

## THE SITUATION ON THE LABOUR MARKET OF REFUGEES FROM UKRAINE AND THEIR COMPETENCES

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**Purpose:** The aim of the article is to answer the questions about what proportion of refugees from Ukraine living in Poland would like to work, how many hours, for what remuneration and what general competences they have, as well as about their residence plans – whether they want to stay in Poland, return to Ukraine or perhaps go to another country.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The research presented in this article uses the analysis of literature on migration, especially war migration, and professional competences. It also includes results of the research which covered 292 refugees from Ukraine who arrived in the West Pomeranian and Greater Poland voivodeships after Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

**Findings:** The results of the research showed that most refugees would like to work, although usually part-time, for a relatively low salary, compared to the average salary in Poland, despite the fact that refugees have relatively high skills. About 1/3 of refugees plan to stay in Poland, about 1/3 to return to Ukraine and about 1/3 to wait with the decision until the end of hostilities.

**Research limitations/implications:** The additional study included in the analysis was conducted on a non-representative sample. The results are due to the reluctance of refugees to fill out surveys in general, and in particular in electronic form.

**Practical implications:** The obtained results facilitate decision-making both by managers in Polish companies and by the state administration. This is due to the better understanding of the competences of refugees and their expectations regarding the labour market.

**Originality/value:** Developing knowledge about the refugees' plans for the country they want to live in learning about their expectations regarding salaries and working hours.

**Keywords:** migration, labour market, competences, salary, employment.

**Category of the paper:** Research paper.

## 1. Introduction

In the last few years, with relatively high economic growth (GUS, 2024) and a low unemployment rate (approx. 5% registered, 3% according to BAEL), there have been dynamic changes in the business environment, the functioning of the economy and Polish society. In 2020-2021, Poland, like the whole world, faced the COVID-19 pandemic, and in February 2022, Russia attacked Ukraine. It caused large emigration, especially of women with children, and a significant part of these people came to Poland. Despite such social, political and economic turmoil, the Polish economy functioned relatively efficiently and opened up to help war immigrants (refugees). In a few months of 2022, about 2 million refugees came to Poland, who required support related to housing, food, health care, education, etc. In 2023, some refugees returned to Ukraine, especially those from the western part of the country, but over a million refugees remained in Poland. Of those who stayed, some work, some do not work but would like to, some do not work because they are pensioners or have children. The question arises as to what proportion of refugees would like to work, how many hours, for what salary and what general competences they have. It is also important to obtain information on future plans for their stay – whether they want to stay in Poland, return to Ukraine or perhaps go to another country. The answers to these questions are the purpose of this article. First, the concept of competences is analysed, then the situation on the refugee labour market in Poland is presented. The empirical part presents the results of surveys conducted directly among 292 refugees in the West Pomeranian and Greater Poland voivodeships. Finally, conclusions are drawn and recommendations are presented.

## 2. Competences – literature review

The concept of competence in Polish literature is relatively new, it appeared basically during the transformation from a planned economy to a market economy. In world literature, it can be assumed that it has existed since the mid-20th century (Kocór, 2019). It generally refers to the compliance of knowledge, education, experience, personality traits with the needs in the work performed and achieving results that are satisfactory to the employer (Mięczkowska, 2003). For H. Król, these are "predispositions in the scope of knowledge, skills and attitudes, ensuring the implementation of professional tasks at an effective and (or) distinctive level, in accordance with the standards set by the organization for a given position" (Król, 2006). A. Springer conducted an extensive analysis of the concept of competence (Springer, 2018), indicating, among others, the variety of definitions of this concept, many types and levels of competence. In turn, C. Bach and R. Sulikova (Bach, Sulikova, 2019) as well as U. Jeruszka (Jeruszka, 2016)

analyzed the diversity of interpretations of the concept of competence and pointed to its multidimensionality. On the other hand, V. Wickramasinghe and N. de Zoyza (Wickramasinghe, de Zoyza, 2009) indicated key competences in various areas of professional activity, the ability to manage time, cooperate and communicate. In the context of management, R.R. Wood and T. Payne considered communication skills and results orientation to be the most common competences (Wood, Payne, 2006). In turn, due to the variability of the political, economic and legal environment, which we have been encountering especially in recent years (Smolbik-Jęczmień, 2017), another element of competence is indicated, which is the efficiency of functioning in difficult and surprising situations (Heyse, Erpenbeck, Ortmann, 2015; Zhang, Yu, Marin, 2021). Career development and achieving professional success require the ability to self-direct, set goals, communicate, continuously acquire knowledge (Smolbik-Jęczmień, 2017), entrepreneurship (Chlebiej, 2022), knowledge of modern communication methods (Czekaj, Tyrańska, Ziębicki, 2022) as well as building social capital in the form of relationships with colleagues, co-workers, superiors, subordinates, clients. It can be assumed, to some extent, that competence development is the continuous updating of a given person's professional activities (Erpenbeck, Sauer, 2001).

