

June 2020

Worldwide, migrants are being resorted to as instrumental agents in crisis response and in the longer term will likely act as key recovery agents. To mitigate the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical, *inter alia*, to develop a robust national policy and administrative framework that facilitates circular migration, maximizes the benefits of well-organized labour migration, strengthens protection measures for Ukrainian citizens abroad and foreign migrants within Ukraine, and widens opportunities for socioeconomic reintegration of returned migrants in their local communities.

The multifaceted needs of mobile populations, as well as the role migrants could play in the recovery, should be assessed and included in the Government of Ukraine (GoU) strategy and action plans for preparedness, response and recovery for future crises. Furthermore, the opportunity to establish a strong and effective coordination mechanism to facilitate the cooperation of ministries and state agencies responsible for implementing migration management policy and legislative provisions, should be sized, to ensure that COVID-19 impact on migrants is not overlooked.



MIGRATION IN UKRAINE

- Experts estimate that there are approximately three million Ukrainian migrant workers abroad at any given time.
- Ukrainians were the highest represented nationality amongst foreign migrants who received employment-related EU-28 residency permits. Poland was the primary country of destination for Ukrainians followed by the Czech Republic, Italy and the Baltic states.
- Ukraine is the largest recipient of remittances in the region. The value of remittances transferred by migrant workers to Ukraine has increased by 86 per cent in the past five years reaching **USD 15.8 billion in 2019** (*World Bank*).
- Annually, IOM Ukraine identifies and assists more than **1,000 victims of trafficking of Ukrainian origin (1,345 victims in 2019; 68% male, 32% female)** who suffered from forced labour and sexual exploitation.



COVID-19 IMPACT ON MIGRANTS AND MOBILE POPULATIONS IN UKRAINE

- According to estimations by the National Bank of Ukraine (NBU), **10 per cent of labour migrants returned to Ukraine and 10 per cent of seasonal migrant workers stayed home unable to leave because of the travel restrictions.**¹
- NBU forecasts that the impact of COVID-19 on remittances could see a **20% decrease on total value figures compared to last year.** The volume of remittances in the second quarter is expected to decrease by 61 per cent compared to the same period of 2019.
- The Polish Association of Construction Employers reported that at the end of March 2020, **20 per cent of Ukrainian workers employed in construction left Poland.**
- Between March–April 2020, the IOM-supported **National Toll-Free Counter-Trafficking and Migrant Advice Hotline received more than 2,000 COVID-19 related calls from migrants and their families.**
- According to the data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), almost **17,000 Ukrainians worldwide have registered for the MFA's Protection Programme.**

¹ https://bank.gov.ua/admin_uploads/article/IR_2020-Q2.pdf?v=4



ADVOCACY MESSAGES AND REQUIRED INTERVENTIONS

To mitigate the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ukraine, the following migration and human mobility policy measures would aid in strengthening protection for Ukrainian citizens abroad and foreign citizens in Ukraine and increase opportunities for their socioeconomic integration in local communities.

OVERALL COORDINATION:

Establishing a strong and effective inter-agency coordination mechanism of all relevant government stakeholders, and strengthening as necessary with the inclusion of expert international and civil society organizations to ensure the safety and prosperity of migrants.

DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND SHARING:

Government and migration stakeholders should continue to collect, analyse and share relevant data on the mobility of migrant workers during COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, and impact of mobility as to be able to develop evidence-based policy and programmatic response.



RETURN MIGRATION

The COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent business closures and economic slowdown are likely to cause a surge of migrant workers returning to Ukraine. This unexpected return will further exacerbate the far-reaching socioeconomic impact of the pandemic at a household, local and national economic level. Returning migrants will have to look for new sources of income in a domestic economy that is shrinking as a result of COVID-19. In early April 2020, the State Employment Service of Ukraine declared that an average of 7,000 people a day were registered as unemployed while almost no new vacancies were appearing on the labour market. Under these circumstances, the process of job seeking among returnees could be difficult, especially for those whose skills are not necessarily matching the demand of the domestic labour market.



