



What are the integration challenges of Ukrainian refugee women?

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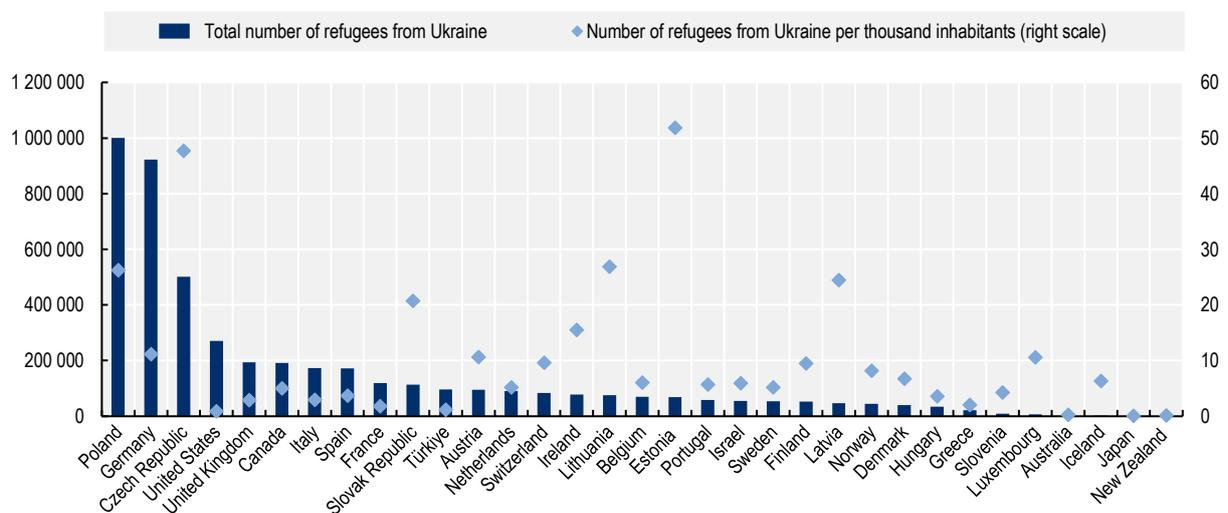
Key messages

- From the onset of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, most refugee arrivals have been women and children, creating unique challenges for integration. The share of women among adult refugees is around 70% in most host countries and many have arrived with children, with the share of minors around 30%. This is different from other refugee flows, for example, women lodged only about 30% of all asylum applications during the 2015-17 refugee crisis in Europe.
- Ukrainian refugee women benefit from some favourable policies, such as having immediate access to employment after registering. They also have relatively high educational levels and social networks. These factors are likely to improve their socio-economic integration prospects compared to other refugee women.
- There are other factors, however, including care burdens, risks of exploitation, the breakdown of family units and uncertainties about the length of stay, that may deter their integration.
- Most OECD countries are supporting the socio-economic integration of Ukrainian refugee women through their pre-existing mainstream integration systems. Refugee integration policies have been, however, often created with different gender and educational profiles in mind, which may weaken outcomes in the longer term.
- There are some promising targeted measures available in OECD countries to support the socio-economic integration of Ukrainian refugee women. These include counselling, networking opportunities, training, and work placements, but also general community-building activities aimed at women.

Background

Amidst the on-going devastation caused by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, more than 10 million people have become either internally displaced or refugees¹ abroad. In April 2023, there were around 4.7 million displaced Ukrainians in OECD countries (Figure 1). Many remain in neighbouring countries, but others have moved onward, including increasingly to non-EU OECD countries, or have returned to Ukraine. As of April 2023, OECD countries with the highest total numbers of Ukrainian refugees include Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Italy, and Spain.

Figure 1. Number of refugees from Ukraine in OECD countries, absolute numbers and per thousand of total population, April 2023



Note: These figures reflect total registrations for temporary protection in the EU or total Ukrainian arrivals since 24 February 2022 in non-EU countries as of April 2023. Exceptions here are Poland and Estonia. In Poland, active PESEL registrations are presented instead to better reflect the total number of arrivals still in the country. In Estonia, the figure reflects the total number of Ukrainians recorded in the country due to a high share of arrivals who do not register for temporary protection but use other legal bases for stay.

