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Understanding the decision-making mechanisms of migrants

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Abstract

This paper investigates the decision-making process of migrants. The study addresses questions about what circumstances, economic events, and social factors influence individuals' decisions to migrate. It reviews and summarizes theoretical approaches to migration and decision-making. The overview of migration theories indicates that migrant flows can be forecasted. An interdisciplinary approach integrates insights from various fields. Migration decisions are affected by economic, social, and other factors. This approach helps study the migration process and suggests ways to improve migration policy. Institutional and structural frameworks are crucial for understanding the economic and social challenges involved in migrant decision-making.

Drawing from survey data on multinational businesses, the article examines the case of Ukrainians whose migration was driven by their desire for stability and security. Key research questions focus on measuring and predicting the impacts of migration flows on the job market, wages, and business growth. Remittances and skills transfers can promote long-term development in home countries. According to the study's findings, it is crucial to understand how migrants make decisions so that migration and integration policies can be designed to balance economic needs with humanitarian responsibilities.

Keywords: migration, mechanism, employment, business, decision-making.

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Introduction

The ongoing war in Ukraine, economic instability, and large-scale population movements within and outside the country are among the factors driving migration. Ukraine was a transit corridor for people seeking work in the European Union. In recent years, it has also become a place of refuge for migrants, including internally displaced persons (IDPs), asylum seekers, and international students. Following the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022, millions of Ukrainians were forced to leave their homes. The existing mobility model has changed. People had to make quick decisions about migration in the face of threats to their lives and choose available routes for movement. This article examines the decision-making mechanisms of migrants in extreme conditions, such as war and natural disasters. Studying the behavior of refugees from Ukraine enables us to summarize their experiences and analyze their adaptation strategies in new countries under changing circumstances.

The article aims to identify the factors influencing decision-making in conditions of uncertainty and risk when choosing a destination. The objectives of the research are to analyze and generalize migration approaches, to conduct and evaluate a survey assessing factors influencing Ukrainians' decision-making to migrate, based on age and level of education, and to propose policy recommendations.

The following research questions were examined. How do contemporary migration theories explain the current socio-economic situation in Ukraine? What are the main push and pull factors influencing Ukrainians' decisions to migrate? How does the level of education in different age groups influence the likelihood of migration? What policy measures could affect the push factors driving Ukrainians to migrate?

By examining first-hand accounts of migrants, as well as policies regulating their movements, the study provides insight into the decision-making process under pressure and the broader factors shaping migration routes. By combining theoretical approaches with empirical observations, the article contributes to a deeper understanding of contemporary migration and the urgent challenges it poses for Europe. It also provides a theoretical overview of the main theories of migration and their significance for understanding current mobility trends. Modern approaches highlight the complexity of migration, emphasizing factors in individual decisions. The study also analyses the characteristics and decision-making patterns of migrants. It examines the specific factors that influence migrants' choices, as well as the reasons why people decide to move or remain in place. These considerations help explain the behavioral differences observed among various population groups. Methodologically, the research adopts an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on data and analytical tools from multiple fields. By transcending disciplinary boundaries, the study broadens the analytical scope and contributes to the search for effective solutions to contemporary migration challenges.

One limitation of the study is the complexity of understanding migration in emergencies (wars, conflicts, disasters). The evaluation of the migration policies' analysis in the countries where migrants could reside is limited by the research. The regional aspect is overlooked due to the war's impact on large population movements from the east to the west in Ukraine, away from direct combat.

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The paper examines theoretical migration theories, factors affecting migration decisions, survey results analysis, and policy recommendations.

Literature Review (Theoretical Background)

Modern migration theories analyze networks, households, institutions, and emotions. These theories provide an economic analysis of people at the macro and meso levels. They define structural flows and systems across various factors. Decision-making theories explain individual-level decision processes based on individual or household choices. The application synergy approach creates opportunities for migrants to navigate multiple choices.

Migrants seek better job opportunities, higher wages, and a safer environment. This hypothesis overlooks return labor migration, which arises from disparities in purchasing power between migrants' countries of origin and recipient countries. According to Opp (2021), subjective factors such as standards, benevolence, or beliefs cannot be considered. Thus, individuals have self-interested preferences. They maximise their objective utility, and their beliefs align with reality. The theory does not explain migrant behavior in situations of conflict and threats to human life. Economic agents lack access to all information and do not always behave rationally.

