



# Creative approaches to boosting the employment of displaced Ukrainians in Central and Eastern Europe

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Employment is a vital strategy for refugees from Ukraine seeking to rebuild their lives abroad or sustain themselves until it is safe to return. To this end, the first-ever activation of the EU Temporary Protection Directive provides for immediate access to the EU labour market for the **over 4 million** people who have registered under the scheme. However, this is not the only innovation that has emerged since the seismic events of spring 2022, and represents but the first step in facilitating the employment of refugees from Ukraine.

Civil society organisations, private sector actors, and individual volunteers (including from the Ukrainian diaspora) are all playing an active role in helping newcomers to find employment. For their part, many national, regional, and local governments from across Europe have responded with creative approaches. This briefing note details government approaches to boosting employment adopted or adapted in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. It focuses on receiving countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), which have received **a large share** of Ukrainian refugees, but, in many cases, have limited recent experience with receiving humanitarian migrants (with the notable exceptions of Germany and Austria).

While not claiming to present an exhaustive or evaluative list of the initiatives being undertaken in the CEE region, this briefing note highlights the variety of creative approaches being taken in response to large-scale displacement on the European continent. In doing so, it aims to provide a list of initiatives to watch, which can subsequently be followed to identify what has proven to work well and which might benefit from adoption under mainstream integration policies and practices for refugees and other migrants.

## New approaches to supporting labour market integration

The government approaches outlined below, adopted primarily at the national level, encompass a variety of measures aimed at boosting employment among refugees from Ukraine. Many of the efforts have focused on enabling refugees to continue working in their previous fields or occupations, in shortage sectors, and/or in occupations where they would serve other Ukrainian newcomers. They include strategies for mitigating credential-related obstacles; facilitating employment-related language learning; job matching; direct hiring; and supporting artists, researchers, and entrepreneurs.

### Increased flexibility regarding requirements

To facilitate rapid employment, and enable refugees from Ukraine to work in their field (and thus allow employers to tap into their skillsets), several CEE government measures have aimed at fast tracking newcomers into their labour markets via increased flexibility on skills requirements. Such tools have included temporarily waiving certain requirements, enabling refugees to work under supervision, and simplifying qualification recognition procedures. These approaches are especially concentrated in the education and health sectors, which faced pre-existing shortages that were exacerbated by the arrival of large numbers of refugees. In many cases, the fast tracking of employment allows for wider provision of services to refugees from Ukraine.

## Education sector

### Austria

A new [qualification campaign](#) for future German language trainers supports jobseekers interested in working as instructors in language courses financed by the Austrian Public Employment Service (AMS), with potential subsequent employment with a course provider implementing courses supported by the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF). This qualification initiative is implemented in cooperation with the Association of Employers of Private Educational Institutions (BABE).

### Vienna, Austria

The City of Vienna, the Austrian Public Employment Service (AMS), the Vienna Workers Integration Fund (WAFF), and the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Kinderfreunde initiated a [project](#) to enable Ukrainian refugees to prepare for kindergarten jobs. It is aimed at those with relevant qualifications and professional experience. The course provided to candidates consists of two components: three days per week dedicated to German language training and two days per week to gaining practical insights and initial work experience in Austrian kindergartens. The programme began in July 2022 with a cohort of [28 participants from Ukraine](#).

### Czechia

[Ukrainian teachers](#) who cannot prove knowledge of the Czech language can teach Ukrainian pupils in their mother tongue. Initially planned to end in August 2022, this measure was later extended to [August 2024](#). They can also be employed in non-teaching positions not requiring Czech, including as pedagogical assistants or adaptation coordinators. Knowledge of the Czech language to the extent necessary to fulfil job duties is verified by the [school head](#) or facility in an interview.

### Estonia

Ukrainian-qualified [teachers](#) can be employed as teaching assistants while awaiting full recognition of their qualifications.

The Estonian Ministry of Education and Research has supported the creation of the [Freedom School](#), a state school with an Estonian-language curriculum and bilingual Estonian and Ukrainian instruction, where about 600 displaced Ukrainian pupils (as of December 2022) receive an education. The school has over 80 employees, of which 60 are teachers, with almost half of the faculty coming from Ukraine. Thus far, they have been offered temporary work, as permanent contracts necessitate proof of proficiency in Estonian and qualification accreditation.