Employers in Poland, but also refugees, are faced with an important issue of identification, which are the competences possessed by refugees, how to use them for effective work and how to develop them.

### **3. War migrants from Ukraine in Poland**

The definition provided by, among others, the Central Statistical Office says that migrations are "movements of people related to a change of place of residence (permanent or temporary residence) combined with crossing the administrative border of the basic territorial unit" and international migrations are defined as "departures abroad and arrivals in the country for the purpose of settlement (permanent residence) or temporary stay" (CSO, 2023).

Migration theories indicate various types, causes, and purposes of migration. Research shows that the main cause of migration are economic factors, and migration is most often voluntary, being a means to achieve a specific income and wealth balance. The priority is the desire to find a new, better-paid job (Janicki, 2007; Docquier et al., 2014; Dustmann, Preston, 2012). When analyzing the issue of migration, not only economic, it is worth emphasizing the context of work and employment. In more developed economies, there is usually a shortage of workers for simple jobs that do not require high qualifications (Musiał-Paczkowska, 2003; Bite et al., 2020). If it is not possible to increase the supply of labor from within, then this gap is filled by immigrants, which can stabilize the economic situation of the country (Arango, 2000). As a rule, research related to migration concerns its impact on the functioning of society,

the economy, culture, and the labour market. The situation related to warfare and related migration was less frequently analyzed. The change in Europe, and especially in Poland, occurred as a result of Russian aggression against Ukraine, when Poland in particular became a country that quickly had to face the challenge of accepting a large number of war immigrants (refugees) (UNHCR, 2023). On the one hand, immigration is beneficial for the state, society, and companies, as the demand for goods and services increases, and the supply of labor increases, but it also creates many economic, social, and cultural problems (Harasimau, 2023; Gunel, Gedik, 2022). It causes an increase in budget expenditure, especially in the case of war immigration. War immigrants do not have time to prepare for departure, often do not have the means to meet basic needs of food, clothing, housing, health (Rowthorn, 2008; Speciale, 2012; Mavisakalyan, 2011). They therefore require support, at least in terms of accommodation, administrative and legal matters and income, including from work, in the search for which the state, private institutions and individuals support immigrants. It is also worth noting that immigrants come from a different language area, a different culture, which causes communication problems, but sometimes also misunderstandings and conflicts.

For the managers of the state and companies, questions also arise about the refugees' competences, needs, development and residence plans. This also applies to immigrants from Ukraine, who should be examined whether they want to return to their homeland, stay in Poland permanently or for a longer period, or perhaps continue to emigrate, to what extent do they make their stay in Poland dependent on the development of the situation in Ukraine? There is also a need to study and present answers to questions about the impact of immigrants on the economy in Poland, the labor market, the housing market, the demand for goods and services, and in the case of current immigration, especially services related to the education of children and youth from Ukraine. It is also worth mentioning the state's policy towards refugees from Ukraine. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Poland became the main destination for the escape of Ukrainians, primarily women with children and pensioners. By the end of 2022, about 8.5 million people from Ukraine had entered Poland and about 6.5 million had returned to Ukraine. After crossing the border with Poland, these refugees received immediate support in terms of food, residence, legal support, etc. (Isański et al., 2022). In the context of the labour market, in 2022, regulations came into force on helping Ukrainian citizens enter the labour market in Poland. A new possibility of legal work was introduced based on a free notification, which should be submitted electronically via website [praca.gov.pl](http://praca.gov.pl). This applies to Ukrainian citizens who entered Poland from 24 February 2022 and whose stay in the Republic of Poland was recognized as legal. Data for 2023 show that 1,080,000 Ukrainians took up work based on this possibility, of which 643,000 women (60%) and 437,000 men (40%) (MRPiPS, 2023).

#### 4. Methodology and results of own research

Research on the situation of refugees from Ukraine on the labour market in Poland and their competences was conducted in the period November 2022 - December 2023. It covered a group of Ukrainians staying in north-western Poland (Wielkopolska and West Pomeranian Voivodeships) during the implementation of the project "Direction Integration - from crisis through support to integration of refugee families".