ADVOCACY MESSAGES

- ✓ Migrants, remittance-reliant households and communities are particularly vulnerable to the economic impacts of the pandemic, therefore their needs should be addressed and included in national COVID-19 response and economic recovery planning.
- ✓ Returning migrants can play an important role in the COVID-19 response and economic recovery, contributing their skills, knowledge, expertise, as well as financial resources.



REQUIRED INTERVENTIONS

- ✓ Profile of returning migrants skill sets and labour market needs in communities of return.
- ✓ Facilitate skills and qualification recognition as well as skills upgrading through (vocational) education and training.
- ✓ Job-matching services (referrals, trainings, requalification) targeted at returning migrants and their communities.
- ✓ Programmes/mechanisms to leverage migrants' savings productively upon return to enhance income-generating opportunities (including grant matching programmes).
- ✓ Small-scale funding for infrastructure/community development projects targeting returned migrants' skills. Geographical targeting to be orientated by areas of the highest return to offset the additional strain on limited resources and employment opportunities.



CIRCULAR MIGRATION

Migrants are the backbone of the Ukrainian economy – remittances sent by migrant workers to Ukraine amount to more than 10 per cent of GDP. Families of migrant workers in Ukraine rely on money sent home to provide for their basic needs including food, rent, education and health care. As a result, COVID-19 and related mobility restrictions have put households whose main income source is remittances at risk. A reduction in remittances can have major ripple effects across entire local economies and communities, resulting in a decrease in productive investment, consumer spending and access to education and health services.² As travel restrictions stay in place, governments are exploring possibilities to admit essential migrant workers by creating exemptions to address the gaps that have emerged in areas reliant on seasonal labour. Ukraine, as a primary migrant worker sending country, is being approached by foreign governments to facilitate the movement of seasonal workers to meet the needs of their labour markets. The GoU has been cautious in its approach to balance the needs of its citizens who seek work abroad and the corresponding public health considerations of global travel.



ADVOCACY MESSAGES

- ✓ Seasonal labour migration in Ukraine is and has always been vital for poverty reduction, significantly contributing to the national economy. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, labour migration can create new livelihood and income opportunities for Ukrainian citizens, alleviating pressure on the domestic labour market.
- ✓ The speed at which COVID-19 has spread globally will likely transform migration, with countries of destination likely to introduce additional measures safeguarding work. In this changing context, additional effort will be required from sending countries to ensure labour migrants' safety. Ukrainian migrant workers safety in accessing foreign labour markets must be ensured from the moment of recruitment until they return home. This can be achieved through essential health assessments and clearly defined requirements from destination countries and employers engaging seasonal migrant workers.
- ✓ The COVID-19 pandemic has generated unprecedented attention to the issues of Ukrainian migrant workers who have been making significant contributions to the country's economy over the years. However, migrant workers have remained unprotected and to a certain extent invisible to the public and the state eye. This presents an opportunity to strengthen the framework for labour migration management in Ukraine that considers the interest of all relevant parties to both maximize benefits of well-organized seasonal migration and to protect Ukrainian migrants and their rights throughout the migration cycle.
- ✓ Migrants' needs during the migration cycle should be addressed and included in the national COVID-19 response and economic recovery planning.



REQUIRED INTERVENTIONS

- ✓ Support with development and operationalization of a national circular migration framework, including bilateral and multilateral cooperation with destination countries.
- ✓ Pre-departure health assessments and medical certification of seasonal migrant workers.
- ✓ Pre-departure and cultural orientation to facilitate quick adaptation in the destination country.
- ✓ Postarrival support in the countries of destination.
- ✓ Setting in place return and postarrival/reintegration support in Ukraine.



PROTECTION OF AND ASSISTANCE TO UKRAINIAN CITIZENS STRANDED ABROAD

Due to the mobility restrictions introduced by most countries, thousands of Ukrainian migrants and travellers remain stranded abroad and with no means to return home. As countries prolong lockdowns, the needs of Ukrainians abroad will increase. This can lead to heightened vulnerability forcing them to resort to negative coping strategies and increasing their risk of exploitation and/or abuse.



ADVOCACY MESSAGES

- ✓ Border closures, curfews and internal lockdowns have had wide-ranging implications for Ukrainian mobile populations, leaving many unable to return to Ukraine. Systems of support should be created and reinforced to ensure that needs and vulnerabilities of migrants stranded abroad are assessed and addressed.