### Germany

In May 2022, the German federal states agreed upon [common key points](#) to facilitate the employment of Ukrainian educators on a temporary basis. [Among other points of note](#), members of

this group are permitted to temporarily submit as part of their job applications a self-assessment statement instead of a police certificate of good conduct and provide alternative documents, such as salary statements, in lieu of official certificates or contracts as proof of prior employment in Ukraine. According to a nationwide [survey](#), about 2,700 teachers and support staff from Ukraine were working in German schools as of November 2022. The [types of employment](#) vary and Ukrainian teaching and support staff are involved in the education system in [different ways](#), mostly teaching and supervising displaced Ukrainian children in special classes for new arrivals.

### Latvia

[Simplified regulatory and language requirements](#) have been introduced for Ukrainian vocational education and training teachers, as well as foreign language teachers, childcare professionals, and sport coaches. Ukrainian teachers, child care providers, and sport coaches have been authorised to teach or supervise Ukrainian nationals without needing to meet local regulatory or language requirements.

### Poland

The [Special Act](#), introduced by the Polish Government in 2022, provides a simplified pathway to employment for teachers from Ukraine. Hires are not obligated to meet qualification requirements (e.g., diploma nostrification), but only to have adequate preparation, as assessed by the school director. It is also possible for Ukrainian citizens to take up the position of teaching assistant for Ukrainian students without formal certification of Polish language proficiency.

Poland's Special Act also allows for professors, lecturers, and researchers from Ukraine to work in Polish public [scientific institutions](#) without the need to conduct open recruitment for the respective roles. Candidates must hold the requisite qualifications and declare their previous employment as an academic teacher in Ukraine prior to 24 February 2022. Ukrainian citizens in Poland holding foreign qualifications can also be exempted from certain title and degree requirements when being hired in academic roles (ranging from professorial to assistant positions).

## Health sector

### Czechia

Prior to the war, medical institutions accredited for education provision were allowed to employ [third-country national doctors](#), dentists, and pharmacists for up to three months. This takes the form of [short-term internships](#), where the intern works under the direct guidance of qualified staff without official recognition of their university diploma(s). Internships lasting from three months to one year require a recognised diploma. [To become an independently practicing doctor](#), the candidate

must pass approbation exams in Czech and prove that they can speak the national language to a degree sufficient for them to fulfil their job duties. To make this already existing pathway more accessible following the displacement of large numbers of Ukrainians to the country, the Government of Czechia has been offering Czech language courses and orientation on providing health care services in the country.

### Estonia

Ukrainian-qualified **doctors and nurses** can be employed as medical assistants under the guidance and responsibility of a registered health care worker pending the recognition of their qualifications.

### Latvia

Health care professionals (including physicians, nurses, midwives, and dentists) are **permitted to practice** for up to one year under the supervision of an experienced medical practitioner who is qualified in Latvia in the same field of specialisation as the trainee and holds at least 5 years' work experience.

### Lithuania

In April 2022, the State Health Care Accreditation Agency **accelerated the process** of recognising professional qualifications and simplified the conditions for issuing licences for personal health care professionals from Ukraine. By July 2022, around **150 medical professionals** from Ukraine had received licences from the Lithuanian authorities.

### Poland

The **2022 Special Act** provides fast-tracking procedures for health care professionals. Doctors and nurses from Ukraine can receive a conditional licence to practice in Poland without full recognition of their diploma, meaning that Polish language proficiency is also not required. Already by January 2023, some **5,000** applications had been received from Ukrainian doctors, and 2,000 from Ukrainian nurses and midwives.

## Other sectors

### Latvia

**Exemptions from recognition requirements**, such as undertaking additional training and passing exams to attain registration in professional registries, were introduced for temporary employment in the fields of construction and electrical engineering.

Ukrainian residents now face **fewer registration prerequisites** to be placed on the Taxi Driver Register. Specifically, there is no need to demonstrate Latvian language proficiency, provide evidence of the absence of driving disqualifications, or obtain

a Latvian driver's licence (the latter is true for Ukrainians generally during their first year in Latvia).

### Lithuania

In March 2022, the Ministry of Environment shortened and simplified the procedure for recognising the professional qualifications of **architects and civil engineers** from Ukraine by introducing a more flexible procedure with lower formal requirements and alternative recognition methods in cases where required documents are not available.

### Poland

Prior to 2022, Ukrainian citizens could be employed in the Polish civil service, as long as the work performed did not involve direct participation in the exercise of public authority or functions aimed at protecting the interests of the state. The changes introduced by the **2022 Special Act** exempt such new hires from the requirement to prove knowledge of the Polish language.

Ukrainian miners are able to perform managerial functions in Polish mines. According to the Special Act, professional qualifications acquired in Ukraine to perform regulated mining professions are now recognised in Poland, similarly to those of EU nationals.

