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Are Labour Markets Inclusive for Ukrainian War Migrants? Perspectives From Polish and Italian Migration Infrastructure Actors

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Abstract

The arrival of several million Ukrainians in the EU since February 2022 has posed new challenges to migration infrastructure. In this article, we pay particular attention to the determinants of labour market entry and its inclusiveness for war migrant women in countries with a history of Ukrainian labour migration. According to Xiang and Lindquist (2014), migration infrastructure consists of five overlapping dimensions: regulatory, commercial, social, technological, and humanitarian. These dimensions influence the position and behaviour of migrants in their host countries. Using this lens, we investigate how the actors within the migration infrastructure in Poland and Italy have played their part in facilitating the newcomers' access to quality paid jobs as well as the biggest barriers they face in this process. Our analysis is based on the results of original field research carried out in 2023, when, apart from other methodological approaches, 37 in-depth interviews with key infrastructure actors were conducted. The findings reveal large-scale collaboration among migration infrastructure actors with overlapping commercial, social, and humanitarian dimensions in both countries. The text contributes to the growing stream of research on the so-called infrastructural turn in labour migration in Europe, especially in terms of changes triggered by crises.

Keywords

inclusiveness; Italy; labour market; migrant women; migration infrastructure; Poland; Ukrainian war migrants

1. Introduction

The EU's extraordinary activation of the 2001 Temporary Protection Directive (TPD; Council of the European Union, 2001) has created opportunities for the urgent economic integration of Ukrainian war migrants. In this article, we use the term "war migrants" to refer to Ukrainian citizens who were forced to flee their homeland as a result of full-scale Russian aggression in February 2022. These individuals, equipped with (temporary) residence status and other forms of financial and non-financial support, have gained full access to the labour market (Andrejuk, 2023; Welfens, 2022). Unlike non-European asylum seekers, they were allowed to use labour market institutions and services (such as training, job placement, and social security) and were able to immediately enter legal employment (IOM, 2024). However, access to the labour market does not equate to "inclusiveness" in the labour market. An inclusive labour market is one where all individuals of working age, in particular vulnerable and disadvantaged groups like the elderly, women, and migrants, can participate in decent, quality work that is paid. Inclusive labour markets remove barriers to employment, invest in fair pay and benefits as well as promote skill-building and qualification acquisition for anyone seeking to join or re-join the workforce (European Commission, 2024). In this context, the European Commission (2024) also emphasizes the importance of entrepreneurship development and the need to remove any obstacles to full labour market access. In her concept of inclusive labour markets, Rubery (2017) highlights the role of different labour market actors, in particular employers or trade unions, who should strive to provide workers with standard employment relations that are stable, compliant, and decent.

In the case of temporary protection beneficiaries, the provisions and measures involved a subpopulation of war migrants, exposed to structural barriers or exploitation. Due to their caring responsibilities, special needs, and traumatic experiences (Kuzmuk, 2024), these individuals faced particular challenges in acquiring jobs. Numerous studies confirm a fairly consistent picture of those who arrived in Europe after February 2022: In most cases, these were women of working age, with limited host country language skills. For instance, a Eurofound study showed that 71% of migrants in Italy (Eurofound, 2023) had little or no knowledge of Italian, while 54% in Poland faced similar language challenges. Moreover, many of these women had little or no previous migration experience (for the Germany case see Brücker et al., 2023). These women were often responsible for caring for children and elderly family members (UNHCR, 2022). Various surveys show that at least half of Ukrainian war migrants have a university degree, which makes them highly skilled workers (Duszczyk et al., 2023). Most of them were previously employed in professional positions, earning above the national average in their home country. Research conducted among Ukrainians across 10 countries after February 2022 clearly indicates that the need to obtain and maintain employment ranked as a top priority for 29% of respondents surveyed in 2022 (IOM, 2024).

Despite the EU's inclusive special regulations and welcoming stance towards Ukrainian war migrants, the degree of integration, including labour market participation, varies significantly across member states (Bassoli & Campomori, 2024; Luyten, 2024). According to OECD estimates of 2023, Poland boasts the highest employment rate among Ukrainians covered by temporary protection (65%), while Switzerland and Italy report the lowest (19%). It should be emphasised that the scale of labour market entry of Ukrainian war migrants far exceeds the one previously observed with refugee arrivals in Europe (NIBR, 2023; Sobczak-Szelc et al., 2023). Nevertheless, a burgeoning literature strand in this area fails to fully answer the question of the determinants of labour market access for Ukrainians covered by temporary protection and the reasons behind the disparities across countries. We therefore argue that such marked differences stem

from the varying efforts of state and non-state actors involved in labour market, migration, and integration policies in the two countries. To further understand these disparities, we raise questions about the elements of infrastructure embedded at the interface between the labour market, migration policy, and the broader social, economic, and political environments. Due to the numerous changes in the law governing the stay or labour market access of Ukrainian war migrants in both countries, the time perspective of our article is limited to December 2023.