Making decisions involves determining options and selecting one solution based on the decision maker's values and preferences. The migrant considers the net present value of the advantages of relocating to another country.

Numerous aspects are evaluated during the decision-making process, which then leads to options on when, where, and how to move. *Rational choice theory* combines factors that affect the decision-making process. The theory describes how migrants consider these factors before making a choice. It assumes that people decide to move or stay by comparing costs and benefits, suggesting that they have access to full information. A comprehensive planning process that includes identifying financial sources, housing, employment, and educational opportunities serves as the foundation for migrants' decisions (Silva et. al.,2025). People behave as rational economic actors for self-interest. They want to optimize their costs during migration. This theory predicts that people move when the expected benefits (higher income, security, or opportunities) outweigh the perceived drawbacks.

The concept of bounded rationality emphasizes the choices made under stress, limited time, and restricted knowledge. When faced with emergencies, people have practical limits in decision-making, escaping from war (military conflicts); however, this is not always the best option. Brunarska (2019) suggests a broad classification of decision-makers who choose migrants' destination. Based on the type of decision maker, the author focuses on migrants' rationality and identifies symptoms of its boundedness, such as the heuristics employed. Crucially, the classification was designed to highlight the range of expressions of rationality boundedness in migration destination choice and is based on methods, a final decision rather than precise reasons for selecting a specific location. Individuals adapt to the new socio-economic environment and adjust to limited capacities. This theory cannot explain the behavior of Ukrainian people who stay or flee from the country after the Russian invasion, and how the emotional factor, trauma, and social relations affect them.

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The push and pull theory analyses population migration from rural areas, attributing overpopulation in agriculture as a push factor and demographic ageing as a pull factor. Nyaoro (2023) defined push and pull factors in the migration decision-making process. Labour mobility, skill acquisition, skills development, and education encourage people to migrate to other countries and establish new residences. The push and pull theory does not explain migration flows from countries with higher wages to those with lower levels of development. Labor migration affects industry, global development, labor markets, and demographics (Nosova, 2024).

Table 1. The migration theories: comparative analysis

Theory	Content	Strengths	Weaknesses	Application
Rational Choice Theory	Humans are rational beings who weigh benefits and drawbacks. They are making decisions to optimize their gains.	Versatility. It can be used in a wide range of fields to predict outcomes.	The theory assumes perfect information and does not analyze the emotional aspects.	Migration of workers and students.
Bounded Rationality	People have limited knowledge, time constraints, and cognitive limitations while making decisions.	Particularly important in crises where snap decisions must be made.	The theory lacks a precise, formal model for decision-making when faced with limitations.	Crisis decision-making and migration in times of conflict.
The push and pull theory	Migration occurs when the perceived benefits of moving outweigh the costs of staying, personal priorities, socio-economic characteristics, and life circumstances.	This theory explains migration processes that are easy to apply across factors.	However, it does not fully incorporate social networks, family ties, or structural constraints.	Explain push and pull factors that affect people's intentions to migrate.
Decision-making theory	Migration decision-making models are based on the notion that migration entails a series of choices and motivations. Each element includes family dynamics, economic opportunities, and perceived risks.	Explain the original choice to migrate and the knowledge of the reasons behind migration.	Focus on the short-term decision to migrate of individuals or households.	Families may strategically allocate labor by placing one member overseas to earn money while keeping the others at home.
Affective/emotional models	Acknowledges the influence of attachment, trauma, fear, hope, and morality in migration decisions.	Prevalent in research on family separation, forced migration, and relocation.	It is a subjective evaluation that is difficult to measure.	Forced relocation and the transfer of refugees.
The New Economics of Labor Migration	Migration is viewed as a means of reducing the risks associated with operating a firm, increasing the predicted individual income.	One family member may be sent abroad to fill a labor market gap and provide remittances to the family.	It provides a biased explanation of migration's causes, the "sending party," ignoring the "receiving party." The theory doesn't explain migration from countries with similar economic conditions.	Describes how international labor migration works and its effects.
A people-centric approach	Labor-market factors and their impact on individual behavior are proposed.	Depends mostly on interpretation techniques and may not be generalizable.	The theory does not clarify the effect of international competition on the labor market.	Use to guide humanitarian efforts while upholding narratives and dignity.

Source: Author's approach.