The surveys were completed directly by 292 people who came to Poland after Russia's aggression against Ukraine. A non-random selection of units for the study was used, mainly using the courtesy of institutions and organizations supporting people who came from Ukraine (Caritas, Refugee Aid Centers, Labour Offices, Greek Catholic Church etc.). This method of reaching respondents resulted from difficult access to the group of migrants, which is largely related to the dynamics of the war situation and the related unpredictability, among others, regarding the place of residence of refugees. For this reason, the results were not segmented based on the characteristics of the respondents. Some of the answers obtained were used in this article, in the context of the current and expected state policy towards refugees. The first part of these results will present a short description of the refugees studied, followed by the results of the research in the context of the competences of Ukrainians. First, the structure of the refugees surveyed is presented (Table 1).

**Table 1.**

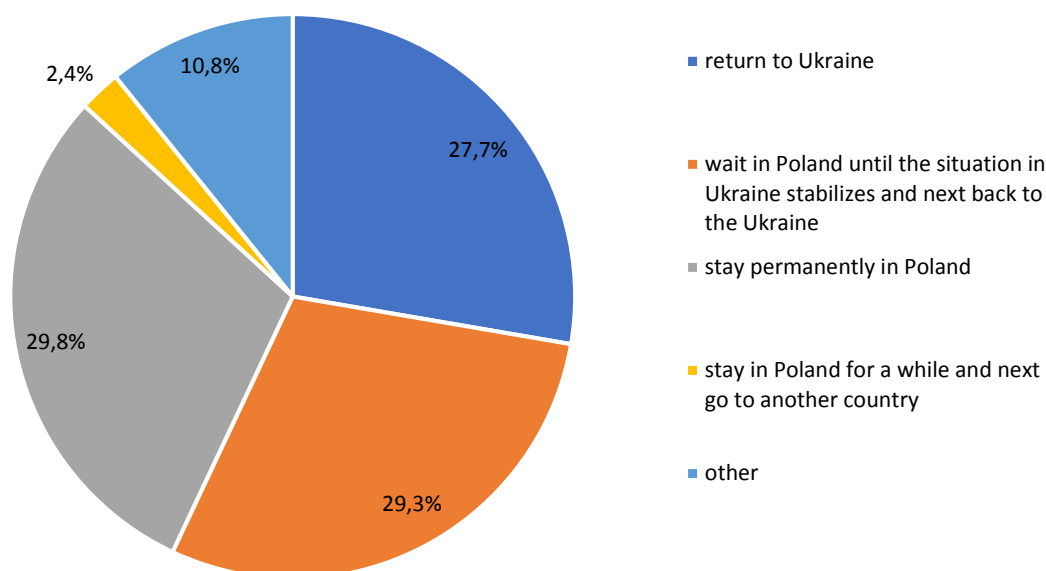
*Structure of the surveyed persons according to selected characteristics*

Characteristic	Specification	Percentage
Current place of residence in Poland	Rural area	12,4
	Small town (less than 50 thous. inhabitants)	13,4
	Medium town (between 50 and 500 thous. inhabitants)	64,9
	Big town (at least 500 thous. inhabitants)	9,3
Age of the person being examined	under 18 years old	2,7
	18-29 years old	7,9
	30-39 years old	35,7
	40-49 years old	26,5
	50-59 years old	12,0
	60 years old or more	15,1
Sex of the person being examined	Women	89
	Men	11

Source: own research.

The data in Table 1. show that the surveyed people most often lived in towns with 50-500 thousand inhabitants (64.9%), were aged 30-39 (62.2%). The surveyed people were mainly women (89%).

The next questions concerned substantive aspects, referring to plans after the end of the war (Figure 1), the possibility of finding a job in the place of residence (Figure 2), they defined their current situation on the labor market (Figure 3), preferred number of working hours per week (Figure 4), received and satisfactory remuneration (Figure 5 and 6) and finally they defined and assessed their own competences: knowledge of languages (Figure 7), professions performed in Ukraine (Figure 8), and general competences (Figure 9).