This article aims to fill the knowledge gap regarding the varying labour market engagement of Ukrainian war migrants and the role of host countries' infrastructures in this process. Employing on a comparative diverse case study method (Yin, 2018), we elucidate the underlying reasons for significant discrepancies in the labour market entry process in Poland and Italy. While both countries have established channels of labour migration for Ukrainians, Poland and Italy adopt different approaches to managing migration. They differ in terms of (a) the institutional environment of their labour market, (b) varieties of capitalism (e.g., role of social partners in policy-making, industrial relations mode, or vocational training and education), and (c) their political-historical relations with Ukraine. Furthermore, (d) these countries have had different experiences when it comes to receiving asylum seekers, which includes a different degree of infrastructural development for their reception and integration of migrants into society or the economy (Ambrosini, 2018; Narkowicz, 2018). Therefore, we argue that, despite a shared demand for foreign workers in both countries, it is the varied responses of labour market actors and the social, historical, and political context that have ultimately shaped migrants' opportunities to find, enter, and maintain paid employment shortly after their arrival in 2022. To explore these dynamics, we employ the analytical lens of migration infrastructure (Düvell & Preiss, 2022; Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). This framework allows us to capture the complexity and inclusiveness of formal and informal actors that interact with war migrants as they navigate the opportunities to enter their host country's labour market. Our analysis is grounded in qualitative document analysis, grey literature, empirical research findings and, most importantly, 37 individual expert interviews with actors of the migration infrastructure in Poland and Italy. While our research is exploratory in nature, we believe that the cases of Poland and Italy provide valuable lessons for other countries that have experienced the presence of immigrants covered by temporary protection regulations

This article makes an original contribution to the so-far limited debate on the economic inclusion of war migrants in EU countries and labour market response to the specific needs of this group (Brücker et al., 2023; Górny & van der Zwan, 2024; Kubiciel-Lodzińska et al., 2024; Welfens, 2022). Theoretically, we advance research on the concept of migration infrastructure in countries with varying labour migration regimes and propose the application of this lens in future labour market studies. Empirically, our comparative case studies provide a unique Polish-Italian perspective on the reception of war migrants from Ukraine in European countries, effectively bridging a significant gap in the literature.

2. Theoretical Considerations: Migration Infrastructure in an Inclusive Labour Market

Our theoretical considerations are situated within the debate on migration infrastructure and its impact on the inclusiveness of migrants in the labour market of the host country. Over the past two decades, a dynamic body of research has emerged around the infrastructural turn in international mobility (Düvell & Preiss, 2022; Wessendorf & Gembus, 2024; Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). This research exemplifies a neoliberal approach to migration governance, characterized by the increasing commercialisation of mobility, the dominance of

technocratic migration management strategies, and the growing importance of non-state actors in shaping the scale, direction, or conditions of migrants within transnationals spaces (Ambrosini, 2018; Martin, 2017). It is a new approach in migration research, emphasising the mechanisms driving transnational mobility and the conditions that shape it within a systemic framework (Faist, 2014; Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). While the concept of migration infrastructure has been developed in the context of managing temporary mobility in Asia, particularly regarding theoretical reflections on the mediation between macro-level determinants and micro-level processes (Düvell & Preiss, 2022), it is gaining recognition in European contexts (Lubberhuizen, 2024; Matuszczyk et al., 2022; Sigona et al., 2021). In examining the reception of asylum seekers and forced migrants in EU countries, a significant body of research has emerged around arrival and/or social infrastructures (Wessendorf & Gembus, 2024), with a focus on local social organisations, civic engagement, faith-based groups, as well as welfare brokers (Haase et al., 2024; Narkowicz, 2018).

Düvell and Preiss (2022, p. 85) define "migration infrastructure" as a set of tangible and intangible resources, structures, and actors (both formal and informal) designed to facilitate international mobility. Access to this infrastructure is essential; without it, would-be migrants would have limited access to information or material resources, which could hinder or even prevent them from acting on their mobility decisions. A different view is proposed by Spijkerboer (2018, p. 455), who uses the term "global mobility infrastructure," which is co-created by various components, including physical structures (e.g., airports, railways, hotels), services (e.g., travel agencies, consular officials, visa brokers), and laws (e.g., liberalisation of international passenger transport or visa regulations). Within the most commonly adopted framework of migration infrastructure, Xiang and Lindquist (2014) identify its five basic dimensions:

1. Regulatory: This primarily encompasses the state apparatus and various procedures, including rules governing entry, residency, access to employment, and their enforcement mechanisms.
2. Commercial: This includes fee-based agencies and other labour recruiters or intermediaries responsible for facilitating, organising, and accelerating international mobility.
3. Technological: This dimension comprises communication channels (such as social media platforms) but also means of transport that enable physical border crossings.
4. Humanitarian: This primarily involves non-governmental, non-profit organisations, such as local NGOs, migrant advocacy groups, but also trade unions, and international organisations.
5. Social: This includes migrants' networks, which are particularly important when newly arrived migrants are looking for work.

The usefulness and innovation of the migration infrastructure concept are based on the simultaneous consideration of the five dimensions that make up this type of infrastructure in the study of migration or migrant behaviour. It is important to emphasise that there may be different interactions between actors in the different dimensions of the infrastructure, as they are characterised by different interests, adopted strategies of action, or driving forces. Each of these dimensions is equally important, although the literature tends to focus on the role of private intermediaries, including their efforts to establish partnerships with other actors (e.g., public–private partnerships between state institutions and intermediaries; see Ambrosini, 2018; Martin, 2017; Matuszczyk & Bojarczuk, 2024).

