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Foreign Workers in Ukraine's Recovery Strategy: Migration Policy in the Context of Sustainable Development

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ABSTRACT:
The full-scale war in Ukraine has caused unprecedented labour market transformations: mass external and internal migration, acute labour shortages, especially in industry, and the need to attract foreign workers for post-war reconstruction. The current labour migration regulation system, shaped during post-Soviet transformation, does not meet contemporary challenges, requiring rethinking in light of European practices and sustainable development goals. The article aims to compare Ukraine's and the EU's migration policies on attracting foreign workers, identify institutional and procedural shortcomings, and substantiate transformation directions as a factor of sustainable development in post-war industrial recovery. The methodology relies on a systemic approach, comparative legal and institutional analysis. A significant lag of Ukraine behind European standards in labour migration management is established: the current model is overly bureaucratized, control-oriented rather than service-oriented, and poorly integrated with employment policy and labour market needs. EU leader countries view labour migration as a long-term tool for economic growth, demographic sustainability, and social cohesion. Despite some positive developments, Ukraine retains procedural fragmentation, low digitalization, and limited focus on economic needs. The comparative analysis of institutional and legal foundations of labour migration in Ukraine and the EU in context of sustainable development substantiated the transition from administrative-control to service-economic model of migration management. An original vision for comprehensive transformation of policy of attracting foreign labour as a strategic factor in post-war industrial recovery is proposed. The practical significance lies in recommendations: harmonization of legislation with the EU acquis, introduction of a single work and residence permit, development of bilateral agreements, intensification of attracting foreign students through regional educational and immigration programmes, creation of a system of information support and socio-cultural integration of migrants, and improvement of statistical accounting. Implementing these measures will help overcome labour shortages, increase industry competitiveness, and achieve Ukraine's sustainable development goals in the post-war period.

Keywords: foreign worker, migration policy, sustainable development, post-war reconstruction, comparative analysis, migrant integration, single permit, harmonization of legislation, employee, labour market.

1. Introduction

Ukraine is undergoing profound labor market transformations driven by the full-scale Russian invasion, large-scale external and internal displacement of the population, as well as an acute shortage of workers in key sectors of the economy. Under these

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conditions, attracting foreign labor migrants is becoming a strategic necessity for stabilizing and further restoring the national economy. However, the current system of labor migration regulation in Ukraine, shaped primarily in the context of post-Soviet transformation, exhibits a number of systemic flaws: it is overly bureaucratized, oriented toward control rather than service, and poorly integrated with employment policy and labor market needs. This undermines Ukraine's competitiveness in the global market for skilled talent, where other countries, particularly members of the European Union, are actively implementing progressive mechanisms for attracting and integrating foreign workers.

Thus, the relevance of this study lies in the critical need for a systemic rethinking of Ukraine's migration policy in the context of European integration and sustainable development. Even at the present time, it is necessary to move from the historical model oriented toward passive registration and control of foreigners' stay to an active strategy of attracting, integrating, and retaining the qualified and motivated workers the economy needs. Bringing in foreign workers will not only help address staffing shortages but also contribute to resolving the demographic crisis that has been worsening in Ukraine throughout the years of the full-scale war. The success of this transition will determine not only the pace of recovery of industry and the economy as a whole, but also the long-term demographic and social resilience of the state in the post-war period.

The aim of this study is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the existing migration policy in Ukraine, identify its key institutional and procedural weaknesses, and, based on a comparison with best European and global practices, develop concrete recommendations for building a modern, effective, and people-oriented national system of labour migration management.

2. Literature review

The contemporary scientific discourse on Ukraine's migration policy and the attraction of foreign workers is taking shape at the intersection of labor market research, demographic processes, and European integration issues. Recent publications from 2024–2025 recognize labor migration as a strategic factor in post-war reconstruction, while at the same time documenting a significant gap between existing institutional tools and the actual needs of the economy. Researchers unanimously point to a critical labor shortage caused by large-scale outward migration—according to estimates, as of July 2025, approximately 5.6 million Ukrainians are residing abroad, and the net migration outflow in 2025 is reaching 200,000 persons. As a result, 60% of employers report a staffing crisis, with the most acute shortages observed in skilled blue-collar occupations (63% of enterprises) and middle management personnel (35%) (European Business Association, 2025).

In theoretical terms, recent studies propose the conceptualization of "migration capital" as a complex socio-economic category encompassing financial transfers, professional competencies, social networks, entrepreneurial experience, and institutional practices formed as a result of labor migration. The work of Lupak, Mulska, and Mulskyi (2024) argues that migration capital can become an important resource for modernizing

the labour market provided there is effective reintegration of migrants and utilization of competencies acquired abroad.

The research agenda on migration policy and the attraction of foreign workers in Ukraine has been shaped primarily in response to the unprecedented migration challenge triggered by the 2022 Russian invasion. Foreign studies focus on analyzing the integration policies of recipient countries hosting Ukrainian refugees, while Ukrainian scholarship emphasizes the consequences of depopulation for the national labour market and mechanisms of regulatory response.

