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### **Economic Integration of Migrants: Three Pillars Relevant for Ukraine**

Integration of migrants is one of the conditions for tapping into the migration potential for development, and economic integration is the basis of the whole integration process. In the majority of countries in the world, integration policies are considered important components of migration policies. [According to UN data](#), in 2011, 91% of developed countries implemented measures for the integration of immigrants, as compared to 79% in 1996. In Ukraine, where actual development of migration policy started only after gaining national independence, attention to integration issues grew gradually in response to migration challenges, due to lack of experience, personnel, and necessary resources. However currently a number of guidelines and political principles have already been developed in this sphere and some experience has been accumulated in the policy implementation.

While integration for the most part is associated with immigration, three-pronged approach may well be applied when studying the subject in the Ukrainian context. The first pillar of economic integration is the inclusion of foreigners into the Ukrainian society. The second one relates to the challenges of integration that Ukrainians face in the hosting states (being one of the major providers of foreign labour force to Europe, Ukraine is reasonably concerned about the well-being of its citizens abroad). Finally, reintegration of labour migrants into society of origin upon return to the homeland is the third crucial pillar.

#### **Pillar #1: Inclusion of foreigners into Ukrainian society**

After the collapse of the USSR in the 1990s, integration efforts of the Ukrainian Government were predominantly addressed to Crimean Tatars, who were deported under the totalitarian rule, as well as at Armenians, Bulgarians, Germans, and Greeks, who were returning to Crimea. Almost 100 thousand previously deported persons were repatriated within the first three years of Ukraine's independence. At the beginning of 2014, more than 270 thousand Crimean Tatars and several thousand repatriates representing other formerly deported ethnic groups resided in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea.

Since massive returns took place in the midst of a deep economic crisis, the majority of the above-described migrants found themselves in extremely difficult conditions in Crimea, having neither housing nor jobs. Despite clear provisions on rehabilitation of the formerly deported people foreseen by the legislation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), countries of former residence did not provide any assistance for successful accommodation in Ukraine. Thus, Ukraine could only rely on the support of international organizations to respond to such reintegration needs. During the first years of independence, specialized governmental bodies were established, state programs for adaptation and integration of the formerly deported peoples were developed, [one of which covered the period up to 2015](#). In the course of 20 years, more than UAH 1.2 billion of budgetary funds were allocated for implementation of these programmes.



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The housing problem was paramount for the resettled, so major focus was on construction of residential housing and municipal infrastructure. 460 thousand square metres of residential housing were commissioned, seven schools for two thousand pupils were built, about a thousand kilometres of water mains, 1.2 thousand km of power transmission lines, etc. were constructed. Due to public funds shortage, financial support was provided to repatriates for construction of individual houses with high levels of completion. Besides, public authorities purchased residential property on the secondary real estate market, particularly in locations with affordable prices.

Major attention was also paid to the legal status of repatriates as key precondition for a complete fulfilment of their social and economic rights. Persons who entered Ukraine before the declaration of independence were granted Ukrainian citizenship automatically, but the returnees who arrived after 1991 had to renounce to the previous citizenship first, and this step required time and money, while the returnees lacked both resources. As a result, over a third of the returnees did not obtain Ukrainian citizenship. In 1998, an agreement was reached with Uzbekistan - almost 70,000 returnees were citizens of this country - to simplify the procedure of Uzbek citizenship renunciation for formerly deported persons and to exempt them from the requirement to pay associated fees. State bodies engaged in Ukrainian internal affairs took responsibility for arranging these matters and submitted all necessary documents to Uzbekistan. In 2001, the Law of Ukraine on Citizenship was significantly amended. New provisions allowed immigrants to renounce former citizenship by a simple declaration of renunciation in case of inadequately high fees and complicated procedures.

While general public consensus regarding reception and accommodation of formerly deported persons existed in the Ukrainian society, the issue of integration of other categories of immigrants was widely overlooked. There were several reasons for this. First of all, the country was not actually attractive for immigrants, they arrived in limited numbers (according to the first Ukrainian nationwide census of 2001, 192.6 thousand foreigners and 84 thousand stateless persons resided in Ukraine - or 0.57% of total recorded population (State Statistics Committee of Ukraine, 2004). [According to the State Migration Service of Ukraine](#), by the end of 2017, the number of immigrants reached 265 thousand people). Secondly, the overwhelming majority of immigrants came from countries representing former USSR, primarily from Russia; i.e. their culture and mentality were quite close to Ukrainian – therefore, special measures for their integration were not truly necessary. Thirdly, the society was far from being ready to share scarce resources with the newly arrived immigrants, especially in the situation when, due to high unemployment rates and low income levels, many Ukrainians had to win their bread abroad.

Nevertheless, international organizations aware of the necessity of integration measures drew attention to this issue. Despite the absence of state policies, charity organizations and church provided the much-needed assistance to immigrants. Their efforts were mostly focused on refugees, as the least socially protected category (in the country, there are about 3,000 foreigners with refugee status under the 1951 UN Convention).