To the best of our knowledge, the concept of migration infrastructure has yet to be applied to study the labour market inclusion of migrants in the host country, with the exception of the work by Sigona et al.

(2021). Research within this framework has highlighted practices of exclusivity embedded in migration regimes, revealing, among other things, states' selective approaches to admitting foreign workers (Ambrosini, 2018). In discussing citizenship-based discrimination in the context of the global mobility infrastructure, Spijkerboer (2018, p. 469) points out the disproportionate use of facilities and privileges derived from international migration by wealthy, white, male individuals. Paradoxically, these disparities are exacerbated by the activities of commercial actors (Martin, 2017). On the one hand, their activities enable migration plans and accelerate the global movement of people; on the other hand, through the financial dependency of migrants (mainly before debt bondage and other financial obligations), they lead to exploitation, increased social inequalities, and diminished agency for vulnerable populations (Faist, 2014).

3. Context: Polish and Italian Migration Infrastructure and Migrant Workers

The labour market conditions in Poland and Italy differ significantly, which determines the degree of inclusion and the ease with which migrants can secure legal paid employment in each of these countries. For example, according to the EU Labour Force Survey, the unemployment rate in Poland was 3.4% in 2021, while in Italy it was 9% (10.6% among women). Both countries show a relatively high share of temporary employment, reaching 16.6% in Italy and 14.9% in Poland in 2021. Moreover, Poland has been experiencing a growing problem of labour shortages and record vacancy rates in many sectors and regions for several years, facilitating access to both permanent and temporary employment (Rollnik-Sadowska et al., 2024). Conversely, Italy has an above-average share of informal employment and seasonal labour demand, particularly in industries such as tourism and agriculture (Dimitradis, 2023). Another striking feature of the Italian labour market is the low level of economic activity rate among women, which stood at just 49.4% in 2021, compared to 64% in Poland.

Poland and Italy play distinct roles in European mobility due to their differing migration patterns and management approaches (Ambrosini, 2018). Poland is considered a new destination country, with a homogeneous group of immigrants, favouring temporary labour migration policies while adopting a more hostile approach toward asylum seekers (Fiałkowska & Matuszczyk, 2021; Narkowicz, 2018). In contrast, Italy has a longer history both as a receiving and, to some extent, a transit country, characterised by a diverse migrant population, including a significant number of irregular and refugee immigrants. This diversity contributes to the existence of a large grey zone within the labour market, which may lead to criminogenic situations such as the *caporalato* system in agriculture (Dimitradis, 2023). So, while both countries have developed arrival infrastructure to accommodate migrants (Bassoli & Campomori, 2024), this does not necessarily guarantee inclusiveness in the labour market. Typically, migrants in both Poland and Italy find employment primarily in low-skilled niches including domestic work, agri-food sector, construction, and services.

Since the early 2000s, workers from Ukraine have been present in Poland and Italy, although their migration paths and experiences differed (Fedyuk & Kindler, 2016). In Italy, there was strong evidence of feminization within this community, which has influenced their roles and performance in the labour market. The motivations and strategies for choosing Italy or Poland as a migration destination differ. Due to the geographical distance, Ukrainian arrivals in Italy have been more sedentary, although some have been circular. Regarding the regulatory framework, Ukrainian workers could not count on special provisions for accessing the labour market in Italy; instead, they were covered by the general laws applicable to third-country nationals, which required them to apply for work permits. Nevertheless, Italy had the highest

number of Ukrainians living long-term (12 months or more) among EU member states in 2021, with more than 236,000 individuals residing there.

In contrast to Italy, Poland has been dominated by a model of temporary migration of Ukrainians, made possible by a well-developed transportation infrastructure (through regular bus services and private shuttles between countries) and liberal employment policies for foreigners (Fiałkowska & Matuszczyk, 2021; Kindler & Szulecka, 2022). Since 2006, Ukrainians (along with Russians, Belarusians, then Georgians, and Armenians) have benefited from a simplified procedure that allows them to work legally without the need for a labour market test (official information from the local labour market confirming the employer's need for additional labour, in this case, a migrant worker). In 2021, over 1 million Ukrainians were covered by this procedure and 666,000 work permits were issued to this group. Within a few years, Poland became the leading EU country attracting workers from third countries, with a strong dominance of migrants from one country (Ukrainians accounted for 70–90% of the various categories of foreign workers in Poland; see Górny & van der Zwan, 2024). This was made possible by, among other things, a rapid growth of private labour market intermediaries (employment agencies and temporary work agencies), which have responded to the growing demand for labour in various sectors across Poland (Kindler & Szulecka, 2022). At the same time, migrant workers have had limited access to the welfare state system in Poland, including labour market services, and may hesitate to report issues such as exploitation or non-compliance to the appropriate monitoring institutions (Pawlak & Lashchuk, 2020).