In 2023–2024, a number of landmark works were published on labor market inclusiveness for Ukrainian migrants. The study by Duszczyk, Górny, Kaczmarczyk, and Kubisiak (2023) demonstrates that Poland, despite its large-scale reception of refugees, faces challenges of long-term integration, as initial humanitarian solidarity has not transformed into systemic employment policies. In the work of Matuszczyk and Kowalska (2024), based on in-depth interviews with key actors in the migration infrastructure of Poland and Italy, it is demonstrated that the success of migrant employment is determined not so much by formal regulation as by the capacity of commercial, social, and humanitarian partners for informal collaboration.

Another important strand of research concerns the subjective experiences of migrants themselves. Karimi and Byelikova (2024), drawing on interviews with Ukrainians in Canada and Germany, argue that war intensifies pre-migration aspirations, and that the structure of macroeconomic policies in recipient countries, together with individual capital, produces uneven mobility trajectories.

Ukrainian scientisti focus on analyzing risks and threats for migration security. Bondarevska (2024) offers an original conceptualization of the categories of "migration challenges," "risks," and "threats," identifying economic consequences such as the loss of skilled workers, staff shortages in certain types of activity, and the relocation of businesses abroad. Bannikova's (2023) study analyzes the impact of forced migration on Ukraine's labour market with a predictive component, allowing for an assessment of scenarios for restoring human resource potential.

An important direction is comparative research on the migration policies of Ukraine and the EU in the field of labor migration. Kortukova and Tokar (2024) conduct a systematic analysis of convergences and divergences in legal frameworks, emphasizing the critical importance of harmonizing Ukrainian legislation with European standards in the context of EU candidate status. The authors' analysis is complemented by a study of social legislation, where they conclude that the war has brought the need for reforms to the forefront while simultaneously creating obstacles to their implementation. In the context of receiving countries, the cases of Poland and the Czech Republic are illustrative, where the response to refugee flows was "exceptional and contextual," ensured by the efforts of local government and civil society in the absence of a systemic state approach (Moroń, Madej, & Csoba, 2024).

Thus, the current scientific landscape demonstrates a convergence around the thesis of the need to move from situational humanitarian responses to proactive, institutionally capable labour migration management policies that take into account both the needs of recipient economies and the long-term interests of Ukraine itself in

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preserving, returning, and strengthening human capital, including through the attraction of foreign workers.

3. Methodology

The methodological foundation of the study comprises a set of general scientific and specialized methods that ensure a comprehensive analysis of Ukraine's migration policy in the sphere of attracting foreign labor. The research is grounded in the neo-institutional approach, which entails analyzing not only formal norms, rules, and institutions but also informal practices, bureaucratic procedures, and their impact on the economic behavior of labor market actors. This approach makes it possible to identify systemic gaps between the declared goals of state policy and the actual outcomes of its implementation, as well as to explain the reasons for the low effectiveness of existing regulatory mechanisms.

A set of complementary methods was used to achieve the stated aim. Content analysis of normative legal acts (Laws of Ukraine "On the Legal Status of Foreigners" (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2011b), "On Employment of the Population" (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2012), "On Immigration" (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2001), the Labor Code (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 1979), as well as Draft Law No. 11405 (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2024)) allowed for systematizing the strengths and weaknesses of the current legal framework and identifying gaps and conflicts. Institutional analysis was applied to examine the functions, powers, and interaction mechanisms of the State Migration Service, the Ministry of Economy and Environment of Ukraine, and the State Employment Service, which made it possible to assess the degree of coordination among key government bodies and to reveal the fragmentation of management processes.

The comparative legal method and benchmarking played a key role in identifying directions for improving the national migration policy. Comparing Ukrainian approaches with the best practices of European Union member states, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, as well as an analysis of data from the international MIPEX integration policy index made it possible to substantiate the need to change the current model of migration flow management. The statistical method and secondary data analysis (including reports from the International Labour Organization, the International Organization for Migration, the OECD, the State Employment Service, and employer surveys) provided a quantitative assessment of the scale of labor shortages and the dynamics of migration processes. The application of the systems approach allowed for examining migration policy as a holistic complex of interconnected elements – the legal framework, institutional support, the labor market, and socio-cultural integration – and, on this basis, to formulate practical recommendations for its transformation in the context of post-war reconstruction and sustainable development of Ukraine's economy.

4. Results

Until 2014, Ukraine's migration policy was shaped primarily in the context of post-Soviet transformation of the economy and labor market. The main emphasis was placed on domestic employment and overcoming the consequences of mass unemployment of

the 1990s. Labor imports were fragmented in nature and limited mostly to seasonal and low-skilled work, predominantly from neighboring states. A far more significant phenomenon was the emigration of Ukrainian workers abroad – primarily to Russia, and from the 2000s also to EU countries. According to estimates by the International Organization for Migration (2008), as early as the beginning of the 2000s, between 2 and 4.5 million Ukrainians were working abroad each year, mainly in Poland, Italy, the Czech Republic, and Portugal. These labor flows led to the formation of the first organizational and normative approaches in the sphere of bilateral agreements with labor-receiving states (Malynovska, 2004). In contrast to labor emigration, the inflow of foreign labor into Ukraine was minimal and had no structural impact on the labor market.

