



Sociological research report

Employment of Ukrainian women who found themselves in Poland. Issues and main needs

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The research singled out two occupation categories chosen by numerous Ukrainian women who find themselves abroad: cleaning/care and beauty services. Those working in these fields were invited to participate in the study.

The study's main goal is to identify the main needs and peculiarities of stay in Poland for employed Ukrainian women in 2022.

It was decided to use a quality method of research, i.e., in-depth interviews to obtain information via direct focused conversation of the interviewer with respondents.

We should note that study results are of illustrative nature and by no means representative. Having analyzed the interviews, we divided study results into three stages.

First stage: travel from Ukraine to Poland (push to move, motivational aspects, etc.)

Second stage: “adaptation” (search for accommodation and job, communication, studying language)

Third stage: “integration” (career, new contacts and plans for the future).

During the study, seven interviews were conducted with women aged 18 to 50. The interviews were held between August 27 and September 16, 2022.

Interview participant No. 1, 25-30 y.o. Originally from Mariupol; after February 24 she moved to Vinnytsya and later to Poland. Now works in Lenica as a manicurist.

Interview participant No. 2, 35-40 y.o. Originally from Kharkiv. In Kharkiv, she used to work in tailoring industry; after February 24 she came to Poland and began working as a hairdresser.

Interview participant No. 3, 40-45 y.o. Originally from Vinnytsya region. Since 2018, she has worked from time to time as a cleaner in Poland. After February 24 she arrived in Poland for a longer term.

Interview participant No. 4, 45-50 y.o. Originally from Kharkiv. There, she worked as a swimming-pool administrator. After February 24 she came to Poland and began working as a cleaner.

Interview participant No. 5, 20-25 y.o. She arrived in Poland before the war. The participant works in beauty services.

Interview participant No. 6, 18-20 y.o. Originally from Khmelnytskyi region. In Ukraine, she used to work as a waitress. After February 24 she came to Poland and began working as a colorist.

Interview participant No. 7, 30-35 y.o. Originally from Zaporizhzhya region. After February 24 she came to Poland and began working as a manicurist.

First stage

Before the start of full-scale invasion, six out of seven participants we forced to leave Ukraine. Four of them are respondents from the east of Ukraine. Their motivation to go abroad was occupation of towns/cities they lived in or constant missile shellings. Participant No. 1 commented this in the following way: *“Persistent panic attacks and fear became the main push for the decision to go abroad”*. In the beginning of full-scale invasion participant No. 7 was in an occupied village near Berdyansk; she used an opportunity to leave for Ukrainian western border with her family and then went to Poland.

Not all participants considered Poland as their final destination in search of safe refuge. Participants No. 4 and No. 7 pondered about other countries like Austria, Germany and Canada. However, during their first two to three weeks in Poland they decided to stay there. This can be explained by the process of “thawing” after terrible events and the launch of gradual adaptation process in a new place. Being constantly stressed, they needed a quiet and calm place without air raid alerts and bomb shelters. Having arrived in Poland and rested there for a few weeks, they became aware that they have no need to move further into Europe as Poland provides everything necessary for comfortable stay of Ukrainian refugees. Both participants arrived with minor children which also became the reason to stay in the country. *“We hardly managed to find accommodation and kindergarten for the children. The conditions were fine for us, so we decided to stay.”* (participant No. 4)

Other participants chose Poland as a place of refuge in the first place. Their main selection criteria were territorial proximity to Ukraine, a rather large Ukrainian diaspora, similar mentality and languages. At the following stages we review whether these criteria stood up to the respondents' expectations.

Participants No. 1 and No. 2 went to Poland without any acquaintances there who would meet them upon arrival and help or advise with accommodation and paperwork. All the other participants related that they were going to Poland knowing that their acquaintances would meet and help them. Some participants who had people they knew in Poland noted that if they hadn't had anyone to meet and help them there, they would hardly have decided to move and instead would have stayed home, explaining that the fear of unknown in a strange country was greater than the risks awaiting them in Ukraine.



Second stage

The adaptation period for respondents arriving from the east of Ukraine lasted between one and six months. Stress, fear and lack of confidence impacted the duration of this process. Participants No. 1, 2, 4 and 7 recalled that for a long time in a safe place they faced panic attacks and had stress reactions to irritants like loud noises. It is also important that participants No. 2, 4 and 7 arrived in Poland with minor children. Responsibility for children and their psychological state also became reasons for long adaptation. All three participants noted that their first priority after accommodation search was the problems with getting children into kindergarten/school/college. Only after that the emotional climate in their family started normalizing. In the interviews, the participants recalled that their children quickly adapted in the new environment thanks to the

schools and experienced teachers. Participant No. 4 with her daughter attend sessions of a Russian-speaking psychologist in Poland; she helps both of them to overcome stress.