REQUIRED INTERVENTIONS

- ✓ Establish a national fund to assist vulnerable migrants stranded abroad on a case-by-case basis. IOM's established procedures of support including migrant screening, case budgeting and planning and service delivery can be leveraged.
- ✓ Monitor developments, identify and advocate for opportunities to protect and assist vulnerable migrants — including assisted voluntary return and reintegration when travel restrictions are lifted.



TRAFFICKING AND EXPLOITATION

In crisis situations migrants are often at risk of increased vulnerability to exploitative practices, including human trafficking. Ukrainian migrant workers who are employed in low-skilled or informal sectors are prone to the risks of exploitation as evidenced by the high numbers of Ukrainian victims of trafficking who were identified before the pandemic. With the inevitable loss of employment due to COVID-19, people previously less at risk of trafficking may become more vulnerable as a result of unemployment due to the pandemic while vulnerabilities of persons already at risk of trafficking may be further increased.

Drawing parallels from IOM's experience of past crises in Ukraine, specifically the financial crisis of 2008–2009 and the impact of the armed conflict and economic instability in Ukraine in 2014, evidence shows a significant increase in vulnerabilities and the consequent increase in the number of identified victims of human trafficking.



ADVOCACY MESSAGES

- ✓ All migrants, in regular, irregular and exploitative labour practices, should have access to health information, testing, treatment and care.
- ✓ Crisis situations exacerbate people's vulnerabilities to trafficking and exploitation. It is essential that anti-trafficking work, particularly preventative measures, commences immediately to build resilience and protect vulnerable populations.

- ✓ Existing national mechanisms of referral and response should be scaled up to offer needed medical and socioeconomic assistance to vulnerable migrants.
- ✓ Enhance existing legislation to effectively safeguard the rights of victims of trafficking, inter alia, prioritizing the introduction of a recovery and reflection period for foreigners or stateless persons who apply for the status of a victim of trafficking in Ukraine.



REQUIRED INTERVENTIONS

- ✓ Targeted prevention activities at the community level, enabling access to reliable information and building resilience of the at-risk population.

- ✓ Reintegration services (including medical, psychosocial, legal and income-generating, as well as family support) for vulnerable migrants, including victims of trafficking, violence and abuse.

✓ Economic empowerment – training on business establishment/running and grants for vulnerable migrants (victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse) to start their own micro-enterprises.

✓ Research focusing on the effects of the pandemic on the increased vulnerability of migrants to violence, abuse and exploitation. Study the link between human trafficking and the crisis triggered by COVID-19, to define the problem beyond anecdotal evidence and build quality responses.



SOCIAL COHESION

Social media monitoring confirms that migrants are frequently blamed for “bringing” COVID-19 to Ukraine. Despite this trend, there is no clear strategy to reverse the negative narrative about returnees in the communities of return and no clear migration communication strategy in place. When the GoU announced the closure of borders, the message provoked panic, and thousands of Ukrainians rushed from Poland to Ukraine, which led to crowds at the border crossing points and further exacerbated public health risks. Later in April, the issue of seasonal migrant workers unable to leave Ukraine³ because of COVID-19 travel restrictions showed that contradictory messaging from different state agencies provoked emotional distress that further fueled discussions in traditional and social media.



ADVOCACY MESSAGES

- ✓ Information campaigns and community programmes aimed at addressing stigma attached to returnees and promoting interaction between returnees and the broader community are needed to foster social cohesion and facilitate the social and economic reintegration of returnees into their communities.
- ✓ Media and communication campaigns and community programmes that integrate behavioural insights supporting intergroup activities can address stigmatization and promote social reintegration of returning migrants.
- ✓ The information on essential services (COVID-19, economic recovery, travel restrictions and other) shall be made accessible to all categories of migrants and mobile populations, available in a language they understand.



REQUIRED INTERVENTIONS

- ✓ Development and operationalisation of the communication strategy and community-based programmes enhancing social cohesion and integration to promote inclusion and dialogue.
- ✓ Communication with communities to prevent stigmatization of returned migrants.
- ✓ Identification of effective channels to communicate with migrants (returnees as well as immigrants) delivering accurate information about COVID-19 and identifying migrants’ needs and capacities.
- ✓ Trainings for migrants and consequent engagement of opinion leaders to communicate with mobile populations and communities.



