

**Erasmus
University
Rotterdam**



Between Stability and Uncertainty: How Economic Integration in Germany Shapes Return and Onward Migration Intentions of Ukrainian Refugees under the Temporary Protection Directive

Abstract

This thesis explores how economic integration in Germany affects the return and onward migration plans of Ukrainian refugees under the EU's Temporary Protection Directive. It is based on ten semi-structured interviews with refugees living in Germany. The study focuses on how job access, recognition of qualifications, and income security influence their decisions. Although many participants appreciated the stability of formal work, they also reported underemployment and loss of professional identity. Family responsibilities, legal uncertainty, and strong emotional ties to Ukraine also played a role in their future plans. The thesis uses several theories – such as the Aspirations-Capabilities Framework, the New Economics of Labor Migration, Integration Theory, Transnationalism, and Return Preparedness – to understand how personal goals, family needs, and legal status all shape refugee decision-making. The findings suggest that refugee policies should not focus only on labor market access but also support long-term integration and provide more legal certainty.

Keywords: economic integration, onward migration, return migration, Temporary Protection Directive, Ukrainian refugees

Zahra Abbaszade (696698)

Erasmus School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Erasmus University Rotterdam

FSWS576: Master's Thesis

Dr. Wybren Nooitegedagt

June 22, 2025

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Context

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 resulted in the greatest forced relocation in Europe since World War II, with more than 8 million Ukrainians seeking safety throughout the continent. As of early 2023, more than 4.8 million people had registered under the EU's Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) (European Commission, 2023; UNHCR, 2023; Adema et al. 2024), which granted them rapid legal residency, labor market access, and social benefits. Germany has approximately 1 million Ukrainian refugees, making it a key country to investigate the impacts of economic integration on long-term migration choices (BAMF, 2023). As refugees settle into host countries, many begin to reconsider whether they will return to Ukraine, stay in Germany, or migrate onward to another EU country. This study explores how economic integration under the TPD shapes Ukrainian refugees' decision about whether to return, stay, or move onward. Understanding this dynamic is essential for both refugee policy and labor market planning in host and origin countries, as the TPD will be in action until 4 March 2027 (at least).

The decisions refugees make about whether to return, stay, or move onward carry major implications not only for their personal futures but also for host country integration systems and the recovery prospects of origin countries. In Germany, long-term settlement for refugees affects labor market planning, social policy, and housing. Meanwhile, for Ukraine and the broader EU, these movements shape demographic recovery, skills availability, and the future design of temporary protection policies in EU, particularly regarding whether temporary frameworks should transition into more permanent residency options.

Economic integration is a key factor influencing refugees' decisions to return to their country of origin or migrate onward (de Haas & Fokkema, 2011; OECD, 2023). Understanding these intentions is crucial for host countries' long-term planning and for designing effective integration policies. Initially, many Ukrainian refugees expressed a desire to return once Ukraine became safe (UNHCR, 2023; Centre for Economic Strategy, 2025). However, as economic integration advanced – offering greater financial security and employment in Germany – return intentions declined, with some refugees now considering permanent settlement or onward migration within the EU (Brücker et al., 2023; Adema et al., 2024). This paper addresses the gap in understanding how economic factors shape return and onward migration intentions among displaced Ukrainians. The choice for onward migration within the EU is enabled by several factors. A key element is the ease of intra-EU mobility under the Temporary Protection Directive.

Additionally, decisions are influenced by the presence of established Ukrainian diaspora networks and perceived better economic opportunities or family reunification possibilities elsewhere in Europe. (Ahrens et al., 2016) Moreover, economic stability, work possibilities, financial security, and skills recognition all have a substantial impact on these choices, especially as many refugees reassess their options based on how effectively they can integrate in the host country (Migration Observatory, 2024; Brücker et al., 2023).

However, challenges to economic integration, such as language barriers and bureaucratic obstacles in credential recognition, can directly shape refugees' migration intentions. When refugees are unable to fully use their professional qualifications and face labor market segmentation, they often experience professional deskilling. This frustration with downward mobility not only hampers integration but can also reinforce the desire to return to Ukraine or move onward in search of better job matches and personal fulfillment (Piore, 1979).

This research project investigates Ukrainian refugees' views in Germany around how economic integration influences their return and future migration intentions under the TPD. Rather than testing hypotheses, I aim to develop a deeper understanding of how refugees think about and evaluate their economic integration activities, such as employment, income protection, and skill utilization, and how these affect their ambitions and self-assessed capacity. I intend to demonstrate how structural restrictions, available opportunities, and personal preferences interact to determine refugees' future movement options by approaching the issue inductively. This goal is supported by a qualitative, inductive methodology that involves in-depth interviews, allowing free exploration of the lived experience and decision-making of this under-researched population.

Several theoretical models help explain migration decisions. Some, such as the Push-Pull Theory (Lee, 1966) and the New Economics of Labor Migration (Stark & Bloom, 1985), emphasize economic factors as major drivers - particularly for voluntary economic migrants. However, these models are limited in explaining forced migration, where other elements such as legal status uncertainty and emotional attachments also play key roles (Cassarino, 2004; de Haas, 2021).

To better understand the migration decisions of Ukrainian refugees under the TPD, this study employs a multi-theoretical framework that complement each other. The Aspirations-Capabilities Framework (de Haas, 2021) accounts for the interaction between what individuals aspire to and what they can do. Integration Theory (Ager & Strang, 2008) connects the level of economic and social integration to the likelihood of return. Meanwhile, Transnationalism (Levitt

& Glick Schiller, 2004) and Return Migration Theory (Cassarino, 2004) offer insights into how migrants maintain cross-border ties and evaluate reintegration options in their country of origin.

By combining these perspectives, this study develops a multi-dimensional tool to analyze how economic integration in Germany influences both return and onward migration intentions. This theoretical approach is especially relevant in contexts marked by legal uncertainty and overlapping economic, social, and emotional factors.

So, the theories mentioned above were selected because they can be used to represent both structural and individual dimensions of migration under temporary protection. Although traditional theories of migration are useful, they tend to assume long-term migration or voluntary mobility, which does not capture the uncertainty and legal exposure that Ukrainian refugees face. By combining paradigms interested in economic choice (NELM), sense of belonging to social groups (integration theory), transnational connectedness, and subjective constraints and desires (aspirations - capabilities), this research offers a more nuanced and expansive account of these extremely intricate decision-making issues among this population. These frameworks align with qualitative, exploratory approach that prioritizes understanding over prediction.

Economic integration significantly influences long-term residence decisions, as stable employment, higher income, and successful skill recognition strongly correlate with refugees' decisions to permanently settle in host countries (de Haas & Fokkema, 2011). Additionally, for those considering onward migration, understanding how labor mobility between EU states influences these decisions is crucial. Because it highlights how intra-European policy differences, labor market conditions, diaspora networks and integration outcomes influence refugees' secondary migration decisions. This can help European policymakers coordinate integration strategies more effectively across member states (Ahrens et al., 2016).

Return intentions have crucial implications not only for host countries, but also for Ukraine. Given that approximately 72% of Ukrainian refugees in Germany hold university degrees, the loss of such highly skilled individuals permanently would cause a significant “brain drain”, hampering postwar rebuilding in Ukraine. (Adema et al., 2024. If return migration happens, it is important for Ukrainian and German governments to develop strategies, ensuring returnees are reintegrated into the labor market with adequate support and economic opportunities.

At the EU level, this study's results may influence temporary protection measures. The TPD was intended as an emergency response; but, if displacement continues, the EU must decide whether to extend protection, provide permanent residence option, or promote return programs

(European Commission, 2023). Understanding the long-term consequences of economic integration on both return and onward migratory intentions is crucial for determining future refugee strategies in Europe.