## Other means of supporting qualification recognition

### Austria

In November 2022, the Federal Chancellery of Austria and the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) launched '**MIKA – Mit Kompetenzen Ankommen!**'. This project aims to speed up the process of recognising qualifications, focusing on Ukrainian refugees with experience in social, commercial, administrative, media, and technical occupations. It offers a holistic examination of competencies, assists in finding training opportunities, prepares a plan for qualification recognition and related support, offers advice, and provides job-related language training.

### Vienna, Austria

The **Fast Track project**, funded by the Vienna Employment Promotion Fund (WAFF) and the City of Vienna, has focused on health and technical occupations (via Fast Track Health and Fast Track Technic, respectively). From July 2022 to June 2023, the project offered several support services to help Ukrainians to continue practicing their profession in Austria: Information about living in Austria; free workshops, trainings, and seminars; job search and application assistance; interview preparation; diploma recognition advice; and specialised language training.

## Germany

In May 2022, the German Chambers of Commerce and Industry, as well as the Chambers of Crafts, have been offering an [initial check of qualifications](#) for Ukrainian refugees. The Chambers collect information about the skills and qualifications of the refugees to produce an 'initial check' document that helps employment agencies and job centres match jobseekers with appropriate training and employment opportunities.

## Latvia

Displaced Ukrainians are permitted to submit [documentation](#) in English or Russian (instead of providing formally translated documents) during formal recognition procedures.

## Poland

A [project](#) implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Poland for the Polish Ministry of Family and Social Policy aims to create measures for the recognition and validation of skills and qualifications obtained in Ukraine in selected regulated professions. It does this by comparing the skills required in Poland and Ukraine and improving the system of recognition of foreign qualifications.

## Other waiving of language requirements

### Latvia

The Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians [permits employers](#) to hire Ukrainians who are not proficient in the Latvian language, provided that this lack of fluency does not interfere with the performance of their stated job duties.

### Lithuania

Displaced Ukrainians are [exempt](#) from language requirements. While language proficiency in Lithuanian is considered a mandatory precondition for numerous professions, it is now the respective employer's responsibility to decide whether the professional duties can be performed without (or with limited) command of the Lithuanian language.

## Supporting employment-related language learning

With a certain level of local language skills important for many jobs, especially higher-paying positions, language proficiency remains a significant hurdle for individuals seeking appropriate job opportunities. Several CEE countries have recognised this challenge and taken steps to specifically support employment-related language learning. In addition to traditional language courses, they have also introduced online instruction and financial aid for employers.

## Austria

In May 2022, the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF) created [additional online German courses for Ukrainians](#) with the Universities of Lviv, Drohobych, and Uzhgorod. The beginner's level classes are taught online by qualified German trainers of Ukrainian background and conclude with a state-recognised exam. The classes began in May 2022, with 1,270 participants attending over the course of 2022.

## Czechia

Through contributions under the Czech Government-supported [POVEZ II](#) project, employers can receive financial assistance to cover the provision of Czech language courses to Ukrainian employees. Moreover, Ukrainians can access [free Czech textbooks](#), which introduce them to the Czech alphabet and pronunciation, practical topics, and everyday communications.

The Postgraduate Medical Education Institute (IPVZ) has launched [Czech language courses](#) and online courses on the provision of health and social services, aimed at health care workers from Ukraine, with support from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

## Job matching

A variety of job platforms have been launched to connect refugees from Ukraine with job vacancies, for both in-person and remote positions. These come in addition to the translation of several existing job platforms into Ukrainian and Russian.

### Vienna, Austria

Through the Skills4Vienna platform, the City of Vienna searched for people from Ukraine who wanted to work at a non-profit organisation or public institution. Cooperation could be voluntary, fee-based, or take the form of paid employment. This programme targeted people with pedagogical, psychological, or social sector education, or with training in the field of health care. Interested parties could provide their contact details, whereupon the City of Vienna coordinated with counselling and support institutions and established contact with suitable candidates.

### Czechia

The Czech Business and Investment Development Agency (CzechInvest), in cooperation with the Ministry of Industry and Trade of Czechia, the Chamber of Commerce, and the main national employers' organisations, created the [Jobs4UA.cz](#) website to help displaced Ukrainians find employment in Czechia. The platform can be used by verified Czech employers and Ukrainian jobseekers. All job advertisements are available in both Czech and Ukrainian.

## Estonia

The Unemployment Insurance Fund has set up a [website](#) listing job vacancies for Ukrainians.

## Direct hiring

Some public entities are actively recruiting refugees from Ukraine, including employers facing shortages in the transportation sector. Some efforts go beyond basic recruitment to also provide complementary supports.