Following the full-scale Russian invasion (from February 2022), the Ukrainian labor market experienced several simultaneous shocks:

- mass internal displacement and external migration – millions of citizens temporarily or for an extended period left the country (as of 2025, over 10% of the pre-war economically active population is abroad (Zhyrii, 2025)), and a significant portion of men were engaged in the country's defense; this reduced the available labor force in a number of sectors (Harmask, 2025);
- sectoral imbalances: some industries (construction, manufacturing, energy, logistics) experienced significant labor shortages, while other sectors underwent a temporary contraction in demand; this created an acute need specifically for recovery and infrastructure personnel (Kyiv School of Economics, 2024);
- the latest analytical materials (national and international) point to hundreds of thousands of vacancies that will need to be filled in the coming years during reconstruction; various experts cite significant staffing gaps in the country in the medium and long term (International Organization for Migration, 2024).

In 2025, the Ukrainian labor market is undergoing profound transformations: large-scale internal displacement, declining employment in some sectors, and a simultaneous need for reconstruction and large-scale infrastructure or industrial projects. The government has finalised its employment strategy for the period up to 2030 (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2026), which incorporates measures for labour resource mobilisation, placing particular emphasis on labor market flexibility and the potential for engaging foreign workers. Mechanisms for attracting foreign labor are positioned as part of a broader set of instruments: targeted quotas, simplified regimes for critical sectors of the economy, bilateral agreements with labor-supplying countries, and digital "single windows" for processing employment. Official presentations of the strategy explicitly mention the need for "effective labor migration management" as part of recovery.

The current normative legal framework governing the attraction of foreign workers in Ukraine is represented by several key legislative acts (table 1) that collectively form the legal field for labor immigration. The primary document defining the legal status of foreigners is the Law of Ukraine "On the Legal Status of Foreigners and Stateless Persons" (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2011b), which establishes the rules for entry, stay, exit, and legalization, as well as declares the protection of foreign citizens' rights, including access to education, healthcare, and social protection. At the same time, the law contains no clear mechanisms for business support, provides virtually no adaptation programs for

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foreign workers, and the existing gap between norms and their practical implementation manifests itself in lengthy procedures and corruption risks.

Table 1: Legislative and Regulatory Framework for Attracting Foreign Workers to Ukraine

Legislative Act	Purpose	Main Advantages	Key Shortcomings
Law of Ukraine "On the Legal Status of Foreigners and Stateless Persons" (No. 3773-VI of 22.09.2011)	Defines the rights, obligations, and procedures for entry, stay, and legalization of foreigners	Clear rules for entry and legalization; declared protection of rights; separate mechanisms for refugees and labour migrants	No mechanisms to support business; no adaptation programmes; gap between norms and practice (lengthy procedures, corruption risks)
Law of Ukraine "On Employment of the Population" (No. 5067-VI of 05.07.2012)	Regulates the conditions for employing foreigners and the procedure for issuing permits	Abolition of the 50 minimum wages requirement; work in several positions; electronic submission via "Diia"; free permits for students	No clear criteria for decisions; increased cost of permits; inconvenient renewal deadlines (50 days); excessive complexity for small business
Law of Ukraine "On Immigration" (No. 2491-III of 07.06.2001)	Establishes the procedure for obtaining an immigration permit and quotas	Simplified procedure for highly qualified specialists and families of military personnel; legal prerequisites for long-term integration	Emphasis on social and family grounds rather than labour market needs; does not determine the volume of attraction for economically important sectors
Law of Ukraine "On Refugees and Persons in Need of Subsidiary or Temporary Protection" (No. 3671-VI of 08.07.2011)	Defines the rights of refugees, including the right to work	Allows employment and self-employment; social rights; partial implementation of international obligations	No benefits for employers; practical implementation complicated by procedures; temporary protection status limits guarantee
Labour Code of Ukraine (No. 322-VIII of 10.12.1971)	Regulates labour relations, including those with foreigners	Equal rights with Ukrainian citizens; guarantees of remuneration, occupational safety, and leave; prohibition of discrimination	Outdated version (1971); does not take into account language barriers, recognition of qualifications, or flexible forms of employment; the new Labour Code has not yet been adopted

In the summer of 2024, Draft Law No. 11405 "On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine on Improving the Procedure for Employment of Foreigners in Ukraine" was submitted to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2024). The purpose of the draft law was to create a legal basis for enhancing

Ukraine's attractiveness to foreign workers needed by the economy and to adapt Ukrainian legislation in accordance with the requirements of Directive 2003/109/EC (Council of the European Union, 2003) on the status of long-term migrants, Directive 2011/98/EU (European Parliament, 2011) on a single permit, and EU Directive 2016/801 (European Parliament, 2016) on the conditions of entry and residence of foreigners for research and study purposes.

The mechanism for issuing employment permits is defined by the Law of Ukraine "On Employment of the Population" (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2012), which underwent significant changes in 2022–2025. Positive innovations include: the abolition of the requirement for a minimum salary for foreigners at the level of 50 minimum wages; the possibility of working in several positions for one employer; submission of documents electronically through the "Diia" portal; and the introduction of free work permits for foreign students. At the same time, the law has significant shortcomings: the absence of clear criteria for decision-making by state authorities, which creates the risk of unjustified refusals; an increase in the cost of work permits; inconvenient renewal deadlines; and excessive complexity of procedures, especially for small enterprises.