1.2. Literature Review and Research Gap

While recent research looks at Ukrainian refugee labor market engagement (Brücker et al., 2023; Adema et al., 2024), there is no examination of how economic integration affects return intentions and onward migration. This gap is important for expanding how we understand migration decisions under temporary protection.

Previous studies on forced migration and economic integration have focused on long-term refugee populations rather than displaced people under temporary protection cases. The TPD creates unique circumstances by providing refugees with immediate labor market access but uncertain long-term residency, which requires a distinct theoretical approach.

Most existing migration theories were developed with either long-term settlement or voluntary mobility in mind. As a result, they often overlook how temporary legal status shapes economic integration and its influence on future migration plans. They often assume legal stability, clear settlement intentions, and access to integration structures over time.

However, refugees under temporary protection experience legal uncertainty, institutional ambiguity and general uncertainty about their future, conditions that complicate the typical assumptions of both economic and transnational migration theories. These gaps matter because policy frameworks like TPD are likely to become more common in future displacement crises, yet the theoretical tools to understand refugee decision-making under such frameworks remain underdeveloped.

This research applies Push-Pull theory, NELM, integration theory, transnationalism, and the Aspirations-Capabilities framework to examine these dynamics in Ukrainian refugee context, addressing gaps in the literature on migration decision-making under temporary protection programs. While I do not aim to establish a causal relationship, exploring how refugees describe the link between their economic situation and their migration intentions may help policymakers design more targeted employment programs.

Understanding onward migration factors within the EU enables more effective coordination across countries, ensuring that refugees successfully integrate, wherever they choose to settle. Although this is not a longitudinal study, capturing refugees' views at this moment still

offers important insight into how temporary protection influences their thinking and future planning.

1.3. Research question and sub-questions

This research intends to explain how economic integration influences the return and onward migration intentions of Ukrainian refugees in Germany who are subject to the EU's TPD.

Main Research Question: "How does economic integration shape the return and onward migration intentions of Ukrainian refugees under the EU's TPD in Germany?"

Sub-questions:

1. What specific elements of economic integration (employment status, income security, skills recognition) most strongly influence Ukrainian refugees' return and onward migration intentions?
2. How does labor market integration influence their choice to return, remain, or migrate to another country?
3. How do refugees value their economic opportunities in Germany compared to Ukraine and other EU countries, and how does it shape their migration intentions?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Economic Integration and Decision-Making

Economic integration is widely recognized as an important factor shaping refugees' return and future migration intentions. In the literature, this concept generally includes elements such as access to employment, income security, recognition of qualifications and skills, and the ability to achieve financial self-sufficiency in the host country (Ager & Strang, 2008; OECD, 2023).

For Ukrainian refugees under the TPD, these aspects of integration may be more accessible due to their legal right to work in EU member states. However, existing research shows that refugees' experiences in the labor market often vary widely, and these experiences can significantly influence their long-term career paths and decisions regarding settlement or return (Arthur et al., 2023).

Push-Pull Theory (Lee, 1966) offers a foundational framework for understanding structural factors that influence migration decisions. It is particularly useful for contextualizing the initial displacement of Ukrainian refugees, as it distinguishes between "push" factors (e.g., war and insecurity in Ukraine) and "pull" factors (e.g., safety and legal protection in Germany). This theory

helps situate the broader geopolitical and structural conditions under which forced migration occurs. In the case of Ukrainian refugees, the open legal framework of the TPD functioned as probably the most important “pull” factor, while the free access to the labor market and social support systems further shaped their potential for longer-term settlement. Although Push-Pull Theory is limited in capturing the full complexity of forced migration, it remains a relevant entry point for understanding the structural context of refugee movements.

To analyze longer-term migration decisions beyond the initial displacement, the New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM) offers a useful ‘tool’ by looking at migration as a household strategy for income diversification and risk mitigation (Stark & Bloom, 1985). While the initial decision of Ukrainian refugees to leave was clearly driven by the war and the urgent need for protection, longer-term intentions (such as return or onward migration) may increasingly reflect economic considerations. Many Ukrainian refugees in Germany maintain close ties with relatives in Ukraine, and for some, migration may function as a way to support those left behind or prepare for post-war reconstruction and reunification. Within the limited timeframe offered by the TPD, certain individuals seek to achieve specific economic goals (for example, securing income, building savings, or investing in education, etc.). Although they are still legally refugees, over time some of their decisions may start to look similar to those of economic migrants.

To bring the role of individual agency, the Aspirations-Capabilities Framework (de Haas, 2021) outlines how migration decisions are determined not just by structural push and pull, but by aspirations and the perceived capability to fulfill the aspirations of the individuals. For instance, a refugee who desires to stay in Germany might not have the capacity due to insecure work or housing, but another who desires to return might feel insufficient due to uncertainty over the economy or uncertainty over conditions in Ukraine. This framework valuable for understanding how economic integration not only expresses but also informs migrants' perceived decision: decent work will enable one to stay or continue, while precariousness will strengthen the desire to return-but only where conditions at home permit.

In a context of temporary protection, with no long-term legal security, economic integration takes on symbolic value as well (Beamen, Onder & Onder, 2022). Refugees who can achieve decent and secure work can begin to plan a future in Germany; refugees who are closed off to economic opportunity might be “stuck” and search for alternative choices. Yet not all options are straightforward: certain refugees will desire to go home even when economically integrated, whereas others may have to stay even when they feel excluded (Arias, Ibáñez, & Querubin, 2014).

This study explores how Ukrainian refugees in Germany interpret their economic lives and how these engage with individual and family-focused desires. Each of the theories explain something of these dynamics, but each explains only a portion of the picture. Push-Pull Theory explains structure but not agency. NELM emphasizes family strategy but perhaps overestimates individual want. The Aspirations-Capabilities framework explains structure and agency but requires subtle contextualization. These perspectives are brought up to explore how economic integration shapes one's willingness and ability to go further, stay, or go back.

2.2. Household strategies and Family Influence

Migration is often not an individual decision, but a household strategy aimed at minimizing risks and maximizing income across family members (Stark & Bloom, 1985; Massey et al., 1993). Drawing on these theoretical perspectives, family composition and responsibilities (including martial law-enforced separation of relatives and gendered mobilization) are seen to influence migration plans. Many Ukrainian refugees in Germany, particularly women and children, remain closely tied to spouses, parents, or offspring who stayed in Ukraine. Such relationships affect not only emotional well-being but also long-term return or onward migration decisions (Carling & Collins, 2018).

The NELM sees migration as a household strategy rather than an individual choice. Households may send a relative abroad to earn remittances, insure against risk, or access services when local markets such as labor, credit, and insurance are fractured (Stark & Bloom, 1985). This process is evident among Ukrainian refugees, many of whom continue to send remittances back home, while their intentions to return often revolve around family reunification and future household stability.

Within this framework, a migrant's stay abroad can be understood as a form of short-term household investment. Refugees may work to earn savings or access education and other services with the goal of improving their family's prospects upon eventual return. Thus, family welfare serves as both an incentive to migrate and a central motivation shaping the timing and destination of future mobility.

This household-based reasoning aligns closely with the Aspirations-Capabilities framework, which emphasizes how individual goals, family responsibilities, and role identities within the domestic unit influence migration decisions. For example, a mother may wish to return but delay doing so until her child finishes school or a spouse can reunite with her. In these cases,

family needs outweigh personal desires, making return conditional on multiple factors (de Haas, 2021). Moreover, gender and caregiving roles further shape these decisions: women may postpone return due to children's schooling or healthcare access, while men may feel pressure to return for family or reconstruction purposes (Kuschminder, 2017). Some refugees also choose onward migration to countries where they have existing family networks, seeking better social support or economic opportunities (Toma & Castagnone, 2015).

