

FROM BARRIERS TO BRIDGES: ENHANCING LABOUR MARKET DYNAMICS THROUGH REFUGEE INTEGRATION IN EUROPE

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Received 16 March 2024; accepted 18 April 2024

Abstract. This article examines the critical role of refugee integration into labour markets as a solution to workforce shortages faced by companies across Europe. With a growing gap between labour demand and the available workforce, the integration of refugees not only addresses economic needs but also supports social inclusion and diversity. Through a comprehensive literature review, this study highlights the mutual benefits for both refugees and companies, including enhanced cultural diversity, innovation, and economic growth. Furthermore, it presents empirical findings from recent research conducted in several European countries targeting refugees, business support organisations as well as NGOs. The result of this survey offers insights into the successes and hindrances of integration practices. Key challenges such as language barriers, credential recognition, and cultural differences are discussed. By providing a nuanced understanding of the complexities and benefits involved, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on labour market dynamics and the potential of refugees to enrich host countries' economies and societies.

Keywords: refugees, labour markets, Ukraine, demographic changes.

JEL Classification: O15, J1, M12.

1. Introduction

The primary objective of this essay is to underscore the critical importance of integrating refugees into local labor markets as a strategy to fill existing job vacancies and ease the burden of demographic challenges. This discourse is anchored on an extensive exploration of the multifaceted challenges encountered during the integration process, alongside an in-depth analysis of how various institutional stakeholders collaborate to navigate these obstacles.

The European economy has faced a number of significant challenges in recent years. These include for example the effects of the coronavirus pandemic, which has led to a reduction in GDP in most member states (Petraškevičius et al., 2022). Another challenge that has been known for some time is the shortage of skilled labour. While the former was not foreseeable, the shortage of skilled labour has been predictable for a long time and is getting worse (Winkelmann-Gleed, 2011). Europe has been grappling with these significant demographic shifts, primarily characterized by an aging population and declining birth rates. These changes pose a substantial

challenge for SMEs across the continent, which are the backbone of the European economy (Di Bella et al., 2023) that are in particular affected by the shortage of skilled labour (Deschênes, 2023). This lack of a workforce threatens the competitiveness and sustainability of these enterprises, necessitating innovative solutions to bridge the gap. Parallel to the demographic challenges, Europe has witnessed an influx of refugees in the last decades. In the last two years in particular from Ukraine, propelled by geopolitical instability and military conflict in the region.

These refugees bring with them a diverse range of skills and the potential to contribute meaningfully to the labour markets of their host countries. However, their integration into these markets is fraught with challenges, including legal, linguistic, and societal barriers. This article posits that the integration of refugees from Ukraine into local European job markets represents a strategic opportunity to address the skilled workforce shortage faced by SMEs. By examining the challenges and reasons for the shortage of skilled workforce, the potential of the Ukrainian refugee population, and the benefits and challenges of their integration, this paper aims to

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explore how this unique situation can be leveraged to mutual advantage.

2. Methodology

This research paper adopts a mixed-methods framework, integrating both a literature review and an empirical survey, to examine the integration of Ukrainian refugees within the labour markets of European host nations. This dual approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted benefits and challenges associated with refugee integration. The outcomes of this investigation aim to augment existing scholarly discourse and offer practical guidance for corporations, business support entities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and policy makers.

2.1. Literature review process

The literature review was structured around a series of methodologically sound steps aimed at identifying, evaluating, and integrating findings from a wide array of sources. Sections 3 and 4 detail the primary outcomes of the literature review.

This process was essential for establishing the research foundation, the survey design, and identifying gaps in the existing body of knowledge when it comes to the integration of refugees in the job market. The first step involved delineating the scope of the search to academic journals, books, and reputable online databases. Priority was given to peer-reviewed articles published in English, with a clear focus on refugee integration into job markets within European contexts. Inclusion criteria were meticulously defined to ensure relevance and quality of the sources. Exclusion criteria were equally stringent, filtering out non-peer-reviewed sources, studies focused on non-European contexts, or those not directly related to the labour market integration of refugees. Each identified source underwent a critical appraisal to assess its methodological rigor, relevance, and contribution to the field. This evaluation helped in excluding studies with significant limitations or biases. The remaining literature was then synthesized, identifying common themes, trends, discrepancies, and gaps in the existing research. The insights gleaned from the literature review were instrumental in formulating the research hypotheses and designing the questionnaire. By identifying gaps and trends in the existing research, the literature review informed the development of survey questions that are both relevant and grounded in the current state of knowledge.