The procedure for obtaining an immigration permit and permanent residence is regulated by the Law of Ukraine "On Immigration" (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2001), which provides for a simplified procedure for highly qualified foreigners and families of military personnel. However, the main emphasis of this law is placed on social and family grounds for immigration rather than on labour market needs, which limits its effectiveness as a tool for attracting labour resources. The rights of refugees and persons in need of complementary or temporary protection are defined by the relevant law (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2011a), which allows them to work and receive social guarantees; however, the practical realization of these rights is complicated by the need to undergo a series of additional procedures, and the protection status itself may be limited in time.

Labour relations with foreign workers are also regulated by the Labour Code of Ukraine (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 1971), which enshrines the principle of equal rights for foreigners and citizens of Ukraine, prohibits discrimination, and defines general guarantees of remuneration, social protection, and occupational safety. At the same time, the current version of the Labour Code (1971) is outdated and does not take into account the specifics of employing foreigners, particularly procedures for the recognition of qualifications, language barriers, and modern flexible forms of employment. The developed draft of a new labour code aims to address these gaps; however, its adoption still remains a matter for the future. Thus, although the legislative framework formally creates opportunities for attracting foreign labour, it is characterized by excessive bureaucratization, fragmentation of procedures, and an orientation toward control rather than service, which significantly reduces Ukraine's attractiveness in the international labour market.

The policy of attracting foreign workers in Ukraine is shaped and implemented by a complex of institutions whose activities encompass economic, migration, social, and security dimensions. The central place in formation of strategic foundations belongs to the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, which determines state policy in the field of labour migration, approves relevant normative legal acts, and ensures coordination of the activities of all involved executive authorities. Functioning under its leadership is the

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Ministry of Economy and Environment of Ukraine – the key body responsible for shaping labour market policy, assessing labour shortages (Ministry of Economy and Environmen…, 2025), and developing mechanisms for attracting foreign workers in accordance with the needs of the national economy. The Ministry determines sectoral and occupational labour market needs, initiates changes in the field of foreigner employment, and develops digital tools and regulatory procedures that ensure simplified access of foreign citizens to Ukraine's labour market.

An important place in the implementation of this policy is held by the State Employment Service and its regional subdivisions, which carry out the practical administration of employment procedures (State Employment Service of Ukraine, n.d. a). This body accepts and processes employer applications, registers vacancies, maintains records of foreigners who have obtained the relevant permits, and monitors employers' compliance with legislative requirements regarding working conditions and remuneration of foreign workers. In the sphere of migration control, the leading role is played by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, primarily through the State Migration Service (SMS). The main function of the SMS is the implementation of state policy in the spheres of migration (State Migration Service of Ukraine, n.d.), including counteracting illegal migration, citizenship issues, registration of individuals, the status of refugees, and other categories. In the sphere of labour immigration, the SMS:

- ensures the "legal framework" within which foreigners can legally stay in Ukraine and work;
- through procedures for administering migrant status and documentary support, the SMS influences whether it is easy or difficult for foreigners to legally enter the Ukrainian labour market;
- without a system of registration and control of foreigners, they cannot proceed to work or obtain a residence permit or work permit, and thus the SMS indirectly influences Ukraine's attractiveness to foreign workers.

On the other hand, the SMS has no authority to actively attract labour migrants and performs primarily control and administrative functions. The SMS is oriented toward registration, control of the legality of stay, and counteracting illegal migration, while the economic expediency of migration and labour market needs remain outside its priorities. As a result, migration policy is not fully integrated with employment policy and perceives the labour migrant primarily as an object of control rather than as a resource for development.

The SMS has historically functioned as an administrative body rather than a service institution. This is manifested in complex, multi-stage procedures, excessive formalization of document requirements, and the absence of clear service standards for foreigners. SMS procedures are often characterized by unclear processing deadlines, broad discretionary powers of officials, and limited opportunities to appeal decisions. For potential labour migrants, this creates legal uncertainty, the risk of contract disruption, reduced trust in institutions, high transaction costs, and diminished attractiveness of Ukraine compared to other recipient countries.

A significant shortcoming is the insufficient coordination of the SMS with other key institutions, particularly with the State Employment Service, the Ministry of Economy

and Environment, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and consular offices, and local authorities. The absence of a single coordination center leads to duplication of procedures, delays in changing the status of foreigners, and a disconnect between the issuance of a work permit and the processing of a residence permit. For the employer and the immigrant, this appears as an unsystematic and unpredictable process.

Despite the declared course toward digitalization, the activities of the SMS in the field of labour migration are still characterized by a significant share of paper-based document flow, limited functionality of electronic services, and the absence of integrated registries with other bodies. This, in turn, slows down procedures, increases corruption risks, and complicates the scaling of migration processes during the recovery period.

Moreover, the SMS practically does not participate in the formation of adaptation programs, does not provide information support to foreigners, and does not coordinate integration measures (language, social orientation, local services at the community level). This negatively affects the retention of labour migrants, their long-term integration, and the formation of a positive image of Ukraine.