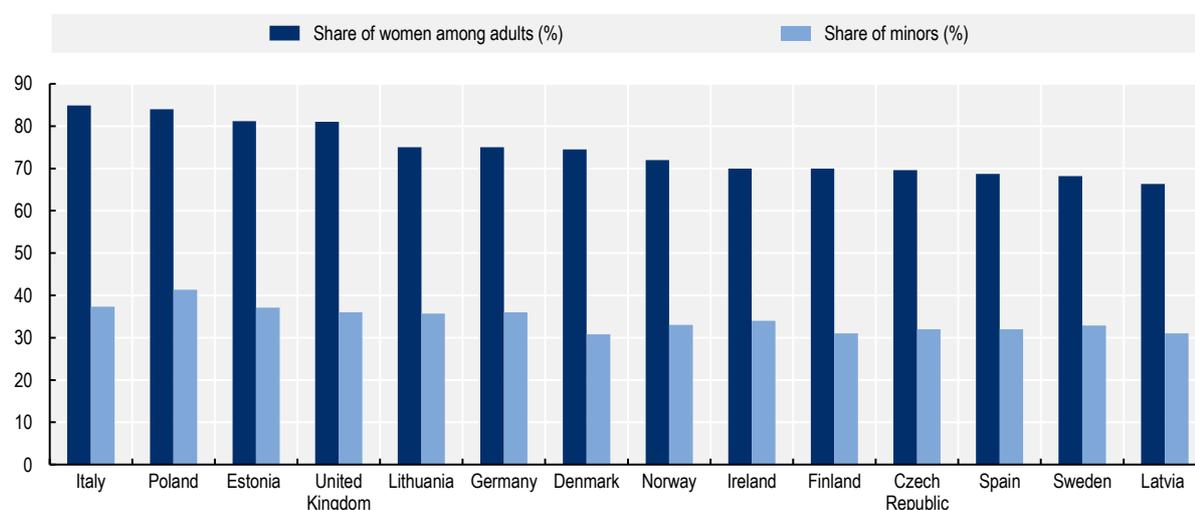
Source: [UNHCR](#); [Chancellery of the Prime Minister of Poland](#); [Home Office \(United Kingdom\)](#); [Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada](#); OECD Secretariat.

One distinguishing characteristic of the refugee flows from Ukraine is the unusual gender distribution. The general mobilisation has prevented most men aged 18 to 60 from leaving the country, which is why the refugee inflows from Ukraine are comprised mainly of women, children, and to a lesser extent of elderly people. In virtually all host countries, at least 70% of adult Ukrainian refugees are women. In some countries, the figures are even higher. In Italy, Poland, Estonia and the United Kingdom, for instance, the share of women among adults exceeds 80% (Figure 2).

In some countries, Ukrainian women made up a high share of those with a valid permit already before February 2022, for instance, in Italy and Greece (Figure 3). In countries like Poland, Lithuania and Estonia, the majority of past Ukrainian arrivals, however, have been men. In all cases, the share of minors has been notably lower in the past.

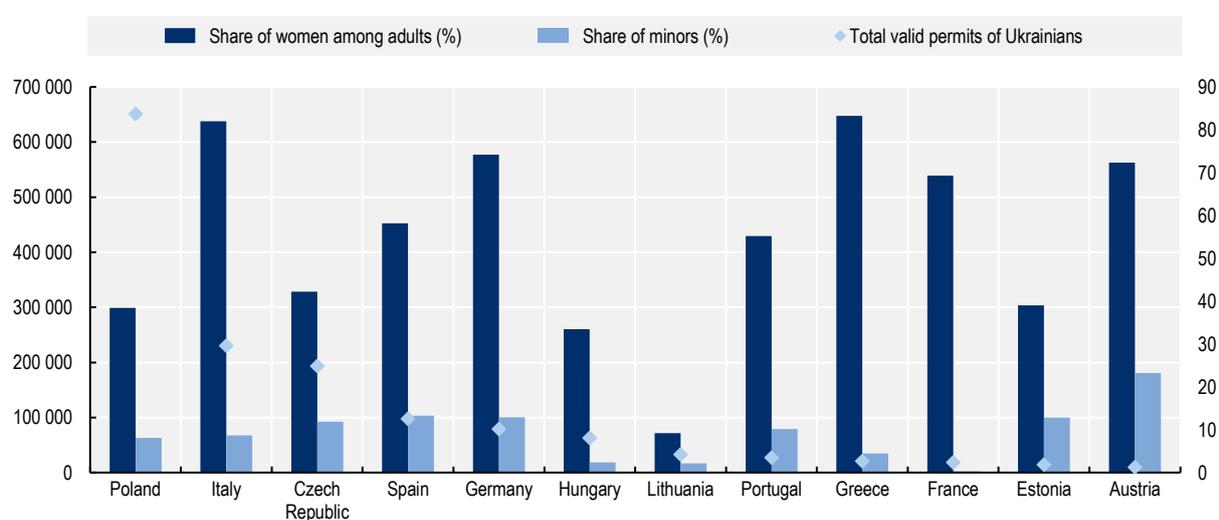
¹ The term “refugee” is used in this document to include persons who obtained some sort of international protection, including not only formal refugee status (as per the Geneva Convention) but also temporary protection or other similar national protection statuses (as in the case of most refugees from Ukraine).

Figure 2. Share of minors and women among registered Ukrainian refugees in selected European countries in November 2022



Source: OECD (2023^[1]), "What we know about the skills and early labour market outcomes of refugees from Ukraine", <https://www.doi.org/10.1787/c7e694aa-en>.

