

POLICY PAPER

GENEVA GRADUATE INSTITUTE

EXECUTIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM “DIPLOMACY, NEGOTIATIONS AND  
POLICY”

## **Integrating Ukrainian Refugees into the Swiss Labor Market: Challenges, Strategies, and Policy Recommendations**

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**Geneva, 15 July 2024**

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## ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the effectiveness of the Swiss labor market and support systems in integrating Ukrainian refugees. It identifies key barriers such as language difficulties, non-recognition of qualifications, and the temporary nature of Status S, which hinder long-term employment and integration. Despite significant efforts and budgets spent on housing, social assistance, and employment opportunities, many highly educated refugees work below their qualifications and are financially dependent on social aid. The paper highlights the need for enhanced policies focusing on language acquisition, qualification recognition, and clearer pathways to permanent residency. It also recommends targeted professional training, intensive language support, and improved employer engagement to achieve the Swiss government's goal of 40% employment for Ukrainians by the end of 2024. The collaboration between SEM, cantonal authorities, and private sector partners is crucial for addressing these challenges and ensuring consistent integration outcomes across Switzerland. The findings underscore the importance of ongoing monitoring, research, and data collection to evaluate and adapt integration strategies effectively.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As of week 27, 2024, there were 66,179 persons with Status S in Switzerland, with 61% being of working age (18-64 years old) and only 25.4% of them being employed (SEM Statistics, 2024). Status S in Switzerland provides temporary protection for individuals fleeing conflicts, such as those from Ukraine. The Swiss government activated Protection Status S for the first time on 12 March 2022 to aid individuals fleeing Ukraine. The goal of this program is to offer quick and effective support during crises, enabling integration into Swiss society while providing safety and stability through the offering of job placement, training, and social participation opportunities. The status includes access to social services, education, and healthcare. It allows recipients to stay and work in Switzerland without going through the standard asylum process. The standard validity of the status is one year, and it has already been extended twice.

Responding to the low employment rates among Ukrainians during the second extension of Status S, the Swiss government set an additional target to achieve an employment level of 40% by the end of 2024 and 45% by the end of 2025. On May 8, 2024, the Federal Council of Switzerland announced measures to enhance labor market integration for people with Protection Status S, particularly those from Ukraine. Actions include appointing a labor market integration officer, improving regional employment services (RAVs), and facilitating the recognition of qualifications. Enhanced cooperation between federal, cantonal authorities, and the private sector is emphasized. These measures intend to reduce reliance on social assistance and support eventual reconstruction efforts in the refugees' home countries.

Several RAVs report that they have started to explore new ways of cooperation with the private sector while trying to increase the number of active Ukrainians searching for jobs with the assistance of RAV. However, they have just started the process. ETH Zurich and the University of Lausanne are conducting a comprehensive study to help a broader group of refugees in Switzerland find jobs in the local market. They note that this could take several years<sup>1</sup>. Cantons implement additional measures that complement a bulk of private initiatives. At the same time, companies are hesitant to hire Ukrainians. Most Ukrainians who secured good jobs so far did so through private networks.

Therefore, in this paper, we aim to define the most appropriate solutions to facilitate the employment of Ukrainians while a more fundamental research by Swiss universities on overcoming barriers for all refugees in Switzerland is ongoing. To do so, we contacted the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM), the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO), cantons, regional employment services (RAV), vocational information centers (BIZ), as well as non-governmental organizations, private companies, and community organizations. Additionally, we surveyed Ukrainian refugees and employers located in Switzerland to learn about their experiences and opinions regarding the employment of Ukrainian refugees in Switzerland.

This paper is structured as follows: we begin by reviewing the existing literature on employment barriers for migrants and refugees in the Swiss context. Next, we discuss the methodology used for our study, including the design and distribution of surveys, as well as the qualitative interviews conducted. This is followed by a presentation of the survey and interview results, highlighting key barriers faced by Ukrainian refugees in securing employment. We then analyze these findings in the context of existing policies and initiatives, identifying gaps and potential areas for improvement. Finally, we propose a set of recommendations aimed at enhancing the employment prospects for Ukrainian refugees in Switzerland.

This research was conducted over a limited time frame from June 1 to July 15, 2024, with data collected between June 10 and July 5, 2024. Due to these time constraints, it was not possible to comprehensively review all policies and initiatives developed at different levels to support Ukrainian refugees. Many stakeholders expressed a willingness to collaborate beyond this period, indicating the importance of regularly repeating similar research. Conducting shorter, more targeted surveys aimed at addressing the main issues identified in the conclusions and policy recommendations would also be beneficial.

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1. Path2Work - free job search support for refugees in Switzerland: <https://www.path2work.ethz.ch/info>

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Swiss labor market is characterized by its high degree of flexibility, strong economic performance, and a low unemployment rate compared to other European countries.

However, the economic growth in Switzerland has decelerated. Despite Switzerland's resilience during the pandemic and the subsequent energy market disruptions caused by the war in Ukraine, the economy now faces uncertain prospects due to tightened financing conditions and slowing global growth. Conversely, a positive resolution of geopolitical tensions could lead to increased trade, renewed confidence, and enhanced growth and stability.

Meanwhile, on the background of the slowed economic activity and the remaining inflation pressures amidst keeping it within the 0-2% target range, real wages continue recording negative growth. Nevertheless, the labour market is robust with the unemployment rate around 4% and vacancies at high levels.

A substantial pension reform is overdue. Ageing increases costs for pensions, healthcare, and long-term care, affecting employment and growth. Recent reforms, such as raising the retirement age for women to 65, temporarily ease pressure but are insufficient. The retiree-to-employee ratio will rise, and pension replacement rates will fall. Adjusting the pension system for longer lifespans can help manage costs.

The labour and skills shortages are escalating and becoming a structural issue. Rapid population ageing and a shift towards shorter working hours are impacting future economic growth. Increasing participation among certain groups, such as mothers, older workers and migrants, presents an opportunity for improvement (OECD, 2024, March).

Immigration is vital for Switzerland's economy, addressing labour and skills shortages. With 30% of the population being foreign-born, the second highest in the OECD, skilled immigrants, especially from non-EU/EFTA countries, are increasingly important. To attract global talent, Switzerland should enhance support for skilled migrants and ease their transition to permanent settlement, improving integration and reducing labour shortages (OECD, 2024a).

Ukrainian refugees represent an opportunity for Switzerland in addressing labour and skills shortages. In this chapter we will focus the discussion on characteristics of different areas of the Swiss labour market and policies, and their adaptation to the influx of Ukrainian refugees, relying on the fact that Swiss government effectiveness and regulatory quality are considered to be the highest in the world.<sup>2</sup> In 2023, 62% of Swiss people reported high or moderately high trust in the federal government, above the OECD average of 39%. In particular, 60% of people expect the government to make decisions based on the best available evidence, compared to OECD average of 41% (OECD, 2024b).

### 2.1. Labor Market Flexibility

The Swiss labor market is considered one of the most flexible in Europe, with relatively low levels of employment protection legislation, which allows for easier hiring and firing practices. This flexibility is often credited with contributing to the country's low unemployment rates and high levels of economic adaptability (OECD, 2022).

#### 2.1.1 Minimum Wages

Switzerland has no national minimum wage, though some cantons and municipalities have their own regulations. Collective bargaining agreements often include minimum wages. The number of standard employment agreements containing minimum wage requirements tends to increase, with their geographical concentration in the Cantons facing pressure on salaries due to the large number of cross-

<sup>2</sup> The Legatum Prosperity Index™ 2023 ranks Switzerland as number one in government effectiveness and number two in regulatory quality. The overall governance rank is 4 showing the improvement trend over the last 10 years. Source: Legatum Institute (2023). The Legatum Prosperity Index™ 2023. Retrieved from: [https://docs.prosperity.com/4316/7689/1447/Switzerland\\_2023\\_Picountryprofile.pdf](https://docs.prosperity.com/4316/7689/1447/Switzerland_2023_Picountryprofile.pdf)

border commuters and service providers, i.e., the Canton of Ticino, bordering Italy, and the Canton of Geneva, bordering France. A proposal to introduce a national minimum wage of CHF 22 per hour was rejected by a large majority of voters in a referendum held in 2014. However, as all 26 Cantons of Switzerland enjoy large autonomy, Cantons of Neuchâtel, Jura and Basel have introduced minimum wages. Efforts to introduce local minimum wages in Zurich and Winterthur are ongoing (GLI, 2024).

The minimum wage rule applies to Ukrainians. The online survey of 2,000 refugees (Federal council, 2023) carried out in September and October 2022, has shown that Ukrainian refugees working 70% of the week earned an average monthly salary of CHF 4,477 (SWI, 2023a). There is no specific information among available surveys if they have faced any discrimination regarding their wages.

The average annual wage range in Switzerland for the popular professions as listed at jobs.ch is from CHF 61'219 (for logisticians) to CHF 142'970 (for CEOs).<sup>3</sup> Other websites give approximately the same estimates, e.g., talent.com lists a wage of CHF 56'875 for cleaner, an average of CHF 91'336 in childcare and education, of CHF 105'833 for the ICT area and around CHF 101'106 in banking, finance and insurance. However, inside every category, wages may differ substantially. For example, for the area of architecture and creative arts the average wage calculated based on 626 salaries is CHF 91'282 with the highest for architect CHF 127'311 and the lowest for the artist of CHF 55'250.<sup>4</sup>

Wages also range based on a matching skill set. For example, for the HR specialist the average annual salary could be from CHF 85'250 to CHF 122'500, and for the head of marketing from CHF 92'250 to CHF 167'500 depending on experience, skills and qualifications. Therefore, bringing the reported above wage surveyed across different professions for Ukrainians in 2022 of CHF 5'820 per month to 100% level makes the annual salary in the range of CHF 69'841 to CHF 75'661 (depending if 12 or 13 salaries paid). Comparing to the average salary estimates, we can conclude that no discrimination as for the level of salaries observed in 2022 with regards to employed Ukrainians.

Overall, the workforce in Switzerland would like a higher salary, meaningful, fulfilling work, and opportunities to develop their skills.<sup>5</sup> At the same time in 2024 the ability of employers to increase salaries is limited. 28% of employers admitted that they will pass on salary increases to customers via price increases and 22% told they will not increase salaries. Only 20% out of 250 surveyed by Robert Half Talent Solutions<sup>6</sup> employers are ready to sacrifice profitability to support staff with the cost of living.

### 2.1.2. Hiring practices

There are a number of issues which require higher attention from authorities regarding the hiring of Ukrainian refugees in Switzerland.

For instance, back in 2021 a study by the Swiss Forum for Migration and Population Studies (SFM) highlighted that despite high levels of education and experience, many refugees remain unemployed or underemployed. The survey underscored the importance of targeted support services, such as language courses and job placement programs, in improving employment outcomes (SFM, 2021).

Still, **proficiency in one of Switzerland's national languages** (German, French, Italian) is often a prerequisite for employment and thus it remains a primary barrier for migrants and refugees seeking employment in Switzerland (Lechner & Pfefferli, 2020).

Discrimination and bias, both explicit and implicit, play a significant role in hiring practices affecting migrants and refugees. Research by Fibbi, Lerch, and Wanner (2006) highlights that job applicants with foreign-sounding names or those who are visibly different from the local population face higher rejection rates. This bias extends beyond the initial hiring process, impacting promotion and career

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.jobs.ch/en/salary/start/>

<sup>4</sup> Salary in Switzerland 2024: <https://ch.talent.com/en/salary>

<sup>5</sup> In April 2023, PwC surveyed 1,070 individuals in Switzerland who are in work or active in the labour market. This was part of the [Global Workforce Hopes and Fears Survey](#) of 53,912 people, one of the largest such studies of its kind. Source: PwC Switzerland (2023). [Workforce Hopes and Fears Survey 2023](https://www.pwc.ch/en/insights/transformation/workforce-hopes-and-fears-survey-2023.html). Retrieved from <https://www.pwc.ch/en/insights/transformation/workforce-hopes-and-fears-survey-2023.html>

<sup>6</sup> Salary Guide 2024: <https://content.roberthalfonline.com/SG24/SG24-PDF/Robert-Half-Salary-Guide-2024-Switzerland-English.pdf>

advancement opportunities (Hainmueller et al., 2020). This could partially explain the difference in the unemployment rate for native-born (3.1%) and foreign-born (7%) Swiss citizens and residents (OECD, 2024c).