Thus, the main shortcomings of the State Migration Service of Ukraine in the context of attracting labour migrants are its control-oriented rather than service-oriented focus, weak integration with employment policy, fragmented interagency coordination, low level of digitalization, and limited orientation toward the economic needs of the labour market. This reduces the institutional capacity of the state to effectively use labour migration as a resource for socio-economic development. The SMS historically operates in the context of ensuring internal security, which is understandable in wartime conditions, but in the long term it limits the flexibility of migration policy, complicates the attraction of needed personnel, and fails to account for strategic demographic and staffing challenges. As a result, labour migration is not viewed as a tool for economic recovery, but rather as a potential risk (Yaroshenko et al., 2024).

Since 2007, the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) has been calculated for 56 countries worldwide—a unique tool that measures the level of migrant integration in countries on six continents.

Within the adopted methodology, the analysis is carried out according to the following characteristics: labour market mobility, family reunification opportunities, access to education, healthcare, political participation, access to permanent residence, access to citizenship, and anti-discrimination policy.

According to data from the official MIPEX website, a systematic analysis of migrant integration policy in Ukraine was last conducted in 2019 (Migration Integration Policy…, 2019). At that time, the level of labour market mobility for foreigners was assessed as relatively favorable (46 out of 100 possible points): foreign citizens could find work and start a business, but without targeted support or the same general support and benefits that Ukrainian citizens can use to improve their skills and career opportunities. The worst indicator at that time was recorded for the education services group (7 points out of 100).

In 2025, labour market policy experienced positive dynamics thanks to better implementation of the EU Single Permit Directive (2011/98/EU). Countries such as Cyprus, Greece, Luxembourg, and Slovenia implemented significant reforms, particularly in qualification recognition and access to public employment services (Migration

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Integration Policy…, 2025). The leader in migrant integration among EU countries is Sweden (with an overall score of 86 out of 100). For comparison, the level of labour market mobility as of 2023 was assessed at 91 points out of 100, and access to education at 93 out of 100. The top three leaders in migrant integration in 2023 also include Finland (84 points out of 100) and Portugal (83 points out of 100). Within the labour market mobility indicator, the leaders are Portugal, Finland, Sweden, and Germany.

Among countries from other continents, Canada has a high ranking (81 out of 100), having significantly improved labour market mobility conditions for foreigners over the past five years (2019–2024), focusing on the employment challenges of youth without work experience and women (Migration Integration…, 2024).

No recent MIPEX data exists for Ukraine, but a 2026 study (Dmytrovskyi, 2026) finds that overregulation, high costs, and lengthy legalisation processes (up to 6 months) are the main hurdles to bringing in needed foreign professionals. According to a May – June 2026 survey, nearly half of employers (45%) are not considering hiring foreign workers at all.

At the global level, competition among countries for skilled labour is intensifying. To compete successfully, the EU is actively implementing migrant integration policy (European Commission, 2025a) and executing the "Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027" (European Commission, 2020). The plan's focus is directed:

- at inclusive education and training from early childhood through higher education, with emphasis on faster recognition of qualifications and language learning, supported by EU funds;
- at integration into a sustainable labour market, so that migrants can find work that matches their skills and ambitions and fully realize their contribution.

The European Commission works with employment services, social and economic partners, employers, and other labour market actors to facilitate skills assessment, qualification recognition, access to upskilling and reskilling opportunities, and entrepreneurship support.

Labour migration is a key factor in long-term economic growth, ensuring the EU's global competitiveness and addressing current and future demographic challenges. The EU's legal migration framework offers specific pathways for specific categories of non-EU citizens, including highly qualified workers, intra-corporate transferees, and seasonal workers. The Single Permit Directive (European Commission, 2025c), which covers most residence permits issued for work purposes, provides a single procedure and a set of rights for these workers.

In addition, the EU is working on the implementation of the pilot project "EU Talent Pool" (European Commission, n.d. b). This initiative, proposed by the Commission in 2023, aims to further facilitate the international recruitment of talented workers. The instrument is designed to ease international recruitment, create flexible admission systems that align with the priorities of each EU country, and enable migrant workers to fully utilize their skills. To systematize information on migrant integration processes, the "Migrant Integration Center" has also been established (European Commission, 2025b).

A comparison of Ukraine's accumulated experience with the practices of the European Union and other developed countries demonstrates a fundamentally different logic of policy for attracting foreign workers: orientation toward labour market needs,

systemic integration of migrants, a high level of procedural digitalization, and an active role of migration authorities as coordinators and facilitators. MIPEX data confirm that the leading countries in migrant integration view labour migration as a long-term instrument of economic growth, enhanced competitiveness, and mitigation of demographic decline.

In the context of intensifying global competition for labour resources and Ukraine's post-war reconstruction, the need to transform migration policy from a control-oriented to a service-economic model is becoming increasingly urgent. This is also evidenced by recent employer surveys on the experience of barriers to hiring foreign workers: only 2% of respondents have such experience due to a range of regulatory obstacles (Dmytrovskyi, 2026).This entails redefining the role of the SMS, strengthening its interaction with employment and economic development bodies, building digital services, and forming a comprehensive policy for the integration of foreign workers. Only under such conditions can labour migration become not a situational phenomenon but a full-fledged instrument for the recovery and sustainable development of Ukraine's economy after the end of the war.