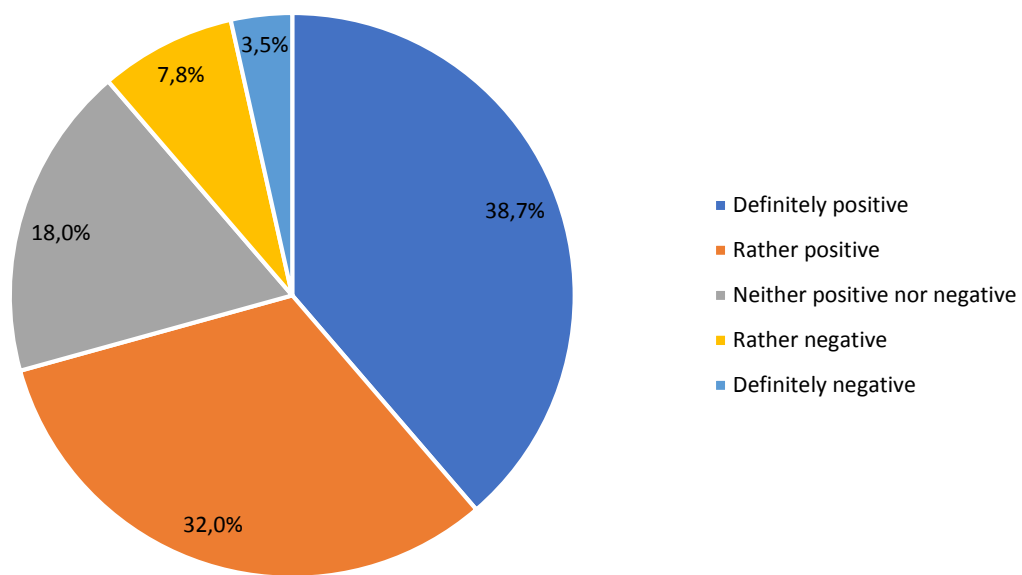


**Figure 1.** Plans of Ukrainians after the end of the war.

Source: own research.

The answers given by refugees indicate that almost 30% want to stay permanently in Poland and another 29% want to wait in Poland until the situation in Ukraine stabilizes. 28% of people want to return to Ukraine relatively quickly. Therefore, it can be assumed that about 1/3 of refugees will remain in Poland, with most of them being women with children.

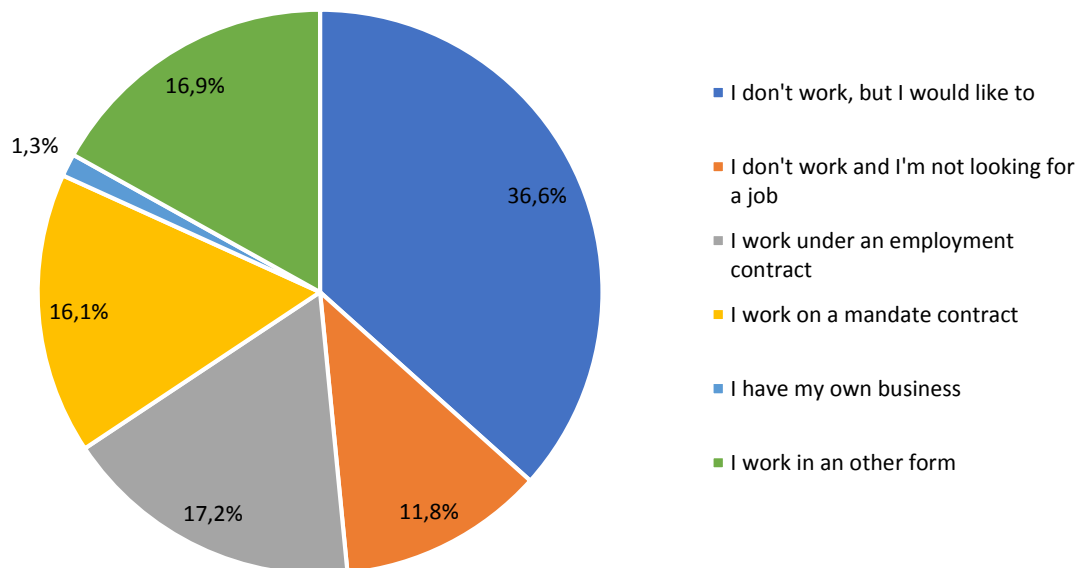
Staying in Poland requires earning an income, and income from work is key in this respect. Figure 2 shows data on the possibility of finding a job as assessed by the respondents. This chart shows that refugees positively assess the possibility of finding a job in Poland. This was indicated by almost 71% of people, including almost 39% who assessed it definitely positively. Only slightly over 11% of the respondents assessed it negatively.



**Figure 2.** Possibility of finding a job in Poland.

Source: own research.

