by men – for example, in harvesting, in greenhouses, warehouses, or in the construction sector. Women also find employment, although they are more likely to take on childcare or elderly care, or work in food processing and local services.

Socially, the presence of Ukrainians in rural areas is becoming increasingly visible. They influence the local labour market, revitalize rural communities, and increase demand for public services: schools, transportation, and healthcare. Their presence also creates a need for local integration, not only linguistically but also culturally and socially. A growing number of Ukrainian children attend rural schools, and local authorities and communities are organizing support programs, Polish language courses, and psychological support.

In summary, data from December 31, 2023, show that while the number of Ukrainians living in rural areas is significantly lower than in cities, their presence is of growing importance to local communities – especially in the central and western regions. The Mazowieckie Voivodeship clearly dominates in terms of the number of rural refugees, primarily due to its proximity to the capital and a well-developed network of suburban municipalities. In the rest of the country, such a distribution depends primarily on job availability and housing conditions, as well as local integration strategies. In the long term, the presence of Ukrainians in rural areas could stimulate the development of local communities and the revitalization of previously demographically challenged areas.

Then, the same data as of December 31, 2024, were analyzed (see Fig. 6). On December 31, 2024, 203,501 Ukrainian citizens under temporary protection were residing in rural Poland, meaning the number of refugees in rural areas remained virtually unchanged since the previous year, when it reached 205,407. Despite the lack of significant numerical changes, a comparison of data from 2023 and 2024 reveals subtle but significant demographic and regional shifts, reflecting processes of stabilization, integration, and internal displacement within Poland.

The most striking change is the slight decline in the number of women in rural areas: from 132,280 in 2023 to 127,549 in 2024, with a simultaneous increase in the number of men – from 73,127 to 75,952. Although the difference is small, the direction of that change may signal an important trend. Initially, rural areas were primarily settled by women with children fleeing war. Over time, as the refugee situation in Poland began to stabilize, more and more men, including family members of women already in Poland, began to join their families. At the same time, a growing number of men are also arriving on their own, seeking employment in sectors where labour demand is particularly high, such as agriculture, processing, construction, and logistics.

The largest concentration of Ukrainians in rural areas remains in the Mazowieckie Voivodeship, where, at the end of 2024, 23,447 women and 14,655 men lived, totalling over 38,132 people. That represents nearly the entire population of rural refugees from Ukraine shown in the chart. This concentration is primarily due to the unique location of Mazowieckie – a vast voivodeship with a large number of rural municipalities, including suburban municipalities around Warsaw.

Ukrainians choose those locations due to the relatively lower cost of living, the availability of cheaper rental apartments, and easy access to work in and around the capital. That region also boasts well-developed educational, care, and healthcare infrastructure, which favors the settlement of families with children.

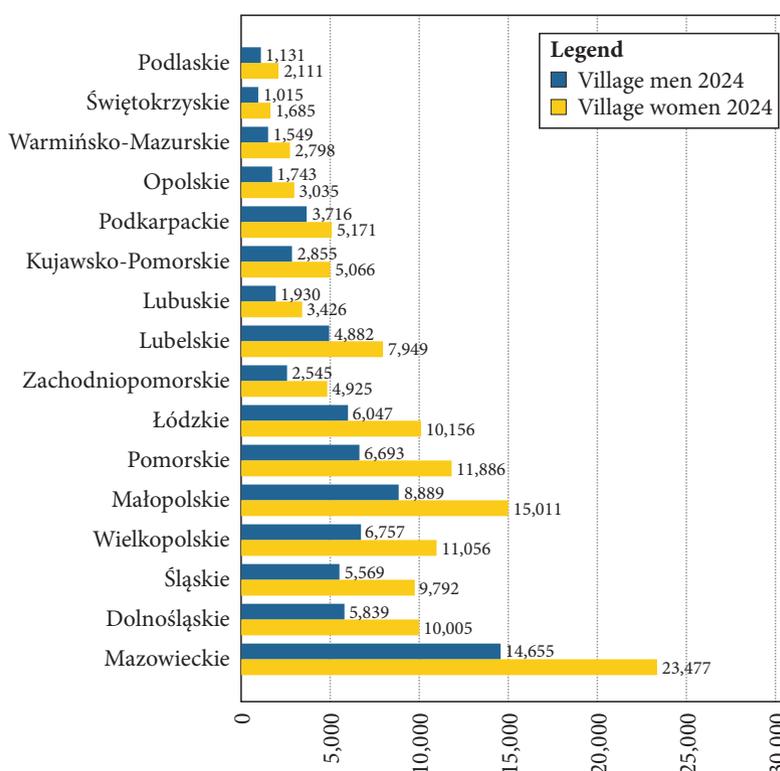


Fig. 6. Pyramid chart of the number of Ukrainians in rural Poland under temporary protection in 2024, broken down by men and women and by voivodeship (as of December 31, 2024)

Source: own study based on: GUS, 2025

Other voivodeships that play a significant role in the settlement of Ukrainians in rural areas include the Małopolskie, Pomorskie, Wielkopolskie, Śląskie and Dolnośląskie voivodeships. Those regions have a relatively high male population – for example, in Małopolskie, 8,889 men and 15,011 women lived in rural areas in 2024, indicating a strong representation of seasonal workers or those employed in agriculture and the processing industry. A comparable situation applies to Pomorskie and Wielkopolskie, where rural workplaces, warehouses, farms, and processing plants are a regular source of employment for migrants, particularly working-age men.