Participant No. 6 who arrived from Khmelnytskyi region adapted faster than in a month but also worried about her family members who stayed in Ukraine. It is worth noting that the more socially active the person had been before the war, the faster she managed to overcome stress and adapt.

Six out of seven participants had to change their occupation to start working in Poland. Participant No. 1 had worked as a manicurist in Ukraine for a long time but after her arrival in Poland she understood that this occupation will allow her to start earning immediately. *“With constant moves I understood that thanks to my profession in a the beauty field I am rather mobile; I can work and find new clients no matter where I live.”* (participant No. 1) Five out of seven participants work in beauty services. Some of them had to complete courses in Poland to master a new profession. All these participants noted that they paid for the courses themselves; they were delivered in Polish or Russian languages.

Participant No. 3 used to come to Poland since 2018, when she had vacations on her full-time job in Ukraine where she worked as a librarian. The opportunity to earn, improve quality of life and short distance from home motivated the respondent to choose Poland. Participant No. 3 started working as a cleaner after a friend’s recommendation. This occupation does not require additional training and employment permit as in the beginning the respondent worked unofficially. However, later she found an official job in a cleaning company. Starting from February 24 she decided to move to Poland as she didn’t have any doubts about finding accommodation or work. Besides, she regularly engaged in volunteering, helped refugees, provided them with information and advice about paperwork and assisted them with housing as she had already had that experience. The participant notes that volunteering helped her overcome stress caused by the war.

According to the replies of six participants, another obstacle was identified on the way to quick adaptation in Poland. Participants No. 1 and 6 noted that they faced prejudiced attitude of Poles towards Ukrainians. This happened at the stage of accommodation search when Polish homeowners refused Ukrainian refugees looking for housing. *“Often they are just not sure that the Ukrainians will be able to pay rent.”* (participant No. 6) However, no more incidents like that happened. We can conclude that owners of rented-out property are the most prejudiced against Ukrainian citizens. Other participants informed that they only heard rumors about Poles being prejudiced against Ukrainians but never faced such situations themselves. On the contrary, most participants note that their clients or even neighbors provided them with humanitarian aid and psychological support. Participants No. 2, 4 and 6 told that they found jobs thanks to recommendations of their new Polish acquaintances.

Participants No. 2, 3, 4 and 5 told that they numerously heard rumors about competition between “Ukrainian gastarbeiters” who arrived before February 24 and “Ukrainian refugees” who arrived

after. Participant No. 5 noticed that Ukrainians who used to live in Poland before the war don't always treat Ukrainian refugees well. *"Oh, a heap of our people arrived. I start feeling jealous towards Poland. No matter where you go, you meet Ukrainians."* (participant No. 5) Certain competition emerges, and the feeling of being special and unique is lost. On the contrary, some participants felt closer to home when more Ukrainians appeared around. Participant No. 2 also noted a special problem of competition in Polish beauty industry between "gastarbeiters" and "refugees". *"Those who arrived after are happy with what they have. That at least there is no shelling and they have a job. And those who arrived before the war have their whims."* (participant No. 2) *"You know, while I lived in the hostel I heard lots of tales. That Ukrainians are not wanted as employees, that they are cheated. Poles are not that kind all the time and don't always want to pay... Everything like that. I haven't seen anything like that. I worked with both Ukrainians and Poles."* (participant No. 3)

However, there are also positive changes in the beauty industry caused by the arrival of Ukrainian women in Poland. First of all, which was noted unanimously by all beauty industry employees, this is the possibility to communicate with Ukrainians. Five of our respondents told that now there are more Ukrainian clients. During the sessions they talk and discuss topics that worry them. Both clients and employees have certain psychological traumas, feel alone and insecure about the future. Communication helps them feel better and belong to a social group in a strange country. Respondents providing beauty services say that they feel like "psychologists" when clients come to them. *"Mostly clients come not just to get their nails done; they come to talk and share things, like at a psychologist's session."* (participant No. 1) **This communication phenomenon is an important component of socialization and an integral part of our identity.** A beauty session is a procedure that envisages close contact of two persons. Manicure, laser epilation or brow correction are procedures performed in a calm and trustful atmosphere. The support provided by the beauty expert and the client to each other is an opportunity to talk things out, feel safe and hear no criticism in reply.