Comparing Poland and Italy, the influx of war migrants from Ukraine after 24 February 2022 differed significantly (Duszczyk et al., 2023; Fedyuk et al., 2023). While Poland immediately became the primary destination for these migrants, despite lacking previous experience in receiving forced migrants, Italy was considered one of the possible EU destinations. Importantly, the governments of the two countries responded differently to the needs of the arriving population. In early March, Poland adopted a special reception law for Ukrainian citizens, while Italy was the last EU state to adopt the 2001 TPD. Nevertheless, on 4 March 2022, the Italian Council Presidency issued Order 872–2022, granting Ukrainians access to the labour market (Protopapa, 2024). However, as it stands, the temporary protection status cannot be converted into a work residence permit, which means that the future of forced migrants in Italy depends on the decision of the state once the temporary protection is over (Fedyuk et al., 2023).

4. Methods and Data

This article draws on the results of comparative research on the labour market situation of Ukrainian migrant women in Poland and Italy. Using the case study method (Yin, 2018), simultaneous field and desk research was carried out by a team of researchers from Poland and Italy. The main empirical component consists of in-depth structured individual interviews with key labour market actors who form the migration infrastructure in both countries. In addition, we also drew on the data from in-depth interviews with migration intermediaries, central administration representatives, and academic experts in Poland and Ukraine, carried out between 2022 and 2024 by one of the authors of this article. A total of 37 expert interviews were conducted between January 2023 and May 2024 (27 in Poland, 10 in Italy). The uneven distribution of interviews was mainly due to the high number of refusals from potential interviewees and the generally lower willingness of private or public actors to share knowledge with researchers. The selection of interviewees was purposive, guided by the migration infrastructure perspective. The research targeted

central government agencies, national labour market organisations (both commercial and non-commercial), and social dialogue partners across different regions of Poland and Italy. Due to differences in the institutional environments of the labour market in Italy and Poland, specific categories of interlocutors varied slightly. Interviewee selection criteria included the length of their experience, involvement in labour migration issues before and after February 2022, as well as their position in their organisation (mainly directors or heads with extensive knowledge of their organisation's activities). Through prior research projects, developed networks, and involvement in the support of war refugees, the research team was able to reach out to key representatives of the institutions that constitute the migration infrastructure in both countries.

Each interview lasted an average of one hour. With prior consent, all interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. The interviews were coded and analysed thematically, focusing on the main themes that emerged, both common and distinct for Poland and Italy. Key issues raised during the interviews included: changes in the labour market due to the war in Ukraine, actions taken by respondent organisations, the needs of Ukrainian war migrants, and recommendations for further measures to improve the inclusion of these workers in the labour market.

In addition to the interviews, we incorporated materials gathered through the research team's participation in conferences and seminars organised by various labour market actors (for example, the European Labour Mobility Congress in Cracow in 2023; a congress on labour market organised by the employers' association Lewiatan in Warsaw in February 2024). Moreover, through their active and practical involvement in labour migration issues, the authors had a unique opportunity to gain expert knowledge and follow the implementation policies affecting Ukrainians in the two countries. To complete the picture of the functioning of the migration infrastructure in both countries after February 2022, a qualitative content analysis of documents produced by organisations within the institutional environment of the labour market (such as trade unions, employers' associations, central administration, or local employment offices) is also included.

5. Empirical Analysis

To structure and elaborate on the collected empirical material and emerging topics, we categorized our findings into five thematic dimensions, following the classification proposed by Xiang and Lindquist (2014). In what follows, we focus on the broad actions and instruments that directly targeted a new category of workers from Ukraine, namely those covered by the temporary protection.

5.1. Regulatory Dimension

The regulatory framework governing access to the labour market for Ukrainians fleeing the war in Poland and Italy is primarily shaped by the law on assistance to citizens of Ukraine in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of that country and the 2001 TPD (see also Sejm, 2022). Poland's adoption of the law, which de facto put Ukrainians arriving after February 2022 on an equal footing with Polish citizens in terms of labour market rights, reflected a policy of openness to war migrants from that country (Andrejuk, 2023). The approach continues a liberal labour market access policy for migrants from Ukraine, aimed at addressing labour market gaps, but without explicit measures for integrating and settling foreign workers (Duszczyk et al., 2023; Kubiciel-Lodzińska et al., 2024). Our fieldwork and participation in conferences on this

topic confirm that from the very first days of the war in Ukraine, the Polish government adopted an approach aimed at granting quick access to the labour market to the largest possible number of newly arrived immigrants. The Italian government's response has been less proactive in this regard, and Ukrainian war migrants have not been able to count on such comprehensive labour market assistance.

One of the first solutions to facilitate labour market navigation for both war migrants and potential employers involved an extensive digitalisation process in the central administration and the creation of online tools. For example, the employer's notification within 14 days (the 2024 amendments reduce this period to seven days) was submitted only via the Polish government portal (https://www.praca.gov.pl/eurzad/strona-glowna). Thus, administrative procedures have been significantly reduced to a minimum. It is worth noting that, before 2022, migrants from Ukraine (and other countries) wishing to work legally in Poland faced waiting times of up to twelve months for visas and work permits. In a short period, the government and various ministries launched dedicated websites to provide reliable and credible information on, for instance, employment opportunities and skills enhancement in Poland. These websites also became spaces where individuals or employers were able to advertise their offers of support and employment (e.g., https://www.pomagamukrainie.gov.pl./potrzebuje-pomocy/praca). A strategic role was played by the Ministry of Family and Social Policy (in particular the Labour Market Department), which was responsible, among other things, for the creation of the website "Work in Poland" (www.pracawpolsce.pl), which has the largest database of verified job offers (250,000). According to this website, Ukrainian migrants can fill in a form and contact a helpline worker to receive new job offers every week, where the offers are tailored to his or her qualifications, expectations, and, most importantly, place of residence. In addition, war migrants in Poland and Italy can make use of publicly available databases (in Ukrainian, English, and Russian) of job offers, as well as the support of district labour offices in their job search, retraining or professional activation.