2.2. Survey

Following the outset of the conflict in Ukraine, the European Union (EU) promptly acknowledged the imperative of integrating war refugees into its member states more effectively and appointed a special adviser for this matter in June 2022 that reported in 2023 (Asscher, 2023). In

addition, the EU has initiated and supported various projects aimed at facilitating this integration. Among these initiatives, the “Prosper BSR” project led by the Hanse-Parlament stands out as a significant example. Co-funded by the EU, this project started in 2022 and involves business support organizations from Germany, Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia, collaboratively exploring strategies to enhance the integration of Ukrainian refugees.

To learn more about the status quo, a questionnaire was created, and the most relevant findings are summarised in section 5. The construction of the survey was based on the literature review and was pivotal in gathering relevant data for the study on the integration of Ukrainian refugees into European labour markets. The survey comprised a mix of closed and open-ended questions, a strategic choice aimed at balancing quantitative data collection with qualitative insights. Closed-ended questions were utilized for demographic information or refugee employment status. These questions facilitated straightforward analysis through descriptive statistics and were critical for segmenting the dataset for more nuanced examination. Open-ended questions, on the other hand, sought to capture the experiences, perceptions, and recommendations of refugees and stakeholders regarding labour market integration processes. This qualitative data enriched the study’s findings, offering depth and context to the statistical analysis. Employing a piped-logic or conditional branching format, the survey dynamically adjusted the sequence and selection of questions based on respondents’ initial answers. This approach ensured that participants encountered questions pertinent to their experiences and roles in the integration process. For instance, refugees who had successfully found employment were asked different follow-up questions from those still seeking work.

Recognizing the diverse linguistic backgrounds of the target population, the survey was made available in six languages: English, Ukrainian and German, Polish, Latvian, Lithuanian, being relevant host countries. This multilingual approach was designed to maximize participation rates and ensure that language barriers did not preclude valuable contributions from any segment of the population.

The survey’s dissemination strategy targeted broad and effective reach within the refugee, corporate, and support organization communities. Distribution channels included email campaigns, social media platforms, participation in conferences, and online meetings with relevant stakeholders. Aware of the potential respondent fatigue, especially among SMEs with limited time resources, the survey was designed to be concise, requiring 5 to 12 minutes to complete. This consideration was critical in achieving a satisfactory response rate, particularly from the business sector, where time constraints often limit participation in research activities. Comprising 39 questions, the survey’s adaptive design meant respondents faced 11 to 23 questions based on their initial answers, tailoring content to different groups

and circumstances. The questions within the questionnaire vary according to the participants' backgrounds, ensuring a comprehensive analysis. For refugees, the questionnaire delves into their educational qualifications, prior work experience, current employment status, and, if applicable, the primary barriers they face in securing employment. Meanwhile, institutional stakeholders such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), public agencies, and business support organizations are queried about the extent and effectiveness of their collaboration. Similarly, companies are surveyed regarding their openness to employing refugees, among other related inquiries. The survey opened in November 2023 and in this article the status quo until March 2024 is summarized.

3. Shortage on skills

Europe faces substantial economic and social challenges due to the aging population. The demographic changes have been profound and far-reaching, with significant implications for the skilled workforce in the region. This shortage has led to decreased productivity and ultimately impacts the growth potential. As the population ages and birth rates decline, the working-age population is shrinking, leading to potential labour shortages in key sectors. Lower fertility levels have a strong impact on the systems in Europe (d'Albis et al., 2017). For many EU member states this is intensified due to the Brain Drain in recent decades (Ruin, 2021). It will lead to fewer students in educational institutions, a shrinking labour force to sustain the aging population, and a greater demand for improved infrastructure, healthcare services, and housing adjustments for the elderly (Braicu, 2016). These pivotal demographic transformations will compromise the ability of governments to generate tax revenues, manage fiscal policies effectively, and ensure the provision of adequate pensions and healthcare services (Lawton, 2020).