Decision-making theory substantiates individual behavior, choice, emotion, and family dynamics. The theory investigates the social, economic, psychological, and decision-making

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aspects of household or individual migration. Turpin and Marais's (2004) study's findings suggest that adopting the normative method aims to increase rational behavior in the decision-making process. There is evidence for a descriptive strategy that concentrates on the human process and presumes that individuals can make decisions. Migration decision-making theory tries to explain how and why people or households choose to migrate. As stated in a bounded rational theory, migration has limitations. a choice reached after considering the benefits, drawbacks, and limitations. Its application is limited by the absence of comprehensive social and emotional data, particularly for assessing migrant decision-making.

Affective/emotional models reflect behaviors driven by feelings, psychological responses, and impressive events. When faced with danger or possible risks, people act irrationally and are emotionally driven to escape. Emotions reflect the preference to behave as rational actors under the influence of family-based or trauma factors. Mahmud (2021) developed an experimentally based hypothesis that explains the relationship between belonging and emotions. The author asserted that embodied cultural capital is inherited and is connected to emotions and values that are forced by migration. The comparison of these behavior models demonstrates that people conduct rational behavior, adjust it to restricted capabilities, and react emotionally. People choose behavioral models based on their reasons, circumstances, and psychological state. The theory limits the subjective assessment of the migrant environment and the absence of critical thinking about possible threats and risks.

The New Economics of Labor Migration theory assumes that the decision-making process is collective, involving all family members. The theory of the New Economics is based on benefits and costs analysis and justifies the benefits resulting from migration. The goal of the migrants' decision-making process is to optimize their work opportunities and benefits. According to this theory, labor migration flows from capital-poor countries with a labor surplus to capital-rich countries with a labor deficit. Grebenyuk (2016) substantiates that an individual's decision to migrate for work is often made in conjunction with other family members, rather than alone, based on the theory of the new economics of migration. The theory of the new economy differs from others in its choice of subject of analysis: not an individual, but the family. This theory does not explain migration from countries with similar economic conditions and political stability factors

*A people-centric approach j*ustifies migration through investments in human capital at the micro level. Market factors are considered, but this theory does not clarify the effect of international competition on the labor market. This theory substantiates the labor-market variables and how these factors affect individual human behavior. Immigrants need to understand local regulations to integrate into the community quickly. They participate in educational programs, self-directed learning, and study the cultural peculiarities of their new country of residence. Chu (2024) states that to create an environment where guests feel secure in their own culture, when migrants face bias and discrimination, a person-centered approach is used. This concept helps address conflicts between the first and second generations of migrants. A people-centric approach to migration understands that migrants are people beings who must make tough decisions and should be treated with justice and respect without bias and discrimination. They advance their interests as sovereign states and as participants in the

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global community. People's decisions to cross borders have an impact on the well-being of both the countries of origin and destination. This approach limits the quantitative assessment of diversity and dignity decisions to migrate. It does not explain the causes, factors, or results of migration.
Modern migration theories analyze networks, households, institutions, and emotions. Migration concepts outline the external and internal factors influencing individual behavior. Socio-economic inequality in society encourages people to migrate to higher-income countries (Belaid and Slany, 2018). Decision-making theories include affective and emotional models. The New Economics and social network theory provide clearer explanations of uneven, recurrent, and multifaceted trends. Theories have different subjects of analysis. The rational choice approach focuses on individual decisions. The New Economics theory analyzes the family values. The push and pull theory explains factors that affect people's intentions to migrate. Decision-making theories include affective and emotional models, but they have limitations in estimating emotions, trauma, and partial information. Rational choice models are constrained, as they presume explicit cost-benefit analysis. The selected groups for examination, such as age, demographic division, and geographic region, vary across theories. No single explanation is sufficient to capture the complexity of migration behavior. The theoretical overview of migration theories demonstrates that migrant flows can be predicted, and refugee movements managed during times of crisis and uncertainty.

Research Objective, Methodology, and Data

The article analyzes migrants' decision-making mechanisms, elucidating the significant factors driving migration.
The tested hypotheses propose to explain people's decisions to migrate. 1. The hypothesis examines whether the process of making migration decisions is predicated on contrasting the economic, political, and sociocultural aspects of its country of origin. 2. The socio-economic and personal characteristics affect the mechanism of decision-making to migrate.
The evaluation of online applications serves as the foundation for the study. The average value analysis, also known as mean score analysis, is a descriptive statistical tool used in this article. The article uses an interdisciplinary approach. We examine factors that push people to move within the country or migrate abroad. Migration impacts demographics, labor markets, and industries. This research is based on a qualitative review of the existing literature and secondary data. Research, thorough comprehension, and understanding of system change as a process and its mechanisms will be facilitated using an interdisciplinary approach (Nosova, 2024, 1). It allows the study of the migration process and proposes methods of policy-regulated flows.
The article uses statistical data from the International Organization for Migration, UNHCR reports, Gradus Research, Rating Group, and the State Statistics Service of Ukraine. The research includes data on online applications of Ukrainian citizens.