In this study, the household is treated as an active decision-making unit. Individual-level migration theories must be expanded to account for how return and onward migration projects are relational and negotiated, especially in contexts of temporary protection and displacement. NELM offers a structural account, while the Aspirations-Capabilities framework highlights how family-driven aspirations and capacities develop amid separation, uncertainty, and displacement. Together, these perspectives provide a nuanced understanding of how family dynamics shape migration intentions under temporary protection.

2.3. Transnationalism & Emotional Pull of Home

Even with physical displacement, many Ukrainian refugees in Germany remain emotionally, culturally, and practically connected to their home country. These transnational connections – such as daily communication with family members in Ukraine, participation in diaspora events, online schooling for children, and remittance sending - are central to understanding how refugees can belong to two worlds at once. Transnationalism theory (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004) is a useful lens for examining this double attachment, emphasizing that migrants live in overlapping social spaces beyond national borders.

Refugees can be economically active and socially integrated in the host country while still feeling a strong sense of obligation, loyalty, or emotional identity to their homeland. For Ukrainian refugees, many identify not as permanent migrants but as temporarily displaced citizens, reflecting an enduring symbolic and emotional connection that profoundly shapes return plans (Faist, 2010; Vertovec, 2009). This connection often includes significant financial flows back to Ukraine, where remittances provide crucial support to families and contribute to the local economy, thereby maintaining a tangible economic link to the country of origin (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Ratha et al., 2011). These transnational connections can intensify the desire to return, even when the economic situation in Germany is more favorable. Refugees may feel obliged to contribute to rebuilding Ukraine, to reunite with family members they had to leave behind, or to go back home

when it will be safe enough to do so (Ghosn et al., 2021). Participation in diaspora initiatives, fundraising for Ukraine, and virtual attendance at homeland events suggest that return is often imagined as both a personal goal and a collective activity.

At the same time, transnational ties could reinforce further migration plans. For example, a refugee whose family members are found in another country may plan to join them by using existing social networks for migrating and restarting. In doing this, transnationalism does not necessarily about return but rather emphasizes the importance of emotional and social networks that shape mobility choices in multiple directions (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004).

This study pays attention to how transnational practices reflect both aspirations to return and the capacity to do so. Also, Cassarino's (2004) ideas about preparedness help to think about how transnational ties support or delay return. The study aim is to show that transnational belonging complicates the idea of migration as one-time decision. Refugees often plan for multiple futures, combining attachment to home with engagement in the host society (Fransen and all, 2020).

2.4. Return Preparedness and Migration Timing

Return migration is often seen as a yes-or-no decision: migrants return, or they do not. However, this binary perspective overlooks the complex realities faced by displaced individuals. Cassarino (2004) argues that return is better understood as a process – one shaped by migrants' access to resources, emotional and social ties, and a sense of preparedness. This approach demonstrates that return decisions are rarely immediate or absolute, but instead develop over time and depend on changing conditions in both host and origin countries. For Ukrainian refugees with temporary protection, return preparedness is uniquely shaped by factors such as the ongoing, active conflict in homeland, the temporary and uncertain legal status provided by TPD, and the strong, often digital, transnational ties that maintain a constant awareness of conditions in Ukraine and family separation. These conditions mean that 'readiness' and 'resources' are not static, but constantly re-evaluated in a context of high legal and personal uncertainty, distinguishing their process from that of refugees under more permanent protection regimes or those fleeing past, concluded conflicts.

Jean-Pierre Cassarino (2004) provides two key concepts to analyze the return migration process: preparedness and resource mobilization. Preparedness includes both the willingness and practical readiness to return - such as emotional preparedness, knowledge about conditions in Ukraine, and a sense of the right timing. Resource mobilization refers to the financial (e.g.,

savings), social (e.g., networks at home), and human capital (e.g., education or skills acquired abroad) needed to ensure a sustainable return. While this framework applies to many refugee groups, it is particularly relevant for Ukrainian refugees under the TPD, whose legal stay is explicitly temporary. For them, return is not only a possible future but often a planned objective, shaped by both symbolic attachments to Ukraine and concrete economic and social conditions in Germany.

In addition, readiness to return is not merely an individual matter; it is also shaped by broader policy, social, and legal contexts (Cassarino, 2004). While such external influences are common across refugee populations, the case of Ukrainian refugees under the TPD involves a unique legal and temporal structure. The TPD grants immediate but temporary residence and labour rights without requiring an asylum claim, creating a legal environment where return is not only anticipated but structurally built into the framework. Combined with the highly visible and rapidly changing conditions in Ukraine, this produces a particularly fluid and contingent planning horizon. Refugees weigh return options not only based on personal readiness but also in response to EU-wide policy extensions, reconstruction developments, and family reunification prospects. Cassarino's model is useful here because it highlights how internal motivations and external conditions jointly shape return readiness (especially in legal contexts explicitly designed to be temporary, as is the case with TPD).

The study explores return preparedness and signs, such as saving behavior, ongoing interaction with the network in Ukraine, knowledge of reconstruction, emotional preparedness, and perceived threat. This allows to move from supposing that intentions and action are identical and rather investigating whether refugees would feel prepared and ready to make return plans initiated. Cyclical migration can also be considered, the possibility that some will attempt return and re-migrate if reintegration proves too challenging an activity. Cassarino's model helps to frame these movements not as failed returns, but as a part of a complex, iterative migration process.

2.5. Integration in Host Country and Future Orientation

Integration experiences are of greatest significance in deciding whether refugees are able to envision a future within the host country, aspire to return, or consider onward migration. Economic participation, acquiring local language skills, access to housing and education, and social inclusion all contribute to a refugee's sense of stability and belonging. For Ukrainian

refugees in Germany under the TPD, these integration areas exist but are not necessarily sustained or guaranteed.

The paper adopts Ager and Strang's (2008) integration model, which outlines the most significant aspects of refugee integration: "markers and means" (employment, education, health, and accommodation), "social connections" (bonds, bridges, and links), "facilitators" (language and safety), and a "foundation" of law rights. This framework allows me not only to consider whether refugees are present in Germany, but the extent to which they are active in society. For instance, a refugee who obtains a secure employment, accommodation, German language proficiency, and social networks beyond the Ukrainian community might begin to regard Germany as a long-term option. A marginalized, underemployed, or socially isolated refugee, on the other hand, might remain ambivalent about staying.

These integration outcomes interact with both capacities and aspirations directly. Successful integration can expand a refugee's capacities to remain, settle, or even proceed to other places with greater credentials and assets. It can also re-shape aspirations: over time, individuals can reassess their goals based on how much they feel they belong in the host community. For example, a refugee who initially intended to return might, after two years of successful employment and positive school experiences for his/her children, begin to imagine a future in Germany (van Tubergen et al., 2024). Others, described as negative integration experiences, such as deskilling, insecure living, or administrative exclusion can reinforce return or onward movement intentions, even where legal status allows them to stay.

Integration is not always a matter of individual initiative, however (de Haas & Fokkema, 2011). Under TPD's premise that protection is temporary, there may be limits on the investment of host institutions in long-term integration and the incentive of refugees to integrate fully. This uncertainty in turn hampers the sustainability of successful integration initiatives, their proper coordination, as well as the will to conceive of long-term integration strategies and policies (Georgia Migrant Policy Group, 2025, p. 3).

Some will delay learning German or avoid formal labor markets if they will be returning shortly. Others get frustrated when temporary protection does not translate into stable opportunities, so they look for other onward migration opportunities to countries that offer more stable alternatives (van Tubergen et al., 2024).

Through interviews, refugees describe their integration experiences and how these shape their migration plans. Ager and Strang's framework is used to trace how lived experiences connect

to imagined futures. This helps to understand how integration is not just a background condition, but an active factor in shaping return and onward migration intentions.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study employs a qualitative, exploratory research approach to investigate how economic integration in Germany affects Ukrainian Refugees' return and onward migration intentions under the TPD. This qualitative design allowed me to explore participants' decision-making processes and complicated migratory circumstances. This approach is particularly suitable for capturing comprehensive narratives that reflect refugees' perspectives on economic integration, labor market experiences and return or onward migration concerns. (Brücker et al., 2023).