Figure 3. Share of minors and women among Ukrainians with a valid permit in selected European OECD countries on 31 December 2021



Note: The figure includes 12 EU countries with the highest number of Ukrainians with a valid permit. It is important to note that Ukrainians have previously arrived in large numbers to the EU through migration channels not always reflected in the permit data. In Poland, for instance, many Ukrainians arrived previously using the simplified procedure for seasonal or other temporary work. These categories are not reflected in the above figure and can be expected to impact the gender breakdown of Ukrainian arrivals.

Source: Eurostat, MIGR_RESVAS.

The high share of female arrivals is also markedly different from other recent refugee flows. Prior to the start of the Ukrainian refugee crisis, at the end of 2021, there were about 89.3 million forcibly displaced individuals worldwide, out of whom women accounted for about 49% (UNHCR, 2022^[2]). Women make up a slightly higher share (53%) among those who have sought protection in Colombia in the context of the

Venezuelan migration and refugee crisis (UNHCR, 2022^[3]). In other cases, however, women have often been disproportionately underrepresented among refugee arrivals, for example, during the 2015-17 refugee crisis in Europe. Between 2015 and 2017, according to Eurostat, women lodged only about 30% of all asylum applications and received 35% of all positive first instance decisions in the EU-28.

In the context of the Ukrainian refugee crisis, many women have been fleeing with family members, notably children. The available data from host countries suggests that, on average, over a third of Ukrainian refugees are minors and around 4-6% are aged 65 and over (OECD, 2023^[1]). Different surveys offer some further insights into this. Among the respondents of the SAM-UKR survey,² nine in ten travelled with family members (86%), including 38% who travelled with children only and 30% with dependent adults (EUAA/IOM/OECD, 2022^[4]). The UNHCR's (2022^[5]) survey³ in six countries neighbouring Ukraine, conducted between May and June, found that more than 70% of respondents left Ukraine accompanied by other persons (mainly immediate family) with 18% travelling with infants (0-4 years old), 53% with other children (5-17 years old), 21% with older persons (60+ years old) and 23% with at least one person with specific needs.

Refugee women face more acute obstacles to socio-economic integration

Ukrainian refugee communities in OECD countries are thus primarily comprised of female-led households, where women face the pressure of securing families' basic needs and well-being, which often makes their speedy integration much more critical and also more challenging. Past research has shown that refugee women may suffer from a "triple disadvantage" as the challenges related to gender, immigrant status and forced migration add up and mutually reinforce each other (Liebig and Tronstad, 2018^[6]). This is particularly evident with socio-economic integration. Refugees generally struggle to enter the labour market and, on average, have lower employment rates than other migrant groups except family migrants (European Commission and OECD, 2016^[7]). In the past, it has often taken up to 10 years to reach an employment rate of 50% for refugees and up to 20 years to have a similar employment rate as the native-born. Bringing refugee women into employment has been particularly challenging in many OECD countries, as female refugees on average have lower activity (57% compared to 77%) and employment rates (45% compared to 62%) than refugee men (European Commission and OECD, 2016^[7]). There are also other challenges to refugee women's integration, including lower host country language levels, higher prevalence of health problems, greater likelihood of social isolation and limited social networks (Liebig and Tronstad, 2018^[6]). Addressing these challenges effectively is essential for host countries as poor integration outcomes among migrant women not only have long-lasting consequences on their own outcomes, but also on their children's outcomes in host societies (OECD, 2020^[8]; 2020^[9]).

Ukrainian refugee women, however, have some characteristics that improve their socio-economic integration prospects. First, Ukrainian refugees generally benefitted from immediate labour market access in OECD countries after their registration – contrary to most other asylum seekers who are subject to waiting periods and labour market tests (OECD, 2016^[10]). The activation of the Temporary Protection Directive (2001/55/EC) on 4 March 2022, for the first time ever, gave Ukrainians the right to work in the EU without delay. Most other OECD countries outside the EU, including Canada and the United States, also granted speedy access to the labour market (OECD, 2022^[11]). Second, the higher educational profile

² The EUAA-OECD Survey of Arriving Migrants from Ukraine (SAM – UKR) surveyed 3 932 adult respondents between 11 April 2022 and 15 August 2022 online, using their mobile phones. Of these, 82% were female with a mean age of 38 years (median age of 37). The majority (79%) were aged between 18 to 44 years, and a further 18% were aged 45 to 64. This Survey is, however, not representative for the overall refugee population.