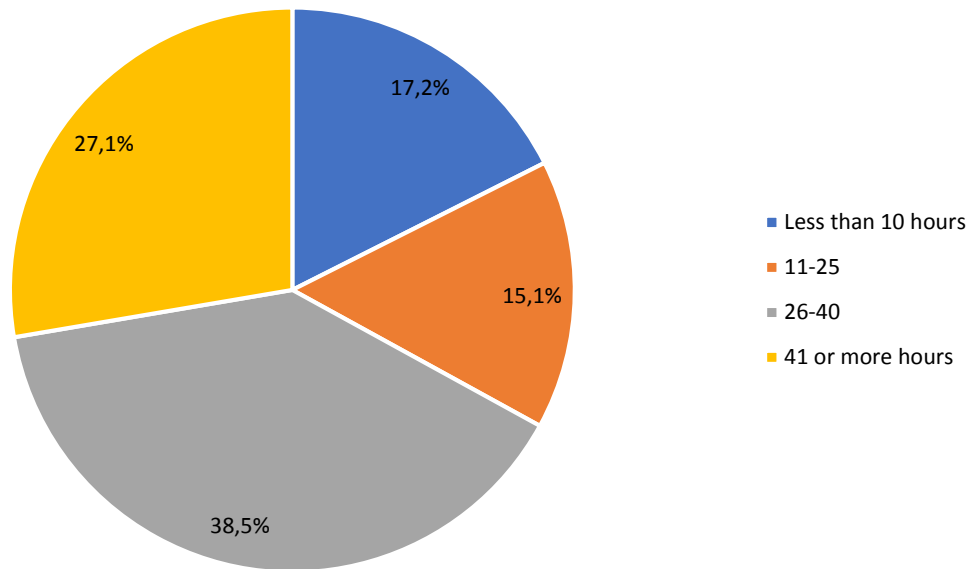
The next chart (Figure 3) presents data on the current professional situation of the respondents.



**Figure 3.** Current professional situation.

Source: own research.

The answers obtained show that over half (approx. 52%) work and almost half (approx. 48%) do not work, but 37% of these people would like to work. This data is supplemented by opinions on how many hours the refugees surveyed would like to work (Figure 4).



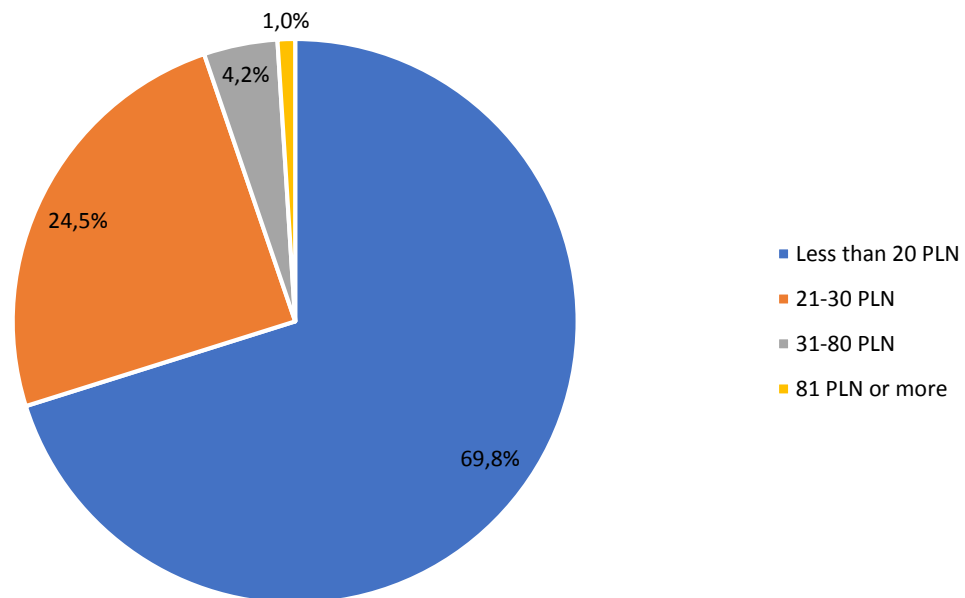
**Figure 4.** Preferred number of working hours.

Source: own research.

The data presented in Figure 4 show that people who work or do not work but want to work would most willingly work 26-40 hours (almost 39%) or 41 hours or more (27%). Some people (17%) would most willingly work up to 10 hours a week and 15% 11-25 hours. The preference for fewer hours probably results from the fact that it concerns mothers with small children.

The next two Figures (Figure 5 and 6) concern received and expected remuneration.