Results and Discussions

Survey results assessment of people’s attitudes to the basic issues in Ukraine

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Five hundred applicants participated anonymously in an online survey in all regions of Ukraine. The survey was conducted with the Ukrainian citizens in 2024. The survey was set up using Google Forms. The survey applied the methodology of the Gradus research and the Rating group.

The generalization of respondents' evaluations of the social, cultural, legal, and economic aspects affects migration choices. We determine how strongly respondents agree or disagree with statements on the possibility of migration by calculating average scores for survey items scored on a Likert scale. Options on a standard five-point scale range from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" (5), with Partially Agree (3), Less Agree (2), and "Disagree" (1).

The age range of the responders was 18 to 65. 30% of respondents were between the ages of 41 and 59, 23% were between the ages of 28 and 40, 16% were between the ages of 21 and 27, 22% were between the ages of 18 and 21, and 9 % were beyond the age of 60.

The use of average estimations allows us to characterize a specific feature of a population despite the quantitative differences in units for this characteristic within the population. To analyze the obtained results, we used means (average values) and variances. The dispersion is calculated on the average values. Dispersion reflects the extent to which the data spread around the mean. High dispersion indicates that the data values deviate significantly from the mean. Significant discrepancies within a group of respondents are defined by variance values greater than 1, suggesting a high variability. Table 1 shows the results of a study assessing economic and legal factors influencing Ukrainian’s decisions to migrate, based on the comparison of age. The respondents’ answers are presented for age groups.

Table 1. Results of a study assessing economic and legal factors influencing Ukrainian’s decisions to migrate, based on the age comparison

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I. Block of questions	1.1 Attitude to economic reforms in the country.	1.2. Protection of property rights.	1.3. Security of life and property.	1.4. The sufficient salary (income).	1.5. The level of well-being (social protection).
Average 18-21 years	1,71	1/71	4,37	2,77	4,23
Average 21-27	3,15	1.6	4,12	3,29	4,16
Average 28-40 years	3,26	2,02	4,24	3,23	4,14
Average 41-59 years	3,53	2,14	4,13	2,7	3,98
Average 60 years and above	3,84	2,56	3.98	2,67	3,87
Dispersion 18-21 years	1,25	1,19	0,98	1,39	0,8
Dispersion 21-27 years	1,3	1,35	1,24	1,23	0,85
Dispersion 28-40 years	1,42	1,72	1,3	1,73	0,99
Dispersion 41-59years	1,08	1,71	1,07	1,41	1,1
Dispersion 60 years and above	1,05	1,93	1,34	1,47	0,87

Source: authors' assessment.

1.1. The assessment of attitude to economic reforms in the country, we can see, there is a trend towards an increase in the importance of market economy principles with age - the older a person is, the more important this indicator is. The most contradictory opinions are held by people over 60 years. Older respondents (60+) rated economic reforms highly. These results reflect their greater sensitivity to the stability of economic institutions, their accumulated life experience, and their susceptibility to long-term structural change. The wide range of opinions among those 60+ indicates significant disagreements within this group, reflecting differences in personal experience and expectations.

1.2. The protection of property rights demonstrates a clear age-related divide. This is because younger individuals (18-21 and 21-27) show lower concern for property rights. They are interested in education and early career development. The older generation considers that the protection of property rights is important, recognizing its role in economic activity and long-term investment. Young people think oppositely. The war consequences in Ukraine demonstrate the destruction of homes and infrastructure, and reinforce the heightened concern among older people, who have more property to lose.

1.3. Across all age groups, respondents rated the highest score as the security of life and property. This confirms that personal safety is a universal priority. The significance of life protection is crucial to the regular growth of the Ukrainian population. Young respondents emphasize the importance of property and life protection. The findings indicate that the opinions of the youngest people are the most prevalent. A high score with minimal dispersion among young respondents confirms that the ongoing war in Ukraine has highlighted the population's vulnerability.