³ The first round of UNHCR intentions surveys with refugees from Ukraine is based on 4 900 interviews with refugees from Ukraine conducted by UNHCR and partners in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania and the Slovak Republic between mid-May and mid-June 2022.

of Ukrainian arrivals is likely to promote a quick labour market integration especially given the current widespread labour shortages in host countries. Despite significant variability between host countries, the available evidence suggests that the educational attainment levels of Ukrainian refugees, especially women, are not only significantly higher than that of most other refugee groups but also exceed that of the Ukrainian and EU population averages (OECD, 2023^[11]). Third, Ukrainians can leverage existing social networks in host countries as there was a large existing Ukrainian diaspora in main receiving countries. At the end of 2021, according to Eurostat, 1.57 million Ukrainian citizens held a valid residence permit in the EU, representing the third biggest group of non-EU citizens behind citizens of Morocco and Türkiye. The most popular host countries were Poland, Italy, the Czech Republic and Spain. Beyond the EU, Canada was home to about 1.36 million people of Ukrainian descent (Stick and Hou, 2022^[12]).

Early evidence regarding the labour market inclusion of Ukrainian refugees indicates that their entry into the labour market has, indeed, been faster than for other refugee groups in the OECD (OECD, 2023^[11]). By November 2022, the share of working-age Ukrainian refugees in employment was already over 40% in some European OECD countries (for example, in Estonia, Lithuania, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom). Elsewhere, the share was lower but increasing. While the early outcomes are good, they are not necessarily an indicator of long-term success and, despite the relatively swift entry, much of the early employment uptake has been concentrated in low-skilled jobs and skills mismatches are widespread (OECD, 2023^[11]).

Care obligations can impede labour market participation

Alongside supportive characteristics, there are also unfavourable factors that might weaken integration outcomes of Ukrainian refugee women. The provision of adequate childcare facilities is key to allow parents with young children to take up employment. As most arrivals from Ukraine are women with children, often fleeing without their partners, the availability of adequate and affordable childcare is a precondition for refugee women's socio-economic integration. A recent FRA survey⁴ found that three in ten refugees could not work because of care obligations and that it was markedly more often a barrier to employment for Ukrainian women (33%) than men (9%) (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2023^[13]). Some countries have sought to address these challenges, for instance, by opening new childcare centres or engaging private childcare centres to expand the number of available spaces for Ukrainian children (e.g. Latvia and Poland) or by offering help with childcare costs (e.g. Denmark, Estonia, Ireland and the United Kingdom). Other countries provide childcare subsidies, often to the same degree as for nationals. In Ireland, for example, Ukrainian refugees are eligible to apply for the National Childcare Scheme, which provides two types of childcare subsidies (universal and income assessed) for children aged over 6 months (24 weeks) and up to 15 years old.

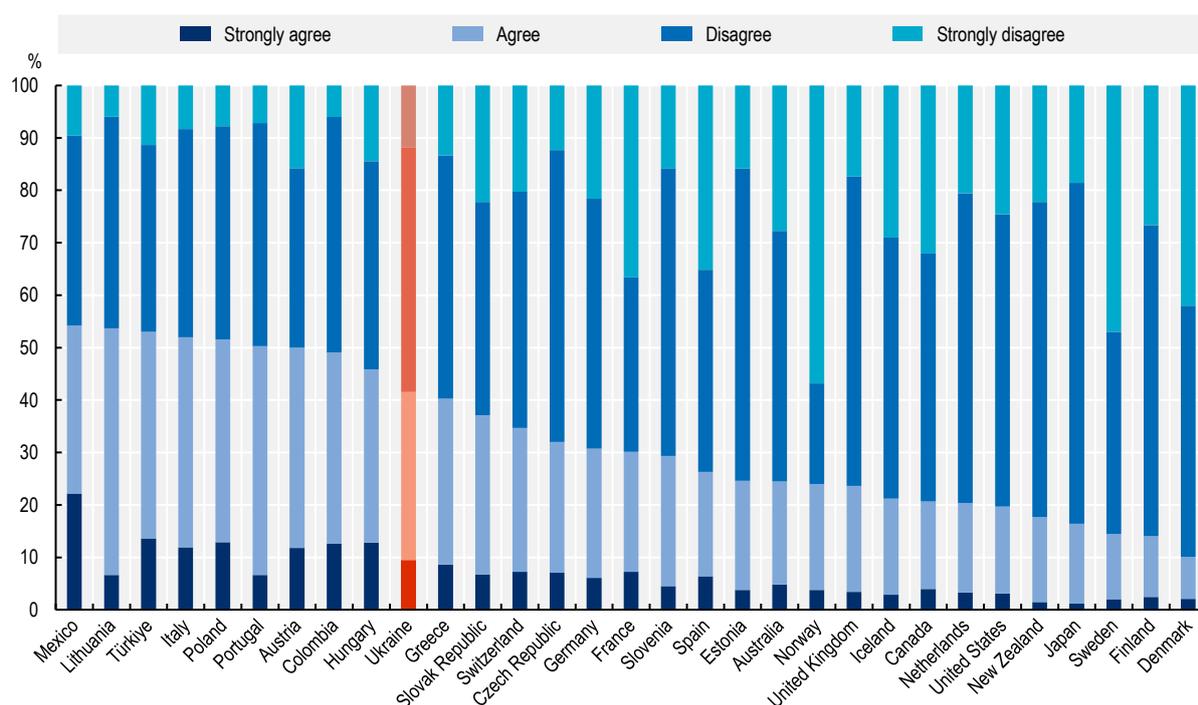
Despite these measures, there are structural challenges affecting the availability of affordable childcare in the longer term. Most host countries were facing severe shortages of care places and staff already prior to the influx of refugees. Childcare fees can be high in OECD countries, even after rebates, cash benefits and tax reliefs, making childcare affordability a major concern for many families, regardless of their origin or migratory status (OECD, 2020^[14]). High fees can substantially weaken employment incentives for parents, discouraging the labour force participation of working-age adults, particularly for the many Ukrainian mothers fleeing without their partners, as they may not have access to informal networks of care support. Atypical employment arrangements further complicate the situation as individuals with flexible, part-time and short-term jobs tend to be disadvantaged in accessing any childcare as providers often lack flexibility, maintain restricted opening hours and long waiting lists that make it difficult to accommodate the needs of those in non-standard employment (Biegel, Wood and Neels, 2021^[15]).