Conceptual directions for transforming Ukraine's policy on attracting foreign workers are presented schematically in Figure 1.

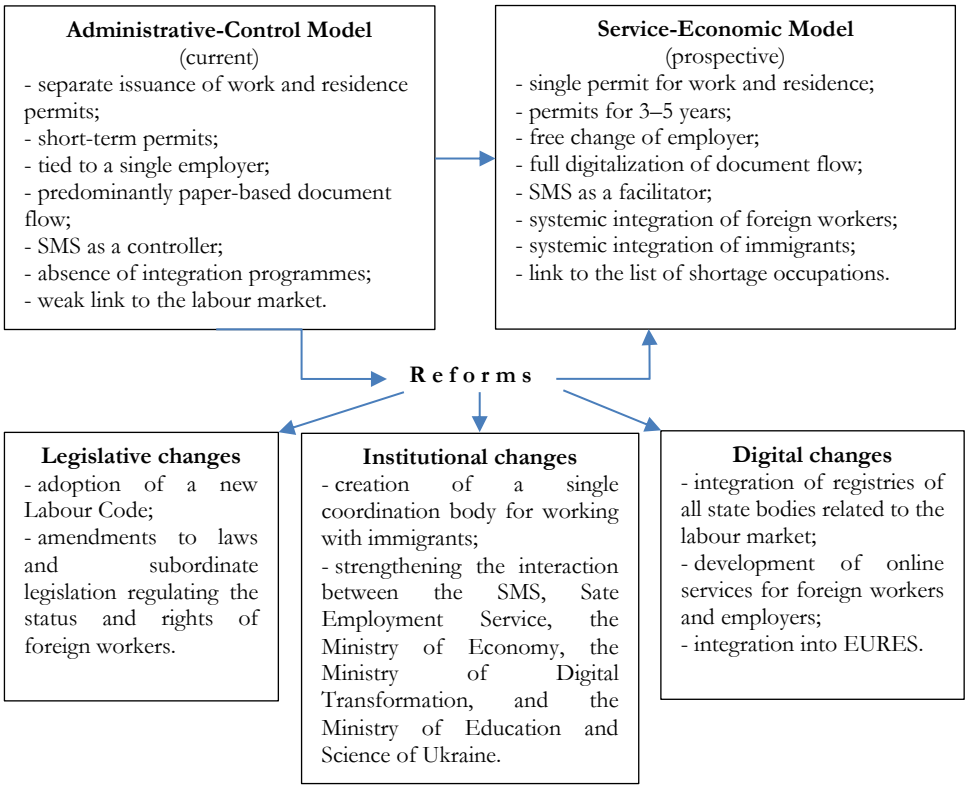

Figure. 1. *Conceptual directions for transforming Ukraine's policy on attracting foreign workers*

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5. Conclusion

In the context of the current situation on the domestic labour market, it is reasonable to consider the following directions for improving the policy of attracting foreign labour:

1. Harmonization of national labour migration policy with EU policy. Accession to the EURES system (European Commission, n.d. a), acceleration of the review and adoption of legislative changes aimed at simplifying and further digitalizing permit procedures for the employment of foreign workers.

In the context of the need to enhance Ukraine's attractiveness to foreign workers from EU member states, it is advisable to review the current model of foreigner access to the labour market with a view to bringing it closer to the approaches applied in EU countries. First and foremost, this concerns the introduction of an integrated legal mechanism that combines the work permit and the right of residence in a single administrative decision. This model, widespread in Germany, the Czech Republic, and Poland, makes it possible to significantly reduce time and transaction costs for both employers and foreign workers, reducing the fragmentation of procedures and increasing the predictability of the migrant's legal status.

An important element of liberalizing access to the labour market is also the transition from short-term permits to multi-year work and residence permits valid for 3–5 years for representatives of shortage occupations. This approach aligns with the European practice of strategic human capital attraction and creates incentives for the long-term retention of foreign workers in the host country, which is particularly important in the context of demographic decline and the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine's economy.

The issue of foreign worker mobility within the national labour market deserves special attention. Enabling a change of employer without the need to repeat the permit procedure is a key prerequisite for the formation of a flexible and competitive labour market. In European countries, this practice is regarded as a tool for reducing the risk of a migrant's labour dependence on a single employer and as a mechanism for improving the efficiency of labour resource allocation in line with the real needs of the economy.

An equally important component of system modernization is the complete digitalization of procedures for processing and maintaining the status of a foreign worker. The introduction of electronic applications, digital tracking of permit status, and integrated state registries corresponds to EU good governance standards and makes it possible to minimize corruption risks, increase the transparency of decisions, and improve the accessibility of administrative services for foreigners.

Taken together, these measures create the preconditions for establishing an access regime for EU citizens to the Ukrainian labour market that is as close as possible in its characteristics to the logic of the European Union's internal market. This approach does not imply a complete rejection of state regulation, but rather transforms it from a control model into a service-economic one, oriented toward attracting, retaining, and effectively utilizing foreign human capital.