1.4. However, respondents between the ages of 28 and 40, who have more financial responsibilities, showed the greatest variation. Notably, students between the ages of 18 and 21 and people over 41 expressed discontent with their income level. These findings demonstrate how young people have fewer employment options and earn lower wages than older people.

1.5. The level of well-being (social protection) relates to a vital issue for all Ukrainian citizens. Social protection is a critical factor in reducing poverty, expanding opportunities, and enabling individuals and households to address global challenges. Respondents almost

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completely agree in their opinions about well-being (social protection) in Ukraine by age category. The assessment confirms the decline in social protection for the older generation. Older people are considered less protected in social programs. In wartime, limited social programs and insufficient state funding cause negative attitudes among people due to the absence of satisfaction of needs. Lower dispersion indicates such views among old people. Assessing the educational level, 70% of respondents have completed higher education, 23% have incomplete education, and 7% have completed secondary school or its equivalent. They differed in various employment, from workers to businessmen, students, and pensioners.
The research results of the assessment of Ukrainian's attitudes to socio-cultural issues based on education level can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of the assessment of Ukrainian's attitudes to socio-cultural issues based on educational level

II. Block of questions	2.1. The protection of a personal life and professional development.	2.2. The conditions for individuals' self-realization and self-development.	2.3. The ease of migrating within Ukraine and beyond its borders.	2.4. Level of education.	2.5. The family values.
Average (Higher education)	3,98	3,80	4,10	4,07	3,88
Average (without higher education)	4,37	4,11	4,16	3,98	3,90
Dispersion (Higher education).	1,21	1,05	1,20	0,94	1,16
Dispersion (without higher education)	0,89	0,99	1,26	1,01	1,18

Source: authors' assessment.

2.1. Personal life protection was rated more favorably by less educated individuals than by those who have a higher education. Highly educated respondents express greater uniformity in their expectations for personal safety and professional development. The dispersion is less than 1in the group of respondents without higher education. On average, the spread of answers to this question is smaller. University graduates rated lower on average, indicating unmet expectations for professional development and personal security. It demonstrates that young people highly assess personal safety and work-life protection.
2.2. Both groups of respondents rated opportunities for self-fulfillment highly. Young people currently studying were optimistic. Students and those early in their careers were positive about their educational prospects and future careers. Employed people believe that structural barriers hinder their self-development.

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2.3. The ease of migrating within Ukraine and beyond its borders relates to the issue demanding a quick decision. The full-scale war in Ukraine has affected migration decisions. The assessment reveals that both groups of respondents mark mobility as important. They face different constraints. This question of migration is difficult and demands preparation. But it should be noted that here, various factors hinder both categories' migration decisions: for students, it is the lack of financial resources for relocation, for adults, family ties, and immobile work. High dispersion among those without higher education demonstrates more diverse experiences and expectations regarding mobility.
2.4. Highly educated respondents gave education a higher relevance rating, according to the survey. The adult educated audience supports the need for an advanced education. Students and young individuals consider the level of education as a central determinant for future migration decisions, study, and employment. The dispersion is more than 1, indicating that respondents' views on the importance of education as a factor in migration vary widely within the group without higher education. This confirms the existence of heterogeneity within the group.
2.5. The family values, elucidated by both categories of respondents, receive similar scores. Dispersion values greater than 1 indicate high variability in the groups. This means the existence of diverse interpretations and priorities of cultural heritage and intergenerational ties. The Ukrainian language, history, and culture are social values that continue to be a stable anchor across educational backgrounds. They determine life ideals and goals that, in the opinion of the majority in each society, should be achieved (Nosova, 2023).
The results confirm the hypothesis that the process of making migration decisions involves comparing economic, political, and sociocultural aspects of the country of origin. A comparison was conducted of respondents' assessments of migration factors, including economic conditions (wages, taxes, business opportunities), legal factors (property rights protection, personal security), and sociocultural factors (family values and social protection). Negative evaluations of the economic and legal spheres suggest that respondents' decisions to migrate may be influenced by conditions both within Ukraine and abroad. The findings indicate that migration decisions are not based on isolated factors but on a comprehensive assessment of structural conditions across multiple domains.
This hypothesis states that socio-economic and personal characteristics affect the decision-making mechanism for migration and is supported by the study data. Differences in migration intentions were identified across age groups and occupational categories. As we can see, there is a trend towards social support and benefits with age. The older a person is, the more valuable this indicator is. The most contradictory opinions were held by people over 60. It is worth noting that students aged 18-21 and people over 41 are the most dissatisfied with their income.
Respondents also cited dissatisfaction with personal security and uncertainty—factors considered when assessing the legal and economic environment. Older individuals emphasized the important role of social support, confirming that personal circumstances and life-cycle factors significantly influence decision-making processes. The findings demonstrate that socioeconomic status, age, and personal circumstances substantially affect how people evaluate the costs and benefits of migration. Additionally, when making decisions, the region