Also, migrants and refugees often face **social isolation**, which can impede their ability to find employment. Programs aimed at fostering social inclusion and providing networking opportunities are essential for improving employment outcomes (Auer, 2020). Researchers from IPL examined recent asylum seekers in Switzerland and demonstrates that ethnic networks can facilitate the economic integration of refugees. They discovered that a 10 percent increase in the size of the ethnic network led to a 2 percent increase in employment within the first few years after arrival (IPL, 2023).

In contrast, the study by T. Müller, P. Pannatier and M. Viarengo (2023) conducted over the period 1998–2018 finds that the presence of a co-ethnic network does not consistently accelerate integration. However, Müller et al. has proved that higher unemployment rates at the time of arrival hinder the integration process for refugees. Additionally, they demonstrated that a shift towards more restrictive attitudes in a canton (compared to other cantons) results in higher employment rates for successive cohorts of refugees. These effects persist throughout the refugees' life cycle.

**Legal and bureaucratic obstacles** further complicate the employment landscape for migrants and refugees. For an instance, obtaining work permits and other legal documentation can be challenging, further hindering employment opportunities (Lechner & Pfefferli, 2020). Therefore, below we would like to highlight what measures have been applied in Switzerland to reduce the legal obstacles to hiring Ukrainian refugees.

From June 1, 2024, Switzerland has simplified the process of hiring Ukrainian refugees with temporary protection status (S). Several measures such as mandatory work permit are still under discussion, while the following measures have been approved:

- Ukrainians with S status can now change their canton of residence more easily if commuting to work takes more than 90 minutes, the workplace is not easily accessible by public transportation, or short-term work assignments are required. This measure aims to facilitate their access to jobs in different regions
- The requirement for a permit for self-employment or employment for persons with hardship status will be lifted.
- The obligation to report employment will be lifted if it serves professional integration and the gross monthly salary does not exceed 600 francs.
- Persons attending a preparatory program for vocational education will be generally exempt from the reporting requirement (Bundesrat, 2024).

These changes are part of Switzerland's efforts to almost double the employment rate of Ukrainian refugees to 40% by the end of 2024. The Swiss government aims to facilitate labor market integration and reduce the burden on the social welfare system. Therefore, the discussions on replacing the current work permit requirement with a simplified online registration requirement are actively ongoing. A minority of right and centre-right politicians believe the existing process is already quick and easy to complete (SWI, 03.2024).

**Finding qualified staff to fill vacancies is a major concern among Swiss businesses.** At the same time there is a high competition for many professions. Only job vacancies with an unemployment rate of at least 5% must be reported to the regional employment office and cannot be advertised elsewhere for five days. This ensures registered with regional employment offices jobseekers are informed first and optimizes the domestic workforce.

The list of jobs subject to this requirement is updated annually. In 2024, the quota dropped to about 3% from 8% in 2023 (GLI, 2024). The list of such jobs in 2024 are in the following professions: actors, conference and event planners, customer information specialists in call centers, telephone operators, plasterers, drywallers, forklift drivers and related occupations, and other occupations for unskilled workers, such as in mining, construction (excluding civil engineering), manufacturing and

transportation, vegetable and fruit growing, horticulture, auxiliary workers in food preparation (excluding kitchen assistants) and others (Stellenmeldepflicht, 2024).

It is important to note that since 2023 the entry of EU and third-country professionals into the labour market of Switzerland has been simplified. This could create additional competition for Ukrainian refugees in Switzerland. In particular, as of February 1, 2023, Swiss authorities have relaxed the requirement for employers to prioritize domestic workers in sectors with a skilled labor shortage. This assumes domestic potential is exhausted in professions with a notable structural shortage. Affected fields include executive roles in ICT, management consultancy, finance, and certain engineering, scientific, healthcare, and university teaching positions. The work experience requirement for non-academic foreign workers has been reduced from 10 to 5 years. Consequently, Swiss employers hiring non-EU/EFTA skilled workers in shortage fields will face less restrictive regulations (Deloitte, 2023).

At the same time employment of nationals of other countries coming to Switzerland to work is subject to quotas, which will remain at the same level in 2024 as in 2023. The annual quotas are divided into short-term L permits and long-term B permits and applied to the following categories of people. These are non-EU/EFTA nationals, EU/EFTA nationals on assignment, UK nationals and Croatian nationals. The annual quotas are rarely used up and are always carried over to the next year (KPMG, 2024). **Therefore, despite no quotas are applied to Ukrainian refugees in Switzerland, the non-exhaustive nature of existing quotas for other migrants seem to bring close to zero privilege to Ukrainians.**

In terms of hiring, the only complicated requirement for employers to hire Ukrainians remains to be a work permit. Application to the work permits is still required to be made by:

- the employers, who want to hire Ukrainians. Such employers must first apply for a work permit from the cantonal authorities at the place of work. The canton periodically checks compliance with the applicable wage and working conditions.
- the employers who aim to hire a Ukrainian residing in another canton. In this case the employer is required to apply for a work permit from the cantonal authorities at the place of work, not residence. If the conditions listed above are met by a Ukrainian (i.e., long trip to work, unreasonable working hours, etc.) and if this Ukrainian person is not receiving social welfare assistance for him/herself or his/her family members, applications to change canton must be submitted to SEM, which decides on the application in consultation with both the old and new canton.
- self-employed Ukrainians, who should get the work permit from the cantonal authorities at the place of work before taking up work regardless of whether being employed or self-employed. The cantonal authorities then assess whether the financial and operational conditions for the activity in question are met, taking into account the special situation of people in need of protection, which potentially could meet milder conditions for people with status S.

However, the **procedure of obtaining this work permit is relatively simple**. Protection status S allows to take up gainful employment. Employers must submit an application for future employees with protection status S to the competent cantonal labour market authority in the canton of assignment together with the following documents, ideally before the Ukrainian employee starts to work. The documents include copy of the foreigner's identity card (S permit) and passport copy, copy of the signed employment contract, as well as copies of curriculum vitae and diplomas if available. Based on the application, the cantonal labour market authority checks whether the wages and working conditions are in line with local and industry standards, and correspond to the qualifications and job profile. It is recommended to include the clause to the contract that it is only valid if the required residence and work permit is granted (Capacity Zurich, 2023). By having such a clause, the employer becomes not responsible to support the employee with the extension of the work permit. In its turn, this will increase the number of available jobs to Ukrainians.

The employer must pay the usual social security contributions, including AHV, IV, EO, UVG, and PK<sup>7</sup>, for employees with S protection status. For withholding tax, it is recommended to consult with the

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<sup>7</sup> AHV (Alters- und Hinterlassenenversicherung): Old-Age and Survivors Insurance

cantonal tax authorities to determine the appropriate rate based on the individual's family situation. When taking up gainful employment, the same social insurance regulations apply to persons with protection status S as to any person in gainful employment in Switzerland.

A UNHCR report (2023, December) mentions that **protection status S can sometimes be a deterrent for potential employers**. This suggests that there might be some level of awareness among employers about the status, but it also highlights potential barriers or misconceptions.

Overall, **employers have indicated a need for greater clarity regarding the future plans of refugees to better understand their duration of stay in the country and to receive timely notifications from authorities about relevant decisions**. Meanwhile, Ukrainian refugees continue facing challenges in securing employment in Switzerland, including the non-recognition of their qualifications and difficulties in navigating the Swiss job market (Visit Ukraine Today, 27 March 2024).

### 2.1.3. Recognition of qualifications

Studies indicate that the **process of validating foreign credentials can be lengthy and complex**, discouraging both employers and job seekers (OECD, 2019). This challenge is particularly acute for those in regulated professions, such as healthcare and engineering, where specific local certifications are mandatory (Piguet and Losa, 2002).

From a Swiss immigration law perspective, access to the labor market is open for all professions. However, for regulated professions like doctors, the necessary authorization to practice must be provided (SEM (employment), 2024). In Switzerland, professional activities not listed<sup>8</sup> by the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) as regulated can be performed without specific formalities. Foreign qualifications do not need a certificate matching Swiss education levels, though one can be obtained if desired. Regulated professions require recognition of foreign qualifications by Swiss authorities. Some professions, like teaching or healthcare, demand specific language proficiency levels in German, French, or Italian.

The Swiss authority evaluates foreign qualifications based on relevant documentation or official online sources regarding the level, duration, and content of education and training. All three cumulative requirements must be met: equivalent level, duration, and comparable content including workplace training or relevant work experience. If equivalence is not directly possible, compensatory measures like an aptitude test or traineeship are required. In hardship cases, recognition fees may be reduced. The final decision is made after these measures are completed.

Different authorities handle various aspects of foreign qualification recognition in Switzerland:

- **SERI (State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation)**: Manages initial inquiries, upper-secondary, and tertiary-level vocational qualifications.
- **Swiss Red Cross**: Recognizes healthcare qualifications; medical professions are handled by **FOPH (Federal Office of Public Health)** and **MEBEKO (Swiss Commission for Medical Professions)**.
- **EDK (Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education)**: Evaluates teaching, pedagogy, and therapy qualifications, requiring proof of language proficiency.
- **Swissuniversities**: Issues level certificates for higher education qualifications for non-regulated professions and provides information on university admission requirements (SBFI, 2022)

While Switzerland does recognize Ukrainian qualifications in various professions, the process can be difficult and complex. The lack of recognition of diplomas and specialist titles is a significant barrier,

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IV (Invalidenversicherung): Disability Insurance  
 EO (Erwerbsersatzordnung): Income Compensation Scheme  
 UVG (Unfallversicherungsgesetz): Accident Insurance Law  
 PK (Pensionskasse): Pension Fund

<sup>8</sup> List of regulated professional activities in Switzerland: [https://www.sbf.admin.ch/dam/sbf/fr/dokumente/2016/08/reglementierte-berufe.pdf.download.pdf/Liste\\_regl\\_Berufe\\_F.pdf](https://www.sbf.admin.ch/dam/sbf/fr/dokumente/2016/08/reglementierte-berufe.pdf.download.pdf/Liste_regl_Berufe_F.pdf)

creating challenges for both employers and job seekers in effectively matching qualifications with job opportunities. Specific data on the costs associated with the recognition process differ case by case, but this aspect can add another layer of difficulty for refugees seeking employment in their trained fields.

## 2.2. Workforce Characteristics

The Swiss workforce is known for its **high levels of education and training**. The dual education system ensures that young people are well-prepared for the labor market, with vocational training programs offering apprenticeships in various trades and professions. Additionally, lifelong learning and continuous professional development are strongly emphasized, ensuring that workers' skills remain relevant in a rapidly changing economic landscape (BFS, 2023).

**69% of Ukrainian refugees in Switzerland hold a university-level education or higher** (Mubi, 2024). This is because the Ukrainian educational system varies substantially, producing many young people with high education degrees but without real practical experience in the job market. Therefore, in the first career years young specialists have to learn a lot, which make them well-trained for accepting the trend of continuous learning. Moreover, unstable economic and political situation over years has not given to Ukrainian people a feeling of stability or predictability over years, making them highly adaptable and quickly adjustable to changes. Therefore, Ukrainian workforce is characterised by a high degree of flexibility and acceptance to change and learning.

In Switzerland in recent years, opportunities for further development and training have become crucial for skilled professionals, influencing their decision to remain with their current employers. Recognizing this trend, many companies have significantly expanded their learning and development programs. Additionally, employees seek to broaden their horizons by working in different departments and taking on new responsibilities. Therefore, companies invested into the job rotation programmes or seconded their employees to other departments or to their customers and suppliers, or temporary switched to branches in other countries/markets. Additionally, they provided in-house training and further education measures, internal leadership programmes, paid time off for participation in external programmes and paid for different study programmes, including those improving all aspects of DEI and ESG.<sup>9</sup>

Noting the cost of investment in employee education, **the majority of employers are focused on adding more permanent jobs** (40%) than the temporary ones (23%), freelances (21%) and outsourcing (25%). This creates a major challenge for Ukrainians with status S, the future of which is still under discussion. Moreover, the majority of Ukrainians cannot give a definite answer if they stay in Switzerland beyond the end of the war in Ukraine and stabilisation of situation. According to UNHCR survey as of December 2023 asking 1000 Ukrainians in Switzerland, only 27% reported no hope of returning, while other 40% have not decided yet and 30% hope to return one day. On the other hand, the war in Ukraine has been ongoing the 11<sup>th</sup> year already, and nobody knows when and under which conditions it will end. Therefore, the hopes of returns can be decreasing with every new year. Thus, their integration and job placement are important both for the Swiss economy to save on their support and to benefit from their skills, and for Ukrainian economy to get back upskilled economically active population able to work for country's reconstruction.