⁴ The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights surveyed 14 685 respondents using an online questionnaire in 10 EU countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic and Spain), Data collection took place between 22 August 2022 to 29 September 2022.

These are not the only barriers to childcare. The preliminary findings of the OECD's (forthcoming^[16]) survey on “Ensuring that Ukrainian refugee students return permanently to schooling and training” suggest that language barriers and relatively low integration levels of Ukrainian families are most significant barriers to accessing early childhood education and care (ECEC) in OECD countries, followed by teacher shortages.

Under these circumstances, women disproportionately bear the burden of care obligations due to entrenched social norms that prevent the equal distribution of caring responsibilities between men and women, thus potentially leading to mothers dropping out of labour market or not entering the labour market in the first place (OECD, 2017^[17]). Previous work by the OECD has also shown the labour market disadvantage associated with having small children is disproportionately higher for immigrant women as for their native-born peers (OECD, 2020^[9]). Many Ukrainian women faced similar challenges already back at home. Prior to the war, about 30% of Ukrainian women between 25-39 were economically inactive compared to about 9% of men (Ukraine LFS 2021). Strong social expectations in Ukraine for women to be more engaged in performing family duties, together with limited access to childcare, may have contributed toward such outcomes. Findings from a survey⁵ conducted by UN Women and UNFPA before the war started suggest that more than half of all female respondents in Ukraine (about 55%) believe that it is better for preschool children to have a mother who is not in paid employment (UN Women and UNFPA, 2022^[18]). The joint European Values Survey and World Values Survey 2017-21, however, suggests lower overall levels of negative attitudes towards maternal employment in Ukraine, comparable to some OECD countries (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Agreement with the statement that “when a mother works for pay, the children suffer” in OECD countries and Ukraine



Source: European Values Survey/World Values Survey 2017-2021.

⁵ The study covers six Eastern Partnership countries (EaP), i.e. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The total number of respondents covered by the quantitative research comprised 6 108 persons (both men and women and not less than 1 000 interviews per country) aged 18 years old and above. Data collection was carried out over the period of 23 October to 16 November 2020.

In the context of Ukrainian arrivals in host countries, childcare pressures are not restricted to young children. The relatively low shares of school enrolment and preference for remote learning among Ukrainian children can also negatively impact their mothers' availability to participate in the labour market and integration activities in some host countries. As children account for one-third of all refugee inflows from Ukraine, the start of the 2022-23 school year prompted most host countries to make substantial efforts to scale up their classroom and teaching capacities, including providing adequate language support (OECD, 2022^[11]). While the number of Ukrainian children enrolled has increased since September 2022 across OECD countries, it remains challenging to know the exact enrolment rates due to onward and return movements. In Poland, about 54% out of 277 740 of Ukrainians aged 7-17 with a PESEL number were studying in primary and secondary schools in March 2023. In Italy, about 25 000 or 55% were estimated to be enrolled, while the enrolment rates in Ireland exceed 90% with more than 15 000 school-aged Ukrainian children in education. In Estonia, out of 9 444 registered beneficiaries of temporary protection (BTPs) of compulsory schooling age (7-17) as of March 2023, 5 441 were in compulsory education, 918 had already completed compulsory education level, and 2 501 were not in education (among those, the place of residence was unknown for 1 201). If we consider all registered school aged BTPs, then the enrolment rate among Ukrainian children is 57.6%, while the share rises to 66% if we exclude those whose place of residence is unknown, expecting them to have left the country.