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of residence and the migration policies of the potential destination country should be considered.

The study's findings show that the ongoing conflict in Ukraine has influenced people's decisions to leave the country for safer regions or to go abroad. Resolving the conflict in Ukraine and improving living conditions will encourage citizens to remain in the country. If economic, social, and technological prospects are comparable to or better than those in their countries of destination, migrants will prefer to return to their home country.

The migration concept and its application

Migration is a complex, multi-stage process involving the movement and change of residence of people from one region or country to another. When deciding to migrate, people gather information about the new destination. If there are potential threats to their personal safety, people may make decisions spontaneously. When planning migration, issues such as security, economic well-being, freedoms, and social guarantees are considered. Comparing conditions in the country of residence with those in the potential destination, and finding the latter more favorable, can lead to a decision to migrate. The use of various theories helps to identify the causes of migration. Developing a coordinated policy to regulate migrant flows by creating socio-economic conditions in countries of origin, improving living standards, and providing social support to low-income groups will help reduce migration.

The article reviews migration theories and defines the factors influencing the decision to migrate. Since the start of their full-scale war in Ukraine in 2022, ten million people have been forced to leave their homes. This figure includes 5.6 million people who moved abroad and 3.8 million internally displaced within Ukraine (Pavlushenko, 2024)

Over 1.2 million families have reported that their homes have been damaged or destroyed, and about 14 million Ukrainians have fled their homes. Property losses include not only the physical destruction and damage of buildings and productive land, but also looting, forced evictions, contamination with explosives, and damage to critical infrastructure such as water, electricity, heating supplies, roads, and social service facilities (Nosova, 2024, 3).

The well-being and social protection are vital issues for all Ukrainian citizens. Social protection is a key factor in reducing poverty, expanding opportunities, and enabling individuals and households to address global challenges. It includes social assistance, social insurance, and labor and economic inclusion. Social protection addresses health and employment issues at various stages of the life cycle.

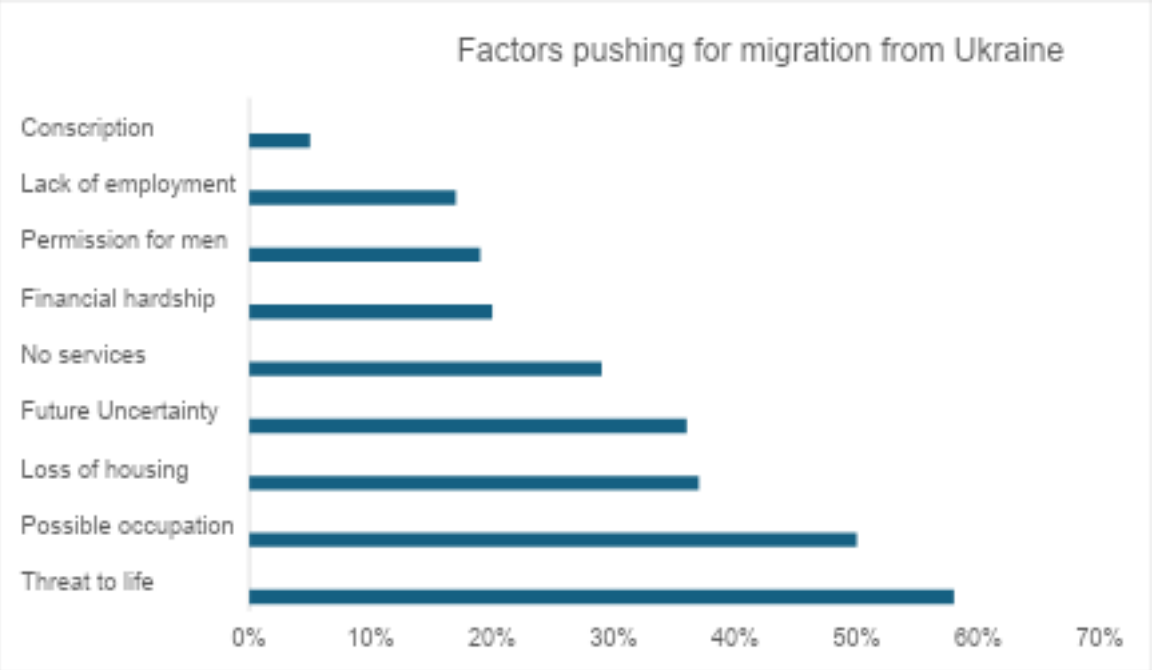
Surveys by the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) confirm that by early 2025, major push factors, such as the threat of occupation and risks to life, will remain the primary reasons for migration (EUAA Surveys, 2024). Despite ongoing threats, conflict, and economic concerns, most people (71% of respondents) state they intend to remain in Ukraine after the active phase of the war ends. Thirteen percent of interviewees plan to leave Ukraine within the next six months in 2025 (Anticipating Displacement, 2025).