FOREIGNERS IN UKRAINE

Foreigners, regardless of their status, are particularly affected by COVID-19 as they are unable to access national social safety nets to the same extent and based on the same conditions as citizens. It is essential for the Government of Ukraine to adhere to the principle of “leaving no one behind”⁴ when addressing the impact of COVID-19. Specifically, this is to ensure that the dignity of the individual is fundamental and that the crisis response actions are taken for all people in the society regardless of their status. Furthermore, actions taken by the government “endeavour to first reach those who are furthest behind”⁵. According to the statistics provided by the State Migration Service of Ukraine, 14,200 foreigners obtained permission to migrate to Ukraine, 32,155 persons obtained permits for permanent residence and 76,431 persons obtained temporary residence permits in 2019.⁶ In total, 285,000 foreigners permanently reside in Ukraine. By the end of 2019, approximately 133,000 foreigners, mainly students and migrant workers were recorded as remaining temporarily in Ukraine.⁷

³ Why the Ukrainian Government Is Keeping Its Labor Migrants At Home

⁴ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

⁵ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

⁶ https://dmsu.gov.ua/assets/files/statistic/year/2019_12.pdf

⁷ https://dmsu.gov.ua/assets/files/statistic/year/2019_12.pdf



- ✓ Border closures and the slowdown of the national economy have had a significant impact on the lives of migrants, regardless of their status, in Ukraine. The government should provide support to ensure that the problems faced by migrants are properly addressed.
- ✓ It is essential that all foreigners, regardless of their status, have access to basic services and health care, as well as COVID-19 testing.



REQUIRED INTERVENTIONS

- ✓ Ensure that migrants staying on the territory of Ukraine, regardless of their status, are included in the Government of Ukraine COVID-19 policy responses.
- ✓ Grant access to the public health-care system to all foreigners regardless of their status. Basic health services, COVID-19 testing, outreach activities ensuring that everyone has the necessary information are to be made available for all foreigners regardless of their status.
- ✓ Consider promoting customer-friendly health-care services through addressing the issues that migrants may experience related to language differences and documentation requirements.
- ✓ Ensure that legally residing foreigners are entitled to, and can exercise the same rights and freedoms as citizens of Ukraine (health-care services, tax easing, social benefits) without discrimination or legal repercussions.
- ✓ Support the establishment of full online coverage of services related to documents issued to migrants (resident permit extension, visa extension, work permit extension, etc.).
- ✓ Consider establishing an automatic extension of the validity of all residence permits, work permits and other documents for a fixed term of three to six months period after the end of the quarantine restrictions. This will avoid overloading the State Migration Service of Ukraine with work, as well as providing migrants with legal status, instead of just a non-penalization concession.
- ✓ Fulfil state obligations and grant immigration permits based on the immigration quota set by the Cabinet of Ministers for 2020.
- ✓ Consider the establishment of regularization programmes (migration amnesty) for selected categories of irregular migrants already residing on the territory of Ukraine, as irregular status and need to resort to informal work arrangements often disadvantage migrants in Ukraine and make them susceptible to risks of abuse, human trafficking and exploitation.
- ✓ Consider the establishment of government programmes facilitating prompt verification of medical qualification for migrants in case of the pandemic situation (to be able to work as nursing staff) if education was obtained abroad. The migrants who have verified their medical education could support the Ukrainian health-care system as nursing staff should there be a second wave of the pandemic.
- ✓ Establish efficient assistance for migrants wishing to return including assisted voluntary return when travel restrictions are lifted. Support the integration of those migrants who decide to stay in Ukraine with an efficient policy response.
- ✓ Provide all necessary measures to ensure the Migrant Accommodation Centres, and Temporary Holding Facilities are supplied with personal protective equipment, disinfection equipment and sanitizers. All staff at these facilities are to be properly trained and regular testing for the staff and migrants is to be ensured. The waste management system is to respond to the hygiene requirements in case of a pandemic.
- ✓ Consider enhancing data collecting methodologies to obtain actual inter-agency harmonized statistical information that can be used for addressing COVID-19 pandemic impact and for future governmental and social science needs.