## Austria

The Austrian Federal Railways (ÖBB), in cooperation with the [Jobs for Ukraine](#) initiative, has presented vacancies in Vienna and actively invited displaced persons from Ukraine to apply. The first available jobs were mainly [in the IT sector](#), since roles in this sector tend to easily allow for English as the working language.

## Germany

[Deutsche Bahn](#), the state-owned railway company, has been providing German job market advice to refugees (in Ukrainian and Russian), including information on recognition and registration processes, in person and via telephone. It also offered a four-week orientation course in six German cities, with the aim of preparing participants for potential employment with the company. The company has worked to recruit refugees more broadly since 2015.

## North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany

In March 2022, Ukrainian refugees were given the opportunity to find a job in the state administration as quickly and procedure-free as possible. On the initiative of the state's Minister of Finance, the state Cabinet [set up a job pool](#) with funds from the state budget for 20 Ukrainians who had fled their country. With a view to expediting the hiring process, the state did not require 'gapless' proof of education and training qualifications. German language skills were also not a criterion for selection.

## Supporting Ukrainian artists

Working in the arts sector, often freelance, comes with considerable risk of precarity. This risk is exacerbated for [refugees](#), as they tend to contend with an unstable source of income and project-based work alongside additional challenges such as language barriers, limited familiarity with the local market, a lack of professional networks, and limited access to essential tools and workshops. Following the displacement of many from Ukraine, some CEE government agencies have taken specific steps to support artists to live and work in their countries.

## Austria

In March 2022, the Federal Ministry for Arts, Culture, Civil Service and Sport (BMKÖS) launched the [Office Ukraine. Shelter for Ukrainian Artists](#) initiative to assist Ukrainian artists and cultural workers fleeing their country and show solidarity with the new arrivals. This programme provides rapid [financial support](#) in the form of artist and project grants, alongside activities to support networking with and participation in Austria's arts and culture sphere. It has awarded approximately 160 scholarships and project grants thus far (as of August 2023).

## Bavaria, Germany

The Bavarian State Ministry for Science and Art [earmarked](#) €500,000 from its culture fund for arts and culture projects connected to Ukraine. Under this special fund for Ukrainian artists, new projects with a nationwide significance implemented by NGOs in 2022 were eligible for funding.

## Poland

The Polish Ministry for Culture is [providing authors and artists](#) from Ukraine with a special form of assistance, consisting of in-kind and financial support such as scholarships. Moreover, the Ministry and related institutions are required to ensure that Ukrainian artists have appropriate living conditions for continuing their artistic, scientific, or didactic activities or research in the arts, be it through professional or artistic development.

## Supporting Ukrainian researchers

Displaced Ukrainians working in academia and research can face the challenges of language barriers, unfamiliarity with the local academic landscape, and limited professional networks, while project-based work might decrease career stability. Several CEE government agencies have stepped in to support this group, offering financial assistance directly or via institutions, with the aim of helping them to continue their work and potentially support the future of the Ukrainian state.

## Austria

The [Ernst Mach-Stipendium - Ukraine](#) is a scholarship specifically granted to students in tertiary education, post-doctorate fellows, researchers, and lecturers in the following areas: Natural sciences, technical sciences, medicine, health sciences, agricultural sciences, social sciences, humanities, and the arts. Grantees receive €715 per month to continue their research and studies at Austrian universities from September 2023 through February 2024. The scholarship is funded by the Austrian Ministry for Education, Science, and Research (BMBWF).

## Czechia

The [Technology Agency of the Czech Republic](#) (TA ČR) has encouraged current recipients of its funding to add Ukrainian re-



searchers and students to their project team, with recipients able to request an increase in funding to cover new staffing costs. In addition, the TA ČR asks new funding applicants to consider ways of incorporating Ukrainian team members into their proposals. Similarly, the [Czech Science Foundation](#) (GAČR) encourages current and prospective applicants to consider adding Ukrainian researchers and students to their project team. Ukrainian scientists and their teams were also eligible to apply under the 2023 calls for proposals, including a new, individual post-doc fellowship which allows international scientists to work for three years at a Czech institution.

### Latvia

The [Latvian Government](#) has allocated funding for study and research scholarships for Ukrainians, with €688,000 earmarked for scholarships until 31 December 2023. Under this scheme, Latvian higher education and scientific institutions can offer (unremunerated) internships to Ukrainian researchers, with the Latvian Government then providing a research fellowship stipend of €900 per month. During the January-June 2023 semester, 92 study scholarships and 20 research fellowships were awarded to Ukrainians, with a total value of €259,880.