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According to [the Law of Ukraine on Refugees and Persons in Need of Subsidiary or Temporary Protection](#), foreigners who are granted the relevant status have the same rights for employment, education, social protection as citizens of Ukraine. However, for long time, the state support for this category of immigrants existed only on paper. In the early 2000s, the first plan for integration of refugees was developed, and UNHCR agreed to provide the necessary funding for its implementation. Integration support was provided by UNHCR partner organizations. At the national level, [the Action Plan for Integration of Refugees and Persons in Need of Subsidiary Protection into the Ukrainian Society until 2020](#) was adopted by governmental decree in 2012.

The latter document is of major importance, as for the first time it introduced the concept of integration into the national legislation and identified authorities responsible for implementation of relevant measures. Although it does not stipulate a direct funding from the state budget, involved agencies had to consider the integration of refugees during budget planning and to report periodically on the implementation of such measures. It is also important that, according to the governmental decree, the integration plans should be developed at the regional level by oblast-level state administrations. The unit for integration of refugees was established in the central office of the State Migration Service (SMS), and similar units were created in the regions with high demand (where resided the largest number of refugees).

Due to adoption of the Action Plan, integration issues appeared on the radar, and many legal provisions were subsequently improved. In particular, clear guarantees granting refugees access to education of all levels were introduced, and the legal conflict was eliminated (according to the Law of Ukraine on Refugees, persons with refugee status had the same right for free access to education as citizens of Ukraine, while according to the Law on Education, foreigners had to pay for higher education). The Ministry of Education and Science (MES) developed methodological recommendations on how to teach refugee children, study Ukrainian language, as well as produced some useful didactic materials. Procedures of recognition of foreign education and qualifications for refugees were simplified. According to the MES order, refugees are allowed to submit incomplete sets of documents for these purposes. If they provide insufficient information, the recognition procedures may include organization of specialized exams, tests, and interviews. Introduced legislative clarifications provided refugees and asylum seekers with access to free legal protection, including representation of their interests in courts and administrative bodies as well as assistance in drafting procedural documents.

Inter-agency coordination also improved. At both central and local levels, the formation of inter-agency working groups to address specific issues became a common practice. Training workshops are regularly conducted for civil servants of various agencies, as well as for teachers, medical personnel, staff members of employment services, etc.

However, it is necessary to admit that the overall progress of facilitating the integration of refugees is rather modest. It is not prioritized as the military actions and the need to address the challenges related to internally displaced persons. The governmental decree on the establishment of integration centres in Kyiv, Odesa, and Kharkiv was adopted only in December 2017, and so far, the actual works started only in Odesa



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centre. Commissioning the second temporary accommodation centre for refugees in Yagotin (Kyivska oblast) is delayed, while the existing centre in Odesa requires major repairs and utilizes only 50% of its real capacity. The state system of provision of information to refugees and of teaching of Ukrainian language is still not functioning.

Problems related to integration of refugees into the Ukrainian society are for the most part solved by the international and non-governmental organizations. UNHCR provides specific assistance to refugees in the form of integration grants for launching small private businesses. UNHCR partners arrange legal advice, interpretation services, assistance and follow-up support for access to social assistance, health care services, and employment. Charitable foundations organize Ukrainian language courses and offer vocational training.

### **Pillar #2: Integration of Ukrainian labour migrants into foreign economies**

Ukraine can hardly guarantee smooth integration of its citizens into foreign economies. However, when migrants are well-integrated into the host communities, it positively influences economic development of their countries of origin. For example, migrants' earnings transferred from abroad are frequently spent on local goods and services. Practical experience gained in another country may be successfully applied in Ukraine, boosting productivity of local businesses. The network of professional contacts built abroad by labour migrants may also benefit Ukrainian economy. As it is well known, the legal status is key to integration, so, first of all, major attention is paid to ensuring legal and safe employment abroad. To this end, both national and foreign policy instruments are used. The system of licensing activities of agencies providing employment services abroad has been established, and the Ministry of Social Policy regularly checks their compliance with licensing conditions. Inter-governmental agreements on employment were reached with a number of destination countries. Agreements on social and pension security are of particular importance for migrants, including the ones concluded with the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, and Spain. Support for self-organization of Ukrainian migrants can also be seen as facilitation of their integration in the host countries. In this regard, the activities of the "International Ukrainian School" (IUS) seem to be rather important (IUS is the secondary education facility under the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine that offers online learning). Cooperation between IUS and schools of the Ukrainian organizations abroad allows children of migrants to master the necessary programme material, to pass tests and obtain education documents that are recognized by the Government of Ukraine. It allows children of migrants to pursue education goals in the host countries without missing the opportunity to be admitted to Ukrainian universities.