In contrast, in the eastern and northeastern voivodeships, such as Podlaskie, Świętokrzyskie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie, and Opolskie voivodeships, the number of Ukrainians residing in rural areas remained consistently low. Those areas have a lower level of infrastructure and economic development, with limited access to jobs and housing, making them less attractive to refugees. Although geographically closer to the Ukrainian border, they often served only as transit points – after crossing the border, most refugees headed for larger urban centers or regions with more developed infrastructure and economies.

It is worth noting that the countryside, as a settlement space for refugees from Ukraine, serves a special purpose. For many, it offers an alternative to overcrowded cities: cheaper housing, a more peaceful environment, and often also the availability of work in the agricultural or processing sectors. At the same time, rural communities are increasingly involved in the integration process, organizing Polish language classes, adaptation classes for children in schools, and social support. The presence of Ukrainians is revitalizing local communities and the economy in many villages where labour was previously scarce. The Ukrainians are proving to be an invaluable support.

In summary, a comparison of data from the end of 2023 and 2024 shows that the number of Ukrainians under temporary protection living in rural Poland remains stable, with minor changes indicating a gradual equalization of the gender structure. The largest concentrations are still found in Mazowieckie, but other regions, particularly the southern and western regions, are also beginning to play a more significant role. In the long term, the presence of Ukrainians in rural areas will impact not only the local demographics and economy but also social and cultural processes, requiring support from state and local government institutions towards sustainable integration.

Next, the data on the number of Ukrainians in Poland under temporary protection in 2024, broken down by men, women, and age groups, were analyzed (see Fig. 7).

Data as of December 31, 2024, indicate that a considerable number of Ukrainian citizens under temporary protection resided in Poland. Their demographic structure, presented in the age pyramid, clearly demonstrates that they can play a key role in mitigating the negative demographic trends Poland has been grappling with for many years. The population pyramid of refugees from Ukraine is characterized by a predominance of young and working-age individuals, providing valuable support to the aging Polish society and the weakening labour market.

Poland has been experiencing unfavorable demographic changes for years: a systematic decline in the birth rate, an increase in average life expectancy, and a consequent increase in the percentage of elderly people. As a result, the number of working-age people is shrinking, which directly impacts the productivity of the economy, the stability of the pension system, and the ability of the country to maintain its pace of social development. In such terms, the influx of Ukrainian citizens under temporary protection appears to be a potentially stabilizing factor.

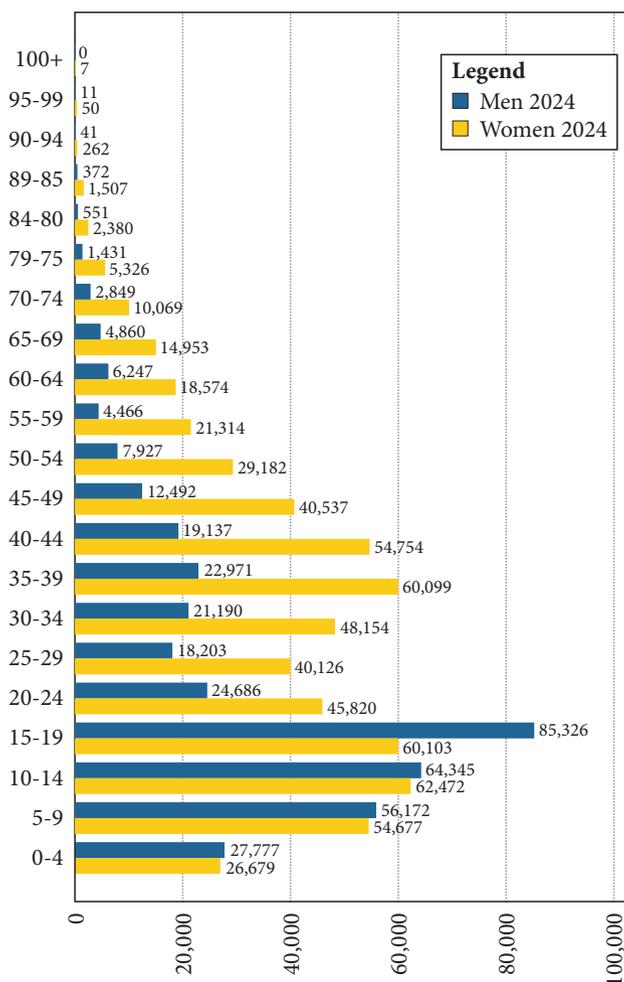


Fig. 7. Pyramid chart of the number of Ukrainians in Poland under temporary protection in 2024, broken down by men and women and by age group (as of December 31, 2024)

Source: own study based on: GUS, 2025

The chart shows the diverse age structure of that population. Particularly noteworthy are the groups of children and youth – the largest numbers are for those aged 5-14 (237,666 in total), followed by those aged 15-19, where there is a significant predominance of boys (85,326) over girls (60,103). In total, people under 20 years of age represent over one million people, representing enormous educational, developmental, and, in the long term, professional potential. Those children and youth currently studying in Polish schools are learning the language, culture, and social values. If the integration process is successful, they will constitute a valuable resource in the future labour market and a part of active citizenship.