**The integration of Ukrainians in Switzerland is supported through various cantonal programs** aimed at facilitating access to vocational education and training (VET). These include language courses, vocational guidance, and bridging courses, now also available to those with status S. Lifelong learning and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) are essential for adapting to the Swiss job market, with strong support from the government and professional bodies for maintaining and updating skills.

**Switzerland's labor market is known for its dual education system**, which combines vocational training with academic education, producing a highly skilled workforce that meets the demands of various industries. Switzerland's economy is diverse, with key sectors including financial services, pharmaceuticals, machinery, chemicals, and tourism. The service sector dominates the labor market,

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<sup>9</sup> Salary Guide 2024: <https://content.roberthalfonline.com/SG24/SG24-PDF/Robert-Half-Salary-Guide-2024-Switzerland-English.pdf>

employing approximately 75% of the workforce, while the industrial sector employs around 20%, and agriculture about 5% (Federal Statistical Office, 2023).

The Swiss labor market is structured around standardized vocational education and training (VET) qualifications, such as the Federal VET diploma and certificate, which are essential for qualified work. Asylum migrants, especially refugees and temporarily admitted persons without recognized qualifications, struggle with employment and have lower employment rates than Swiss citizens and other migrants. To address this and as a response to a high influx of refugees to Switzerland between 2015-2017, Switzerland accelerated asylum procedures in 2019 and implemented integration measures under the Integration Agenda Switzerland (IAS).

The "pre-apprenticeship programme to support integration" (PAI) was launched as part of the IAS strategy, leveraging the Swiss VET system's public-private partnership model. This program focuses on occupation-specific skill development and learner support. Four years after its introduction, the PAI has successfully helped refugees and temporarily admitted persons enter vocational education and training, which is crucial for their occupational integration.

The PAI is well-regarded by participants and employers, creating a "win-win" situation: employers secure skilled workers, and participants gain VET and employment opportunities. The Swiss government and cantons plan to continue and consolidate the PAI, underscoring its long-term success as an important educational initiative (Teräs et al., 2024).

The available evidence suggests that well-designed vocational education programs, such as the Swiss PAI, can be effective in supporting the integration of high-skilled refugees, including Ukrainians, into the labor market. However, more research is needed to fully understand the long-term outcomes and optimal design of such programs.

The cantons in Switzerland offer a variety of programs to facilitate refugees' access to vocational education and training. These programs include basic language or literacy courses, vocational guidance, and one-year bridging courses aimed at integrating refugees into the VET system. Since 2024 the programme has become also open to persons with status S and to young people from EU, EFTA and third countries<sup>10</sup> (Busse et al., 2024).

Various programs have been mapped out to facilitate access to higher education for refugees in Switzerland. These include academic or vocational baccalaureate programs and equivalent foreign qualifications, which help bridge the gap for refugees seeking advanced educational opportunities (UNHCR, 2024).

Lifelong learning is vital for professional development in Switzerland's dynamic job market, enabling workers to adapt to changing roles, technologies, and trends. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is a key aspect, involving both formal and informal learning activities. The Swiss government and professional bodies advocate for CPD to help workers maintain and update their competencies (SERI, n.d.).

### 2.3. Labor Market Participation

**Labor force participation in Switzerland is high, with a significant proportion of both men and women engaged in the workforce.** The employment rate for women is notably high compared to other European countries, partly due to supportive policies such as parental leave and childcare facilities (ILO, 2023). The majority of refugees from Ukraine in Switzerland (79%) are women and children

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<sup>10</sup> The Integrationsvorlehre (INVOL) program in Switzerland, launched in August 2018, aims to prepare recognized refugees and provisionally admitted individuals for vocational training. It focuses on practical, occupation-specific training and has been extended to include young people from the EU/EFTA and third countries. The program provides targeted support to enhance employability and facilitate integration into the Swiss labor market. Participants with protection status S have access to INVOL too. The Swiss government and cantons are committed to continuing and consolidating INVOL due to its positive outcomes. Source: <https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/de/home/integration-einbuengerung/innovation/invol.html>

(Mubi, 2024), which means that childcare facilities are in demand to help those women join the workforce.

In Switzerland, in 2022, women were still, however, considerably more likely than men to be working part-time (57.7% compared with 19.3%). Women more likely than men to be employed in the services sector. Only 10.3% of women are employed in industry and 1.7% in agriculture. Wage inequality between women and men is gradually decreasing. In 2020, the monthly median wage of women in the overall economy was CHF 6211 and that of men CHF 6963. The wage gap has narrowed since 2014, decreasing from 12.5% to 10.8% in 2020 (FSO news, August 2023).

## 2.4. Immigration and Labour Market

As discussed above, **Switzerland has a long history of immigration**, with foreign workers constituting a substantial portion of the labor force. Immigrants are employed across various sectors, including healthcare, hospitality, and construction. The country has developed specific policies to manage the influx of foreign labor, balancing the need for skilled workers with the socio-economic integration of immigrants.

*Between 2017 and 2022, the number of economically active persons with foreign nationality grew much faster than that of economically active Swiss nationals (+9.7% to 1.8 million compared with +0.4% to 3.6 million). Naturalisations play a role in the structure of the economically active population: from 2017 to 2021, some 121 000 economically active foreigners obtained Swiss nationality. Were it not for these naturalisations, the number of foreign economically active persons would have increased by 17.0% between 2017 and 2022. The unemployment rate based on the ILO definition was higher for the foreign population (7.3% against 2.9% for Swiss nationals). Part-time work was less common among foreign nationals as compared to Swiss: 47.7% to 61% for women and 12.5% to 22.2% for men in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2022. Foreign workers are mainly salaried employees with only 5.8% of them being self-employed or work in a family-run enterprise, which is considerably less than for Swiss workers (10.5%).*

*Over the past five years, the structure of the employed foreign population in Switzerland by permit status has changed slightly. The share of cross-border commuters with G permits increased by 1.4 percentage points to 21.8%, and those with B permits rose by 0.8 percentage points to 28.2%. In contrast, the share with C permits (permanent residence) decreased by 1.8 percentage points to 45.4%, and holders of short-term residence permits (L permits) decreased by 0.9 percentage points to 2.2%.*

*In 2020, Swiss employees had higher median monthly wages (CHF 6988) compared to foreign workers (CHF 6029). This wage gap was consistent across all residence categories. However, foreign workers in high-responsibility jobs, like senior managers, earned more than their Swiss counterparts. For example, cross-border commuters earned CHF 10,692, those with residence permits earned CHF 12,268, while Swiss senior managers earned CHF 10,346. Conversely, for jobs without managerial responsibility, Swiss workers earned more (CHF 6345) than foreign workers, including cross-border commuters (CHF 5773) and residence permit holders (CHF 5287) (FSO, 2023).*

*In general refugee employment rates gradually increase, reaching about 15 percentage points lower than natives' rates ten years after arrival. Younger refugees integrate more quickly and achieve higher long-term employment. Compared to non-EU-15 migrants, refugees take longer to integrate but converge faster than in other European countries. After ten years, refugees' employment rates are 4 percentage points lower than migrants', with similar long-term gaps for both genders. Initial high unemployment negatively impacts refugees' employment prospects long-term, while restrictive attitudes initially have positive effects that decrease over time. Co-national networks have mixed effects, benefiting female refugees but disadvantaging males (Müller, 2022).*

**However, with every new wave of immigration Switzerland has to adjust those policies to effectively match the Swiss labour market demand with the skill set of specific groups of refugees.**

According to UNHCR, the majority of Ukrainian refugees (82%) currently residing in Switzerland came in 2022. In May 2022 SEM estimated their level of professional qualifications based on the random survey of 1000 Ukrainians residing in different cantons and aged 18 to 64. They got 877 answers, showing that fully employable S permit holders tend to have a similar or higher level of education and training compared to the existing migrant population in Switzerland (SEM, 2022). According to a recent UNHCR survey, 69% of respondents have at least university level education and 32% have a master's level degree or above (UNHCR, 2023 December). Therefore, the integration policies applied to Ukrainians should take into account their high level of education.

Also, SEM's survey revealed that the largest professional category of Ukrainians in Switzerland is 'Intellectual and scientific professions' accounting for 39% of the total professional categories

estimated (which also includes 11% of IT and 12% of healthcare professionals), followed by technicians and non-academic staff and service professions and sales staff, who account for other 17% each. Office workers and related staff constitute 10.7%, and managers together with craftsmen and related professions add around 5% each. Other professions are less than 3% and lower (SEM, 2022).

**The demographic composition of Ukrainian refugees is unique due to martial law**, which prevents most men aged 18-60 from leaving Ukraine. Consequently, 70% of adult refugees in host countries are women, and more than a third are children. In Switzerland 79% of Ukrainians are women and children. 14% of refugees are aged 60 and above in Switzerland (UNHCR, 2023 December). This family composition, predominantly mothers with children, poses challenges for labor market integration due to increased caregiving responsibilities and limited access to childcare (OECD, 2023).

In Switzerland, more than half of those employed work part-time. At the same time 52% of Ukrainian refugee households composed of 1-2 adults with dependents. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate if the received from part-time employment income is enough to cover the living costs of those refugees. 27% reported to UNHCR of not being able to cover their household's basic needs.

However, according to OECD Ukrainian refugees appear to have held higher-skilled positions. At least half of the Ukrainian refugees in Switzerland reported working in high-skilled jobs, particularly in intellectual and scientific professions. Middle-skilled occupations, such as cashiers and secretaries, were less common, accounting for 37%. Sales and services were the most common middle-skill jobs, comprising about 18%. Hospitality is one of the most common sectors of employment for Ukrainian refugees in a number of countries with available data, including Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, Switzerland and Ireland. Less than 4% of refugees worked in elementary occupations in Switzerland. At the same time UNHCR's survey revealed that 50% of those employed work at a lower level than their previous employment in Ukraine (OECD, 2023; UNHCR, 2023 December).

According to SEM's statistics the employment of Ukrainians has grown from 20.87% in December 2023 (week 50) to 25.68% in July 2024 (week 28).<sup>11</sup> During the UNHCR's survey Ukrainians reported that 21% respondents are currently working, while about one fourth declared themselves as unemployed and looking for a job (29%), and a fifth are following professional trainings or courses (21%). The composition of economic sectors of work has not changed much during this period (judging by the statistics of SEM). The majority is working in hotel and catering (22%) followed by planning/consulting/ IT (19%). Personal services, education and residential homes/ welfare care constitute 6%, 5% and 4% among employed Ukrainians in Switzerland. The rest of 44% work in other sectors.

The majority of Ukrainians live in canton Zurich (18'487 persons or 17,91%) followed by canton Bern (12'446 or 12%), Vaud (9696 or 9.4%), Aargau (8'291 or 8%), St. Gallen (6'148 or 5.94%), Geneva (6'034 or 5.84%), Luzern (4954 or 4.81%), Ticino (4'172 or 4.04%) and Valais (4'156 or 4.03%).<sup>12</sup>

**Since 2018, Switzerland is piloting an algorithm to enhance refugee employment by using big data to analyze asylum seekers' characteristics and recommend regions where they are most likely to find work.** The algorithm aims for an even distribution across cantons based on capacity and integration opportunities, though it doesn't consider language. This approach has raised concerns in Aargau about the effectiveness of integration, as language barriers can impede asylum seekers' ability to settle and integrate into their new communities. At the same time preliminary research results show that this data-driven, cost-efficient approach optimizes longer-term employment outcomes, potentially improving integration without expensive interventions like language or job training programs. It has the potential to increase third-year employment in the Swiss context by about 73%. Nevertheless, further research is needed to refine the algorithm for optimal results (Graham 2018; Bär 2018; Bansak 2018).