The Italian model of assistance to war migrants from Ukraine was based on a multi-level governance system, where the Department of Civil Protection operated in close connection with the other central state administrations involved, as well as with the Regions and the Autonomous Provinces, the Prefectures Territorial Government Offices, the Municipalities, and third sector subjects. Respondents from small aid organisations highlighted the extensive collaboration with a range of large NGOs and local authorities, describing it as an innovative approach to crisis management:

> At that time we certainly started more institutional collaborations than before, in the sense that we had never yet, how to put it, done any work with them. We also started to work with Refugees Welcome, which is a very large NGO, to put it briefly, one that has a lot of resources. (I_NGO_2_08.06.2023)

In these optics, the services and guarantees for TPD beneficiaries became more accessible. Similarly to Poland's model, Italy established specific websites (mainly on a regional basis), for submitting requests for contributions, accommodation and various administrative matters (see also Bassoli & Campomori, 2024). From the labour market perspective, applying for temporary protection allowed Ukrainian war migrants to work in Italy immediately whether as employees (including seasonal workers), self-employed individuals, attender participants in vocational training courses, internships, and other active employment policy measures, under the same conditions as Italian citizens. For recruitment purposes and other related procedures it was sufficient to present a residence permit for temporary protection or the application receipt, along with an Italian tax code that was assigned while applying for the permit. The job search

process was facilitated by a vast network of Employment Centres, Employment Agencies or other public and private entities accredited to assist with employment services.

A popular way for Ukrainian women to enter the labour market was to set up their own businesses. In both Poland and Italy, migrant women can rely on extensive institutional support to start, develop, and run their own businesses. In Poland, for example, the Polish-Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce continues to be particularly active in this field, providing comprehensive services for Ukrainian entrepreneurs (these include advisory services, assistance in obtaining financing, filing documents, or representation before authorities). In Italy, the entrepreneurial ecosystem is also well-developed and offers various microfinance programmes for third-country migrants (European Investment Bank, 2024). However, it is worth noting that while entrepreneurship is promoted as part of an inclusive labour market by the European Commission, our research shows that for many, this entrepreneurial path was a necessity dictated by the need to find paid work. Our research has only partially addressed the issue of forced self-employment among immigrant women, for whom, self-employment (sole proprietorship) is a form of precarious employment expected by the employer.

However, the opening of the labour market for Ukrainians under temporary protection did not mean that all migrants with higher education or specific professional qualifications quickly found jobs that matched their qualifications. Some professionals, including medical staff, could use fast-track procedures for diploma nostrification, both in Poland and Italy. The Polish government offered a non-refundable loan of PLN 3,000 to cover the costs of completing the formalities (such as diploma translation), whereas teachers from Ukraine were allowed to work in Polish public schools where there was a need to support Ukrainian-speaking pupils. Nevertheless, these specific measures addressed to some groups of war migrants cannot be considered a guarantee of inclusive labour market conditions for all.

5.2. Commercial Dimension

Thanks to the boom in in the employment mediation system in Poland before 2022, many private labour market intermediaries had the resources to respond quickly to the emergence of a new category of migrants. Through interviews with over a dozen migration intermediaries in Poland, we found that most representatives of these actors were actively involved in multidimensional support. This engagement stemmed from concerns about the outflow of male labour, increasing competition for workers in Poland, and the emergence of new challenges in labour-intensive sectors. Both large corporations recruiting thousands of workers and smaller, family-run intermediaries responded to the needs of war migrants by contributing intensively to their economic activities. This was partly made possible by the involvement of Ukrainian recruiters, who were able to reach and communicate with war migrants more easily. As reported by several nonstate actors, the main challenge faced by women seeking employment was their caring responsibilities, which some agencies tried to address by providing essential support:

> The problem of care, that they are here alone with these children….Some groups organise themselves to take care of these children internally in a group of Ukrainians, so that someone can work. Well, this, this was certainly reported as a problem. The employment agency in Opole, which wanted to recruit these people for work, began offering private kindergartens and childminders to Ukrainian women for the duration of their work hours for a fee. (PL_COM_5_ 23.03.2023)

However, the response of Polish commercial actors to the emergence of a new category of Ukrainian workers did not fully embrace the concept of an inclusive labour market. Although the "package deals" offered by temporary work agencies included arrangements for legal work found quickly, often with guaranteed accommodation and transport, these jobs often lacked stability and quality. Typically, temporary work agencies provided jobs in the so-called secondary segment of the labour market (e.g., food processing, production, or industry), mainly based on fixed-term contracts (in Poland these are civil law contracts), without a full guarantee of employment rights or retraining opportunities. Nevertheless, many women with no access to social networks or migration experience in Poland decided to take their first job in Poland with the help of temporary work agencies.