The analysis of economic, legal, and socio-economic factors clarifies the decision-making processes involved in migration. Well-being is affected by income level (salary, pension, scholarship), tax rates, and entrepreneurial flexibility. The legal environment is shaped by factors such as corruption, the judiciary, migration capacity, freedom of movement, and place

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of residence. Participation in elections, political culture, and political stability reflect the country's political system. Human rights abuses, societal instability, discrimination, conflict and violence, and a lack of educational opportunities all contribute to migration.
The survey conducted by the Center for Economic Strategy affirmed that factors pushing Ukrainians to migrate play the key role (See Figure 1). The fundamental requirement for citizens to remain in the nation is the preservation and guarantee of their safety. The military and economic barriers to repatriation are the primary obstacles. Among the main things deterring refugees from returning to Ukraine are the country's continuing threats to life, uncertainties, house destruction, low living standards, and difficulties obtaining work.

Figure 1. Factors pushing for migration from Ukraine

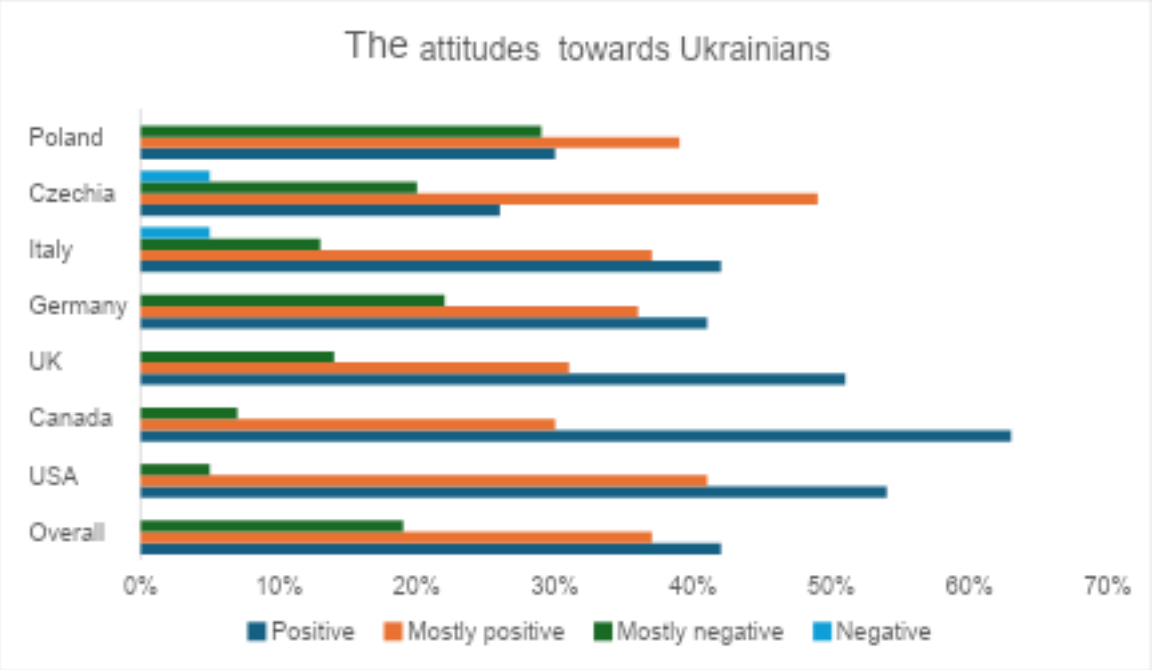


Source: Constructed on data from the Centre for Economic Strategy, 2025.