It is therefore essential for European countries to implement comprehensive policies and strategies to mitigate the impact of demographic developments (Astrov et al., 2021). One approach is to focus on increasing birth rates through incentives for families, such as parental leave policies, affordable childcare, and financial assistance, which is often not effective (Saxonberg & Sirovátka, 2020). Additionally, investing in solid education and training for the younger population can help address labour force shortages and promote economic growth. Furthermore, establishing support systems for the elderly is crucial for addressing the challenges posed by an aging population also in the Industry 4.0 (Wolf et al., 2018). Overall, a multi-faceted approach that encompasses both social and economic initiatives is necessary to address the demographic challenges facing Europe, but last but not least, encouraging immigration and integration programs with a pro-active policy can also contribute to offsetting population decline and diversifying the workforce (Muenz, 2007).

The successful integration of refugees into the labour market presents a promising solution to address this

issue (Martín et al., 2016), maintain productivity and thus reduce the effect of the demographic changes (Marois et al., 2020). Contemporary research findings indicate that a scarcity in the local staff force leads to lower competition for available positions, consequently improving the employment prospects for refugees (Tsolak & Bürrmann, 2023).

4. Refugees and the job markets

The escalation of conflict and outbreak of the war beginning in early 2022 has significantly amplified the movement of Ukrainian citizens into the European Union, marking a dramatic increase in their numbers. This recent surge, however, is part of a broader historical context of migration from Ukraine to the EU, which has been occurring for decades before (Kupets, 2016). While the western member states have had refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq in particular since 2015, the eastern member states had less experience. Specifically, the integration of Muslim refugees into Polish society has been challenging due to significant cultural disparities (Narkowicz, 2018). In contrast, Ukrainian refugees have experienced a relatively smoother acceptance in Poland, attributable to their more congruent cultural backgrounds. Thus, there were already around one million immigrants from Ukraine working in Poland before 2020 (Klaus, 2020). It is thus no surprise, that many refugees from Ukraine went to Poland, since the social networks are the strongest pull-factor when choosing a new host country (Di Iasio & Wahba, 2024).

In contrast, the post-2022 period has seen the conflict as the overriding reason for migration, with many migrants now classified as war refugees.

A significant shift has occurred in the demographic composition of migrants from Ukraine to Poland, particularly since the early 2022. Prior to the war, the migratory trend was predominantly characterized by male migrants who engaged in the Polish labour market. This demographic has seen a drastic reduction as many of these individuals have returned to Ukraine to participate in the defence efforts against the invasion, thereby depleting the available workforce in Poland. While Ukrainian refugees have the potential to make a significant contribution to the labour force in European host nations, they do face specific challenges distinct from those of other migrant groups (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2022b). With the commencement of hostilities, there has been a marked increase in the influx of women accompanied by children seeking refuge in Poland (Duszczyk et al., 2023).

This new demographic presents a distinct set of challenges and opportunities for the Polish job market. While women are indeed potential participants in the workforce, their ability to contribute is often constrained by numerous factors. Primary among these is the necessity of childcare responsibilities, coupled with the challenges of integrating into a new labour market under the

pressures of displacement and the need for familial stability. Furthermore, integrating Ukrainian refugees into the European job market can also foster social cohesion. By allowing refugees to become financially independent and productive members of society, it promotes a sense of belonging and reduces the likelihood of social exclusion or resentment (Sahin Mencutek & Nashwan, 2021). Refugees from Ukraine have demonstrated relatively swift inclusion in the labour market compared to other refugee cohorts, with some finding employment in sectors like healthcare and education (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2023).

4.1. Legal access to the labour markets

Securing employment represents a significant hurdle for refugees as they navigate the complexities of resettlement in new host countries (Fasani et al., 2022). A paramount barrier to the effective assimilation of refugees into local job markets is the restrictive legal framework governing their employment rights. In numerous jurisdictions, refugees face statutory prohibitions against their participation in the workforce (Federico & Baglioni, 2021). Such legislative measures, often archaic in nature, were ostensibly designed to safeguard domestic employment during periods of elevated unemployment rates. However, the contemporary economic landscape is markedly characterized by a pervasive scarcity of skilled labour, rendering these regulations increasingly anachronistic. Calls have been made for the European Union to revise its policy frameworks to expedite and improve the labour market integration of refugees (Bredgaard & Thomsen, 2018).