It should be emphasised that not all intermediaries focused solely on integrating war migrants into the Polish labour market. In recent years, an infrastructure has been established for posting workers from Poland to other EU countries (Matuszczyk et al., 2022), and this framework is now being increasingly utilised for the posting of third-country nationals, including Ukrainian citizens. As our research and participation in events focused on this issue revealed, those who post Ukrainian workers for contracted services outside Poland have intensified their efforts to recruit and prepare war migrants for cross-border labour markets. A representative of one of the interviewed care agencies sending workers to Germany pointed to the high absorptive capacity of European markets for mobile care workers. She added that temporary employment in Germany is available to war migrants without knowledge of the German language, prior work experience, and, above all, to individuals aged 50 and over, who are particularly sought after in this sector.

Based on TPD provisions, war migrants from Ukraine could enter the labour market in Italy immediately, but the newly adopted legislation did not ensure access to quality employment opportunities. To some extent, the private labour market intermediaries involved in facilitating inclusion of newcomers after February 2022, implemented various ad hoc strategies to respond to their special needs. The interviews with representatives of employment agencies evidenced, among others, setting up special programmes for Ukrainian women looking for work, where their skills were linked to specific industries and professions (e.g., Ranstad for Ucraina). Our desk and field research mapped projects, internet platforms, and apps designed to profile and match professionals with their potential employers while ensuring protection and guarantees for both parties. One respondent described its company strategy as follows:

> Our first point of contact with all candidates is our institutional website where there are structured information paths on our services, candidate management, orientation and training….We have information and recruitment policies and campaigns that target individuals registered in our databases through mass mailing offers and special projects. (I_COM_1_ 09.06.2023)

Some Italian agencies also focused on empowerment pathways to develop the employability of Ukrainian war migrants, stimulate their autonomy and work awareness, promoting personal and professional growth. Specific mentoring initiatives were targeted at university students and young Ukrainians entering the labour market for the first time. A notable example of a comprehensive programme to support the inclusion of Ukrainians into the labour market was the Hospitality and Work programme initiated by the Italian Association of Employment Agencies (Assolavoro). Employment agencies offered Italian language courses and vocational training to beneficiaries of temporary protection, for which participants were reimbursed for food, accommodation, and a lump sum of EUR 3.5 per hour of participation. Nevertheless, it can be

concluded that while the arrival of Ukrainian war migrants did not significantly change the Italian labour market's ability to absorb foreign workers, it is essential to consider the shifts resulting from this specific influx. These include the characteristics of candidates, particularly their higher average qualifications, the predominance of female applicants, and the complexities of their family situations.

5.3. Social Dimension

Both Poland and Italy had Ukrainian migrant communities at the onset of Russia's full-scale aggression in Ukraine, consisting mainly of economically active migrants. For many war migrants, connections with fellow nationals provided the first and only way to enter the labour market, often leading them to occupational niches. For example, research by Kubiciel-Lodzińska et al. (2024) shows that one in three Ukrainian war migrants in Poland found their first employment through family or friends. However, our research nuances the importance of (potential) cooperation among Ukrainians concerning labour market integration. One of the interviewees, a Ukrainian woman involved in the regional migrant community, pointed out mutual resentment and lack of support, stating that the introduction of the special law created a clear divide among Ukrainians and a differentiated socio-economic situation. This divide largely stems from circumstances under which individuals crossed the border and their subsequent coverage by special regulations. Pre-war migrants are critical of the widespread support for newly arrived refugees from Ukraine, which also translates into a limited commitment to helping them. In particular, the differences between the position and job opportunities of migrants from Ukraine and migrants from other countries present in Poland are widening:

> There is free access to the labour market, so all Ukrainian citizens have free access to the labour market, provided their stay is legal. In fact, no documents are required, apart from registration with the labour office, and Ukrainian citizens can be employed more quickly. This puts Ukrainian citizens in a different situation from other migrants. An employer will hire a Ukrainian citizen more quickly because he does not need a work permit. This creates jealousy in the migrant community. (PL_NGO_1_12.03.2023)

However, most Ukrainian community networks (formal and informal) make efforts to integrate all Ukrainians by organising thematic meetings (e.g., sharing Orthodox holidays). Although these activities are more indirect regarding labour market inclusion, their organisers aim to enhance the social capital of war migrants, making it a valuable resource in their job search efforts. The Italian context, where the reception took place based on the EU directive, did not experience the same dichotomy, which translated into very strong support for newcomers by Ukrainians already living in Italy. As confirmed by one of the migration infrastructure actors:

> [The first ad hoc hospitality was] the spontaneous process of word of mouth, especially in the community….Getting in touch with the sense of community that was gathering in St. Sophia Church. That is where this word-of-mouth support began that we continue to see to this day. (I_NGO_1_12.04.2023)

It is worth noting, however, that in the case of Ukrainians, potential support networks extended beyond their fellow citizens. In the first weeks after the Russian aggression in Ukraine, we witnessed, especially in Poland, but also in Italy (Bolzoni et al., 2023), a national social mobilisation and the involvement of thousands of host country citizens in the hospitality offered to newly arrived Ukrainians:

> A lot of citizens have been engaged in hospitality efforts, supporting families through associations or other initiatives, stated the respondent from one of the Italian NGOs specialising in refugee reception. (I_NGO_1_ 12.04.2023)

Driven by a variety of motivations, Poles and Italians not only welcomed refugees from Ukraine into their homes, but also became involved in sharing information, helping them to obtain financial support or benefit from the available local and state programmes (Cwalina et al., 2023). During the expert interviews in two countries, we learnt of instances where migrants from Ukraine provided paid or unpaid household services (cleaning, cooking, or caring) as a form of hospitality.