Separately should be mentioned the support provided by various international organizations, in particular the United Nations Migration Agency (IOM), to Ukrainian labor migrants in the process of their economic integration abroad. Such support may include the telephone and electronic consultations for labour migrants; providing special training for employers on hiring foreigners; intercultural communication and prevention of discrimination; promoting ethical recruitment standards within the framework of the Institutional Reform and the Informal Sector (IRIS) Project; conducting cultural orientation training; conducting information campaign to promote positive contribution of migrants to the host society.



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### **Pillar #3: Reintegration of economic migrants after their return**

Therefore, IUS activities not only positively influence the process of integration abroad but also help Ukrainian migrants reintegrate into their community of origin upon return home. The integration policy dimension appears to be particularly important for a country that is currently rapidly losing its population due to unfavourable demographic trends and massive emigration. International organizations made a valuable contribution into development of the Ukrainian integration policy, although this direction was brought to spotlight with a significant delay. In particular, for a long time, the UN Migration Agency (IOM), jointly with governments of many host countries, has been implementing programs to facilitate the return and reintegration of Ukrainian migrants, who have no legal grounds for a further stay abroad. Returnees are provided with advisory, logistical, and financial support. Since 2000, more than 2,000 beneficiaries have received the much-needed assistance. In addition to the assistance provided to voluntary returnees, IOM, through a number of its programs, supports the reintegration, including economic one, of persons who have been trafficked.

Attention to the reintegration of migrants increased significantly thanks to the cooperation with the European Union. [The EU-Ukraine Action Plan for Visa Liberalization](#) stipulated, among other things, the development of legislation on reintegration of Ukrainian citizens who return voluntarily or under the readmission agreements. In 2011, the Government of Ukraine approved [the Action Plan for Integration of Migrants into the Ukrainian Society for 2011-2015](#), that, however, was too brief and not specific (it contained only six clauses in total, two of them dealt with provision of information to returnees, and the rest repeated the contents of the Action Plan for Integration of Refugees). The document was a mere formality serving to convince the EU to encourage the Ukrainian Government to follow international recommendations, rather than a real attempt to promote integration.

After the events of winter 2013-2014 that resulted in the change of the country's top leadership, reform in the sphere of migration management significantly intensified. In late 2015, [the Law on External Labour Migration](#) was adopted - now, according to the document, the state migration policy focused on "creating conditions for the return of labour migrants and their family members to Ukraine and their reintegration into society". The law contained separate article dedicated to reintegration, and the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine was chosen as the executive authority responsible for this issue. Pursuant to the above-mentioned provision, [the Action Plan was developed for the reintegration of migrant workers and their family members into the society](#). Unfortunately, it turned out to be rather declarative. At the same time, certain issues that are important for successful reintegration of returnees were raised in this law. In particular, provisions stipulating the improvement of procedures for recognition of informal education, extracurricular Ukrainian language courses for children, improvement of labour migration statistics, the study of foreign experience in migration management were included into the document.

Integration issues receive major attention in [the State Migration Policy Strategy of Ukraine up to 2025](#) developed by the State Migration Service of Ukraine with IOM support. Three out of thirteen objectives



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outlined in the Strategy are associated with this sphere. These objectives relate to integration of foreigners, integration of refugees and reintegration of returning migrants. Regarding the last group, the Strategy seeks to strengthen ties with Ukrainians abroad, to disseminate information on job opportunities in Ukraine, to improve financial literacy of the returnees for more efficient use of the money they earned abroad, to develop national and regional programs for return and reintegration, etc.

The State Migration Policy Strategy defined important guideline principles for the society and authorities. Setting objectives is the first step towards achieving them. However, in order to transform declarations into tangible results, major efforts are needed. It is necessary to ensure that the Ministry of Social Policy - as responsible agency in charge of reintegration of returnees, authorized by law - has a specialized department, and other stakeholder agencies have relevant focal points. It is important to improve coordination of public authorities by establishing a permanent inter-agency commission. In order to make governmental decision-making responsive to the needs of people, it is necessary to ensure permanent communication with associations of migrants, and with the civil society in general. For the same purpose, it is important to conduct periodically scientific research studies, to arrange statistical reporting on labour migration abroad and return of economic migrants to Ukraine. Cooperation with the host countries where Ukrainian migrants choose to stay and work should be given the highest priority in the implementation of migration policy, particularly in the sphere of return and reintegration.

Experience of the Eastern Partnership countries and the EU Member States may prove to be especially useful for the development of effective solutions in the sphere of integration of migrants. Namely, the examples of Georgia, Moldova, and the Western Balkans show that with political will, states can successfully take targeted steps to encourage return and reintegration of their citizens. [The recent meeting held in Warsaw in December 2017 in the framework of the Eastern Partnership Panel on Migration and Asylum](#) – the Regional Consultative Process functioning with the support of European Commission and IOM – demonstrated deep interest in the topic of economic integration of migrants, highlighted the importance of dialogue between the EU and neighbouring countries, allowed to share information on the best practices for protection of migrants' rights, procedures for recognition of qualifications, and on effective use of migration potential for development.

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