

Labour Migration from Ukraine and its Ethical Implications

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Need for a Different Approach in Labour Migration Analysis

The national and global debate on the issue of labour migration is usually concentrated on the economic impact and the legal status of individuals or groups of immigrants. However, there is need for another perspective on this critical question, the perspective that would seek to understand the ethical implications of labour migration.

Similarly, the issue of labour migration from Ukraine to EU countries and Russia has been widely discussed both in Ukraine and to some extent in Europe, although mainly from the economic and sociological points of view, and without taking into account the implications of this new phenomenon for society, value systems and the persons affected by it. However, currently, after roughly a decade since this tendency became prevalent, it is already possible to analyse the main implications of labour migration from the ethical and anthropological points of view. The findings of such research help in understanding the axiological underpinnings of the personal motivation of labour migrants and the way they manifest themselves in relation to other people.

The ethical issues of labour migration are quite complex. There are many perspectives on why people of working age migrate, exactly how they migrate, what impact their migration has on receiving, transit and sending countries, and whether countries should encourage, discourage, or limit labour migration. Labour migration significantly affects the communities that migrants leave and the communities that receive them. The analysis of labour migration issues always reveals tensions between individuals, on the one hand, and communities and nations, on the other.

The Ukrainian Situation

One of the officials of the Office of the Mayor in Moscow, after being asked about how seriously they oppose illegal Ukrainian labour migration, said, “*if we started really fighting it, all construction in Moscow would stop.*”

Recently, Ukraine has become one of the major labour exporting countries in Europe. Rough estimations of the workforce that has at some time worked abroad range from 2 million to about 7 million¹ (most likely 3 to 4 million), which is a lot in any case for Ukraine with its work-capable population of about 28 million.

The approximate statistical data for labour Migration from Ukraine in 2005 is the following² and ³:

Country	Number of Ukrainians working legally and registered at consulates (thous.)	Number of Ukrainians working illegally – an expert estimation (thous.)
Russia	94	1,000
Poland	3.5	250-300
Italy	200	200
Czech Republic	54.8	120-150
Spain	2.8	50-100
Portugal	70	150
USA	1.6	20-40
Israel	0.3	20
Greece	1.3	3
Turkey	0.08	5-35

The level of labour migration is particularly high in Western regions of Ukraine. For instance, some 10% of the population in Zakarpatska oblast (region) are migrants; over 6% in Ivano-Frankovsk oblast; over 5% in Lviv oblast. The rural population participates more actively in migrating than urban dwellers.

Ukraine has become particularly well-known for a huge number of mostly illegal workers coming to the EU. Without the ability to defend their rights properly because of their illegal status, these people often become victims of diverse modern forms of slavery and exploitation, of which the sexual slavery and human trafficking related to it are the most notorious. In case they get a job, however, most often it is in construction, the oil

industry, baby-sitting or other services that are considered particularly difficult or dangerous. Only very rarely do labour migrants get jobs corresponding to their education (many of them have university degrees) or to the skills they acquired while still at home.

According to the poll conducted in 2005 by the Centre for Peace, Conversion and Foreign Policy of Ukraine (CPCFPU), the most attractive countries among labour migrants are (percentage of respondents who selected an option):

60% - Italy;
32% - Portugal;
25% - Spain;
23% - Poland;
18% - The USA;
17% - Czech Republic;
15% - The UK;
13% - Germany;
8% - Russia;
7% - Canada;
5% - Netherlands;
5% - Greece (respondents could select no more than three options)⁴.

Higher wages in recipient countries are accompanied by a higher cost of living. This sometimes leads the Ukrainian labour migrants to a necessary acceptance of very poor working and living conditions. For instance, they sometimes make savings by having poor quality food and lodging, let alone medical care. One more stress factor is that, usually, labour migrants from Ukraine do not go to recipient countries with their families – these rather stay at home.

Imperfect international legislation in the field of labour migration leads to exploitation by employers, and discrimination against migrants in labour relations (leading to unofficial employment, low pay, poor working conditions). Migrants have to deal with corruption and fraud at every stage of the migration process, including recruitment agencies, border crossings, employment, payment for labour by an employer, and remittances. Lack of regulation also can provoke competition between migrants and the local labour force. Migrants may occupy about 30% of workplaces that could have been occupied by local labourers, and this usually promotes an increase in anti-immigrant feeling.

The majority of Ukrainian labour migrants do not intend to stay in the recipient countries and return

home after their work abroad. The number of such migrants is growing, which is supported by the growth of money invested by migrants in small business enterprises, rather than, traditionally, real estate.

The peculiarity of the Ukrainian situation is that Ukrainian labour migrants are not using all the legal opportunities available to citizens of Ukraine according to inter-state agreements. For example, the quota for legal work in the Czech Republic is never used up. This happens mainly because of lack of information about such possibilities.