Empirical research has consistently highlighted the benefits of adopting a more permissive stance towards the job market integration of refugees. Already experiences from the 1990s in this domain unequivocally demonstrate that a liberalized policy approach not only facilitates the economic self-sufficiency of refugees but also addresses critical labour market needs, thereby engendering mutual advantages for both the host countries and the refugee populations (Andersson Joona & Gupta, 2023).

Moreover, the revision of these outdated legal frameworks to reflect the current economic realities and labour market demands is imperative, but in case of refugees from the Ukraine the policy makers acted effective. The European Union took decisive steps to facilitate the entry of refugees from Ukraine in 2022 into the job markets of their respective host countries. A key measure in this initiative was the activation of the European Union Temporary Protection Directive (Carrera et al., 2022). This legislative action, on one hand, has standardized the residency regulations for Ukrainian war refugees across EU Member States. It encompasses provisions for equal access to social services and, crucially, to the labour market. The enactment of the Temporary Protection Directive marks a significant policy shift aimed at ensuring that refugees from Ukraine are not merely recipients of humanitarian aid but are also given the opportunity to

contribute to the economies of their host countries. By granting practically full access to the job markets, the EU is promoting a model of integration that emphasizes the importance of swift and effective access to employment opportunities for displaced individuals. This model recognizes the dignity, independence, and potential economic contribution of refugees, facilitating a smoother transition to their new environments. However, while the directive provides a framework for access, the practical realization of these opportunities varies by country and its respective integration policies that are quite different in the EU members states (De Coninck & Solano, 2023).

4.2. Entrepreneurship

Already before the Ukraine crisis, research indicated that successful labour market integration is vital for refugees' self-sufficiency and economic contribution (Marbach et al., 2017). Refugees enrich the labour market not merely as workers but also as entrepreneurs, leveraging their distinct experiences and cultural heritage (de Lange et al., 2021). This background often translates into heightened creativity and an exceptional work ethic, traits that are particularly beneficial in the entrepreneurial realm (Shneikat & Alrawadieh, 2019). Their unique perspectives and resilience can drive innovation and success in business ventures. Accordingly, welcoming policies and practices are called for specifically for refugees in order to enable them to become financially independent as soon as possible (de Lange et al., 2021). Entrepreneurs are not only needed to start their own company, but also to take over business from the elder generation (Hogeforster & Alexander, 2018).

5. Evaluation of survey

For the purpose of ensuring the integrity of the survey analysis, responses identified as incomplete or manifestly erroneous were meticulously filtered out. This process resulted in a dataset comprising 173 valid responses for evaluation at the study's completion. The breakdown of the valid responses is as follows: NGOs contributed 18 responses, business support organizations provided 28, public authorities submitted 34, refugees offered 44, and companies contributed 49. Herein, we present the responses deemed most critical to our findings.

5.1. Jobs and perspectives

Among the refugees surveyed, 59.09% reported being employed, while the remaining 40.91% were unemployed. This discrepancy significantly affects their future prospects. Regarding intentions to return to their country of origin, among the employed refugees, 15.38% expressed a desire to return as soon as possible, 23.08% within a few months to a year, 38.46% plan to return after a few years, and 23.08% have no intention of returning. In stark contrast, a substantial 77.78% of unemployed refugees wish to return immediately, and 11.11%

aim to return within a few months or years. Active engagement in the job market significantly influences satisfaction levels, which can be measured on a scale from 0 (representing complete dissatisfaction in the host country) to 100 (indicating the highest level of satisfaction). Individuals employed in the host country reported a satisfaction level of 59.09%, compared to 40.91% reported by those without employment. Additionally, those who were employed expressed a considerable degree of job satisfaction, with an average rating of 68%. When inquired about the alignment of their current job with their qualifications, 38.46% affirmed a match, 34.62% reported a partial match, 19.23% considered themselves overqualified, and 7.69% felt underqualified.

Notably, there is a gender disparity in employment outcomes, with 61.36% of male refugees securing employment compared to only 38.64% of female refugees. Remarkably, among the individuals without employment, 50% attributed their joblessness to caregiving responsibilities for children or elderly family members. Meanwhile, 22.22% expressed a lack of interest in working, 16.67% cited an absence of necessary qualifications as a barrier to finding work, and 11.11% indicated plans to commence their job search in the upcoming months.