As the research question has an exploratory character, I used semi-structured in-depth interviews. This method enabled me to study not only the objective employment situation of the Ukrainian displaced persons in Germany, but also - and most importantly - their subjective experience, perceptions, and expectations towards the future. This technique allows for the comprehension of complexity of individual lives, motivations, and coping strategies, which are impossible to fully analyze by quantitative methods alone. Open-ended questions were designed to explore participants' sense of belonging, identity change and contemplation of potential return or further migration.

A semi-structured interview style is the best option because it ensures consistency across major themes - such as job circumstances, social integration, and return preparedness - while enabling respondents to elaborate on their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This method allows for follow-up questions, exposing hidden reasons and complex opinions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Robinson, 2014).

This qualitative method is particularly useful in studying decision-making choices (return vs. integration vs. onward migration) since decisions are themselves likely to be emotional and derived from a wide range of individual and contextual factors in addition to measurable variables.

I planned to conduct approximately ten in-depth interviews, consistent with methodological standards in qualitative research, which prioritize depth of insight over breadth. The principle of data saturation (the point at which no new themes emerge) typically occurs within 8 to 12 interviews when working with relatively homogenous populations (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Therefore, this sample size was deemed sufficient to

generate rich, nuanced data on Ukrainian refugees' experiences of economic integration and their return and onward migration intentions.

The research focuses on Ukrainian refugees staying in Germany under TPD. The following criteria was followed: Ukrainian nationality and under TPD in Germany, age 18 and some experience with the German labor market, whether employed, job-seeking or in training programs.

To reach out to participants, I collaborated with a Ukrainian academic residing in Germany who helped establishing connection professional and community networks.

While this recruitment method aligns with most practices for selecting participants in qualitative research (Robinson, 2014), it also introduces potential selection bias, as participants from such networks may differ from those with less social connectivity or institutional access. I acknowledge this limitation in the sampling strategy.

3.2. Data collection

I conducted semi-structured interviews lasting 30-60 minutes. I used the online platform, Zoom, to create access for participants from Germany. The interviews were recorded consensually and manually transcribed for analysis. Reflecting on respondents' preferences, I presented them the option of conducting the interviews either in English or Russian. While Ukrainian is the official language of Ukraine, Russian remains widely spoken, especially among refugees from eastern Ukraine. As a results, I obtained 4 interviews in English and 6 in Russian. Later, those transcriptions were uploaded to Atlas.ti, a program used for qualitative data coding and thematic analysis. This software allowed me to observe patterns, concepts, and relationships relevant to the research.

3.3. Data Analysis

After completing the interviews, I worked on cleaning up the transcriptions and making sure they were ready for the next steps. I personally translated the Russian interviews into English and manually ensured their accuracy. Using Atlas.ti as my only tool, I coded each transcript line by line, identifying recurring patterns, tensions and moments that stood out to me as meaningful. In this context, I use the word "tensions" to describe the participants' internal or situational conflicts, such as desire to go home but inability to do so or feeling safe in Germany while feeling emotionally displaced. After this process, I organized the initial codes into broader, more interpretive themes. I categorized the findings around 5 key themes that reflect both realities of

participants' lives and the concepts outlined in my theoretical framework: (1) economic integration and labor market experience, (2) skill recognition and underemployment, (3) family strategies and household considerations, (4) future orientation and legal uncertainty, and (5) return, onward migration and transnational ties. To support this process, I wrote analytical memos for each theme, which is a feature in Atlas.ti that helped me to read interviews and make those notes simultaneously. These memos helped me reflect on the connections between participants' narratives and the theoretical concepts I was working with. They also allowed me to capture contradictions and nuances that simple coding might miss. The combination of systematic coding and critical reflection allowed me to trace both the patterns and tensions that shape migration intentions under temporary protection.

3.4. Ethical considerations

Participants received an information sheet and consent form outlining the study's purpose. Since I was working with a vulnerable population, ethical sensitivity was one of my priorities. The overwhelming majority of respondents from Ukraine are exposed to trauma related to war, displacement, and loss.

At the beginning of each interview, I clearly explained that the participants can skip any questions they do not feel comfortable answering. All responses were anonymized and handled under complete confidentiality. My goal here was to learn about their own experiences without pressure or judgment.

I have carefully designed the interview guide to avoid direct or emotionally charged questions, such as war experience, discrimination or mental health. Instead, I use open and inviting language that allows participants to share what they feel comfortable sharing. I have included an interview guide as an appendix, where the interview questions are clearly shown.

I also asked them to complete a short demographic questionnaire (age, education, employment status), and I clearly stated that I will not collect any personally identifiable data. Interviews were stored on a password-protected device that only I can access.

4. Data Analyses and Results

This section presents the results of my thematic analysis of ten in-depth interviews conducted with Ukrainian refugees currently living in Germany. My aim was to explore how their

experiences with economic integration under Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) influence their intentions to return to Ukraine, remain in Germany, or move onward to another EU country.

4.1. Economic Integration, Labor Market Experiences, Skill Recognition and Underemployment

One of the most consistently discussed topics in the interviews was employment. Participants often spoke with appreciation about the structure and stability of the German labor market. Nine out of ten participants described Germany's labor market as more structured and stable than in Ukraine, especially when it came to formal contracts, fixed working hours and access to social protections.

Participant 4, a former teacher who is currently working as a nursing assistant, shared their sentiment:

“Here, I work exactly 39 hours per week with clear shift schedules. In Germany, everything is strictly regulated - break times, safety protocols, uniform requirements...In Ukraine, we had more flexibility but fewer resources and support.”

This appreciation for structure and employee was a recurring point across the interviews, with 4 respondents (Participants 2, 4, 6, and 8) mentioning that overtime work was properly compensated and there was a “respect for employees’ rights and work-life balance.” However, this structure was sometimes perceived as inflexible. For instance, Participant 9 noted that arranging personal time for matters like a doctor’s appointment was easier in Ukraine, whereas in Germany, “everything needs to be planned well in advance.”

Although all participants were employed, their current positions did not fully reflect their education or past professional roles. There was a profound sense of professional dissatisfaction that emerged as a central tension. The most common challenges that participants mentioned were language proficiency and non-recognition of Ukrainian credentials.

Eight of the ten participants described experiencing significant deskilling or underemployment, working in positions that did not utilize their education or prior extensive professional experience.

At least eight of the ten participants expressed significant underemployment or deskilling. This includes a legal researcher (P1) using fewer skills, a teacher (P2) feeling her potential isn't utilized, an administrative assistant (P3) feeling overqualified, a literature teacher (P4) working as a nursing assistant and feeling her "intellectual capabilities are underutilized", a logistics

manager (P6) whose expertise is "not being utilized", a seamstress (P7) working in a factory whose talents are "wasted", an engineer (P8) whose "creative engineering skills and deep technical knowledge are rarely utilized", and a sales manager (P9) for whom the new work is a "significant step backward".

This was not a minor issue, but a core part of daily reality for several participants. Five interviewees (Participants 3, 5, 7, 8, and 10) explicitly described a difficult trade-off between economic security and their former professional identity. What came through clearly was a recurring tension: while jobs in Germany offered safety and stable income, they often came at the cost of working below one's qualifications. Participant 8, an engineer with 25 years of experience, articulated this feeling of wasted potential:

"In Ukraine, I designed electrical systems and supervised implementation. I used my engineering education fully and made important decisions. Here, I mostly use my technical knowledge to understand documents and explain basic concepts to clients. My creative engineering skills and deep technical knowledge are rarely utilized."