In the short term, a lack of investment in the economy will limit the recovery of labor demand. Only 19% of business owners intend to launch new investment initiatives in the following year (Nosova, 2023). Approximately 20% of Ukrainians may consider going abroad if the situation worsens (Gradus Research study on the migration intentions of Ukrainians, 2024).
Figure 2 highlights the positive attitude towards Ukrainian migrants in most countries. The estimates show that the highest levels of positive relations are in Canada, the USA, and the UK. Further assessments indicate unfavorable perceptions of Ukrainian immigrants in Italy and the Czech Republic (see Fig. 2).

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Figure 2. The attitudes towards Ukrainians



Source: Constructed on data from the Centre for Economic Strategy, 2025.

The Center for Economic Strategy (CES) proposes scenarios for Ukrainians wishing to return to the country from abroad. Approximately 13.5% of "quasi-labor" migrants and 86% of "patriotic" refugees intend to return (Ukrainian Refugees After Three Years Abroad, 2025). Security guarantees for Ukrainians motivate them to remain in the country and to return from abroad.

Migrants have a positive impact on business development in their destination countries. Their entrepreneurial activities help stabilize the labor market. A substantial body of empirical research shows that skills – rather than just formal educational attainment – are crucial for promoting production and job creation. Furthermore, there is growing awareness of the widening gap between workers' technical expertise and the rapidly changing demands of the labor market (Nosova, 2025).

The International Labor Organization has stated that migrant workers can strengthen social protection systems, encourage entrepreneurship, address staffing shortages, and revitalize the host nation's workforce. Labor-intensive industries, such as construction and agriculture, are attractive for foreign workers.

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Conclusions

The “push-pull” concept highlights the hypotheses that migration decisions are conducted on an analysis of economic and legal conditions. The socio-cultural and personal characteristics influence this research. The theoretical review of migration theories stresses that migrants’ flows can be predicted. The migration theory explains the behavior of respondents from different age and educational groups who compare conditions in Ukraine with potential destination countries.

The article confirms both hypotheses:

1. Migration decisions are made based on a multidimensional comparison of economic, political, and sociocultural conditions in the country of origin.
2. Socio-economic and personal characteristics have a significant impact on migration mechanisms, influencing how people perceive risks, benefits, and long-term opportunities

This article presents the results of a survey in Ukraine in 2024. It assesses their attitudes toward key economic, legal, and socio-cultural issues, and their decisions to migrate within the country or abroad. The study considers differences in age, education, and socioeconomic status, and their impact on perceptions of security, opportunities, and well-being.

The study results showed that young people are interested in educational and career prospects, while older people point to instability and legal uncertainty. Scenarios for reducing potential threats can be estimated.

The results showed a gap between respondents' high sociocultural resilience and their acute dissatisfaction with economic and political conditions. The ongoing war exacerbates fears related to physical safety, property protection, income stability, and prospects. The safety of life and property is a central factor in migration decisions. All groups of respondents rated it as equally decisive for their existence, both within the country and abroad.

Economic dissatisfaction with low wages, unequal tax burdens, and limited business opportunities was identified as a factor in both internal and external migration, especially among the youngest (18-21) and oldest (41+) age groups. This factor remains the main driver of both internal and external migration.

The respondents' assessments of attitudes toward legal issues, including the enforcement of property rights and the rule of law, indicate a steady increase with age. This confirms the increased vulnerability of older people.

The level of education also plays an important role in shaping socio-cultural expectations and feelings of mobility. Students express greater optimism about self-fulfillment and mobility opportunities, while those with higher education express disappointment at the gap between professional expectations and reality in wartime conditions. Despite these difficulties, family values and cultural identity remain strong stabilizing factors that mitigate migration pressure among various demographic groups.

When making migration decisions, people consider factors of uncertainty, structural difficulties, and social ties. Contemporary migration decisions in Ukraine are based on considerations of security, economic dissatisfaction, and socio-cultural stability.

Policymakers, scientists can use these findings to develop policies aimed at reducing

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migration, supporting vulnerable groups, and strengthening citizens' confidence in the long-term future of their country.

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