Extended families fleeing together can help to alleviate some care pressures. Several surveys suggest that Ukrainian women have arrived not only with minors, but also with other dependent adults or older persons (EUAA/IOM/OECD, 2022^[4]; UNHCR, 2022^[5]). These accompanying adults can potentially help with childcare and support mothers' participation in the labour market. At the same time, accompanying dependent adults may have their own care needs due to age or disabilities.

The absence of their partners and the exposure to various stress factors and trauma due to displacement are also likely to add to the mental load of Ukrainian women's family obligations, including emotional and cognitive labour of family life such as thinking, planning, scheduling, organising, caring and being responsible for family members (Dean, Churchill and Ruppner, 2021^[19]). These obligations are potentially heightened due to uprooting and displacement with additional expectations for psycho-social support care to family members. This is likely to increase care pressures further, leaving less time for refugee women to plan and prepare for their employment or to recover from their engagement in paid employment (Craig and Brown, 2016^[20]).

Refugee women may face a higher risk of exploitation

All recently arrived refugees have vulnerabilities, but the atypical gender profile can further increase the different risks faced by the Ukrainian arrivals. Refugee women are under a particular risk of gender-based violence (GBV)⁶ and concerns about the potential risks of exploitation and abuse (including economic) of Ukrainian women have been raised from the start of the displacement crisis. Some OECD countries, including Austria, Belgium, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland and Spain, have opened investigations regarding trafficking in human beings. Such experiences can have a lasting effect on the physical and psychological safety of individuals, especially if individuals are left without sufficient support, affecting forced migrants' capacity to integrate, making it difficult for survivors to engage in work or education, generating housing uncertainty, isolation, instability and fear (Phillimore et al., 2022^[21]).

Alongside the atypical profile, the notably larger roles of private citizens and initiatives in supporting the reception of Ukrainian refugees have also increased the risk of GBV and exploitation. This has been particularly a concern in relation to housing (OECD, 2022^[22]). Most host countries have relied heavily on

⁶ Gender-based violence (GBV) is a serious violation of human rights and a life-threatening health and protection issue. It can include sexual, physical, mental and economic harm inflicted in public or in private. It includes threats of violence, coercion, and manipulation (UNHCR, n.d.^[30]).

private accommodation to house new arrivals from Ukraine. In Belgium, Italy and Poland, for instance, the share of those housed with private hosts reached 90%. Private offers provided an agile solution in the beginning of the crisis and have helped to cope with the sudden housing demand, yet they also raise concerns about safety. Similarly to housing, many ad-hoc matching pages mediating job opportunities from private individuals and business owners have also sprung up and come with their own risks, including falling victim to traffickers targeting these sites and engaging in undeclared work (OECD, 2023^[1]).

OECD countries have been attentive to these risks from the early stages of the crisis and different mitigation strategies have been put in place in many. In Poland, for instance, a framework has been developed in co-operation with police for screening organisations, foreign entities and individuals looking to volunteer and provide aid to Ukrainian refugees (CBSS, 2022^[23]). In Luxembourg, the Red Cross and Caritas organise house visits because of an identified risk of labour and sexual exploitation. In Germany, the online central support portal for the Ukrainian refugees (germany4ukraine.de) provides information on basic labour rights and directs to counselling centres on assistance in cases of potential exploitation and trafficking. Meanwhile, the Danish Centre against Human Trafficking, jointly with the country's cyber police units and financial institutions, co-operates with tech companies such as Meta and Microsoft to better detect and prevent trafficking online (CBSS, 2022^[23]). Alongside mitigation measures, engaging in general integration processes can also help to protect refugee survivors against further victimisation, making it important for host countries to identify victims of GBV and trafficking early and to ensure they have access to effective support for recovery and (re)integration.

The breakdown of family units deepens uncertainties regarding the future and may deter integration

A major challenge for integration is the lack of clarity regarding the potential length of stay of displaced Ukrainians in host countries. Different surveys on Ukrainians' future intentions reveal a shared uncertainty about the future. Moreover, as the different rounds of UNHCR's intentions surveys⁷ suggest, this uncertainty may not diminish over time but has increased instead: in June 2022, about 10% of respondents were undecided about return in the near future, while in September their share had risen to 43% (UNHCR, 2022^[5]; 2022^[24]). High levels of uncertainty can deter refugees from making country-specific investments in host societies, such as learning a language, and integration due to the potentially temporary nature of their stay.

The decisions about return or settlement in host countries are shaped at least to some degree by family considerations, especially among Ukrainian women who fled without their partners. The information on Ukrainians' return intentions is already scarce, but even less is known about the differences between groups. In Germany, a survey by the Munich-based Ifo Institute for Economic Research,⁸ offers some insights into the ways in which gender and family circumstances may come to shape return intentions. The findings suggest that men rather than women (68 versus 51%) and more than two-thirds of those who fled with their partners are planning to stay in Germany (Panchenko, 2022^[25]). These differences between men and women may be explained by the difficulties of return of potential conscripts but are likely also due to most Ukrainian refugee men in Germany living with their partners and families.