This experience of being overqualified was widespread among respondents. A former literature teacher expressed feeling her "intellectual capabilities are underutilized" and a logistics manager noted their "specific professional expertise not being utilized". For many, this led to a feeling of losing their professional identity. As Participant 7, a highly skilled seamstress now working in a factory, put it: 'I was someone with valuable skills in Ukraine; here, I feel like everyone could do my job.'

4.2. Family Strategies and Economic Decision-Making

All ten participants described their migration decisions as deeply shaped by family roles and obligations. A dominant theme across eight interviews was the prioritization of children's well-being, especially their education and sense of safety, over personal career development. For many, the decision to stay in Germany (despite professional compromises) was made in service of a larger family strategy.

Participant 3 clearly stated this priority:

"My daughter's future is our priority."

Participant 4 elaborated on the tension between personal development and family need:

"Honestly, my job satisfactions was much higher in Ukraine...But I stay because of my son's education and the security here."

Participant 5 described the situation in practical terms:

“We don't know if we will stay, but for now my children are safe, and that's enough.”

This pattern reflects a broader theme of family-first decision-making, where participants saw their own aspirations as secondary to those of their children. The consequences were emotional: feelings of professional loss, identity mismatch, and frustration.

Care responsibilities also extended beyond children. Several participants mentioned elderly parents still in Ukraine, describing emotional and financial obligations that shaped their decisions.

Participant 10 explained:

“I send money to my mother every month... I cannot be there physically to help her, so sending money is one way I can still care for her.”

This transnational caregiving reflects what Fransen et al. (2020) describe as “emotional remittances,” where staying abroad is both a sacrifice and a strategy to maintain family well-being across borders.

Participant 8 described being pulled between different locations and emotional commitments:

“My family pulls me in different directions. My daughter is working here. But my son, daughter-in-law, and grandson are in Ukraine and I miss them terribly.”

These examples highlight a recurring theme: migration decisions were rarely individual. Instead, they were collective strategies negotiated within families.

This reflects the household-centered perspective of the NELM (Stark & Bloom, 1985; Massey et al., 1993), which sees migration as a family-level strategy to maximize security, income, and access to services. Even in contexts of forced displacement, family ties remain a central force in shaping both return and onward migration (Carling & Collins, 2018).

As Kuschminder (2017) argues, gender and caregiving roles also strongly influence return decisions. In this study, several women emphasized their role as mothers or caregivers as a reason for delaying or avoiding return. See Participant 2's comment:

“I want to go back one day, but not until my son finishes school.”

Taken together, these insights affirm that family dynamics (with caregiving roles) are not only personal but profoundly structural, shaping migrants' choices in the present and their visions for the future.

4.3. Future Orientation and Legal Uncertainty

During the interviews, I asked participants about their visions for the future—whether they saw themselves staying in Germany, returning to Ukraine, or moving elsewhere. Many found it difficult to provide a definite answer. This uncertainty was closely tied to their temporary legal status under the TPD, which at the time of the interviews lasted until March 2026 (now 2027). For six of the ten participants, this date acts as a psychological deadline influencing their plans. For example, Participant 1 stated:

“Now it depends mostly on the decision of the German government about the legal situation for Ukrainians in March 2026.”

Several participants (five) described feeling “in limbo,” suspended between two places and uncertain about their belonging. Participant 2 summarized this tension:

“There is always that sense of being in-between; not fully German but gradually becoming less connected to the Ukraine I left.”

This legal precarity affects more than just residence, it shapes emotional well-being and the willingness to invest in the future. Participant 7 explained:

“It is hard to invest in serious german language courses or professional requalification if we might return to Ukraine next year.”

Importantly, participants emphasized that their integration experiences were deeply influenced by this uncertainty. They expressed hesitance to make long-term commitments, such as pursuing citizenship, enrolling children in permanent schooling, or investing heavily in vocational retraining, without clearer legal prospects.

Unlike many other refugee populations who often face constrained mobility, Ukrainian refugees under the TPD have a legal framework allowing work and residence, but its temporariness creates distinct challenges. This temporary status contributes to a sense of conditional belonging and ongoing contingency in life planning.

Regarding future mobility, seven participants indicated that legal uncertainty influenced their openness to onward migration or return. For instance, some considered moving to other countries with more stable legal options or joining family members elsewhere in Europe. Others hoped to return to Ukraine when the situation allowed but felt unprepared to do so currently due to political instability and personal circumstances.

Overall, the interviews suggest that legal uncertainty under the TPD creates a state of suspended agency: participants neither fully root themselves in Germany nor definitively plan their

return or onward movement. This liminal position shapes both their sense of identity and practical decision-making about the future.

4.4. Return, Onward Migration and Transnational Ties

Participants expressed mixed opinions about either returning to Ukraine or moving to another EU country. 7 participants did not completely rule out the possibility of return, but on the condition of safety, functioning infrastructure and economic recovery of Ukraine. Participant 1 expressed their concerns as:

“I am afraid to go back to Ukraine even when the war is over, as it is very dangerous.”.

The consideration of onward migration to another country was mentioned by 4 participants. Their motivations were primarily driven by two factors: the search for better professional opportunities where English is more widely spoken, and the intention to join family members living in other countries. Throughout their time in Germany, all participants maintained strong transnational ties. These connections were primarily sustained through frequent, often daily, communication with family and friends in Ukraine via messaging apps and video calls. Furthermore, nine out of ten participants regularly send financial support or remittances home, motivated by a sense of family responsibility and a desire to remain connected to Ukraine’s struggle and recovery. These enduring ties illustrate that, even while building new lives in Germany, participants remain deeply connected to their homeland.

5. Discussion

This section interprets the findings in relation to the main research question: “How does economic integration shape the return and onward migration intentions of Ukrainian refugees under the EU’s TPD in Germany?”

The discussion is organized around the three sub-questions, using key theoretical frameworks to analyze how economic integration, labor market experiences, and perceptions of future opportunities influence migration intentions.

5.1. What specific elements of economic integration most strongly influence Ukrainian refugees’ return and onward migration intentions?

The findings reveal that economic integration is complex and multi-dimensional. Refugees value formal employment stability and income security, which provide material safety and a sense

of predictability in their new environment. Participants appreciated Germany's regulated labor market, including formal contracts, employee rights, and structured schedules, consistent with Ager and Strang's (2008) framework.

However, a significant tension emerged around de-skilling and underemployment. Many participants, despite being highly educated, worked in jobs that did not utilize their qualifications, leading to professional dissatisfaction and a lack of meaningful participation. This challenges the assumption of linear economic integration where employment leads progressively to deeper belonging and settlement. The Aspirations-Capabilities framework (de Haas, 2021) helps explain this mismatch: participants have the financial capability to stay but lack the professional fulfillment to fully commit to settlement.

These findings align with labor market segmentation theory (Piore, 1979), showing that credential recognition and language barriers create structural constraints that limit refugees' economic inclusion beyond basic employment. The majority of the participants did not only feel underemployed, but they also felt unseen. The denial of professional identity gives feelings of partial integration, suggesting that labor market access alone is insufficient without targeted institutional support, such as credential recognition assistance or 'bridging' programs.

5.2. How does labor market integration influence refugees' choice to return, remain, or migrate onward?

Most participants who were underqualified (and were employed) expressed greater openness to return to Ukraine, but this willingness was strongly conditional on the restoration of peace, reliable infrastructure, and personal safety. This finding underscores that return intentions among refugees are not fixed but depend heavily on external circumstances in their home country.

Participants' experiences of partial integration, characterized by economic inclusion, professional exclusion, and uncertain legal status, produced complex and often ambivalent views of their futures. The TPD, set to expire in March 2026 at the time of interviews, generated a pervasive sense of limbo that hindered long-term planning and psychological investment in permanent settlement. This legal uncertainty contributed to a state of "social suspension," where refugees remained undecided about whether to return, stay, or migrate onward.