As for the cantonal distribution of Ukrainian refugees, the Swiss government has implemented a coordinated system where Ukrainian refugees with protection status S. They are distributed across the

<sup>11</sup> SEM (2023, 2024). (Archive): *Persons with Protection Status S in employment*:  
<https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/en/home/asyl/ukraine/statistiken.html#accordion1720698252467>

<sup>12</sup> SEM (2024). *Cantonal allocation of persons with protection status S*  
<https://www.sem.admin.ch/dam/sem/en/data/asyl/ukraine/statistik-w/240711-kantonszuweisung-status-s.pdf.download.pdf/240711-kantonszuweisung-status-s-e.pdf>

cantons based on population size, with the federal government providing financial compensation to the cantons to support the accommodation and integration of these refugees. Even in cases when refugees arranged private accommodation by themselves, the distribution ratio was controlled to be maintained.<sup>13</sup>

Different cantonal and private initiatives have been established to support the integration of Ukrainians.

For example, Caritas Switzerland helped to place 4'180 Ukrainians into private accommodation/ host families in 2022 (Caritas, 2023). 25,000 people were accommodated through the Swiss Refugee Council (SFH). SFH put an emphasis on effective coordination among various stakeholders (authorities, aid organizations, refugees, and host families), proposing minimum standards for uniform treatment across cantons. The Swiss population showed significant solidarity, with many offering accommodation to Ukrainian refugees. The SFH's concern is the demographic composition, primarily women and children, which poses challenges for labour market integration due to increased caregiving responsibilities and limited access to childcare. Therefore, the SFH continues to push for the private accommodation of refugees as a permanent part of the Swiss asylum system and advocates for further legislative changes to ensure fair treatment and better integration of all refugees (SFH, 2023).

As for the employment possibilities, SFH as well as other organisations organized numerous educational events for adults and youth, focusing on asylum, migration, and integration. Caritas Lucerne initiated the job search project for Ukrainian refugees in August 2022 that was running till the end of 2023. Caritas reported that the biggest challenge is the language, especially for the lower qualified jobs with which Caritas work (e.g., catering or cleaning industries). Another reported hurdle is the recognition of qualifications, as the procedures often take a very long time until the necessary evidence is available (Caritas 2023).

Based on the results of numerous projects and initiatives carried out by various actors for the integration of Ukrainians in Switzerland, here is a list of identified obstacles/ key challenges to employment:

1. **Recognition of Qualifications:** This is one of the primary barriers for all refugees. Many refugees possess skills and qualifications that are not easily transferable to the Swiss labor market due to differences in education systems and standards. This often results in underemployment or employment in low-skilled jobs that do not match their qualifications (OECD, 2022).
2. **Language Proficiency:** Proficiency in one of the national languages (German, French, Italian, less Swiss German regional dialects and Romansh) is crucial for securing employment in Switzerland. Language barriers significantly hinder refugees' ability to find jobs that match their skills and experience. Language courses are available, but the time required to achieve proficiency can delay entry into the labor market (Caritas Switzerland, 2023).
3. **Social Integration:** Social integration challenges, including discrimination and a lack of social networks, also impede refugees' employment prospects. Employers may be hesitant to hire refugees due to stereotypes or concerns about their ability to integrate into the workplace culture (UNHCR, 2023).
4. **Administrative and Legal Obstacles:** Navigating the administrative and legal requirements for employment can be daunting for refugees. The process of obtaining work permits, understanding labor laws, and accessing employment services requires support and guidance, which is not always readily available (Swiss Refugee Council, 2023).
5. **Access to Information and Services:** Refugees often lack information about available job opportunities, vocational training programs, and support services. Effective dissemination of information and targeted outreach are essential to connect refugees with resources that can aid their employment efforts (BAG, 2023).

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<sup>13</sup> Questions and answers as for the cantonal allocation can be found here:

<https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/en/home/sem/aktuell/ukraine-krieg.html#-292571337> (cantonal allocation).

The Swiss government and various non-governmental organizations have implemented several policies and initiatives to address these barriers:

1. **Integration Programs:** Various integration programs provide language training, job search assistance, and vocational training to refugees. These programs aim to enhance refugees' employability and facilitate their entry into the labor market (SEM, 2023).
2. **Recognition of Qualifications:** Efforts have been made to streamline the recognition of foreign qualifications, including the establishment of equivalence procedures and advisory services to help refugees navigate the process (SECO, 2023).
3. **Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and private companies has led to the development of initiatives aimed at creating job opportunities for refugees. These partnerships leverage the resources and expertise of different sectors to support refugee employment (UNHCR, 2023).
4. **Local and Cantonal Initiatives:** Cantonal governments have implemented additional measures to complement national policies, tailoring support to the specific needs of refugees in their regions. These initiatives often involve local employment services and community organizations (Path2Work, 2024).
5. **Research and Advocacy:** Ongoing research by institutions like ETH Zurich and the University of Lausanne aims to provide evidence-based recommendations for improving refugee employment outcomes. Advocacy efforts by various organizations also play a crucial role in raising awareness and influencing policy (ETH Zurich, 2023).
6. **Online job search platforms.** The filter of "Jobs4Ukrainians" has been introduced at two websites: jobs.ch (for German-speaking cantons) and jobup.ch (for French-speaking cantons).<sup>14</sup> However, as of 12 July 2024 only one company ti&m AG in ICT area advertised the job with this filter at jobs.ch. Another search result at the website find-a-job-in-Switzerland has shown 7 work opportunities for Ukrainians in Geneva, Zurich and Ticino.<sup>15</sup> A separate example is the project J4UA (Jobs for Ukrainians) that is under development and based on the scientific project of the University of Lausanne called J4U (Jobs for You) within Behavior-Change Technology to Support Job Seekers in Switzerland<sup>16</sup>. A scientific apparatus is used there, which allows to combine cognitive abilities, competencies and professions that are in demand in Switzerland and match them with the skills and competencies of job seekers (Iarmosh, 2023).

*The literature review on the Swiss labor market for Ukrainian refugees reveals a complex interplay of economic, social, and policy factors influencing employment outcomes, with a significant challenge posed by the "Status S" designation. Studies highlight that while Switzerland's robust economy and low unemployment rates present favorable conditions, structural barriers such as language proficiency, recognition of qualifications, and social integration challenges persist. The temporary nature of Status S creates uncertainty for both employers and refugees, hindering long-term employment opportunities and affecting the ability to secure stable and meaningful work. Research underscores the importance of targeted support mechanisms, including language and skills training, and employer incentives, to enhance employability and job retention among refugees. Comparative analyses with other refugee groups indicate that tailored policies addressing specific needs of Ukrainians and fostering collaboration between governmental bodies, NGOs, and the private sector are crucial. Additionally, policy reforms providing clearer pathways to permanent residency and employment rights, alongside enhanced support services tailored to the specific needs of Ukrainian refugees, are essential for achieving sustainable employment integration in Switzerland.*

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.jobcloud.ch/c/en/ukraine-friendly-jobs-switzerland>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.findajobinswitzerland.com/search?language=Ukrainian>

<sup>16</sup> Research Project: [Behavior-Change Technology to Support Job Seekers](https://wp.unil.ch/persuasivelab/open-source-projects/) by the [Persuasive Technology Lab](https://wp.unil.ch/persuasivelab/open-source-projects/) of UNIL/ HEC Lausanne: <https://wp.unil.ch/persuasivelab/open-source-projects/>

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively understand the factors influencing the employment of Ukrainian refugees in Switzerland. The methodology integrates quantitative and qualitative data collected through surveys, interviews, and secondary data analysis. The survey period was ongoing from June 10 to July 5, 2024.

#### 3.1. Survey among Ukrainian Refugees

A structured survey was conducted among Ukrainian refugees residing in Switzerland to gather quantitative data on their employment status, challenges faced in securing jobs, and their perceptions of the labor market. The survey included questions in English with Ukrainian translation on demographic information, language proficiency, education and skills, job search experiences, and barriers to employment. The survey was designed in Google Forms and had a logical structure to allow not only Ukrainians with status S answer the questions, but also citizens of other countries to express their opinion, as well as those Ukrainians that hold other than S status or live in Switzerland longer than since February 2022. Later the logical structure allowed to create different streams (set of questions) for employed and unemployed Ukrainians.

The survey was distributed through various channels. The major channel was Telegram groups in different cantons. In particular the following Telegram channels were used:

- (1) Ukrainians in Switzerland who communicate in Ukrainian language (12'285 members with usually about 20% being online or being active)
- (2) Switzerland for its own (21'229 members with about 15% active)
- (3) Ukrainians in Thun (893 members with about 14% active)
- (4) Ukrainians in Lausanne (2'324 members with about 16% active)
- (5) Ukrainians in Zurich (2'756 members with about 19% active)
- (6) Ukrainians in Winterthur (913 members with about 13% active)
- (7) Ukrainians in Basel (two groups: 656 members with about 17% active; and 1588 members with about 20% active)
- (8) Ukrainians in Solothurn (736 members with about 14% active)
- (9) Ukrainians in Luzern (1'254 members with about 15% active)
- (10) Ukrainians in Zug (531 members with about 15% active)
- (11) BSUE – Ukrainian business club in Switzerland (2244 members with about 18% active)<sup>17</sup>

Other distribution channels included refugee/ migrant support and training organizations (e.g., BNF<sup>18</sup>, Capacity Zurich), refugee support individuals (who reached out privately to respondents via their social networks), Ukraine related networks (e.g. Ukraine Culture Network in Bern, UCN) and private networks.

#### 3.2. Interviews and Surveys with Employers

To gain insights from the demand side of the labor market, semi-structured interviews and online surveys were conducted with employers across different sectors. The simple survey in Google Forms

<sup>17</sup> The number of members and activity status is given by the state of 13 July 2024.

<sup>18</sup> BNF - Nationales Qualifizierungsprogramm, [https://www.bnf.unibe.ch/index\\_eng.html](https://www.bnf.unibe.ch/index_eng.html)

was designed and distributed to a range of international companies in Switzerland, via business clubs (e.g., BPW<sup>19</sup>), training centers (BNF), work integration networks (e.g., Arbeitsintegration Schweiz), during the thematic events (e.g., TASC Future of Work Summit 2024<sup>20</sup>, events of Capacity Zurich<sup>21</sup> and Powercoders<sup>22</sup>) and private contacts (including LinkedIn). The interviews were conducted during the in-person events and personal meetings, and focused on employers' experiences with hiring refugees, perceived benefits and challenges, and their suggestions for improving the employment prospects of Ukrainian refugees.

### 3.3. Consultations with Employment Services and Government Agencies

Emails sent to 26 cantons, in particular to departments or employment services which deal with Ukrainians found via the Cantonal immigration and employment market authorities<sup>23</sup> or via the Work.Swiss.<sup>24</sup> In-depth consultations were held with representatives from employment services in several cantons (RAV) and the Swiss public employment service (BIZ Bern). The State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) shared links to their website to relevant documents and publications, while the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) expressed interest in the research results, however was not able to respond to the request due to the short notice. These consultations aimed to understand the existing support mechanisms, identify gaps in services, and gather recommendations for policy improvements.

### 3.4. Secondary Data Analysis

Secondary data from official sources such as SEM, SECO, the Federal Statistical Office, international organisations such as UNHCR, ILO, OECD and others, academic literature sources, as well as newspapers (e.g. Swissinfo), public and private initiatives were analyzed to provide context and validate findings from primary data collection.

### 3.5. Data Analysis

Quantitative data from surveys were analyzed using standard Google forms inbuilt software to identify key trends, possible correlations and aggregate the results. Qualitative data from interviews and consultations were transcribed and analyzed thematically to extract common themes and insights.

### 3.6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all survey respondents and interview participants. Data confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, and participation was voluntary with the option to withdraw at any time without consequence.

This comprehensive methodology ensures a robust and holistic understanding of the employment landscape for Ukrainian refugees in Switzerland, providing a solid foundation for evidence-based policy recommendations.