5.2. Language skills

Proficiency in languages significantly impacts employment outcomes for refugees, encompassing both the local language of the host country and English. Among those who remained unemployed, 94.45% reported minimal or no knowledge of the local language, with only 5.56% claiming basic language skills. Conversely, among the employed, 34.62% have attained an intermediate level of proficiency in the local language, while still an even 50% described their skills as beginner or basic. Regarding English proficiency, a mere 5.56% of the unemployed claim to have intermediate skills, in stark contrast to 43.38% of those employed reporting an intermediate or fluent level of English proficiency.

5.3. Education and work experience

Among the refugees who have successfully secured employment, 100% possess prior work experience, with the largest proportion (42.31%) having between four and six years of experience. Conversely, among those still seeking employment, a substantial 44.4% lack any work experience, while 38.89% have only limited experience, ranging from one to three years. Those the refugees that secured employment, 56.52% possessed vocational training qualifications, 13.04% had undergone dual training programs, 13.04% held a bachelor's degree, and 17.39% had attained a master's degree or higher. This data underscores the particular importance of vocational education and practical experience, which appears to be highly sought after in many job markets (Oswald-Egg & Renold, 2021). This finding underscores the critical importance of vocational education and training (VET)

in the contemporary labour market. Specifically, the model of “dual training”, which integrates work-based learning with theoretical instruction, emerges as exceedingly pertinent for smaller companies (Hogeforster & Priedulena, 2014) . In many contexts, participation in such programs virtually assures employment, highlighting their significance in addressing the skills gap faced by many industries today. Before the year 2022, Ukraine was actively engaged in the enhancement of its VET system (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2022a). Such initiatives were designed to bridge the gap between educational outcomes and the actual skills demanded by employers, thereby facilitating smoother transitions from education to employment for Ukrainian youths. Consequently, it is unsurprising that refugees possessing practical experience and dual vocational training tend to secure employment with relative ease.

5.4. Companies

When surveyed on the employment of refugees, 58.33% of companies responded with “Yes, absolutely”, 35.42% indicated “Yes, if possible”, and 6.25% were indifferent, with none selecting “No, they are only here for a short time” or “No, not at all”. This consensus within the private sector strongly suggests that refugees ought to be integrated into the labour market. Presently, 64.58% of the companies confirmed employing at least one refugee, whereas 35.42% reported not having any refugee employees.

Companies that employ refugees expressed significant satisfaction, rating their contentment on a scale from 0 (dissatisfied) to 10 (extremely satisfied), with an impressive average score of 7, indicating above-average satisfaction. This favourable experience has led to 83.87% of these companies being open to hiring refugees again, while 9.68% remain uncertain, and only 6.45% expressed reluctance to rehire. Those companies that have not yet employed any refugees gave the overwhelming reason that no refugee has applied so far (64.81%). Accordingly, 70.59% of these companies without a refugee in their team stated that they would definitely hire a refugee, 23.53% stated possibly and only 5.88% categorically denied this.