These results resonate with Cassarino's (2004) theory of return preparedness, which emphasizes that the decision to return depends on a combination of internal readiness and favorable external conditions. Moreover, the Aspirations-Capabilities framework (de Haas, 2021)

helps explain that while refugees may aspire to integrate and settle, their ability to act on these aspirations is constrained by structural and legal barriers.

Interestingly, for some participants, successful economic integration (mentioned as financial stability) actually enhanced their capability to envision a sustainable life back home, complicating traditional return migration theories that often link return intentions primarily to social and economic exclusion. Those experiencing deskilling or professional dissatisfaction were particularly likely to consider return, but only under improved conditions in Ukraine. Meanwhile, onward migration was mostly contemplated by participants seeking better job prospects or family reunification opportunities in other countries.

5.3. How do refugees evaluate their economic opportunities in Germany compared to Ukraine and other EU countries, and how does this shape their migration intentions?

Refugees' evaluations of economic opportunities were deeply embedded in household and family considerations, consistent with the NELM theory (Stark & Bloom, 1985). Migration decisions were rarely individual but influenced by children's education, family reunification, and caregiving responsibilities.

Most participants prioritized family safety and children's schooling over their own professional aspirations, reflecting emotional and relational dimensions of economic decision-making often overlooked by traditional theories. This emotional trade-off affects many refugees to Germany despite professional dissatisfaction, highlighting that economic decisions are interwoven with affective concerns.

Transnational ties reinforced this dynamic: participants maintained strong communication and financial support to family in Ukraine, reflecting dual belonging and emotional investment in both home and host societies. Onward migration was less frequent but linked to existing social networks and language factors, illustrating migration decision-making as a complex, multi-directional process.

5.4. Theoretical and Policy Implications

This study contributes to migration theory by highlighting the importance of legal temporality and partial integration as central to understanding refugee mobility under temporary protection schemes. Current models that assume linear integration or fixed migration choices fail to capture the fluid and conditional nature of refugees' intentions.

From a policy perspective, giving labor market access is insufficient for a durable settlement. Addressing underemployment through streamlined credential recognition and enhanced language and professional training programs is crucial. Policies should also account for the emotional and familial contexts shaping migration decisions, moving beyond purely economic or legal frameworks.

5.5. Directions for Future Research

The studies tracking how intentions evolve as the TPD deadline approaches would provide deeper insight into temporal dynamics. Comparative research across EU member states could demonstrate how varying integration policies impact Ukrainian refugees' trajectories. Given emerging research suggesting some recent refugee cohorts resemble "classical migrants" (Adema et al., 2024), future work should explore these evolving profiles to deepen understanding of diverse migration intentions.

6. Conclusion

This research explored how economic integration shapes the return, stay, and onward migration intentions of Ukrainian refugees under the TPD in Germany. While stable employment provides crucial financial security, it often comes at the cost of professional fulfillment due to deskilling and credential recognition barriers. Refugees' decisions are deeply influenced by family needs, legal uncertainty, and ongoing ties to Ukraine. Economic integration 'opens a door' to stability, but without realistic opportunities for meaningful work and long-term legal clarity, many remain in a state of waiting and uncertainty (hesitant to fully settle or commit, while continuously re-evaluating their migration options). These findings highlight the need for policies that go beyond labor market access to include credential recognition, clearer legal status, and support for family and transnational connections, fostering true inclusion rather than temporary survival.

7. Positionality

At this stage, it is important to mention my characteristics as a researcher to give a clearer picture of my research process. I am from Azerbaijan and the reason I chose this topic in the first place is mainly because of my background in post-Soviet social context and my own personal

experiences about migration. I have not personally experienced forced displacement but I have enough knowledge from my parents' and relatives' personal stories about their own forced displacements due to war in 1990s. This has taught me that legal, economic and social environments greatly influence opportunities and goals. This affected how I approached the topic and interacted with the participants. This background likely helped in building rapport with participants, creating a sense of shared understanding of how legal and economic environments can profoundly shape on life. However, I was conscious that this could also lead to assumptions. To mitigate this, I actively avoided mentioning my own family's history during the interviews, focusing on asking open-ended questions that allowed participants to tell their own unique stories, rather than projecting my own experiences onto theirs.

My linguistic skills also helped me a lot during the interview process. I speak Russian and I was able to conduct 6 interviews in a language in which participants were comfortable, without the formal presence of an interpreter. This likely created a more trusting and open environment, allowing for a better discussion. I translated those transcriptions based on my own fluency, so I understand the responsibility of being able to deliver accurately interpreted data. To ensure that accuracy and mitigate any potential interpretation bias, I first transcribed the interviews verbatim in Russian before translating them to English, reflecting on specific words or phrases to ensure I was capturing the intended emotional tone and meaning, not just literally translation.

I was also in a complex position as both cultural insider, sharing certain Eastern European sensibilities and an institutional outsider. My status as a master's student with secure residency in the Netherlands created an unintentional power imbalance when speaking with refugees on temporary protection programs. To navigate this, I began each interview by explicitly expressing my role as a student, emphasizing that they were the experts of their own lives and my goal is solely learning from them. This was a conscious effort from my side to de-center my own authority and create a more collaborative and less extractive discussion space.

The idea of "transnationalism" also has a personal meaning for me. Like many of my participants, I have strong emotional ties and connections to my family and friends back in my home country. This helped me to understand how the participants tried to stay connected to Ukraine while living in Germany.

Instead of claiming neutrality, I acknowledge that my analysis is shaped by these intercepting personalities. They allowed me to get close to the refugees in the study but also they

made me question my own understanding of their responses and ensure that I was presenting their voices authentically, not just through the lens of my own experience.

This section is not meant to justify or defend my position, but to make it visible. I believe that it is very important to clearly define the role of the researcher in qualitative research, especially when working with vulnerable or displaced communities. Being aware of your own position is not a limitation, but rather it is a responsibility to interpret, represent and analyze with integrity.

Reference List

Adema, J., Aksoy, C. G., Giesing, Y., & Poutvaara, P. (2024). Ukrainian refugees' return intentions and integration in the course of time. *EconPol Forum*, 25(6), 36-40. <https://www.econstor.eu/handle/10419/308554>

Ager, A., & Strang, A. (2008). Understanding integration: A conceptual framework. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 21(2), 166-191. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fen016>

Ahrens, J., Kelly, M., & van Liempt, I. (2016). Free movement? The onward migration of EU citizens born in Somalia, Iran, and Nigeria. *Population, Space and Place*, 22(1), 84-98. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.1869>

Arthur, N., McMahon, M., Abkhezr, P., & Woodend, J. (2025). Beyond job placement: careers for refugees. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 25(1), 251–269. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10775-023-09579-x>

Brücker, H., et al. (2020). *Integration of refugees in the German labor market: Early evidence from the IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey*. IAB Discussion Paper, 2(1), 1-32. (<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099016304302411714/pdf/IDU11c9e7599116ee1416a19d8e16213c178b8fb.pdf>)

Brücker, H., et al. (2023). *Labor market integration of Ukrainian refugees in Germany: First evidence from IAB-SOEP survey*. IAB Discussion Paper. <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/301260/1/fb1624en.pdf>

Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge. (2023). *Migration report Germany: Ukrainian refugees' integration and return intentions*. Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. (<https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/EN/Forschung/Migrationsberichte/migrationsbericht-2023.html?nn=387824>)

Carling, J., & Collins, F. (2018). Aspiration, desire and drivers of migration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44(6), 909–926. <https://www.prio.org/publications/10775>

Cassarino, J. P. (2004). Theorizing return migration: The conceptual approach to return migrants revisited. *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, 6(2), 253-279. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000138992>

Centre for Economic Strategy. (2025). *Ukrainian refugees after three years abroad: Fourth wave of research*. <https://ces.org.ua/en/refugees-fourth-wave/>

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2023). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications. <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/research-design/book277232>