### 3.7. Research limitations

This research was limited to 45 days, with only 35 days allocated for data collection and analysis. Respondents were asked to provide responses within 1-2 weeks upon receiving the email or access to the questionnaire. We fully understand the reasons why many companies and other contacted organizations and institutions were unable to provide answers within this timeframe. Nevertheless, we

<sup>19</sup> Association of Business and Professional Women Switzerland: <https://bpw.ch/en/Home>

<sup>20</sup> <https://tascplatform.org/event/future-of-work-summit-2024>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.capacity.swiss/events/> (i.e. Connect Networking Event, DOW speed coaching event)

<sup>22</sup> [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/christianhirsig\\_dont-miss-our-rooftop-party-in-bern-activity-7206200098249158658-B1OL/](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/christianhirsig_dont-miss-our-rooftop-party-in-bern-activity-7206200098249158658-B1OL/)

<sup>23</sup> [https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/en/home/sem/kontakt/kantonale\\_behoerden/adressen\\_kantone\\_und.html](https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/en/home/sem/kontakt/kantonale_behoerden/adressen_kantone_und.html)

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.arbeit.swiss/secoalv/en/home/menue/institutionen-medien/links.html>

would like to express our sincere gratitude to those who managed to respond on such short notice and to those who expressed their willingness to discuss the results and cooperate on developing a multistakeholder framework to facilitate the employment of Ukrainian refugees in Switzerland.

Moreover, the requests for cooperation and data collection were sent by a private Ukrainian individual holding Status S in Switzerland and studying at the Executive Education Program in Diplomacy, Negotiations, and Policy at the Geneva Graduate Institute. Several organizations replied that they do not cooperate with private researchers and can only respond to similar requests if sent by SEM or other official institutions. Some Ukrainian respondents raised concerns regarding the protection of their personal data, despite the questionnaire containing a disclaimer on data confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation.

Finally, considering that policies and instruments used in different cantons sometimes differ, a thorough analysis requires more time and discussions with responsible individuals. Therefore, the results and policy recommendations derived from this research are solely based on the received data, their analysis, and comparisons. Data triangulation with previously conducted surveys and research, as shown in the literature review, as well as opinions obtained from interviewing multiple stakeholders representing different organizations or Ukrainian refugees, were also utilized.

## 4. DATA COLLECTED

**We collected both qualitative and quantitative data.** For quantitative data we designed surveys in Google forms separately for Ukrainian refugees and Swiss Employers. The form for Ukrainian refugees was in English and Ukrainian languages and had a logical structure depending on the status, the years of residency in Switzerland and on the employment status. The form for employers was the simple one to save their time.

The Google form surveys have been filled in by 154 Ukrainian refugees and 5 companies during June 10 and July 5, 2024. As the questionnaires were voluntary none of questions were marked as obligatory to answer. Therefore, the quantity of responses appeared to be lower for some questions. Moreover, due to the logical structure, the number of respondents also divided between those who live in Switzerland long-term, who are employed and who are unemployed.

For the qualitative data we conducted interviews with some Ukrainian refugees, employers and organisations, and other stakeholders involved in the integration work. We sent emails to SEM, SECO, BIZ and cantonal employment and integration offices, usually trying to target people who might work with Ukrainian refugees. We received answers from SEM, SECO, BIZ and about half of the cantons, and sometimes engaged in a longer conversation via scheduled calls. We also sent emails to multiple employers and over 50 organisations working in integration area<sup>25</sup>, and used BNF and BPW to reach out to more employers. We approached different stakeholders at the thematic events related to the future of work (TASC platform) and integration (Capacity Zurich, Powercoders). We received answers from several employers, SFH, Powercoders and several other organisations. We carefully analysed the documentation provided by state institutions, cantons and organisations working in integration.

Limited time for this research did not allow for a deeper analysis or a thorough examination of the integration practices for Ukrainian refugees across different cantons. Additionally, the short timeframe prevented the involvement of more employers in the study. We observed that most employers are not interested in participating in research cooperation, indicating the need for targeted individual discussions with them to gather more comprehensive insights.

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.arbeitsintegrationschweiz.ch/mitglieder>

## 5. RESULTS

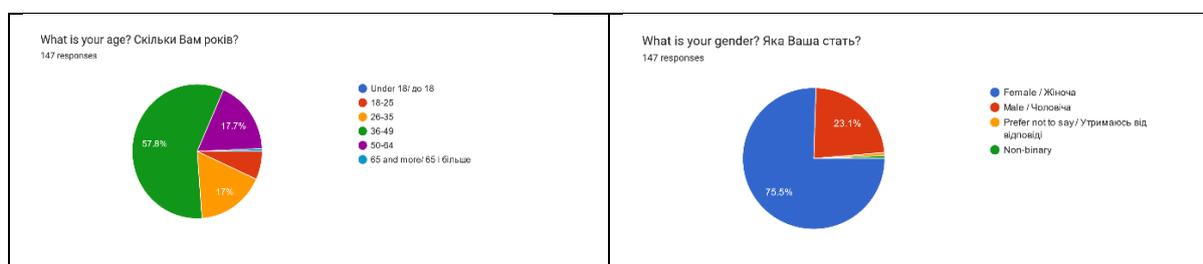
### 5.1. Ukrainian refugees in Switzerland

#### 5.1.1. General demographic picture

The majority (57.8%) of 147 respondents are 36-49 years old with 75.5% of them being women. 40.1% of participants are married and 21.8% have their husband or wife with her/ him in Switzerland. However, partners of 11% of respondents stay in Ukraine. 36.8% of respondents have their children under 18 y.o. living with them in Switzerland. 12.9% are single mothers or fathers. Only 6.8% respondents answered that they have a family member with them who help with childcare. 30% of people are single with no kids. This data fully corresponds with previously conducted surveys, e.g., UNHCR reported the average age of their respondents of 41 y.o. with the majority being women with children.

Marital and family status: 147 responses, checkbox*	
I am married/ in partnership	58
My husband/ wife live in Ukraine	16
My husband/ wife live with me in Switzerland	32
My kids are under 18 y.o. and with me in Switzerland	54
I am a single mother/ farther taking care of kids under 18 y.o. in Switzerland	19
I have my family member with me in Switzerland, who is helping with child care	10
I am single with no kids (incl. divorced/ widowed)	44
Other**	11

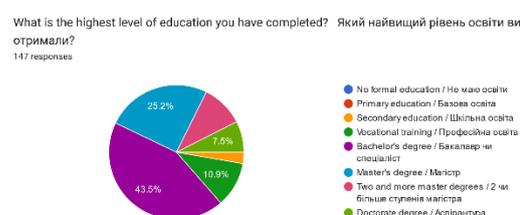
\* Respondents could select several answers applicable to her or his situation.  
 \*\* I am single and my adult son lives in Ukraine; my child under 18 y.o. is in Ukraine; my son is over 18 y.o. and lives with me; I am divorced and my 2 children and 2 grandchildren live in Ukraine; I take care about my mother; I am divorced and my kid lives with my former wife in Switzerland; etc.



#### 5.1.2. Educational characteristics

Most respondents have university-level education but need longer time to master local languages. These results are in line with UNHCR, OECD and SEM estimates presented above in the literature review.

In particular, 86.4% of respondents have high education, which include 43.5% people with bachelor (or specialist<sup>26</sup>) degrees, 25.2% with master degrees, 10.2% with two or more master degrees and 7.5% with doctorate degrees. 48.3% of people speak fluent English and 27.9% speak fluent German, while only 4.1% speak French and even less (0.7%) speak Italian fluently. Several respondents answered that they are learning either German or French, and some – English. One person raised the concern that his/ her social worker refused to cover B1 German courses. Some participants marked that they also speak fluent Polish. Obviously, 95.5% of Ukrainians speak fluent Russian.



Which languages do you speak fluently, checkbox for 147 responses	
English	72
German	41
French	6
Italian	1
Russian	141
Ukrainian	148
Polish	3
Learn French	3
Learn German: B1-B2	4
Learn German: A1-A2	3
Learn English	3

<sup>26</sup> Specialist is a middle degree in Ukraine that requires 5 years of study in the institution of higher education. Bachelor degree is obtained after 4 years and master degree after 5.5-6 years of studies.

### 5.1.3. Cantonal distribution and living conditions

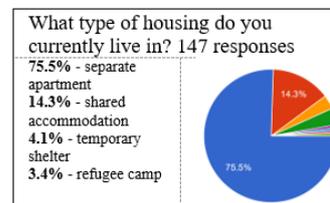
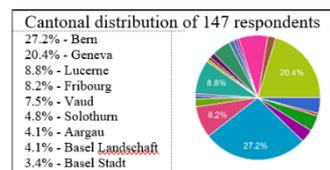
The majority of respondents live in cantons Bern and Geneva, followed by Lucerne, Fribourg, Vaud, Basel, Solothurn and Aargau.

75.5% respondents live in a separate apartment and 14.3% share accommodation. 62.6% found and rented their accommodation on their own while 34.7% got it from the government/ municipality.

**73.5% are satisfied with their current living conditions.** Those who are unsatisfied put the lack of privacy as a primary reason for their dissatisfaction (33 checkbox answers for 144 respondents). Other reasons named were high cost of rent (29), overcrowding (25), poor maintenance (14), long distance from school or work (10). Eight answers identified their facilities as inadequate and five more named safety concerns.

**53.7% think that improvements in their housing situation may not influence their employment potential,** while 40.1% think that it may.

This suggests that while adequate housing is crucial for overall well-being, it may not be a primary factor affecting their ability to secure employment. Therefore, other factors such as language skills, recognition of qualifications, and integration into the Swiss labor market may play a more significant role in their employment outcomes.



### 5.1.4. Reasons for migration and intentions of return to Ukraine and geographical distribution in Switzerland

War in Ukraine was the primary reason of migration of Ukrainians to Switzerland. 87.1% out of 147 respondents selected this reason. Other 5.4% joined their family members (reunification) and 4.8% moved to Switzerland due to work.

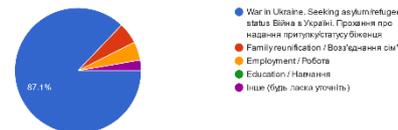
The majority of Ukrainians who answered the questionnaire came to Switzerland more than 2 years ago (56.5%). A third part lives in Switzerland between 1 and 2 years and about 12% came less than a year ago.

**Most of respondents do not plan to come back to Ukraine (48.3%)** and a little bit above the third has not decided yet (34.7%). Only 13.6% have a firm decision to come back. Taking into account that only a minority of Ukrainians are sure to come, the integration policies with the focus on employment should be intensified.

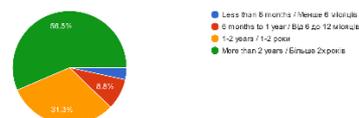
We also asked **what can influence the decision of Ukrainians to come back to Ukraine.** The majority answered that they plan their future in Switzerland (82 answers), as well as work, security and future of their children are important for them. Twenty people no longer have a place to return to – their homes ruined or territories occupied.

**In order to address the concerns of employers about the reliability of Ukrainian employees—specifically regarding the possibility of them quitting their jobs in Switzerland and returning to Ukraine—we collected and analyzed their opinions. 55.8% answered that if they have a good work in Switzerland, they will not come back to Ukraine.** Other 33.3% still answered that it is too

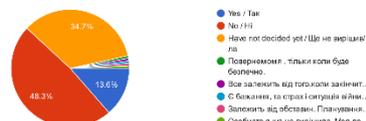
What was the primary reason for your migration to Switzerland? Що було основною причиною вашої міграції до Швейцарії?  
147 responses



How long have you been living in Switzerland? Як довго Ви живете в Швейцарії?  
147 responses



Do you plan to come back to Ukraine? Чи плануєте Ви повертатися в Україну?  
147 responses



early for them to decide – they prefer to evaluate the situation when the war ends. 6.1% answered that work is not the main factor for them to decide about the coming back and 2.7% answered that they will come back.

We also got 127 responses to the open question “**What is the main driver for you to decide if to stay in Switzerland or come back to Ukraine?**”. The majority

answered that it is safety in Switzerland, war in Ukraine and future of their children. Respondents pointed out that they value Switzerland for democracy, respect of human rights, neutrality, stability, independent economy, dignified wages and work conditions, future perspectives, security and the most important – 500 years without the war. Many pointed out the necessity to find a job in Switzerland and become independent from the social aid. The only reason to come back could be reunification with families.