Another important group is those aged 20-49, the core of the working population. In that age category, the numbers are extremely high and evenly distributed across genders – ranging from 12,000 to 60,000 in each five-year age group. Those individuals are already actively participating in the labour market, filling gaps in many industries, such as construction, logistics, healthcare, education, the food industry, and services. They are also starting families, paying taxes, and building lasting ties with Poland, not only professional but also social and emotional.

However, the group of older people (over 60) constitutes a marginal percentage of that population, with each age group numbering between 7,000 and 25,000, an exceptionally low percentage compared to the total number of migrants under temporary protection. Such a structure means that refugees from Ukraine will not burden the pension and healthcare systems in the coming decades; on the contrary, they can contribute to their support as active contributors and labour market participants.

It is also worth noting that the predominance of young age groups and the balanced participation of working-age women and men create conditions conducive to demographic and social development. Those individuals not only take up employment but also start families and have children, as is already evident in the increasing number of refugee children in Polish nurseries, preschools, and schools. That could, over time, result in a halt to the decline in the birth rate in Poland and an increase in the number of people in younger age groups – so vital for the long-term demographic balance of the country.

However, for that potential to be fully applied, systemic and long-term measures are necessary to integrate migrants effectively. Key factors will include access to Polish language instruction, recognition of professional qualifications, opportunities for education, employment in line with skills, family support, psychological care, and combating discrimination and exclusion. The more refugees from Ukraine feel part of Polish society, the more willing they will be to live, work, invest, and develop here.

The age structure of Ukrainians under temporary protection in Poland in 2024 is a significant advantage in terms of the demographic challenges facing Poland. Those are primarily young, professionally active, and adaptable individuals who can not only support the labour market but also contribute to the reconstruction of the demographic structure of the country (Babakova, Kyrychenko, 2024). Appropriate integration policies can ensure that their presence becomes not a temporary necessity, but a long-term impetus for Polish social and economic renewal.

Summary

The migration of Ukrainians to Poland has had an impact on many dimensions of security – both positive and challenging ones. Further support for integration processes, strengthening social solidarity, and pursuing a well-thought-out migration

policy will be crucial to maintaining stability and social cohesion. As a border country of the European Union, Poland has the opportunity not only to manage such a process effectively but also to become a model for an effective and humane response to mass migration in crisis conditions. Migrants from Ukraine are crucial to the current and future demographic situation of the country, both in cities and rural areas, and those aged 0-19 will strengthen the country's economic sector in the future as both employees and taxpayers. Ukrainian migrants are settling throughout Poland, in both large cities and rural areas, but their presence is clearly dominant in voivodeships with developed labour markets, such as the Mazowieckie, Dolnośląskie, Śląskie and Małopolskie voivodeships. Cities have the largest concentrations, but villages are also gaining in importance, especially in regions with a high demand for manual workers in agriculture and industry.

The demographic structure of that population stands out from the general Polish community – it is dominated by young, working-age individuals (20-49 years old), with a considerable number of children and adolescents. In total, people under 20 constitute over a million refugees, demonstrating significant educational and future professional potential. At the same time, the exceptionally low share of older people (60+) indicates that migrants from Ukraine do not pose a significant burden on the pension or healthcare systems. On the contrary, the vast majority of them are active, able to work, and ready to settle on the long-term basis.

Such a demographic structure offers a real opportunity to mitigate the negative trends that Poland has been facing for years: declining birth rates, an aging population, and staff shortages in key economic sectors. If those individuals are effectively integrated through access to education, employment, social benefits, and the possibility of legalizing their stay for longer periods, they could become not only a support for the labour market but also part of a new model of a multicultural, open, and demographically balanced society.

However, to fully realize this potential, responsible policy measures are essential. Poland should invest in the integration of migrants, develop an education system that takes into account foreign children, support the professional activation of women, especially mothers, and create conditions for the settlement of entire families through both housing and family-friendly policies. At the same time, it is important not to neglect the demographic needs of its own citizens; systemic measures are necessary to support childbearing and reconciling family and work life.

In conclusion, the influx of Ukrainian citizens under temporary protection could be an impetus for the sustainable reconstruction of Polish demographic structure. Given the irreversible trends of aging and depopulation in many regions, such an opportunity should be used wisely, benefiting both refugees and Polish society as a whole.

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