According to government estimates, the process of harmonizing national legislation with EU law is to be completed by the end of 2027 (Ukrinform, 2025). The

main costs relate to the further digitalization of public services, with funding provided through grant resources from the EU itself. In particular, the Ministry of Digital Transformation (Ministry of Digital Transformation, 2026) attracted 10 million EUR for 2026 and is actively working on the development of the digital ecosystem "Obrii" (State Employment Service of Ukraine, n.d. b), which is intended to connect, within a single digital space, the data of the Ministry of Economy and Environment, the State Employment Service, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, the State Migration Service, and the "Diia" portal. The system only began operating in July 2026 and is still at the development stage.

The success of these reforms depends on the speed of the planned legislative changes. The main legal barriers remain the need to adopt a new Labour Code and to amend the Laws "On Employment of the Population", "On Immigration" and "On the Legal Status of Foreigners and Stateless Persons", while the political constraints include the sensitivity of the issue of labour immigration and the security conditions of martial law.

2. Development of the practice of concluding interstate agreements on attracting foreign labour, with a shift in focus from Southeast Asian countries (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh) to post-Soviet countries (particularly Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan) and Balkan countries (formerly part of Yugoslavia). The populations of these countries also experience unemployment problems, while being much closer to Ukrainians in mentality, which can make the process of social adaptation and assimilation considerably faster (Yanishevska, 2025).

Interstate agreements (governmental or interagency) in the field of labour migration make it possible to introduce managed mobility mechanisms, including preliminary selection of workers, recognition of professional qualifications, and coordination of working conditions, social insurance, and employer responsibility. This approach is widely used in the European Union, particularly within the framework of Germany's bilateral agreements with Western Balkan countries, Italy's with North African countries, and Spain's with Latin American states, and is recognized as an effective tool for combating illegal employment and labour exploitation (OECD, 2022).

For Ukraine, the development of a system of bilateral labour migration agreements can become an important element in shaping a predictable and economically oriented migration policy aimed at covering labour shortages in construction, the agricultural sector, industry, transport, and care services. In the context of demographic decline and post-war economic recovery, such an instrument makes it possible to combine Ukraine's interests as a destination country and partner states' interests as countries of origin of labour migrants, which corresponds to ILO recommendations (International Labour Organization, 2022) on forming mutually beneficial models of labour mobility.

3. Attracting foreign labour migrants through educational programs. Canada is considered the leader in this area (for example, Provincial Nominee Programs for Graduates), which, through attractive regional educational immigration programs, obtains up to 60% of its workers from among those who came to the country for studies (Immigration.ca., 2025).

Most educational programs in Ukraine offered to foreign citizens have a significantly higher cost than those paid by Ukrainian higher education students. On the

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other hand, not all educational programs in critically important specialties are accredited with the possibility of teaching foreign students. The inadequate quality of educational programs and the lack of readiness of university teaching staff to work with international students are also problems that the Ministry of Education and Science needs to address in the near future. Therefore, it is advisable to review educational programs and change pricing policy for those specialties that are in short supply in Ukraine, with links to specific regions. The leading role in this process should be played by the Ukrainian State Center for International Education of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (Ukrainian State Center…, n.d.), which should assume the role of active promoter and coordinator of the process of recruiting international students to meet the targeted specialist needs of each region. Training should take place in a dual format, and upon graduation from the higher education institution, the young specialist should be provided with a workplace with proper working conditions and a package of social guarantees that will encourage them to stay and work in Ukraine.

4. Regional labour immigration programs are a tool that should also become a component of the previous proposal, regarding attraction of young people for education and subsequent employment.

One of the successful examples of regional labour migration programs is Canada's Provincial Nominee Program (Government of Canada, n.d.), which allows individual provinces and territories to independently select immigrants who meet their economic needs. Australia also implements a number of regional visa schemes aimed at attracting skilled migrants to less populated areas outside major cities (Government of Australia, n.d.). In New Zealand, the immigration model provides for a points-based selection system that evaluates education, work experience, and other professional factors, as well as the availability of a job or skills in areas important to the local economy; through the Skilled Migrant Category Resident Visa, skilled workers gain the opportunity for permanent residence while working and living in the country (New Zealand Immigration, n.d.).

Ukraine lags significantly behind EU countries and other countries of the world in the international competition for attracting skilled workers (permit procedure costs are considerably higher, salary levels are lower, etc.), but combining attractive educational offers with regional programs for attracting critically important specialists after the end of the war can create favorable conditions for the formation of a small but sustainable flow of foreign labour migrants. Regional programs for attracting labour migrants will be relevant at the recovery stage after the end of the war in Ukraine. The key factor is the willingness of the population itself and local self-government bodies to invite foreign workers who are to become part of the community in the future.

5. Formation of a modern system of information support and socio-cultural integration of labour migrants.

Today, the European Labour Authority (ELA) operates in the EU—an agency established to coordinate labour mobility policy and protect the rights of working migrants, as well as to facilitate the exchange of information between member states on mobility, working conditions, and integration. In addition, ELA coordinates the EURES network – a European platform with information and practical tools for employment in EU countries.