A respondent wrote: *“I have three children, two with me, and my eldest son, who is 23 years old, stayed in Ukraine. Therefore, I would return to Ukraine only for the sake of my son, although if I had a well-paying job here, I might stay with my other two children, as we come from an occupied area and do not have our own home in Ukraine.”* Another respondent pointed out: *“I have adapted and am working, and my child has been attending a Swiss school for two years. She has forgotten the Ukrainian alphabet; even when I say the days of the week in Ukrainian, she doesn't understand and asks me to say it in German.”*

Some people pointed out that freezing the conflict is not a solution for them. They expressed concerns that the war may start again, so they will not return under such circumstances and will wait for the establishment of real safety, security, and the start of the reconstruction of Ukraine. Others mentioned that they are concerned about the politics in Ukraine and the state of economy, and do not see themselves in Ukraine any longer. They are concerned about corruption and medical support in Ukraine. Some do not have their home in Ukraine any longer.

A respondent wrote: *“Corruption in Ukraine – I don't see any signs that it will significantly decrease in the next generations. I have lived through two revolutions and no longer want to spend time waiting for a better future.”* Another respondent emphasised: *“The war in the country has been going on for 10 years, why is no one talking about this? The conflict will last a long time, and our best people are dying. What are you even talking about?”*.

The minority plan to move to other western countries or look at Switzerland as a temporary solution of stay. Still there was one answer: “My homeland is Ukraine”.

These responses confirm once again that integration with the emphasis on meaningful employment of Ukrainians is very important as the majority like Switzerland and plan their future here, especially if they have a good job.

### 5.1.5. Attitude to Ukrainians and discrimination

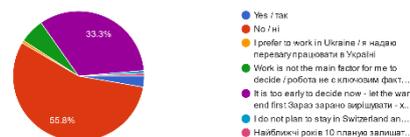
We received 138 responses to the open question if Ukrainians faced any discrimination in Switzerland. There were 15 answers “no” and others admitted and even named the cases of discrimination.

Several people pointed out that they feel that the respect and inclusion for Swiss people is higher. They face discrimination in municipalities and with their social workers. They feel discriminated because they do not speak German fluently.

Several people mentioned discrimination in the job hiring process: preferential selection of Swiss and EU citizens, requirement to know German as native and temporary nature of the status S. One person complained: *“Yes, because of my age. I am 59 years old. The social worker said that I have little chance of finding a job and they won't pay for the B1 language courses.”*

If you have good work in Switzerland, will you come back to Ukraine? Якщо у вас буде хороша робота в Швейцарії, чи повернетеся ви в Україну?

147 responses



### 5.1.6. Financial wellbeing of Ukrainians in Switzerland

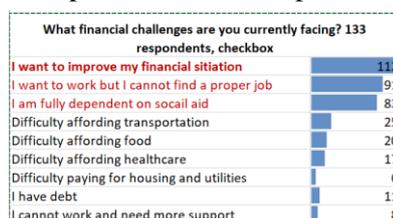
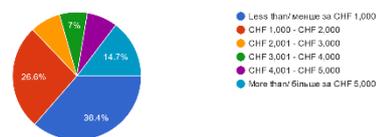
147 respondents identified their main sources of income. The majority depend on social assistance (101 checkbox answers), while other half get the main income through the employment (53). Some use their savings (13) or receive support from their families or friends (8)

The monthly income of Ukrainians in Switzerland is very low: less than CHF 1000 for 36.4% respondents and below CHF 2000 for 26.6%. At the same time 14.7% earn more than CHF 5000 per month.

67.3% and 63.3% of respondents answered that government covers their housing costs and health insurance (social assistance), while 33.3% and 30.6% out of 147 respondents cover these costs on their own.

We asked what financial challenges people face, and what are their plans as for the improvement of their financial situation. The majority mentioned that they are concerned about their full dependence on social aid, they want to change the situation/ improve their financial wellbeing but they cannot find a proper work. **In the current situation some Ukrainians experience difficulty affording transportation, food, healthcare and pay for their housing. Some have debts.**

What is your total monthly household income? Який ваш загальний щомісячний дохід домогосподарства?  
143 responses



Via the open question we asked to name other categories of expenses which Ukrainians find difficulty to cover. People mentioned dental services and medicaments which are not covered by basic insurance, clothes and shoes, on-line and professional studies, sports, music and other educational activities for children, support of relatives in Ukraine, haircut, etc. Some people mentioned they need to travel to Ukraine to visit a dentist. One Ukrainian refugee pointed out: “I want to learn the language or take professional courses, but I don't have the money.”

We also asked if they have savings or financial resources for emergencies. 71.2% out of 146 respondents answered that they don't have. 16.4% mentioned that they have some which will be enough for 3 months, 4.8% - for up to 6 months and 7.5% - for over 6 months.

*These results show that the majority of Ukrainians want to improve their financial situation by finding a proper job but they face numerous obstacles, including for improving their qualification and language learning.*

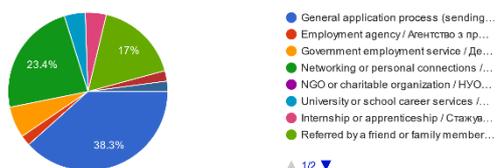
### 5.1.7. Survey of employed Ukrainians

67.3% out of 147 people who answered the question “do you work” are employed. Further details on employment were provided by up to 50 people.

In particular, **56.3% out of 48 respondents answered that they are working full-time and 33.3% - part-time. 4.2% are self-employed.**

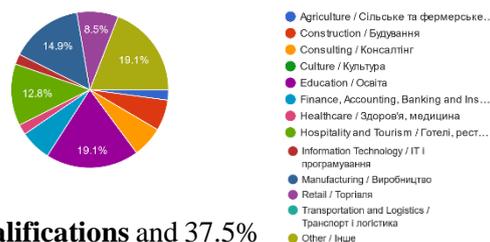
38.3% of respondents found their first job through the general application process, while 23.4% mentioned that this happened via networking and personal connections and other 17% were referred by a friend or relative. Regional employment agencies (RAV) helped to three respondents get the job. Two people started with internship or apprenticeship. Two people got assistance from university and career services. One person got the job through the service of employment agency and two remaining via volunteering.

How did you find your work? Як ви знайшли свою роботу?  
47 responses



We asked about **their positions**. Listed job titles are from low to high levels. In particular, these are expert, assistant in municipality to help with Ukrainians, seller, accountant, jurist, financial consultant, team leader in production, architect, researcher, teacher, cleaner, industrial and farm workers and hotel services.

In which industry do you work? У якій галузі ви працюєте?  
47 responses



**52.1% answered that their job is lower than their qualifications** and **37.5%** admitted that it fits and only **4.2%** got a job that is higher than educational or qualification level.

The majority work in business (70.7%), while 12.2% work for NGOs and 9.8% for the government.

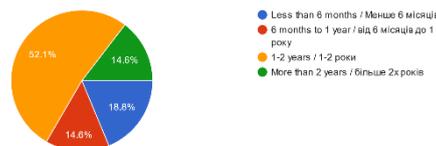
In which sector do you work? У якому секторі ви працюєте?  
41 responses



We asked what were the positions of respondents in Ukraine and if they feel a significant difference in Switzerland. Only 3 people answered that there is no difference, while others pointed out higher level positions like business owners, managers, IT and financial specialists, engineers, etc.

**50% of Ukrainians (24 persons) got permanent contracts** and 33% - temporary contracts. 6 people work with the letter of engagement or consultancy contracts.

Employment duration: How long have you been in your current job? Тривалість зайнятості: Як довго ви працюєте на своїй нинішній роботі?  
48 responses



The majority of respondents are satisfied with their jobs in Switzerland and over a half of respondents work already 1-2 years.

**18 people answered that with other than S status they can count on a longer-term employment.**

10 other people shared that their employers are ready to help them to get another status. **9 people pointed out that their employers plan to employ them long-term disregard of the status**, while other 8 persons admitted that their employers are not concerned because their jobs are temporary.

Does your employer see a problem with status S? Чи бачить ваш роботодавець проблему зі статусом S?  
45 responses



*This statistics indicate a relatively stable employment situation for Ukrainian refugees in Switzerland, with a significant proportion securing permanent contracts and expressing job satisfaction. However, the dependency on Status S remains a barrier to long-term employment stability. Many refugees believe that alternative legal statuses would enhance their employment prospects, and there is notable employer support for facilitating status changes. This suggests that policy adjustments to provide clearer pathways to permanent residency could improve employment security and integration for Ukrainian refugees. Additionally, the willingness of some employers to support status changes indicates a positive environment for advocacy and collaboration between government bodies and the private sector.*

### 5.1.8. Job search

The majority of respondents found their jobs quite fast – within 6 months (38 out of 47 people). However, during this process, **multiple obstacles have been faced by Ukrainian job seekers**. They included:

- Language barrier (29<sup>27</sup>)
- Lack of work experience in Switzerland (27)
- Status S (17)
- Lack of recognition of qualifications (14)
- Lack of job opportunities (12)
- Lack of professional network in Switzerland (12)
- Discrimination (7)
- Financial constraints (e.g., cost of required additional certification or training) (5)
- Psychological stress or trauma (5)
- Lack of childcare support (4)
- Other obstacles: health issues, difficulty in understanding the job application process, cultural differences, overqualification and many job refusals without justification.

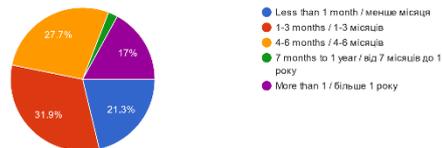
We also asked people to describe which **qualifications** they have. They mentioned higher education degrees, professional qualifications and vocational education, knowledge of languages (for some also Swiss national languages), management, customer service and IT skills.

We also asked if they tried to **recognise their qualifications in Switzerland**. The majority answered that they either did not do so, or do not see a need to do so (35 out of 47 people).

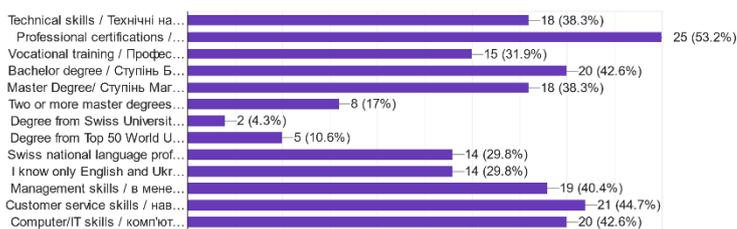
We also asked people what **further education** they need to improve their work situation. In most cases people pointed out language courses, professional certifications and vocational education. Some would like to study in the university or at least get Swiss technical education.

Also, people shared numerous personal stories the majority of which are linked to the lack of clarity as for the status S, impossibility to change it at the moment even for working Ukrainians. This creates obstacles to planning of their future and making investments into the self-education, including Swiss-German which employed Ukrainians feel important to know for informal communication with colleagues at work.

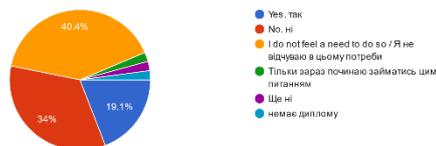
How long have you been actively looking for work? Як довго Вам прийшлося активно шукати роботу? 47 responses



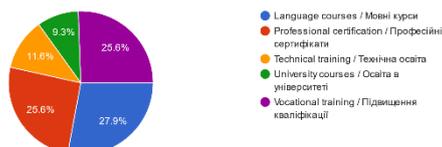
What skills and qualifications do you have? (Select all that apply) Які навички та кваліфікації ви маєте? (Виберіть усі, що стосуються) 47 responses



Have you tried to get your qualifications/ diplomas recognized in Switzerland? Чи намагалися Ви визнати свою кваліфікацію/диплом у Швейцарії? 47 responses



If you feel that you need further education to improve your work situation, please share what type of training or education do you need? Якщо ви від...я, якого типу навчання або освіти ви потребуєте? 43 responses



<sup>27</sup> Number of checkbox answers made by 48 respondents

### 5.1.9. Unemployed Ukrainians.

We managed to get 99 responses from unemployed Ukrainians. The majority of them, 67.7% claim to be actively searching for work. The majority of those who are not searching and indicated the reasons mentioned language learning. 32 people are searching for more than 6 months already, with 16 of them – for more than a year.