Causes of Ukrainian Labour Migration

The old debate about the interplay of "push" and "pull" factors in labour migration goes on in various forms. Among the "pull" factors, the opportunity for legal or illegal employment with better wages is usually mentioned, and "push" factors usually include poverty, conflict and disaster. Taking this division into account one can notice the prevalence of "pull" factors in the Ukrainian situation, even though "push" factors also have their place and are sometimes emphasised in analyses. Nevertheless, Ukraine has not had military conflicts or devastating disasters (except for local ones). Therefore one can say that the decision to go abroad to work is rather a matter of free choice for Ukrainians than a necessity to escape from desperate conditions. Even though some Ukrainian experts insist on the role of "push" factors, their influence rapidly diminishes and the decision to move abroad for work is viewed as an effort to build a better life.

According to a poll conducted in 2005, in response to the question "What problems do you solve by working abroad?," migrants answered in the following way:

51.3% - making money for living;
22% - education (my own or for children);
20% - buying a house/apartment;
7% - making money for starting my own business;
6% - buying a car;
2.5% - other (respondents could select no more than two options)⁵.

Among the economic causes of the massive Ukrainian labour migration those most often cited include the crisis of 1995-1999, when thousands of enterprises were closed in Ukraine leading to unprecedented workplace losses with local business infrastructure not yet established. However, the

crisis passed, and industrial activity recovered, but the amount of labour migration did not seem to diminish. On the other hand, Ukrainian enterprises experience a significant lack of skilled workers, especially production workers.

There are a number of social groups directly interested in the existing “pipeline” of labour migrants, from tourist companies that provide them with diverse forms of support, to enterprising Ukrainians who establish and control the interaction of potential employers and labour migrants.

Some people leave the country in search of new jobs “by inertia,” having only information from their acquaintances about opportunities abroad and not taking enough measures to find similar solutions at home. This just seems to be a simpler solution, supported by the fact that earlier migrants assist subsequent migrants with accommodations, jobs, and contacts.

Moreover, the attempt to go abroad for work and to try to make one’s own life better can often be a matter of recognition in local communities. Having a family member abroad has become some kind of status symbol. Likewise, on the other hand, members of a community may look down on those who have never tried this.

One should also take into account the traditions of labour migration prevalent in Western Ukraine with its over-population and corresponding high rate of unemployment. Even as early as the beginning of the 20th century, there was massive labour migration mainly to Canada and the USA from these territories. At that time, however, they emigrated together with families and took their part in constituting an immigrant society in the New World.

At the same time, one should also mention the difficult conditions of family life in post-Soviet Ukraine. According to statistical data, about 43% of Ukrainians admitted that they suffered from cruelty on the part of their parents, most often from beating. These events were recorded not only in problematic families, but also in quite affluent ones.

About 15% of children in Ukraine have been put into care at least once because of parental cruelty. This is one of the factors leading to the situation in Ukrainian boarding schools and orphanages where about 200,000 children are maintained⁶. Quite often it is family cruelty and disrespect that plays the most influential role in the decision of an economic migrant (mainly women) to look for some job abroad. This has been supported by interviews with the migrants themselves.

The Impact of Labour Migration on Individuals

Some labour migrants get invaluable experience, which, paradoxically, can be a good addition to their CV. Even though the qualifications of the job they accept abroad can be significantly lower than the ones to which their education formally entitles them, the migrants can get significant and worthwhile expertise in the field. An example of this is a person with a veterinary qualification who worked for some time in Norway, legally, as a technical worker at a horse farm. Overall, this kind of experience, although formally lower in rank, is not totally fruitless.

The practice of labour migration has personality implications. For instance, one of the new common types of personality disorders recorded by Ukrainian psychotherapists has received the name of the “Italian syndrome.” In this case women experience a grave shock caused by the contrast of the quality of life in Ukraine and other countries and by very the difficult working and living conditions they may experience while abroad. The difference can be both positive and negative. Often the background of this disorder is accompanied by family difficulties compounded by the lack of sufficient economic opportunity at home. This has led some researchers to compare a decision to look for a job abroad to an escape.

This shock only worsens their relationships with husbands and children, and the “Italian syndrome” becomes a serious personality disorder after return, when the Ukrainian women, regardless of the financial support they provided during their work abroad, feel the lack of belonging and recognition

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The Impact of Ukrainian Labour Migration on structures, networks and economic systems

The main form of impact of Ukrainian labour migration on economic systems are remittances sent back home by the migrants through different means (Western Union, bus drivers etc.). The amount of money sent, according to some bold estimates, may be equal to almost 10% of GDP. Still, this money, being non-taxed, does not contribute to society's welfare or to the labour migrants' pension plans. As a result, they deprive themselves of future pensions and negatively impact the whole Ukrainian pension system which is already overloaded with commitments towards a rapidly aging Ukrainian society.