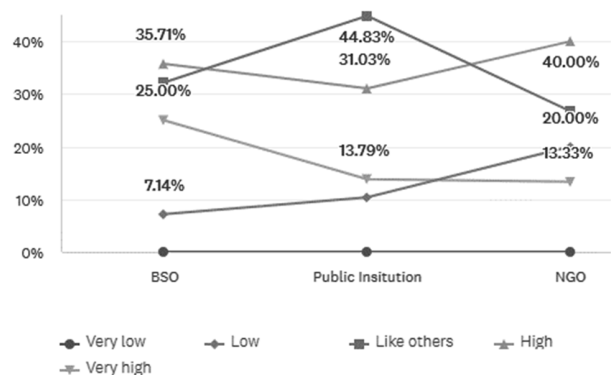


Figure 1. Willingness to hire refugees by companies

Approximately 70% of respondents observed no disparity in the employment of refugees compared to other employees, signalling a high or very high willingness to integrate refugees into the workforce – illustrated by the 25% of BSOs who rated their willingness as “very high”, as Figure 1 shows. The survey explored the current state of collaboration among various institutions, including their aspirations for future interactions. These responses were particularly illuminating, revealing a tendency towards insular cooperation: NGOs predominantly collaborate with other NGOs, BSOs with BSOs, and public authorities with their counterparts. This pattern is highlighted by the fact that 61.54% of NGOs reported no engagement with BSOs. Despite this, there is a unanimous desire among these institutions for strengthened cross-sector partnerships. Specifically, 76.92% of NGOs expressed a wish to considerably enhance their collaborative efforts. In parallel, BSOs acknowledged the need for stronger (53.86%) or much stronger (26.92%) cooperation with NGOs. Furthermore, there is a significant interest from BSOs in intensifying their interactions with public authorities, with 52% seeking closer or significantly closer collaboration.

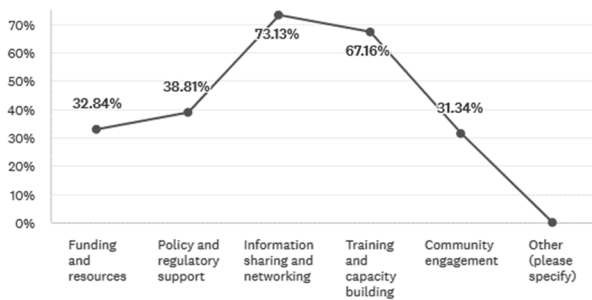


Figure 2. Areas for cooperation among institutions

As depicted in Figure 2, there is a strong desire among the institutions for enhanced information exchange and networking, with 73.13% prioritizing this area. This is closely followed by a demand for training and capacity building, sought after by 67.16% of respondents, aiming to collectively bolster integration into the labour market.

5.5. Challenges

Participants were surveyed to identify the primary obstacles they face in securing employment, with challenges rated on a five-point scale ranging from “no challenge” to “major challenge” (Figure 3).

The obstacles presented for evaluation included language barriers, formal recognition of qualifications, limited knowledge of where to apply, cultural differences, and issues related to legal/immigration status or childcare/family responsibilities. The results overwhelmingly indicated that the language barrier was perceived as the most significant challenge (weighted average 3.66 out of 5), whereas cultural differences were deemed the least problematic (2.24 weighted average) like Figure 3 shows. Analysis of responses segmented by participant

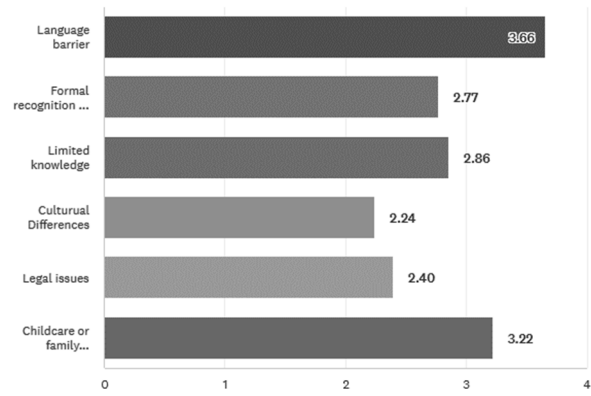


Figure 3. Challenges

categories sheds light on distinct perceptions of challenges. Focusing solely on refugee responses, the language barrier emerges as the foremost obstacle, scoring 4.14, with childcare issues trailing at 3.57. While public authorities acknowledge the language barrier as a significant hurdle (3.63), they rank the formal recognition of qualifications slightly higher at 4.15. It’s noteworthy that in the practical experiences of the business community and refugees, the issue of qualification recognition scarcely registers as a concern.

5.6. Ease of transition into job market

In the concluding section of the survey, participants were inquired about which interventions they believe would most effectively facilitate integration into the workforce (Figure 4). The options presented encompassed fostering an open, welcoming community, providing language and skills training, assigning mentors for guidance, offering internships at companies, extending financial support, and disseminating more comprehensive information. Notably, the establishment of a welcoming community (with a weighted average of 3.92) and the provision of language training (3.84) were identified as the paramount measures.