5.4. Humanitarian Dimension

Our research confirms that both national and international NGOs in Poland and Italy provided parallel services to help migrants find and take up work, alongside humanitarian aid (Bassoli & Campomori, 2024). Key activities and measures with a bearing on the professional situation and employability of war migrants focused on offering language courses (online and on-site, free of charge or with grants for participants), legal and psychological support as well as guidance on housing and access to employment. In Italy, it led to a particular type of horizontal cooperation (small and large organizations, national and local, worked together to provide comprehensive services (virtual and onsite) in line with their overlapping competences). An example of this type of cooperation and the project that grew out of it was the initiative "My Colf Ucraina," a digital course platform in Ukrainian featuring vocational courses for women seeking employment in the domestic sector. The project was run by a small Italian NGO, with the support of Caritas Italiana and Ebin Colf–National Bilateral Agency for Employers of Family Workers. It should be noted that in both countries many migrant organizations were active before 2022, so this previous experience helped them to be active immediately after the outbreak of the war.

When discussing the significance of migration infrastructure in ensuring adequate employment standards or countering exploitative and non-compliant practices, attention should be paid to labour organisations. However, the level of their activity and development seems to be different in Poland and Italy. In Italy, many more organisations are working on migrant workers' rights (e.g., ActionAid), providing direct support to workers in the workplace placed in different sectors (e.g., domestic care, agriculture) and regions (including rural areas). The only example of a nationwide workers' organisation in Poland is the Inter-Union of Ukrainian Workers, which has been active since 2016 in the largest trade union, the All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions (OPZZ). Based on field research, it was found that this body became actively involved in supporting war migrants interested in professional activation in Poland. In addition to helplines, employment counselling, and CV writing assistance, this organisation offered tailor-made language courses, taking into account the caring responsibilities and workload of migrant women. The second organisation that Ukrainians could count on for support was the newly established Commission of Domestic Workers (established in 2021). In addition to worker empowerment activities, regular meetings, and community integration, this organisation serves as a resource for job placement in the personal services sector (Fedyuk et al., 2023).

Recent scholarship highlights that universities (or higher education institutions) increasingly serve as important entry points for highly skilled migrants in host countries (Pawlak & Lashchuk, 2020), becoming a relevant part of migration infrastructure. A similar trend could be observed in Poland and Italy after February

2022, when many public and private universities implemented their own programmes to support researchers from Ukraine. For example, the University of Warsaw launched a scholarship and ran a one-year programme for Ukrainians under temporary protection who had a university degree. As part of the comprehensive programme, participants had the opportunity to learn the Polish language, get to know the higher education system in Poland, or develop ideas for their own research projects, among other things. One of the authors of this article was actively involved in providing training in Polish and English for those planning to apply for research grants and pursue academic careers in Poland or other countries. Similarly, Italian universities prepared dedicated language programmes to facilitate better integration into the host society (i.e., Unitelma Sapienza in Rome) and numerous Ukrainian scholars were involved in research activities.

5.5. Technological Dimension

The material collected clearly indicates that humanitarian assistance in the reception and integration phases for war migrants in the host countries was made available through new technologies. As highlighted earlier, the high speed of job search and labour market navigation procedures was made possible by the introduction of government-run websites and job vacancies databases. However, not everyone chose these official sources of knowledge when seeking information about the labour market access and offer. As we found, in both countries the first choice for war migrants was social media, which, from the very onset of the conflict in Ukraine, became a platform for cross-border information exchange and a space to offer or seek support (Andrejuk, 2023). Among the most frequently mentioned platforms were Facebook and Telegram, where thematic groups were created ad hoc in response to job demand for people with specific needs (for example, based on specific qualifications, language skills, place of residence, and caring responsibilities). Similarly to pre-war migrants, individuals under temporary protection also sought job opportunities on publicly accessible websites, such as OLX in Poland or website "Pracuj" (www.pracuj.pl). The NGO representatives we interviewed confirmed the relevance of this type of communication channels but warned of the risks arising from the lack of control over the quality and reliability of the information shared. One solution to mitigate these risks is, for example, the website "Mapuj Pomoc" (www.mapujpomoc.pl), where those seeking support on the labour market can find verified institutions providing support in different parts of Poland. In Italy, social media platforms, particularly Telegram and WhatsApp groups, phone applications, and websites were used, which also helped to bypass the important language barrier particularly evident in contexts of face-to-face recruitment. An example of this kind of support for Ukrainian female refugees was described by an infrastructure actor from Milan in the following way:

> We moved on createour own specific proprietary app, which is an app that allows people who are registered…to see what all the job offers are in a very concise way and to give a minimum of information on what the job offers are and what is required. This is a tool through which one can apply for the job position, but can also update his or her profile or change availability as first it was possible to do one schedule and now it has changed and you can do another one. This is a road we will have to travel because the future is made of tools that allow for continuous real-time interaction between job providers and job seekers. (I_NT_2_29.06.2023)