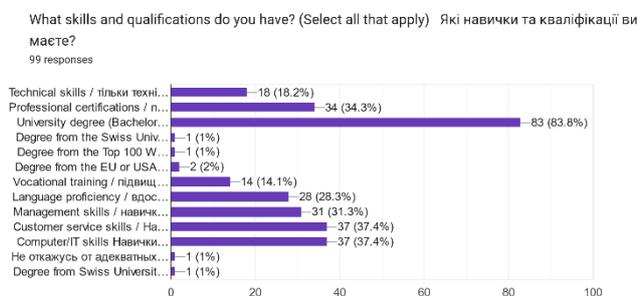
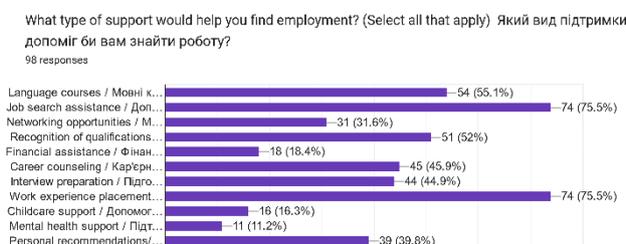
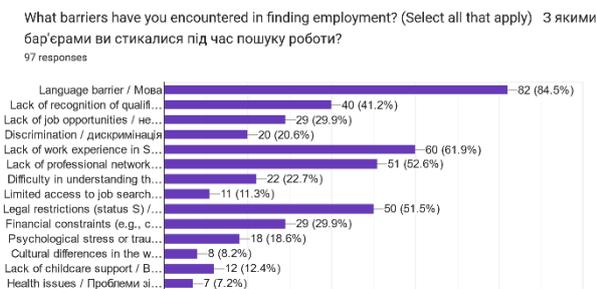
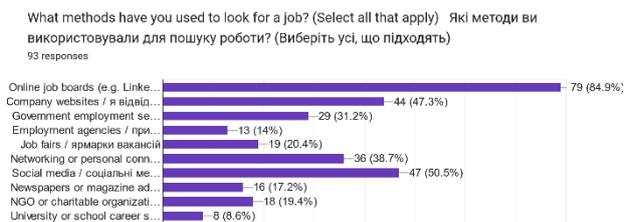
The **major employment barriers** listed by unemployed Ukrainians coincide with the generally recognised barriers which have already been identified during the literature review. They include language barrier, lack of work experience and professional network in Switzerland, legal restrictions/ status S, as well as financial constraints to increase professional qualifications, lack of fitting job opportunities, discrimination, difficulty in understanding the requirements, psychological stress and others.

We asked Ukrainians which type of **support** in their opinion help them **to find jobs**. They listed the following: job search assistance, work experience placement, language courses, recognition of qualifications, career counselling, interview preparation and personal recommendations. Less people asked for financial assistance for additional studies, childcare or elderly care support and mental health support.

**Unemployed Ukrainians have the same set of skills as employed Ukrainians.** In particular, university degrees (including some from Swiss, EU or US universities) and professional certifications, as well as a number of technical, IT, management and language skills.

The majority (64.6%) **did not try to get their qualifications recognised** saying that the either are not aware of the process and do not see a need or find the process to be unclear, too complicated or expensive. Some miss the required documentation or tried to recognise with no success.

Unemployed Ukrainians (98 responses) come from various economic areas with 22.4% occupying top-management position in Ukraine, 18.4% - middle-management, 17.3% - office work and 11.2% were self-employed. This indicates that their skills



may not be easily transferable or recognized in the Swiss context without targeted support and policy adjustments.

58.2% of unemployed Ukrainians expressed the intention to get additional training or education to work in their professional field in Switzerland, while other 31.6% were not sure if this helps.

We also asked how their **current situation affects the ability to seek employment**. Regrettably, the majority answered that they need to prioritise immediate financial needs over the job search, as well as they experience financial difficulties with affording job-search expenses (like transportation or clothes). Several people expressed the need for the child and elderly care, and healthcare support to focus on job search.

We also asked how those **unemployed Ukrainians** supported in Switzerland. The majority answered that they **get government assistance**, while others supported by friends, communities, charitable organisations, host families, professional networks or rely solely on themselves.

We also tried to evaluate their **flexibility as for the job search**, i.e., if they are ready to change their professional field. **60.6% out of 99 respondents answered that they are ready to change the occupation field** in case either the on-job training is provided or the level and salary at this job is corresponds or higher than their current occupation level. 25.3% will be able to decide in a concrete situation and 12.1% are not ready at all.

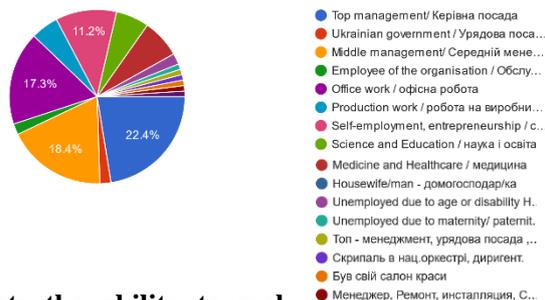
Additionally, we evaluated the **Swiss national language proficiency** of unemployed Ukrainians in Switzerland. 54.1% appeared to be beginners (A1-A2) and 39.8% are intermediate users (B1-B2). Also, in the checkboxes we got 38 answers for fluent English speakers and 9 answers for fluent German speakers. 59.6% are **currently attending language courses** and 14,1% complained that they do not have money to pay for language courses.

**We also asked people if they feel integrated into the Swiss job market. The majority (93.8% out of 98 respondents) answered they feel no or low integration into the Swiss job market.**

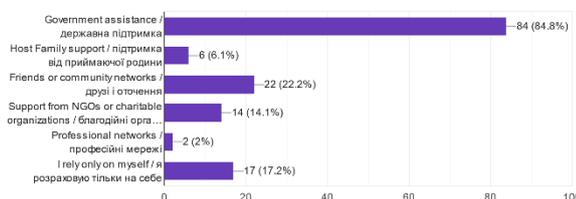
In the end in the open question, we asked **unemployed Ukrainians to share their recommendations as for the facilitation of employment of Ukrainians in Switzerland**. The answers were the following:

- 1) Clarification on status S for both employers and employees. Employers are often not aware on what does it mean to employ the person with status S and about the future of this status.
- 2) Encourage companies to hire Ukrainians by introducing quotas/ encouragements to employ Ukrainians. This is crucial because Ukrainians can be hired only after Swiss and EU citizens, which lives limited opportunities.
- 3) Simplification of legal requirements and introduction of financial incentives for self-employment (grants, loans).
- 4) Increase of funding for professional studies to get required qualifications at the Swiss market.

Which level did you occupy at your work in Ukraine? На якому рівні Ви працювали в Україні?  
98 responses



What type of support systems do you have in Switzerland? (Select all that apply) Як Вас підтримують у Швейцарії зараз?  
99 responses



Are you ready to change your field of profession/ previous education? Чи готові ви змінити сферу діяльності/ попередню освіту?  
99 responses



- 5) Awareness raising workshops for job seekers. Some respondents noted that they are not aware of vacancies and requirements in their cantons, as well as need additional trainings for CV and motivation letter targeting to Swiss market.
- 6) Introduce parallel to job trainings for improving professional qualifications, including language. Ukrainians wish to earn money and study in parallel.
- 7) Support in narrow/ niche areas, access to professional networks (e.g., music).
- 8) More targeted workshops as for employment possibilities and requirements in specific areas.
- 9) Openness and advice for re-qualifications
- 10) Assistance (advice and financial) to Ukrainians in recognition of diplomas and qualifications

Finally, **we asked unemployed Ukrainians to share their future plans**. 44.9% answered that they will stay in Switzerland in case they find a good job. 22.4% answered that they will stay in Switzerland in any case. 17.3% answered that they may consider moving to another country (not Ukraine) where a good job will be available. Only 8.2% of unemployed Ukrainians plan to come back to Ukraine.

Also, we asked them to share personal stories. Many people expressed their gratitude for the support and new home they received in Switzerland. However, many expressed a lot of concerns related to the job search and integration, which could be summarised as follows:

- 1) Integration courses proposed were not targeted to the level of education, qualification and needs, and therefore had no result as for the employment. These courses are financed by the government, and therefore have to be reconsidered to be effective and efficient.
- 2) Language courses are not targeted to capability levels of the group. The effectiveness and speed of language learning could be better if the groups are formed based on qualifications/ educational levels.
- 3) Integration of Ukrainians differ from integration of other refugees. Social workers push to low qualified jobs (cleaners etc.) and refuse paying additional language courses (as A2 is enough for a cleaner).
- 4) Experience of overexploitation of Ukrainians at work
- 5) Clarity with status S will help to get a job easier
- 6) Integration burn-out: several people shared that they are studying, learning language, volunteering, attending professional courses and seminars, as well as have dependencies or childcare, or health problems, and feel little targeted support.

#### **5.1.10. Experience of Ukrainians living in Switzerland for more than 3 years**

We got answers from 4 Ukrainians living in Switzerland longer than since February 2022 with half of them longer than 9 years. They came to Switzerland either via the employment contract, marriage or studies. One person also marked that war in Ukraine was the reason as it is ongoing since 2014. They have S, B, C permits and Swiss citizenship.

Two people got their first job in Switzerland via the general application process and one relocated from the EU. One person is not working due to the childcare. They agree that Ukrainians in Switzerland face language barriers, lack of recognition of qualifications, lack of work experience and professional network in Switzerland, difficulty in understanding the local requirements and other listed above obstacles.

Answering the question on how the increase of number of Ukrainians influenced their lives, three answers were that they are ready to help other Ukrainians to integrate.

## 5.2. Interviews and Surveys with Employers

### 5.2.1 Survey in Google forms

We got 5 answers from companies with 2 companies deciding not to indicate the company name. Several employers which were invited to participate rejected the cooperation for this survey due to the following reasons:

- they could answer such questionnaires only if the survey is conducted by the Swiss government/ authorities.
- they cannot do this on the short notice
- the HR who received the survey is not competent to answer these questions/ not aware of the respective company policies towards hiring of Ukrainian refugees
- big companies and institutions forwarded the survey to wrong departments. More time was needed to make the follow up.

However, the majority of employers which received the survey did not respond at all. The survey was sent to around 70 employers and organisations working in integration.

For respecting the anonymity, we will not give any company/ organisation name here. This survey was answered by 5 organisations. Two respondents represented government/ public sector, other two – business sector and one was an NGO. Two were from the food and FMCG, one – manufacturing and one – consulting.

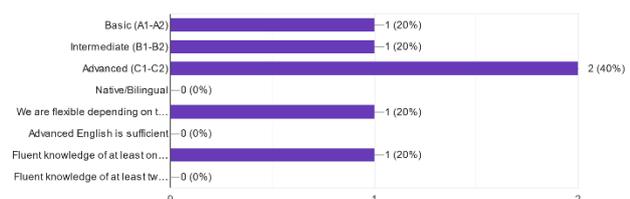
Two employed less than 50 employees, and other three equally represented the 50-100, 100-500 and over 500 employees' sizes. **Only one company hired Ukrainian refugees in the past, up to 10 people.** The positions given to refugees were at different levels: entry and mid-levels, as well as internships / apprenticeships and temporary jobs. The opinion was that Ukrainian refugees are very well trained and educated and fit easily into the team. **Three companies answered that they are willing to hire Ukrainian refugees.**

All five companies answered that **when hiring, they will first look at the set of skills and qualifications** of the person. Four responses also highly estimated language proficiency and one response was about the status S (availability of work permits). All five responses marked German language as an obligatory for them. One respondent also added English.

Regarding the **recognition of qualifications**, only one company said that it will accept a diploma from Ukrainian institution. Another company marked that Swiss diploma or a diploma from a reputable Swiss institution is a must. Other **three employers are ready to accept Ukrainian diplomas verified by a Swiss institution.** At the same time only one company answered that recognition of foreign qualifications is a barrier in the hiring process of Ukrainian refugees. Four out of five respondents might consider supporting the initiatives to simplify the recognition of qualifications of Ukrainian refugees.

Answering about challenges which employers face in hiring Ukrainian refugees. **Language barrier was ranked the highest followed by the recognition of foreign qualifications and experiences, as well as lack of specific skills needed in Switzerland.** The knowledge of at least one Swiss national language is significant with the level depending on the position.

4.3 What level of language proficiency (in Swiss national languages) do you require for the roles available to Ukrainian refugees? (Select all that apply)  
5 responses



Three companies supported if language courses for their Ukrainian employees could be proposed by an NGO or government.

When hiring, one company expressed the concern as for the complicated work permit process. Also, only one company answered positively to the question that the **streamlining of the work permit process allows employers to hire more Ukrainian refugees**.