⁷ See details on the first round of UNHCR intentions survey above. The second round used a mixed methodological approach based on phone interview (1 600), web-based (2000) and face to face interviews (1 245). The overall combined sample included a total of over 4 800 surveys completed between August and September 2022. 2000 surveys were carried out in countries neighbouring Ukraine and the rest in other EU countries.

⁸ The Ifo Institute conducted two waves of online surveys and qualitative interviews of Ukrainian refugees in Germany in June and October. The first round included information on return intentions by different segments and included 936 participants. Sampling was conducted independently in each round but is not necessarily representative of refugees from Ukraine in Germany.

In contrast, most Ukrainian refugee women live without their partners. Among the respondents of the first round of UNHCR's intentions survey, the large majority (82%) had separated from family members, mainly due to mandatory military conscription (61%) and/or because their family members did not wish to leave Ukraine (48%)⁹ (UNHCR, 2022^[5]). Not surprisingly, reuniting with families is one of the main reasons for intending to return: almost half of those respondents who are planning to return to Ukraine in the near future do so for family reunification (48%), just narrowly behind the desire to go back to their home country (49%) (UNHCR, 2022^[24]). Reuniting with family members was the main driving factor for return also according to border interviews conducted by IOM¹⁰ (68%, multiple responses possible) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in Poland¹¹ (IOM, 2022^[26]; NRC, 2022^[27]).

The breakdown of family units and the need to plan for family reunification – whether in Ukraine or elsewhere – thus deepens the already high levels of uncertainty for many Ukrainian refugee women in host countries and may prevent planning for longer-term displacement, language learning or expanding local social networks. It is also likely to disincentivise labour market integration at skill-appropriate levels. Any gainful employment – even below skills levels – or income may be seen as satisfactory under temporary circumstances, which could have severe implications in the case of long-term displacement not only on individual refugee women, but also on host country labour markets and on Ukraine if the skills of displaced women are left to decay.

Policies and measures to promote the integration of Ukrainian refugee women

In recent years, refugee integration has become a priority in many OECD countries and investments have been made to improve related measures and activities, especially in Europe. Most OECD countries have thus sought to rely on their existing integration systems during the Ukrainian refugee crisis, scaling them up as necessary (OECD, 2022^[11]). These systems, however, have been frequently created with different refugee groups and needs in mind. Consequently, some adjustments have been required to address the gender-specific needs and challenges of the Ukrainian refugee flows, especially during the reception phase. These efforts include ensuring wider access to dignity kits, nursing rooms, maternal and reproductive healthcare services, and safe spaces for women. Notably, UNHCR and UNICEF operate the Blue Dot Safe Space, Protection and Support Hubs (“Blue Dots”) along border crossings, main entry points, and registration sites in seven European countries (Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Moldova, Poland, Romania and the Slovak Republic) to provide children and families with critical information and services, including offering referral services to women for GBV.

The European Commission (2022^[28]), in its guidance on labour market integration for refugees from Ukraine, has also invited the EU Member States to pay particular attention to the gender dimension as part of supporting socio-economic integration of Ukrainians. Since the start of the Ukrainian refugee crisis, however, most EU and non-EU OECD countries have focused on the atypical educational profile and improving skills transferability and foreign qualifications assessments rather than addressing the unusual gender dimension of inflows (OECD, 2023^[11]). This is partly because migrant women, especially mothers, have already been on the integration policy agendas in recent years and different activities have been developed with these groups in mind, many aimed at activating foreign-born women (OECD, 2020^[8]). In other cases, countries look to support socio-economic integration of Ukrainians through their mainstream

⁹ Multiple responses were possible.

¹⁰ IOM interviewed 1 115 people at three border crossing points in Poland (Medyka-Szegine, Hrebenne-Rawa Ruska, Korczowa-Krakowiec) between 21 April and 21 June to assess the profiles and intentions of Ukrainians entering Ukraine from Poland.

¹¹ Between 4 July and 15 July, the NRC interviewed 371 people who were about to board a train to Ukraine from either East or West Warsaw train stations.

integration systems, which are expected to also address gender-specific needs sufficiently. In Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Spain, Sweden and the Netherlands, for instance, general migrant integration policies already incorporate gender-sensitive measures or follow a gender mainstream approach (EMN, 2022^[29]). Yet, this is not the case everywhere – notably in the countries bordering Ukraine, which still host the bulk of the refugee population. Targeted measures may be needed in these cases to support the socio-economic integration of Ukrainian refugee women.