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications. <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/qualitative-inquiry-and-research-design/book246896>

de Haas, H. (2021). A theory of migration: The aspirations-capabilities framework. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 9(1), 1-35. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-020-00210-4>

de Haas, H., & Fokkema, T. (2011). The effects of integration and transnational ties on return intentions. *Demographic Research*, 25(24), 755-782. (<https://doi.org/10.4054/DemRes.2011.25.24>)

European Commission. (2023). *Temporary protection for Ukrainians in the EU: Policy implications and future considerations*. Policy Report. https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/asylum-eu/temporary-protection_en

Faist, T. (2010). Diaspora and transnationalism: What kind of dance partners? In R. Bauböck & T. Faist (Eds.), *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods* (pp. 9-34). Amsterdam University Press. <https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/34853>

Fransen, S., Kalantaryan, S., Erdal, M. B., & Fokkema, T. (2020). Family separation and the impacts on refugee integration. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 8(14). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-020-00171-8>

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59-82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903>

Ifo Institute. (2023). *Integration and return intentions of Ukrainians in Germany*. <https://www.ifo.de/en/project/2023-01-01/integration-and-return-intentions-ukrainians-germany>

Kivisto, P., & Faist, T. (2007). *Beyond a border: The causes and consequences of contemporary immigration*. Sage Publications. <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/beyond-a-border/book232328>

Kuschminder, K. (2017). Taking stock of assisted voluntary return from Europe: Decision making, reintegration and sustainable return. *International Migration*, 55(3), 148–163. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12329>

Lee, E. S. (1966). A theory of migration. *Demography*, 3(1), 47-57.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2060063>

Levitt, P., & Glick Schiller, N. (2004). Conceptualizing simultaneity: A transnational social field perspective on society. *International Migration Review*, 38(3), 1002-1039.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2004.tb00227.x>

Levitt, P., & Jaworsky, N. (2007). Transnational migration studies: Past developments and future trends. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 33, 129-156.
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.33.040406.131816>

Massey, D. S., Arango, J., Hugo, G., Kouaouci, A., Pellegrino, A., & Taylor, J. E. (1993). Theories of international migration: A review and appraisal. *Population and Development Review*, 19(3), 431-466. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2938462>

Mazzucato, V., & Schans, D. (2011). Transnational families and the well-being of children: Conceptual and methodological challenges. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 73(4), 704-712.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2011.00840.x>

Migration Observatory. (2024). *Ukrainian Migration to the UK*. The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford.
<https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/ukrainian-migration-to-the-uk/>

OECD. (2023). *Working towards dual intent integration of Ukrainian refugees*. OECD Policy Responses on the Impacts of the War in Ukraine. <https://doi.org/10.1787/6b4c16f7-en>

Piore, M. J. (1979). *Birds of passage: Migrant labor and industrial societies*. Cambridge University Press. (<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511572210>)

Ratha, D., Mohapatra, S., & Plaza, S. (2011). Harnessing diaspora resources for Africa. *Finance & Development*, 48(3). <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2011/09/ratha.htm>

Righard, E., & Laczko, F. (2016). *Migration, development and governance*. International Organization for Migration (IOM).
https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/smuggling_report.pdf

Robinson, O. C. (2014). Sampling in interview-based qualitative research: A theoretical and practical guide. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 11(1), 25-41.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2013.801543>

Stark, O., & Bloom, D. E. (1985). The new economics of labor migration. *American Economic Review*, 75(2), 173-178. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1805591>

Temple, B., & Young, A. (2004). Qualitative research and translation dilemmas. *Qualitative Research*, 4(2), 161-178. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794104044430>

Toma, S., & Castagnone, E. (2015). What drives onward migration? *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 41(11), 1777–1795. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2015.1021489>

UNHCR. (2023). *Lives on hold: Intentions and perspectives of Ukrainian refugees in Europe*. UNHCR Report. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/102901>

Vertovec, S. (2009). *Transnationalism*. Routledge. (<https://www.routledge.com/Transnationalism/Vertovec/p/book/9780415432984>)

Williams, A. M., & Baláž, V. (2022). Migration, risk and uncertainty: Theoretical perspectives. *Population, Space and Place*, 18(2), 167-180. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.663>

Appendixes.

Appendix 1.

Interview questions

The interview questions were developed using current research on migration, labor market integration, and return migration intentions. I designed them to align with the theoretical concepts introduced earlier.

Can you please explain your current employment situation in Germany? (in terms of profession, hours, type of contract, responsibilities).

How does your current employment in Germany compare to your past work in Ukraine?

Would you say you earn comparatively more or less than in Ukraine?

How do aspects, such as hours, flexibility, safety or remote work differ?

Are you able to fully use your professional skills and training here?

How do you feel about your current work, compared to what you did in Ukraine?

Income question make it sensitive (do you make comparatively more or less income).

Did you face any challenges when trying to find work in Germany?

If yes, what were the main difficulties? • What are your thoughts and feelings about potentially returning to Ukraine in the future?

What circumstances or conditions would influence your decision?

What specific changes would you need to see in Ukraine to consider returning?

Have you considered moving from Germany to another EU country?

If so, which countries and why?

What factors would encourage or discourage such a move?

How important is legal stability (residency or citizenship status) in shaping your decisions about staying, returning, or moving elsewhere?

Do you see yourself staying in Germany longer-term? Why or why not?

How does your family situation - in Germany, Ukraine or elsewhere - influence your thoughts on staying, returning or migrating again?

Can you tell me about how often and in what ways you stay in contact with family members in Ukraine?

And what about your friends in Ukraine - how do you maintain those relationships?

Do you send money or other forms of support to people in Ukraine?

If yes, how often?

What motivates you to do so?

Is there anything important about your employment experience in Germany, or your future migration plans, that I have not asked but you think should be mentioned?

Appendix 2.

Respondents overview

Respondent #	Gender	Age	Work experience Ukraine	Work experience Germany	Consider leave to other EU country?
1	Female	49	Professor	Researcher	No
2	Female	39	Language teacher	Language teacher	Yes
3	Female	39	Secretary	Administrative assistant	Yes
4	Female	55	Teacher	Assistant nurse	No
5	Female	21	No	Junior web developer	Yes
6	Female	43	Logists	Doctor's assistant	No
7	Female	56	Seamstress	Worker at a pasta factory	No
8	Female	50	Engineer and constructor	Assistant at an energy consulting firm	No
9	Female	43	Sales assistant	Worker at the hotel	No
10	Female	43	Engineer	Kitchen help	No

Appendix 3.

Codebook

Code	Groundedness					
afraid of going back	7	Return Migration Intentions & Preparedness				
appreciation of social benefits	4		Economic Integration & Labor Market Experiences			
caregiving responsibilities (elderly parents)	4				Family Strategies & Economic Decision-Making	
child's needs prioritization	8				Family Strategies & Economic Decision-Making	
concerns about infrastructure in Ukraine	9	Return Migration Intentions & Preparedness				
considering move to another EU country	7			Future Orientation & Legal Uncertainty		
credential recognition problems	8		Economic Integration & Labor			

			Market Experiences			
dependence on transnational family ties	8				Family Strategies & Economic Decision- Making	
dissatisfaction with skill use	9		Economic Integration & Labor Market Experiences			
economic security	9				Family Strategies & Economic Decision- Making	
emotional burden of family separation	6					Transnational Ties & Emotional Belonging
emotional connection via social media	10					Transnational Ties & Emotional Belonging
family or friends in other EU states	4			Future Orientation & Legal Uncertainty		
family pressures to stay / return	5				Family Strategies & Economic Decision- Making	
fear of another invasion	8	Return Migration Intentions &				

		Preparedness				
formal job structure (rules, protocols)	9		Economic Integration & Labor Market Experiences			
frequent contact with family in Ukraine	10					Transnational Ties & Emotional Belonging
higher income	10		Economic Integration & Labor Market Experiences			
job search challenges	10		Economic Integration & Labor Market Experiences			
language barrier in employment	10		Economic Integration & Labor Market Experiences			
legal uncertainty	7			Future Orientation & Legal Uncertainty		
professional identity loss	10		Economic Integration & Labor Market Experiences			
psychological readiness to return	4	Return Migration Intentions & Preparedness				

safety and security in Germany	5			Future Orientation & Legal Uncertainty		
satisfaction with working conditions	6		Economic Integration & Labor Market Experiences			
sending remittances	10					Transnational Ties & Emotional Belonging
shift work / fixed schedule	5		Economic Integration & Labor Market Experiences			
underemployment / deskilling	8		Economic Integration & Labor Market Experiences			
would return if city is rebuilt	7	Return Migration Intentions & Preparedness				

Appendix 4.