Ukraine faces a severe demographic crisis as its population rapidly shrinks and ages. As adults capable of having children, being abroad sometimes for years, labour migrants directly contribute to this negative tendency. Moreover, in Ukraine's western regions, between 60 and 70% of labour migrants are female. In addition to this, the majority of migrants have a rural or small-town origin, which means that their migration seriously undermines the life of small communities.

However, in many cases money earned by labour migrants becomes start-up capital for the former migrants to establish their own small businesses after return.

As active and goal-oriented individuals, the labour migrants are said to become the basis for formation of the Ukrainian middle class. This implies that earning money abroad will enable them to open their own businesses in Ukraine, efficiently implementing the knowledge, experience and skills acquired abroad. The former labour migrants usually have quite active public positions and above average levels of political awareness. In general, although many have had negative experiences abroad, labour migrants perceive themselves as much more actively involved in shaping their own lives than do non-migrants.

There are also other positive implications of labour migration for Ukrainian society and its economic system. The main aspect is that staying and working in EU countries becomes "the school of democracy" for many Ukrainians as they observe the activity of European institutions. They come

back home with an awareness of democratic standards of service provision and with higher expectations from Ukrainian authorities, which in turn promotes the development of democracy. The experience of different societies from within, whether positive or negative, raises social awareness in general. The former migrants create a tradition of caring about changing the Ukrainian society for the better.

This is especially valuable as one of the main characteristics of post-Soviet societies is wide-spread anomie, a condition in individuals characterised by an absence or diminution of standards or values. In the opposite way, an experience of working abroad, in societies with other social traditions and values, can stimulate labour migrants to reconsider and realise their own values and standards.

Influence of Labour Migration on Family Life

Labour migration can have devastating consequences for family values. In Ukraine, an extremely high rate of broken marriages, both registered and unregistered, has been recorded.

In particular, long periods of parents being away from their families seriously undermines parent-children relationships as children in many cases are left on their own. Ukrainian women often go to Europe to baby-sit the children of others instead of devoting time to their own. Their families may be indefinitely separated. There are many stories of migrant Ukrainians, especially women, concerning the alienation of their children.

The husband-wife relationship also deteriorates due to long periods of separation. It is not unusual to hear of extra-marital affairs on the part of one spouse while the other is abroad.

One particular instance of the influence of the long-term practice of family remittances is growth in materialistic attitudes and values among the children of labour migrants. The migrants can feel guilty for not being able to spend enough time with their children and try to compensate for this by giving extra monetary support and thus teaching their children to be demanding and selfish.

Ethical Concerns

It is difficult to provide a single judgment

concerning the morality of the process of labour migration, as it is a highly complex and multifaceted phenomenon. It does, however, raise a number of additional ethical issues and concerns. For instance, there is an ethical dimension of the poorer sending country bearing the costs of educating the potential migrants, while the receiving countries reap the benefits. The issue can also be seen, from the positive perspective, as one of “brain overflow”. Viewed from this perspective, emigration reduces the supply- demand gap for

skilled workers in developing countries and ensures optimal allocation of unused human resources⁷.

Overall, the complex issue of labour migration from Ukraine to Russia and European countries reveals many tensions and conflicts between ethical standards and value systems. It also, on the other hand, leads to a re-evaluation of the influence of values and moral norms on individual, community and societal levels.

NOTES

¹ The Young Ukraine (Ukrayina Moloda) (Newspaper), 2006, #40.

² Shevchenko Aleksey, *Chasing after an Easy Euro* (Za dlinnym Euro), in “Korrespondent”, 2005, 19 March.

³ Tishkov, Valery, Zhanna Zayinchkovskaya, and Galina Vitkovskaya, "Migration in the countries of the former Soviet Union," Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM), September 2005, <http://www.gcim.org/attachements/RS3.pdf>

⁴ Dikiy, Eugene. *Living in Two worlds* (Zhizn' na dva mira), in Russian, in “Expert”, #10 (61), 11 March 2007, <http://expert.ua/articles/18/0/1700/>

⁵ Dikiy, Eugene. *Living in Two worlds* (Zhizn' na dva mira), in Russian, in “Expert”, #10 (61), 11 March 2007, <http://expert.ua/articles/18/0/1700/>

⁶ Hohvera, Maria. *Economic migration: an opportunity or a risk for the family?* (in Ukrainian) // XXII International Congress for the Family – Kiev 9 to 11 May 2006: „The Family, a Community of Love”, Kyiv: Dukh i Litera (Spirit and Letter), 2007, p. 90.

⁷ Parker Lynette. M. *The Ethics of Migration and Immigration: Key Questions for Policy Makers*, http://www.scu.edu/ethics/practicing/focusareas/global_ethics/migration.html