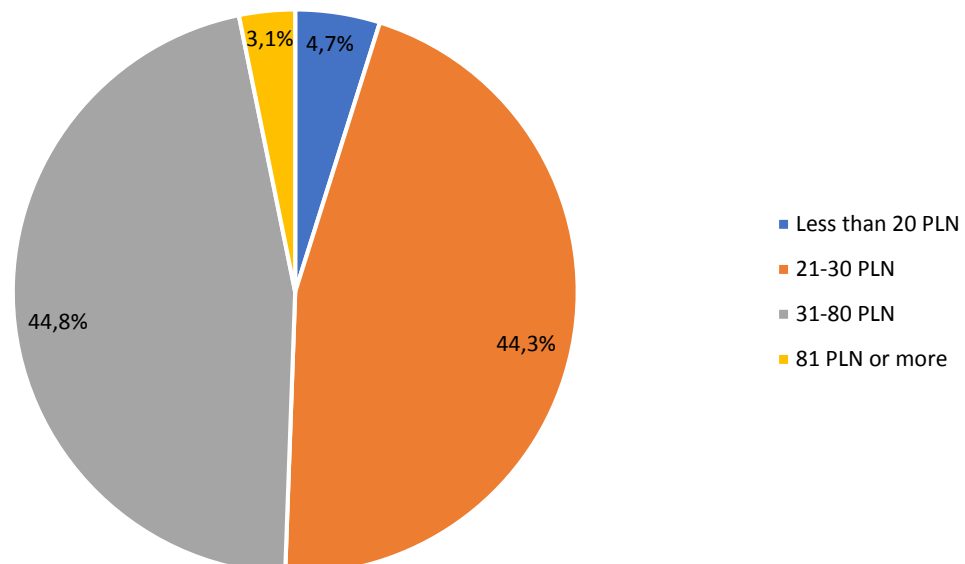




**Figure 5.** Remuneration received per hour of work (net, PLN).

Source: own research.

The refugees surveyed most often (70% of respondents) earned a salary of up to PLN 20 net, which is relatively low. Another 25% earned PLN 21-30 net and only 5% above this amount. It is worth comparing these data with the salaries expected (satisfactory) by refugees (Figure 6).

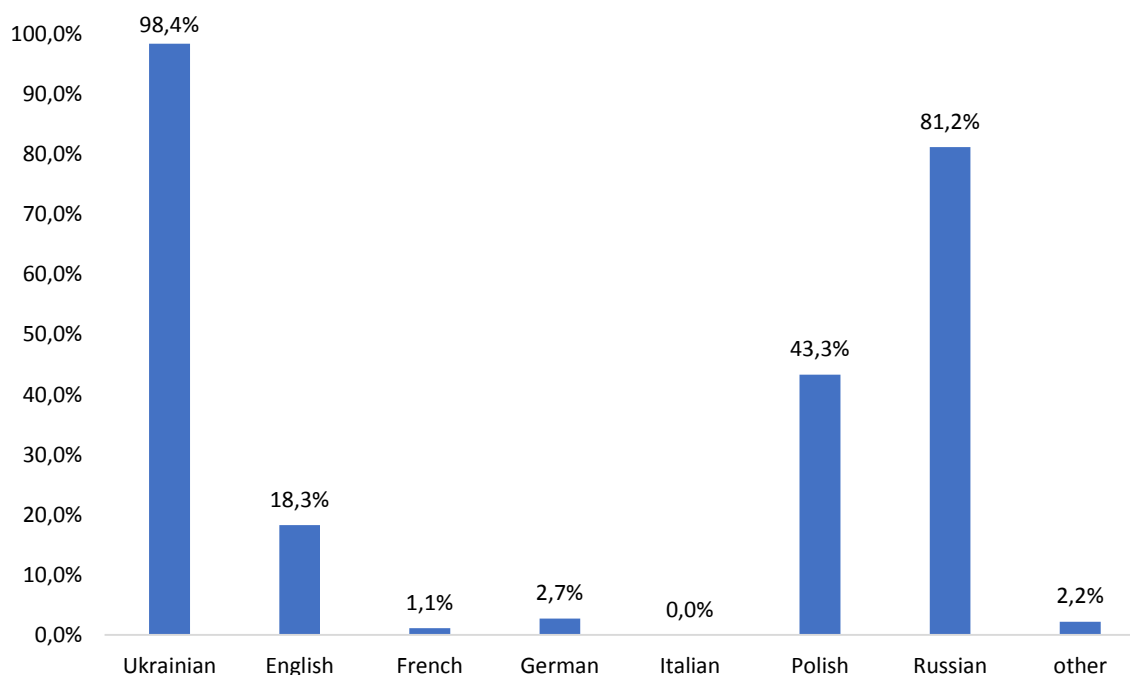


**Figure 6.** Satisfactory salaries.

Source: own research.