Checklist ethical and privacy aspects of research

Instruction

This checklist should be completed for every research study that is conducted at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS). This checklist should be completed *before* commencing with data collection or approaching participants. Students can complete this checklist with help of their supervisor.

This checklist is a mandatory part of the empirical master's thesis and has to be uploaded along with the research proposal.

The guideline for ethical aspects of research of the Dutch Sociological Association (NSV) can be found on their website (http://www.nsv-sociologie.nl/?page_id=17). If you have doubts about ethical or privacy aspects of your research study, discuss and resolve the matter with your EUR supervisor. If needed and if advised to do so by your supervisor, you can also consult Dr. Bonnie French, coordinator of the Sociology Master's Thesis program.

Part I: General Information

Project title: How does the Economic integration in Germany Influences the Return and Onward

Migration Intentions of Ukrainian Refugees under the Temporary Protection Directive

Name, email of student: Zahra Abbaszade (696698za@eur.nl)

Name, email of supervisor: Wybren Nooitgedagt (nooitgedagt@essb.eur.nl)

Start date and duration: February 4, 2025 – June 22, 2025

Is the research study conducted within DPAS YES

If 'NO': at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted?
(e.g. internship organization)

Part II: Human Subjects

1. Does your research involve human participants. YES

If 'NO': skip to part V.

If 'YES': does the study involve medical or physical research? NO

Research that falls under the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act ([WMO](#)) must first be submitted to [an accredited medical research ethics committee](#) or the Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects ([CCMO](#)).

2. Does your research involve field observations without manipulations that will not involve identification of participants. YES

If 'YES': skip to part IV.

3. Research involving completely anonymous data files (secondary data that has been anonymized by someone else). NO

If 'YES': skip to part IV.

Part III: Participants

1. Will information about the nature of the study and about what participants can expect during the study be withheld from them? NO

2. Will any of the participants not be asked for verbal or written 'informed consent,' whereby they agree to participate in the study? NO

3. Will information about the possibility to discontinue the participation at any time be withheld from participants? NO

4. Will the study involve actively deceiving the participants? NO

Note: almost all research studies involve some kind of deception of participants. Try to think about what types of deception are ethical or non-ethical (e.g. purpose of the study is not told, coercion is exerted on participants, giving participants the feeling that they harm other people by making certain decisions, etc.).

5. Does the study involve the risk of causing psychological stress or negative emotions beyond those normally encountered by participants? NO

6. Will information be collected about special categories of data, as defined by the GDPR (e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a person, data concerning mental or physical health, data concerning a person's sex life or sexual orientation)? YES

7. Will the study involve the participation of minors (<18 years old) or other groups that cannot give consent? NO

8. Is the health and/or safety of participants at risk during the study? NO

9. Can participants be identified by the study results or can the confidentiality of the participants' identity not be ensured? NO

10. Are there any other possible ethical issues with regard to this study? NO

If you have answered ‘YES’ to any of the previous questions, please indicate below why this issue is unavoidable in this study.

This research explicitly focuses on Ukrainian refugees in Germany under Temporary Protection Directive. As such, I will collect information about their ethnicity by default, because they are selected based on their ethnicity.

What safeguards are taken to relieve possible adverse consequences of these issues (e.g., informing participants about the study afterwards, extra safety regulations, etc.).

Participants will receive informed consent, a detailed information sheets that will explain the purpose of this research, their rights, confidentiality measures and voluntary participation.

Personal identifiable information will not be either recorded or associated with responses. Interview recordings and transcripts will be stored in password-protected devices that will only be accessible to the researcher.

Are there any unintended circumstances in the study that can cause harm or have negative (emotional) consequences to the participants? Indicate what possible circumstances this could be.

Interviews may trigger emotional distress as participants recount sensitive experiences related to war, displacement, family separation, economic hardships and uncertainty about their future. Therefore, they will be informed beforehand about the nature and sensitivity of the topic. They will be explicitly ensured about their right to withdraw at any given time without any repercussions.

Please attach your informed consent form in Appendix I, if applicable.

Continue to part IV.

Part IV: Sample

Where will you collect or obtain your data?

Data will be collected through online interviews via Zoom with Ukrainian refugees in Germany. Participants will be recruited through Professor Natalia Mishina’s network. She is a Ukrainian professor whom I had met in Baku, when she moved to because of war and she has many Ukrainian friends residing in Germany.

What is the (anticipated) size of your sample?

10 interviews

What is the size of the population from which you will sample?

The size of the population is approximately 1 million Ukrainian refugees under TPD in Germany. I intend to interview 10 participants for the research as my sample.

Continue to part V.

Part V: Data storage and backup

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

Data will be stored in my two password-protected devices: phone and laptop

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?

Me, Zahra Abbaszade

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

My phone and my laptop are backed up weekly.

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?

As mentioned in the informed consent form, no personally identifiable information will be collected or recorded. Participants will be assigned either pseudonyms or ID codes, which will be stored separately from the interview data.

Part VI: Signature

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam.

I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: Zahra Abbaszade



Date: 16 March 2025

Name (EUR) supervisor: Wybren Nooitgedagt



Date: 2025-03-20

Appendix 5: Informed Consent Form (if applicable)

Study title: How does Economic integration in Germany Influence the Return and Onward Migration Intentions of Ukrainian Refugees Under Temporary Protection Directive?

Researcher: Zahra Abbaszade

Affiliation: Erasmus University Rotterdam

Supervisor: Wybren Nooitgedagt

Contact information: 696698za@eur.nl

Purpose of the Study

You are invited to participate in a research study on how economic integration in Germany affects the return and onward migration intentions of Ukrainian refugees under the EU's Temporary Protection Directive. The goal of the study is to understand the economic, social and legal factors influencing migration decisions. This study is a part of my master's thesis research at Erasmus University Rotterdam.

Structure Details:

- You will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview that will last between 30-60 minutes.
- The interview will take place online via Zoom at a scheduled time that is convenient for you.
- The interview will be audio-recorded (with your consent) to ensure accurate data collection.
- You may choose to conduct the interview in English or Russian.

Confidentiality & Data Protection:

- Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without providing a reason.
- Your response will remain confidential and anonymous.
- No personally identifiable information will be recorded
- The data will be stored until the end of thesis project and will be permanently deleted afterwards.

Your Rights:

- You have the right to access the data you provide.
- You have the right to rectify or request data deletion of your data at any time before the final thesis submission.
- You have the right to withdraw consent at any time without any consequences.
- You may contact Data Protection Officer (DPO) for Erasmus University Rotterdam, if you have any concerns about data privacy, through this email address: fg@eur.nl

Consent Agreement:

By signing below, you confirm that:

- You have read and understood the purpose of this study.
- You voluntarily agree to participate in the study.
- You agree to be audio-recorded during the interview.
- You understand that your participation is confidential, and you may withdraw at any time.

Participant's name:

Participant's signature:

Date:

Researcher's name: Zahra Abbaszade

Researcher's signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Zahra' followed by a stylized surname.

Date:

If you have any questions, please contact me at 696698za@eur.nl. Thank you for your time and participation!