### Lithuania

In April 2022, the [Lithuanian Science Council](#) launched a special call for proposals to hire Ukrainian researchers, allocating €1.5 million from its annual budget. In addition to funding new research staff positions for Ukrainian scientists and PhD students at Lithuanian research and study institutions, government funding also supported institutions that had already hired Ukrainian researchers displaced to Lithuania through the reimbursement of salaries and related taxes.

### Poland

For 2022, the National Science Center offered a [special scholarship programme](#) for Ukrainian students and non-doctoral scientists seeking refuge in Poland. Researchers who had worked in Ukrainian research institutions were eligible to apply for the scholarship. The work of scholarship recipients was supported at Polish scientific institutions. The value of all scholarships granted (with durations of 6-12 months) ranged from PLN 3,500 to PLN 5,000, potentially supplemented by host institution funds.

## Supporting Ukrainian businesses

Entrepreneurship provides an opportunity for self-employment and potential job creation for others (who may or may not be refugees). This fact has been acknowledged by several Member States that have eased legal access for temporary protection recipients. Some entrepreneurs and businesses are also receiving targeted support for existing and new endeavours.

### Lithuania

[Job creation and relocation support](#) for small Ukrainian businesses is provided through a new version of the existing Star-tuok financial instrument, financed by the European Regional Development Fund. The Ministry of the Economy and Innovation of Lithuania introduced [amendments to this loan facility](#), which enables Ukrainian citizens and businesses wishing to launch in Lithuania to obtain soft loans for business start-up or working capital, with an interest rate one-third lower than the market rate. The Ministry is also supporting emerging Ukrainian businesses by [granting subsidies](#) for jobs created by Ukrainian business entities in Lithuania.

## Financial incentives

Another way in which national governments are encouraging Ukrainians to take up employment is through the use of financial incentives.

### Latvia

A [once-off allowance](#), equivalent in value to the current national monthly minimum wage of €500, is provided to each Ukrainian refugee employed. Already by [January 2023](#), more than 10,000 Ukrainians in Latvia had received one-off benefits for starting work.

## Takeaways

In times of crisis, innovation often emerges as a response to novel challenges. As was the case during the arrival of unprecedented numbers of asylum seekers to Europe in 2015-16, and following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, governments in Central and Eastern Europe have responded by adjusting their policies, including those geared towards boosting refugee employment. The latest measures introduced by governments in the CEE region build on innovations from these previous periods of high crisis, including the pandemic-related easing of qualifications requirements and rise in remote work. While the endeavours outlined above do not represent an exhaustive list, it is clear that, in response to large-scale displacement from Ukraine, CEE governments are displaying creativity and adaptability in crafting strategies to bolster employment prospects for refugees.

The outcomes and impacts of these novel approaches are still unfolding, underscoring the importance of tracking and evaluating these new measures to identify their actual impact. While various measures to speed up labour market entry appear promising, there are still considerable challenges to be faced, especially in regard to addressing [underemployment](#).

Existing fast-track initiatives are aimed at certain occupations. While they allow individuals to continue working in their chosen field of expertise, they largely only allow for assistant or trainee positions to be taken up. This is an important step, but there should be a clear path towards full recognition of qualifications that enable the holders to put their skills to use (for the benefit of all) – in jobs that pay accordingly. It should also be highlighted that concentrating fast-tracking efforts on narrow (often high qualification) professions raises concerns with regard to the supply of opportunities for middle-skilled workers.

Long-term approaches that focus on skills recognition and development, rather than just swift entry into the labour market, deserve greater attention. Furthermore, while many of the current destination countries have increasingly realised the importance of holistic integration policies including economic inclusion, integration in the CEE region has tended to be ‘projectised’, pointing to the continued need to shift to a long-term and holistic approach.

Given the flurry of new initiatives, promoting the exchange of promising and proven practices among CEE countries, and European countries more broadly, can provide inspiration for other actors now making moves in this area. While the present briefing note focusses on government approaches, such an exchange should also include civil society, the private sector, and other relevant actors.

An important opportunity also exists to extend promising approaches to a wider group of refugees and migrants. Identifying which measures could be extended to support broader labour market inclusion is a useful exercise: Ukrainians are not the only group of migrants that stand to benefit from these creative approaches; in addition, the employers that hire them and receiving economies at large can benefit from the full recognition and use of their skills. Harnessing these crisis-driven innovations presents a chance to create a more inclusive and sustainable labour market for all – to the benefit of each stakeholder – an opportunity that will hopefully be seized.

#### Annual Policy Initiative

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