The salary satisfactory for refugees is higher than the one received and amounts to approximately PLN 30 net for half of the respondents (for most of them, because for 44% of all those working or wanting to work PLN 21-30) and for the other half over PLN 31 net (for 44% PLN 31-80). However, it can be assumed that the salary satisfactory is not high, taking into account the average salary in Poland.

Both in social life and at work, one needs to communicate with others. Therefore, one of the elements of competence is knowledge of languages. Figure 7 presents the answers in this area.

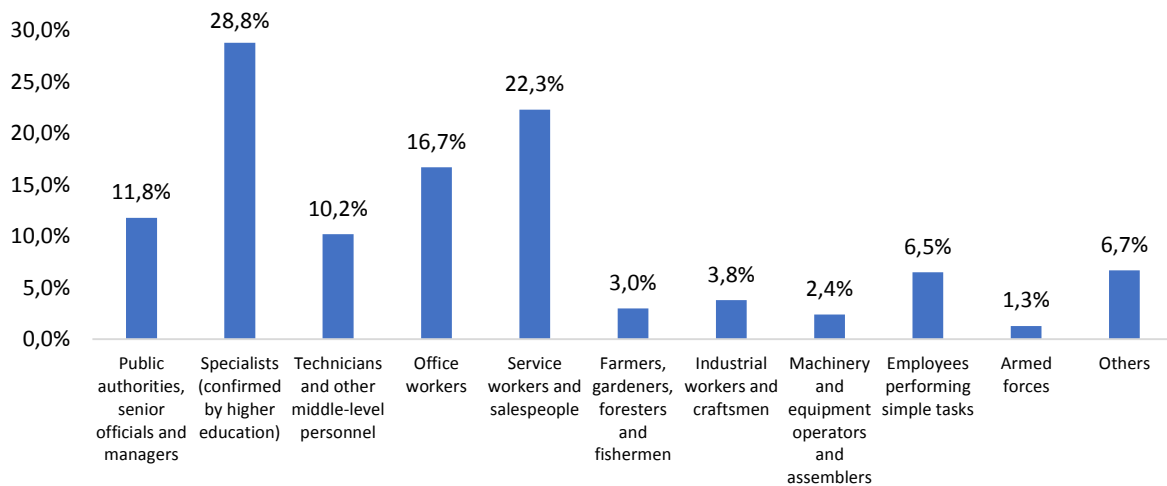


**Figure 7.** Knowledge of languages at a communicative level.

Source: own research.

The presented answers show that refugees mainly know two languages at a communicative level: Ukrainian and Russian. In addition, a relatively large number of people know Polish (43%). Of other languages, only English can be indicated, which is known by 18% of respondents.

One of the most important elements of competence, professional experience, has an impact on finding a satisfactory job. Refugees were asked in what professions they worked before emigrating from Ukraine. The answers are presented in Figure 8.