Segmenting the responses by the respondents’ backgrounds unveils insightful nuances. Across the board, the consensus highlights the paramount importance of a welcoming society for successful integration. However, notable disparities emerge in the prioritization of financial support, which on average is deemed the least critical (2.76) for job acquisition. Distinct variations are observed: refugees yet to secure employment consider financial support almost vital (4.06), in stark contrast to the lower valuation (2.36) by their employed counterparts, a sentiment echoed by the business sector and institutional respondents. This suggests that while financial support is not universally valued, specific groups perceive it as significantly more crucial. Comparatively, countries with high employment rates, such as Poland and Lithuania, exhibit less reliance on strong financial support than Germany, where such aid is more prevalent. For businesses, offering internships (3.69) is deemed essential, while language training (3.86) receives high importance from BSOs.

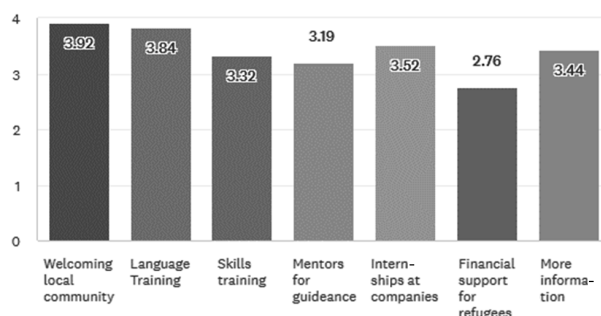


Figure 4. Supporting instruments

5.7. Limitations of study

The conducted and evaluated survey acknowledges certain limitations that may affect the interpretive breadth of its findings. Primarily, the informative value of this research is constrained by the limited participation of refugees themselves. Despite efforts to ensure a comprehensive analysis, the direct perspectives of refugees were underrepresented, which may lead to an incomplete understanding of their specific challenges and needs. Conversely, the participation rate of institutions, including Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), business support organizations, and public institutions, was notably high due to the fact the questionnaire was distributed by business chambers. This disproportionate representation allows for representative conclusions regarding the institutional framework and support systems in place but may not fully capture the nuanced experiences and perceptions of the refugees. As such, the study's conclusions should be considered with an understanding of these participant dynamics. Further research is encouraged to incorporate a larger sample of refugee participants to enhance the study's informative value and provide a more balanced view of the support mechanisms and their effectiveness from the perspective of those directly affected.

6. Conclusions

Due to demographic shifts, Europe has experienced a growing shortage of skilled workers in a wide array of industries for decades. Simultaneously, the influx of refugees has seen a marked increase. The experience with war refugees from Ukraine has underscored their capacity to successfully fill a number of these job vacancies, highlighting a viable solution to the skilled labour deficit. Results from the survey reveal a pronounced willingness among companies to employ Ukrainian refugees, with those having already provided employment opportunities expressing considerable satisfaction with the work performance of these individuals. This feedback reflects a broadly positive reception within the business community towards the integration of refugees, emphasizing their potential to enhance organizational productivity and diversity.

What sets it apart from other refugee groups is that migrants from Ukraine were already working in

neighbouring countries long before the war. Labour market integration achieves success through the concerted actions of NGOs, BSOs and the public sector. With NGOs often representing the first touchpoint for refugees, BSOs linking individuals to the labour market, and the public sector setting the overarching policies, a collaborative approach is imperative. Such a unified strategy is crucial for developing sustainable networks that enable effective and long-term integration. The critical role of a host country's welcoming attitude, like demanded in the survey, and supportive environment is underscored by the European Union countries' exemplary openness to refugees from Ukraine. These nations have swiftly facilitated legal employment opportunities, significantly accelerating the integration process for Ukrainian refugees compared to their counterparts in other countries (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2023). This rapid integration highlights the pivotal importance of national policies and societal attitudes in fostering an inclusive environment for displaced individuals. Further research should be conducted into the extent to which the special features of Ukrainian refugees' successful integration into the labour market can also serve as a model for other refugees, for example by removing barriers and facilitating free access to the labour market.

Authors' contributions

Drawing upon an extensive literature review, Author 1 spearheaded the conception and design of the analytical framework and was also responsible for the collection of pertinent data. The analytical examination of this data was a collaborative endeavour between Author 1 and Author 2, both of whom were instrumental in the composition and refinement of the final manuscript.

Disclosure statement

There are no competing financial, professional, or personal interests from other parties.

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