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## 5 TAKEAWAYS ON FAST TRACKING THE LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION OF UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

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*Takeaways from a SPRING project webinar on 18 October 2022.*

Since 2015, Europe has increasingly acknowledged the importance of swiftly validating refugees' informal and non-formal skills and recognising their foreign qualifications so they can contribute to local labour markets. The rapid arrival of large numbers of newcomers, including 4.7 million Ukrainians who registered for Temporary Protection in the EU, increases the need for additional workers across several sectors, including education and health care, on top of existing labour shortages in many sectors of European labour markets. In order to help these newcomers take up work, several EU countries have simplified employment procedures, especially for professions including teachers, carers, intercultural mediators, doctors, and nurses.

On 18 October, the ICMPD organised a webinar focusing on European efforts to fast track the labour market integration of Ukrainian refugees as part of the [SPRING](#) project, bringing together experts and practitioners from the European Labour Authority, Austria, Germany, Italy, Poland, and Sweden. Speakers discussed challenges and opportunities related to the labour market integration of persons displaced from Ukraine as well as lessons learnt from earlier fast-track approaches. They also shared good practices, tools, and approaches for accelerating labour market inclusion in certain sectors and professions.

The **5 main takeaways** featured below provide a snapshot of the discussion.

### **1. Labour market inclusion yields better results when newcomers can access the whole 'package' of integration services.**

Temporary Protection Beneficiaries (TPBs) may possess skills that can fill labour market shortages in the EU, such as those relating to social services, health care, and information technology.

However, while new arrivals are often eager to enter the labour force in order to sustain themselves and their dependants, they first and foremost need support in securing their basic needs, including housing and health, and in orienting themselves in their new community.

One-stop-shops that connect displaced persons to different services, as well as initiatives to make information easily accessible online, can ensure that these needs are met. Mainstreaming integration into standard social services can also facilitate access to services and improve integration outcomes. In Germany, for example, Ukrainians have enrolled with job centres and received social transfers from the Federal Employment Service since June 2022, meaning they can access vocational and language training, which is key to long-term integration.

Employers can also play an important role in helping potential employees to become acquainted with the host country and facilitate access to housing and other basic services. A comparative study of the labour market integration of Ukrainians in Germany and Poland, carried out by [EWL Group](#), showed that the support of future employers in finding housing was essential for newcomers seeking to enter the labour market. Since access to schooling and kindergarten programmes is a precondition for many caregivers, especially women, to enter the labour market, some employers decided to open childcare centres for their employees.

**2. The ‘golden middle’ – between fast tracking and giving new arrivals sufficient time for settling in, language learning, and upskilling – is the key to successful labour market integration.**

While many displaced persons feel the need to earn money early on, many face specific obstacles to entering jobs that match – and pay in line with – their qualifications, including language barriers, caregiving obligations, and uncertainties about the length of stay. This situation leads many to take a job as soon as possible – even if they are overqualified – rather than investing in upskilling and language learning before entering the labour market. While early employment, particularly in a qualified occupation, may facilitate language acquisition and integration, entering an unqualified occupation may result in a deterioration of skills and missed opportunities for upward social mobility.

Training for upskilling, as well as programmes that combine language learning and vocational training, tend to be successful in supporting swift entry into qualified professions.

In the context of upskilling, it is also important to take into account the drastically changing job market, in which some employers might opt to prioritise informal skills or potential, and subsequently provide on-the-job training rather than hire based on certified qualifications. This provides opportunities for refugees, since relatively short coaching and training programmes can help them develop competencies that allow them to enter qualified professions, for example in the IT sector, that are less regulated but in high demand.

Overall, past experience has shown that finding the ‘golden middle’ between fast tracking and giving new arrivals sufficient time and opportunities to settle in and build their skills and qualifications is key to successful long-term integration outcomes. That being said, migrants and refugees come with different profiles and experiences that require different timelines for language learning, recognition of qualifications, and acquisition of additional qualifications.

### **3. Eased regulations for taking up regulated professions and fast tracking the recognition of qualifications help new arrivals to enter qualified positions.**

One major obstacle to the labour market integration of new arrivals is the lengthy procedure for the recognition of skills and qualifications, for example in the health sector. Facilitating the recognition of qualifications or (temporarily) easing regulations for protected professions can create a win-win situation for newcomers and host societies, facilitating the access of newcomers to these jobs and helping to address shortages in these professions. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, several countries went so far as to relax travel restrictions and credential requirements to meet their need for essential workers in the healthcare and agriculture industries.

Sweden is a pioneer in [fast tracking](#) the labour market integration of migrants and refugees into shortage professions including social workers, preschool teachers, and professions in health care. However, at the time of the webinar, these programmes have not been opened up to Ukrainians.

In Poland, special provisions have been put in place allowing for the employment of newly arrived Ukrainians as assistant teachers. Access to professions in the healthcare sector has been eased for Ukrainian doctors and nurses. The City of Vienna has launched a programme combining internships and language classes that helps kindergarten pedagogues from Ukraine to enter employment while also addressing a pre-existing labour shortage and enabling children from Ukraine to access support in their mother tongue.

In this programme, the City of Vienna is working in close cooperation with the Vienna Employment Promotion Fund to facilitate the quick validation of diplomas of programme participants. The programme also helps participants access childcare, where needed, so that they can take part.

#### **4. Previous experiences with hiring workers from Ukraine shape current approaches.**

A migration history with the country of origin and cultural proximity greatly facilitate labour market integration. Ukrainians, for example, had a long migration history with Poland prior to the Russian invasion, and Poland accordingly has long-standing experience in the employment of migrants from Ukraine. Many employers have had prior experience in hiring Ukrainians, including relevant procedures available in the Ukrainian language. Interestingly, according to aforementioned EWL Group study, 60% of new arrivals interviewed indicated that they could speak in their mother tongue at their workplace. This connectedness had a positive effect on the labour market integration of new arrivals.

#### **5. Dissemination of information and information exchange among stakeholders is key for the orientation of newcomers in the labour market.**

To minimise the risk of exploitation and facilitate entry into quality professions, new arrivals need information on their rights and obligations, working conditions, and opportunities in the labour market. At the European level, several initiatives are engaged in disseminating relevant information to TPBs. The European Labour Authority, for example, provides people from Ukraine with information on their rights in Ukrainian, and the [European Job Mobility Portal - EURES](#), which also hosts the pilot [Talent Pool](#), also provides information in Ukrainian. In addition, the European Labour Authority, which supports Member States in [tackling undeclared work](#), undertook a mapping of national employment initiatives to understand the measures taken in each country.

Diasporas play an important role in providing information and support for navigating the host society, helping to empower newcomers and overcome cultural barriers. They can provide knowledge of cultural values that are important in the workplace, knowledge of the skills that are needed and worth learning, and information on the welfare system. A programme called Neighbouring Mothers for example, implemented in Berlin and later in Stockholm, harnesses this potential of the diaspora by connecting newly arriving women with women from the same origin by building bridges between the women and the area in which they live.

*The webinar took place as part of the Sustainable Practices of Integration ([SPRING](#)) project. The SPRING project is funded by Horizon 2020 and gathers available research and evidence on integration in the context of the large-scale movements of refugees and other migrants to Europe since 2014.*

*The recording of the webinar can be accessed [here](#).*

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