In some countries, Ukrainian women have been able to benefit from existing targeted measures to support socio-economic integration. Several OECD countries offer counselling, networking opportunities, training and work placements for migrant and refugee women. Germany has launched a new federal programme, MY TURN, to help immigrant women and native-born women with migrant parents to gain qualifications, training, and employment with social security contributions. Building on the experiences of a similar prior programme (“Strong at Work”), it takes a gender-sensitive and lifestyle-oriented approach, offering specialist advice and individual support related to balancing family life and work, as well as support with securing internships and jobs. Ukrainian women in Germany were initially also eligible to participate in the Strong at Work programme that offered immigrant mothers and mothers with migrant parents individualised support to find employment according to their family needs and opportunities. This programme, launched in 2015, however, expired at the end of 2022. In Canada, refugees from Ukraine participate in the Women’s Economic Council’s Her Mentors project, which connects migrant women to mentors and offers skills training to advance employment or self-employment opportunities and supporting women in joining professional associations. Spain and Latvia have partnered as part of a “Women in Need” project to train and inform young migrant women through mobile devices about the basic aspects and skills required in the labour market of their host country, promoting their labour insertion and social integration in the medium and long term.

There are also activities that have been developed with specifically Ukrainian refugee women in mind. For instance, the #DamyRadę (#WeCanDolt) initiative in Poland helps Ukrainian women to navigate the Polish labour market by providing in-person and online trainings (including language), professional mentoring with HR and labour law experts and peer-to-peer support. The Tent Partnership for Refugees, a global network of more than 300 companies committed to integrating refugees, also launched the Sunflower Project to support Ukrainian refugee women through direct hiring, training, upskilling, and mentoring.

Several projects have been developed by or in partnership with Ukrainian organisations. The Projector Institute, a Ukrainian EdTech company, together with the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine, Diia.Business and the UNDP, have committed to retraining 5 000 Ukrainian women refugees to pursue new careers in creative and technological fields. The focus has been particularly on jobs that can be easily done remotely. The Women for the Future project, implemented by the Ukrainian career portal “Happy Monday” and UN Women, also offers online training for displaced Ukrainian women, who have lost their jobs or income due to the war, both in Ukraine and abroad. Participating women have access to virtual training and retraining courses (for example, financial literacy, communication, content marketing and search engine optimisation), career counselling sessions, individual coaching, and psychological support.

Not all Ukrainian women are looking for employment yet are still in need of integration support. In these cases, general community-building efforts can help to minimise the risk of social isolation, build support networks, and familiarise them with their host communities. There are many different measures in this sphere, often administered and run by municipalities. Notably, different neighbourhood peer support schemes for women, frequently referred to as Neighbourhood Mothers programmes, have been gaining popularity in OECD countries. As part of these measures, migrant women are trained to provide peer support to other migrant women whose integration process is still at an early stage and to encourage them to be an active participant in society. Such schemes have been implemented in several countries, including Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. In many other host countries, including Australia, Canada and the United States, the existing Ukrainian diaspora and organisations have also been active in organising support for displaced Ukrainian women and helping them build capacity and resilience through community engagement.

What is the outlook?

As OECD countries are looking to support the integration of Ukrainian refugees, the atypical gender profile of Ukrainian arrivals needs to be considered more explicitly. Ensuring a swift and sustainable labour market integration is essential for allowing refugees to rebuild their lives and achieving stable livelihoods, regardless how long the refugees may stay in host countries. There are, however, many challenges that refugee women from Ukraine face in host countries regarding both reception and socio-economic integration. While Ukrainian women have some favourable circumstances to integration, there are also other limiting barriers, including care obligations, the risk of exploitation, the breakdown of family units and uncertainties about the length of stay, that may deter their speedy and successful labour market integration.

It is thus necessary to ensure that there are support measures in place to promote the socio-economic integration of Ukrainian refugee women. There have been substantial improvements in refugee integration systems across OECD countries in recent years, but the available policies and activities have been often developed with different refugee or migrant profiles in mind. Moreover, targeted measures may be needed alongside mainstream measures to ensure speedy labour market integration at skill-appropriate levels that would allow Ukrainian refugee women to support their families during their displacement. While there are some targeted measures already available in OECD countries, they remain an exception rather than the rule. Different steps are being taken to account for the unusual educational profiles (OECD, 2023^[1]), but the atypical gender dimension also requires attention and policy adjustments, especially in relation to care burdens, exploitation risks, the breakdown of family units and uncertainties about the length of stay that may deter Ukrainian women's integration otherwise. The Ukrainian refugee crisis is a profoundly gendered crisis calling for gendered responses.

What are the key considerations for policy makers?

- While mainstream measures to support labour market integration of refugees are available in virtually all OECD countries, it is important that host countries assess if existing policies sufficiently address the atypical gender profile of Ukrainian refugee inflows, and to adjust their policies where needed.
- Ukrainian refugee women's labour market integration is shaped by a complex interplay of both favourable circumstances as well as limiting barriers. While there is no doubt that Ukrainian women are better positioned than many other refugee women, there is still likely a need to implement gender-sensitive and targeted integration measures to ensure their successful labour market integration.

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