Access to public transport has been considered essential for full active participation in the labour market and its inclusiveness. However, little attention has been paid to this dimension of migration infrastructure, so knowledge of activities and actors in this area remains limited (Lubberhuizen, 2024). Thanks to expert

interviews and the collection of knowledge and materials in both countries, we were able to identify, among other things, initiatives by some local governments (e.g., Warsaw and Kraków) that decided to address the needs of war migrants: (Temporary) free travel projects for new residents became popular, especially in the first months of 2022. Legislation has also been introduced in Italy to provide newly arrived Ukrainians with complimentary rail travel within the country (for the first five days) and 30 days of free car insurance (Integrazione Migranti, 2024). Although this solution was not aimed at those employed or those seeking a job, it can be seen as an important step towards facilitating active labour market participation. Labour market experts highlighted a wider problem of transport exclusion in both countries, especially outside urban areas. Many Ukrainians have settled in rural areas or small towns where regular passenger transport services do not operate or do not coincide with working hours.

6. Conclusions

The main objective of the article was to map the practices and instruments of migration infrastructure actors in response to the emergence of a large population of war migrants from Ukraine in 2022 in Poland and Italy. Particular attention was paid to the inclusiveness of labour markets in these two countries, which exhibit different migration regimes and different approaches to receiving Ukrainian migrants. Going beyond previous studies (Górny & van der Zwan, 2024; Kubiciel-Lodzińska et al., 2024), we have adopted an infrastructural perspective, which allows us to examine the mechanisms underlying the inclusion of newly arrived migrants into the labour market. Despite the limitations of our study and its conclusions (i.e., a small sample size, the specific context of the study, limitation of the time horizon of the analysis to the end of 2023), we believe that this analytical approach will be replicated in other countries, and in comparative studies.

The possibility of immediate access to the labour market for Ukrainian war migrants under the 2001 TPD (Italy) and Polish law (Sejm, 2022) was certainly a new solution and a strong advantage. However, the relatively weak inclusiveness of the labour markets in Poland and Italy, in terms of the low percentage of quality paid job offers and the general persistence of barriers to employment and skills development for these migrants, pointed to significant cons. It should be emphasised that the openness of the various state and non-state actors to the Ukrainians after February 2022 was unprecedented, also in terms of rights and opportunities to navigate labour markets.

The material collected allowed us to identify several key findings to enrich the rapidly growing body of research on the economic integration of migrants under temporary protection:

1. Difference in labour activity: The variance in labour activity levels among Ukrainian war migrants can be attributed to the scale of pre-war labour migration to both countries, which implies the degree of sophistication of the different actors in the migration infrastructure. In contrast to Italy, Poland introduced immigration policy instruments much earlier, facilitating the arrival of Ukrainians. Moreover, the degree of openness of Polish authorities—both national and local—towards Ukrainians and the virtual equalisation of war migrants' rights and privileges with those of Polish workers was not seen in other EU countries (NIBR, 2023).
2. Role of commercial actors: Our research has shed new light on the role of commercial actors, who have become one of the most important entities actively supporting the rapid entry of war migrants into the labour market. Consistent with previous research (Ambrosini, 2018; Matuszczyk & Bojarczuk,

2024), private migration intermediaries in both countries organised humanitarian aid, provided language courses, and, above all, tailored their offerings to meet the specific needs and challenges faced by the new category of migrants.

3. Importance of digitisation: The accelerated digitisation of government processes and the availability of translated labour market websites played crucial roles in helping migrants navigate the labour markets in Poland and Italy. Due to labour shortages, centralised databases of job offers for Ukrainians were much more widely developed in Poland than in Italy.
4. Workers initiatives in Italy: Italy noted a greater significance of workers' initiatives aimed at helping migrants protect their labour rights (but mostly in low-wage sectors). On the other hand, only two young organisations focused on migrants' labour rights were identified in Poland. In both countries, national and international NGOs play a complementary and substitute role in this regard and have stepped up their activities after February 2022 to support migrants' entry into paid employment.

To sum up, it should be noted that despite their inclusive nature, the solutions put in place in both countries are primarily temporary in character. This is a direct consequence of the legal provisions introduced in both countries, which will expire in 2025. However, the measures taken in 2022 and 2023 are expected to lead to positive outcomes, such as increased labour force participation among Ukrainian war migrants. As a result, the many solutions introduced in Poland and Italy have only partially fulfilled the vision of an inclusive labour market for newly arrived Ukrainians. Despite the efforts and investments made, as well as the resources allocated, neither country has yet achieved the inclusion of Ukrainian women migrants with different backgrounds (e.g., skills, age, caring responsibility). Although the employment rate of Ukrainians in Poland is several times higher than that in Italy, a significant proportion of women are engaged in low-skilled jobs with low wages and precarious working conditions (Rollnik-Sadowska et al., 2024). Future studies should pay more attention to the context of the matching of migrants' skills with the positions they occupy, as well as the role of migration industry actors in this area. Researchers and policymakers should pay particular attention to the situation of mature migrants (over 50) who have received the least attention in terms of labour market integration policies.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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