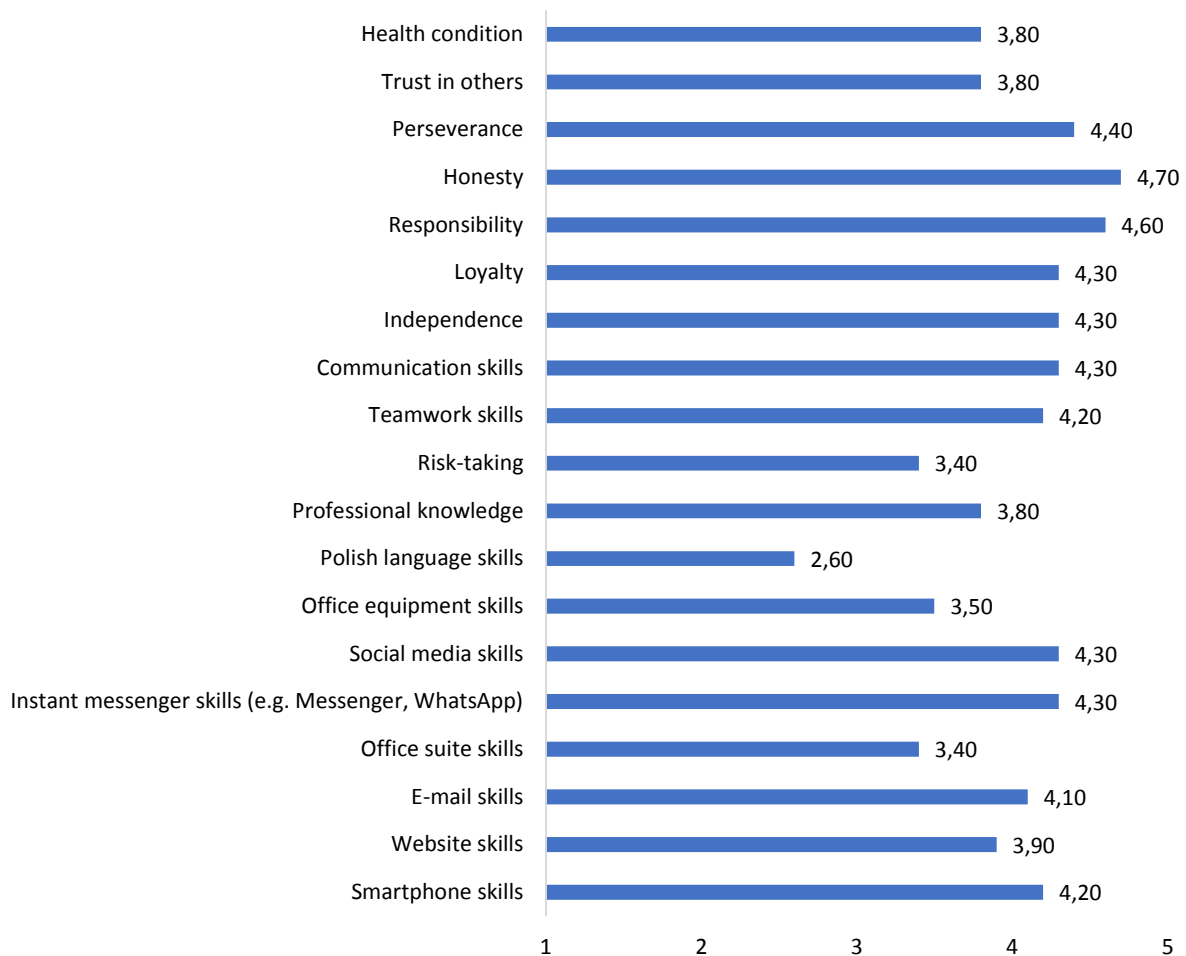
**Figure 8.** Most recent profession in Ukraine<sup>1</sup>.

Source: own research.

The data obtained show that the largest percentage of people (almost 41%) worked in professions requiring high competences and, as a rule, higher education (29% as specialists, 12% as representatives of public authorities, senior officials, directors, etc.). In addition, almost half worked in positions requiring medium qualifications: 22% worked as salespeople, 17% as office workers and 10% as technicians and other medium-level personnel.

The last graph (Figure 9) presents self-assessments of various elements of competences.

<sup>1</sup> The percentage exceeds 100% because some respondents had two jobs and marked two answers.



**Figure 9.** Assessment of own competences (on a scale of 1-5, where 1 – very poor, 5 – very good).

Source: own research.

The answers presented in Chart 9. show that in most cases refugees assess their competences well. The exceptions are the assessments close to very good: honesty (4.7), responsibility (4.6) and perseverance (4.4), or on the other hand: knowledge of Polish (2.6) and average assessments for: ability to use the Office package (3.4), risk-taking (3.4) and ability to use office equipment (3.5).

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

The aim of the article was to determine the situation of refugees on the labour market and their general competences. Surveys conducted among refugees allow us to draw certain conclusions and present recommendations for further, in-depth research. It should be emphasized that the research concerned women in particular, as they constituted the vast majority of adult refugees.

Of the surveyed, approximately 1/3 want to stay in Poland, 1/3 want to wait for events to unfold and 1/3 want to return to Ukraine. Therefore, the end of Russia's aggression may cause a significant outflow of refugees, but on the other hand as many as 1/3 plan to remain in Poland.

Refugees are people who worked in Ukraine in professions that required relatively high skills. In Poland, about half of these people work, most often more than 25 hours a week, for low pay, below PLN 31 net. Their expected salary is also not high. For half of them, up to PLN 30 net per hour would be satisfactory.

A drawback is poor knowledge of foreign languages, including Polish. On the other hand, refugees rate other skills, especially soft ones: honesty, responsibility, perseverance, highly. There are basically no skills, apart from knowledge of Polish, that they would rate below average.

Based on the conducted research and presented conclusions, it can be stated that decision-makers in Poland at the state level, but also company managers and refugees, face certain challenges. In the case of refugees, these include in particular: investing in learning Polish, looking for opportunities to better use their professional skills, implementing flexible forms of time and work organization. The presented studies have several shortcomings: competences were assessed in general, too large a range of received salaries was taken into account (31-80 PLN), the studies were not conducted on a random sample. It is worth noting, however, that they overlap with other studies, e.g. those conducted by the National Bank of Poland.

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