Within the framework of the new Employment Strategy until 2030, the Ministry of Economy and Environment of Ukraine is already actively preparing for accession to the EURES platform (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2026). However, this alone is not sufficient., Ukraine is already actively preparing to join the EURES platform, but this is not enough. An integrated structure should emerge that combines the process of migration support with immigrant integration. This is important for the long-term integration of migrants into the national labour market. Typically, such a structure (agency, center, national non-governmental organization) is established at the national level (it may function under the state migration service) with representations at the regional/local level. Such a structure has its own web portal and physical offices, provides full information support, ensures legal and social assistance to newly arrived immigrants, and coordinates the implementation of educational and language programs for immigrants at state institutions.

For Ukraine, the existence of such a structure is extremely important. The growing need for labour resources in the context of post-war economic recovery requires the attraction of foreign workers. Comprehensive support for migrants makes it possible to reduce social risks associated with illegal employment, discrimination, or conflicts in places of residence. The creation of an adaptation system will promote the effective integration of migrants into the local community (Malynovska, 2025), enhance cultural interaction, and build a positive image of Ukraine as a state friendly to workers from abroad.

6. Improvement of the statistical accounting system regarding the attraction and employment of labour migrants (National Institute…, 2014). This is a fundamental prerequisite for effective migration policy, especially in the context of shaping a strategy for attracting foreign labour to various industrial sectors of Ukraine. Given that migration flows are an important component of the modern labour market, and that labour migrants play a significant role in the global economy and national labour markets in general, the need for accurate and timely data is beyond doubt (according to ILO data, there were 167.7 million labour migrants in the labour force of destination countries as of 2022) (DevelopmentAid, 2024).

Without a reliable statistical accounting system, state management tools cannot adequately assess the real needs of the national economy for labour resources. Without such data, structural reforms, including those concerning the implementation of the policy of attracting foreign labour, risk being based on estimates with a high margin of error.

Comprehensive, standardized accounting makes it possible to identify key trends, dynamics, and sectoral demand for labour, which is particularly relevant for economic modernization and industrial transformation. Analysis of international trends in OECD reports shows that in countries with developed migration policies, the level of temporary and permanent labour migration significantly influences the structure of employment and economic productivity. At the same time, accounting and monitoring allow for policy adjustments in response to real changes (in particular, changes in the number of work permits and the dynamics of migrant integration processes into the labour market) (OECD, 2024).

Modernized statistical accounting will make it possible to systematically measure the impact of attracting labour migrants on socio-economic indicators, including employment, wage levels, labour productivity, and structural changes in individual

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industrial sectors. This is critical for formulating evidence-based recommendations on employment policy, regulating quantitative restrictions for foreign workers, and stimulating their attraction specifically to sectors where labour shortages are observed.

Finally, the standardization of statistical accounting will contribute to the harmonization of Ukrainian migration data with international standards, which will, in particular, enhance Ukraine's ability to participate in international research, cooperate with organizations such as the OECD and ILO, and adapt global best practices in labour migration management and worker integration. Such steps align with international recommendations on measuring labour mobility, which emphasize the importance of using agreed methodologies for statistical monitoring of labour migrants in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals and decent work (SDG 8) (UNECE, 2019).

Given the above, improving the statistical accounting system is not merely a technical but a strategic element of the policy of attracting foreign labour, which creates the foundation for effective management of migration processes, optimal allocation of labour resources, and the construction of a competitive, inclusive labour market in Ukraine.

Since mid-2025, the development of a new migration policy strategy through 2035 has been underway in Ukraine (Office of Migration Policy, n.d.). Within the framework of shaping labour immigration policy, it is worth orienting toward a radical paradigm shift from administrative control to an active talent management system. This requires deep institutional reform, in particular the creation of a specialized body whose primary task will be facilitation rather than merely regulation of labour immigration processes. Such a body should be closely integrated into joint work with the employment service through shared digital platforms for the operational coordination of business needs, the national labour market, and migration flows of necessary workers at the local level.

The core of the strategic policy for attracting foreign labour should be a flexible, multi-level permit system tied to migrant categories and economic priorities. It should include separate pathways for highly qualified specialists (analogous to the EU Blue Card (European Commission…, 2025d) with fast-track processing and long-term rights), for skilled workers in shortage occupations (with simplified procedures and the possibility of changing employers), as well as a transparent pathway (study-work-residence) for international students who obtain professions in shortage specialties. The technological foundation of all processes should be full digitalization and the creation of a unified ecosystem – a portal for employers, migrants, and the state, integrated with European employment platforms.

At the same time, the new migration policy strategy must include a comprehensive direction for the socio-cultural integration of foreign workers, encompassing mandatory language training, a network of adaptation centers, and measures for cultural integration and interaction with local communities. At the international level, it is necessary to pursue an active policy by concluding bilateral agreements with the countries of the Eastern Partnership, the Western Balkans, and Central Asia, as well as working toward a simplified regime for EU citizens.

The implementation of the proposed measures requires broad statistical accounting and a reliable monitoring system based on key performance indicators such as the rate of filling shortage vacancies, migrant retention, and their social integration.

Ultimately, the new migration policy strategy through 2035, in the part concerning the attraction of foreign labour, should become not a set of disparate measures but a holistic system aimed at building competitive human capital as the foundation of an innovative economy and Ukraine's demographic resilience in the post-war period.

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