Neither of the respondents knew Polish language before moving to the country. It is interesting to note that the understanding of Polish language varies among respondents. Besides, this depends not even on the language level but on self-confidence and ability to communicate. For example, participant No. 2 noted she didn't have problems with communication. Even though she doesn't know Polish, she managed to come to an understanding with Poles thanks to her high sociability. The respondent plans to properly learn the language as she is going to stay in Poland for good. Participant No. 5 studies Polish language at school and works in a beauty salon at the same time. Participant No. 4 has no chance to study the language due to tight schedule at work. Other participants noted that they study the language gradually and on their own, speaking Polish in stores, institutions and with some clients.

Third stage

Those participants who work in cleaning mostly have Polish clients, and the services of beauty experts are predominantly used by Ukrainians. The respondents from the beauty industry have noticed that even if Polish clients come to them, they do not care as much about the level and quality of the procedure; in general, they may even neglect such “trifles” as fresh high-quality manicure or brows. Ukrainian women are very meticulous about their appearance, and even if they are living through possibly the most difficult period in their lives they find the time for beauty care.

As the cleaners mostly communicate with the same clients when providing their services, they have rather close relationships with them. Both respondents informed that they have good relationships with their Polish clients. Participant No. 3 tells that Poles help her learn Polish language, and new Polish acquaintances helped participant No. 4 to find housing where she now lives with her minor daughter.

It is necessary to note that not a single respondent complained about the lack of vacancies. Having arrived in Poland, all women and their relatives managed to quickly find a job; some had to complete courses (relevant for respondents from the beauty industry) but as a result they also found a job without any problems.

Participants No. 3, 4 and 5 did not apply for financial or other assistance provided to all Ukrainian refugees by Poland. If participants No. 3 and 5 do not receive assistance because they felt more confident in Poland having accommodation and a stable job, respondent No. 4 refused assistance because she believes she can earn her living herself, and presently her salary is enough to meet the main needs of her family. *“I came here for calm and safe life, not for money.”* (participant No. 4)

The main communication channel for all participants was social networks. Truly, communication with family and friends who stayed in Ukraine (we have to note that all respondents have family members back in Ukraine) cannot be replaced by anything else. The respondents working in cleaning can sometimes see their clients in more informal settings. They can go out for a coffee or talk over the phone, but language and cultural barrier along with subordination principles do not allow them to grow closer and become friends. *“I cannot really say I have friends among Poles. But there are many Poles I communicate with very warmly and closely.”* (participant No. 3).

At the moment of the interview, all participants felt emotionally stable. They have work and housing; they gradually integrate and socialize. For some participants this move was beneficial as they started seeing their future in a new country; others feel comfortable but plan to return to Ukraine later. For example, after the move abroad participant No. 2 started actively socializing, studying to become a hairdresser, changed her occupation and is gradually studying the language. The change of the country of residence and absence of significant stress from the war had a positive

impact on the respondent's life. The respondent surely sees these positive changes and plans her future in Poland.

Participant No. 6 plans to come back to Ukraine as soon as she sees it is safe. Participant No. 7 is not ready to come back to Ukraine even after the victory as she and her family were highly traumatized psychologically when leaving their occupied village. *“Even after the victory I won't be able to come back to Ukraine as I have two small children and they won't be able to normally function in Ukraine due to the crisis, PTSD and other terrible consequences of the war.”* (participant No. 7) Other participants plan to come back to Ukraine but not in the nearest future. They noted that they have an opportunity and willingness to work in Poland for one or two more years and then to come back to their motherland.

The examples above demonstrate certain motivation of Ukrainians to stay in Poland, due to the level of life and salaries among other things. The participants also told that they noted obvious differences in mentality between Ukrainians and Poles. According to the observations of our participants, Poles live a more paced life, and senior citizens travel abroad and go to restaurants. This is rather unusual for us but this European way of life is something Ukraine is confidently moving towards. However, these peculiarities are not to everyone's liking. Such differences as slow functioning of the banking system and bureaucracy scare many people off. The participants noted that in Ukraine they got used to banking apps approving transactions in several seconds and taxes or utilities paid online via Diia app.

In conclusion it is worth noting that the second stage is very important in the process of Ukrainians' rehabilitation and adaptation abroad in the times of full-scale war. Poland as a state did everything possible for Ukrainians to feel safe on its territory. The rumors of “hostile attitude” of Poles towards Ukrainians have been disproven in our study. However, accommodation is a problem faced by immigrants in most countries of Europe and the world. Conflicts among Ukrainians are a national problem we should fight.

Correct and moderate adaptation will allow the refugees to stop feeling alone, and psychological support many Polish psychologists are ready to provide to us free of charge will help Ukrainian refugees overcome post-traumatic syndromes. Psychological health is not something to be neglected; mentally and physically healthy Ukrainians are a pre-requisite for healthy Ukrainian future.

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