**Cultural integration is not significant for three companies and somehow significant for other two.** At the same time, they all will appreciate mentorship and capacity building programs, cultural competency training for staff or community integration activities.

We asked then employers what could help them to hire more Ukrainian refugees. The answers were that these are (1) language training programs, (2) skill development programs, (3) simplified work permit process – easy replacement of status S with B or C, and (4, 5) financial incentives and subsidies and support with recognition of qualifications.

We also asked employers about their future initiatives as for hiring Ukrainian refugees. **All five employers answered that they are not planning any initiatives specifically aimed at hiring Ukrainian refugees in the next 12 months.** At the same time three employers might be interested in partnering with local authorities or NGOs to support the employment of Ukrainian refugees. **Four out of five surveyed companies think it is important for the Swiss economy to increase the employment level of Ukrainian refugees.**

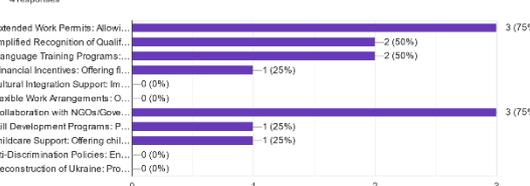
Two companies were concerned if the Swiss federal government's target of employing 40% of Ukrainian refugees by the end of 2024 is not met, and one company reported that they are not involved into this policy making. Two others abstained from any answer to this question.

Also, **we asked if Ukrainian refugees should be prioritised in hiring.** Employers answered that on the one hand Ukrainians are better qualified than other refugees and have very minor differences with other Europeans. However, all refugees should have the same treatment also taking into account that majority of Ukrainians do not plan to stay long-term in Switzerland. Nevertheless, employers are ready to support a number of policies for Ukrainian refugees from extended work permits to financial incentives (please see figure 5.7).

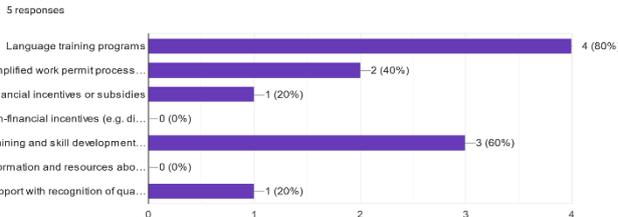
Also, from the **positive sides of the growing number of Ukrainian refugees** in Switzerland employers see a diversified talent pool, addressing labour shortages, cultural enrichment – enhanced workplace diversity, economic contribution, innovation – fresh perspectives and ideas, employee motivation – boosting morale through humanitarian support and corporate responsibility - CSR goals fulfilment.

From the **negative sides of the growing number of Ukrainian refugees**, the employers are concerned about the language barrier, administrative burden, training costs, qualification recognition, integration challenge, increased competition for job vacancies, employee tensions and regulatory compliance. **Employers might also invest into developing**

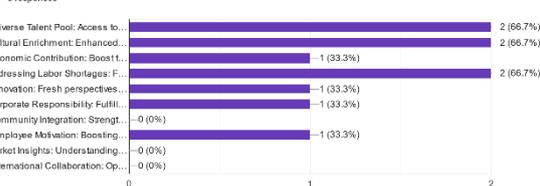
5.7 Which policies towards the future treatment of Ukrainian refugees will your company support?



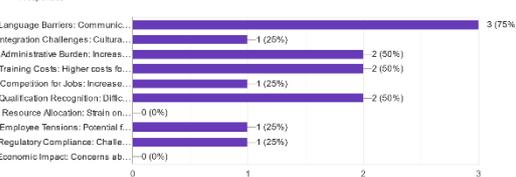
4.12 What types of support would help your company hire more Ukrainian refugees? (Select all that apply)



5.8 Which positive sides of the growing number of Ukrainian refugees in Switzerland does your company see?



5.9 Which negative sides of the growing number of Ukrainian refugees in Switzerland does your company see?



**mitigation and adaptation measures** to address the negative sides listed above alone or in collaboration with other stakeholders. One company also pointed out that it is in consultation in workintegration and potential analysis on the topic.

In the final comments one employer noted “Status S is temporary and return-oriented. If the course of the war in Ukraine makes it reasonable to return, many Ukrainians will return to Ukraine.” This statement contradicts in majority to the responses of Ukrainians, who are not going to come back. **This highlights a discrepancy between employer perceptions and the actual intentions of Ukrainian refugees**, underscoring the need for policies that support the long-term integration of Ukrainians into the Swiss labour market in close coordination with employers informing them about the intentions and efforts made by the Ukrainian refugees to integrate into the Swiss society, proving the non-return plans of the majority.

*In general, we cannot derive firm conclusions from this survey of employers due to the low number of responses received, making it non-representative. However, we encourage SEM and other responsible authorities to conduct similar surveys among employers and to regularly update them about relevant surveys and policies regarding Ukrainian refugees. This will provide more comprehensive data to inform effective policy-making and ensure the successful integration of Ukrainian refugees into the Swiss labor market.*

### 5.2.2. Interviews of individual employers and organisations working in integration area

Interviews and surveys with the employers, private sector and organisations working in integration have shown that the obstacles faced by Ukrainian refugees coincide with the majority of general obstacles shown in the literature review for migrants in Switzerland such as language barriers, lack of recognition of foreign qualifications, limited access to language courses (B1+) and vocational training, insufficient tailored job coaching and counselling, discrimination and bias in the job market, limited availability of childcare solutions, limited information and support for navigating the Swiss labour market, competition with Swiss and EU job seekers, inconsistent integration support across cantons, and financial constraints and limited funding for integration programs. The picture differs from refugees as most of Ukrainians have higher initial qualifications and education, as well as different gender composition – most are women. Some employers see very minor differences with EU migrants; however, they are hesitant to employ Ukrainians due to the status S that is aimed at return. The meaning of protection permit S makes some employers believe that Ukrainians plan to come back. On the background of intentions of Swiss government to integrate Ukrainians into the job market, it is important to raise the awareness of employers on the opinion polls and surveys conducted among Ukrainians, as well as develop a clear transition mechanism for Ukrainians to other work and residential permits. For the permanent jobs it is not possible to force employers hire a person who is indefinitely temporary hosted in Switzerland. The employer invests into an employee and deserves to demand predictability. Those employers participating in our survey expressed the willingness to cooperate with a diverse group of stakeholders to find the solution for a better integration of Ukrainians into the job market.

One big national highly decentralized organisation in Bern that employs almost 8000 persons shared that it employed 23 Ukrainians in the year 2023. However, there is no way to see when their contracts started, nor if there are limited contracts among them. Also, there is no evaluation of their performance in the statistics of this organisation. Therefore, it was not possible for this organisation to fill in the questionnaire. It shared that it treats Ukrainians same as all other their employees.

We had an exchange with the **Swiss Refugee Council (SFH)** that is an “independent voice speaking up for the protection and for the rights of refugees in Switzerland since 1936”. SFH shared that to achieve the targeted 40% employment rate by year-end, their key **recommendations include intensified language training, job coaching, and better support for diploma recognition**. SFH highlights the importance of avoiding discrimination against refugees from other countries and **calls for increased initial integration funding**. The SFH also stresses the **need for comprehensive childcare solutions** to enable refugee women to work (SFH, 2024a). Additionally, since a while **SFH advocates for a**

**unified protection status** to ensure fair treatment and integration opportunities for all displaced persons in Switzerland, stressing the equal treatment for all war-displaced individuals (SFH, 2024b).

Additionally, we got a detailed opinion of **Powercoders** regarding the employment of Ukrainians in Switzerland. Powercoders is a Swiss-based initiative aimed at integrating refugees and migrants into the ICT job market. Their core activity is providing intensive IT bootcamps followed by internships, helping participants develop essential digital skills and gain employment in the IT sector. The program primarily targets refugees and migrants who face barriers entering the Swiss IT job market. It is open to individuals aged 18-55 who are legally permitted to work in Switzerland. Powercoders encourages applications from diverse backgrounds, with a focus on women and other underrepresented groups. Around 93% of the graduates secure internships, and about 60% transition into jobs. This not only helps fill the ICT skill gap in Switzerland, which is projected to reach a shortage of 40,000 specialists by 2030, but also provides a sustainable livelihood to the participants.

Powercoders collaborates with various companies and organizations to support its mission. Notable partners include IBM, Swisscom, and UBS. These partnerships provide resources, internship opportunities, and support for the participants, enhancing their integration into the workforce. The usual pathway involves a 13-week full-time IT course (covering various specializations like Web and Software Development, Data Analytics, Cyber Security, Testing, or DevOps combined with training in social and business skills) followed by a 6-12 month internship with partner companies and potentially a job contract.

Powercoders has been actively involved in training Ukrainian refugees as part of their ICT job integration program in Switzerland. To date, 28 Ukrainian women and men have been trained, with 25 securing internships in leading companies as Banque Pictet, Swisscom, Insel Spital (Data Science Center), SIX, Vaudoise Assurances, ON AG, Ralph Lauren, IBM, Rychiger AG, VNV SA, Alpiq, Baselland Kantonalbank, Swiss Cluster AG, Schweizerische Post, Liip AG, and 5 signing temporary and permanent job contracts. 19 more internships are currently ongoing.

However, Powercoders has shared that working with Ukrainian refugees presents unique challenges compared to other refugees with F or B statuses. The legal barriers include:

1. **Work Permit Requirements:** Employers offering internships to Ukrainian refugees must request a work permit, unlike for other statuses. Internships are a valuable opportunity for Ukrainian refugees to gain experience in the Swiss job market. However, legal complications create additional difficulties in offering more internships to these refugees. The explanations usually received from the cantons are that status S is intended for the return of people to their home country. However, the war in Ukraine has been ongoing for more than two years, and for some territories, for more than ten years. These legal barriers create significant obstacles for these individuals to plan their future and contribute to Swiss society with their skills.
2. **Internship Duration Limits:** Internships for Ukrainian refugees are limited to 6 months. Some IT professions require longer internships, making it difficult for refugees to secure jobs post-internship, often forcing them back to social aid or lower-qualified jobs.
3. **Financial Support Discrepancies:** Financial support for S-status refugees is lower than for other permits. For F and B permits, cantons equally share training costs with Powercoders, but often refuse for S permits, leading to financial strain on the non-profit organization and potential discrimination against S-permit refugees. For example, in the last cycle, Powercoders selected 50% of participants as Ukrainian refugees.
4. **Administrative Burden:** The requirement for permanent contracts for Ukrainian refugees in some cantons adds significant administrative work, further complicating the employment process for motivated companies. Powercoders helps companies negotiate with the cantons. Finally, cantons agree to give a one-year contract to Ukrainian persons, but after one year, a new wave of negotiations has to start.

The Swiss federal government acknowledges these issues but suggest that procedural changes could take up to two years, contradicting the goal of achieving 40% employment for Ukrainians by the end of

2024. These complications, although significant in the ICT sector and for internships, might not apply to all domains. For example, short-term contracts for lower-qualified jobs, such as in restaurants, are reportedly easier to secure.

### 5.2.3. Consultations with Employment Services and Government Agencies

In this part of the research, we followed the general breakdown structure of the labour market in Switzerland.

In particular, at the **federal level** we contacted State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) that oversees immigration policy, asylum procedures, and refugee integration, coordinating with cantonal authorities, and the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) that manages labour market policies and employment services, providing guidelines and support to cantonal labour offices. SECO needed more time to process the request, while SEM shared general information about the federal program "Support measures for persons with protection status S", report on the implementation of support measures as part of the Program S in the cantons, relevant press releases and factsheets regarding the specific national measures announced.

At the **cantonal level** we tried to reach out to cantonal Migration Offices that handle residency permits and ensure compliance with immigration laws, as well as cantonal Offices for Economic Affairs and Employment<sup>28</sup>, which develop and implement regional labor market policies to promote employment and economic growth and which most often linked us to the Regional Employment Centers (RAV / ORP / URC<sup>29</sup>) that provide job placement services, career counseling, and training programs. Also, we had some exchanges with Cantonal Integration Offices, which focus on social and professional integration, offering language courses and vocational training.

Due to the limited time of this research, we did not have an opportunity to talk to all cantonal migration, economic, employment and integration offices. Moreover, we realised that it is more efficient to call to all these services than to write emails. Also emails initially should be written in the language of the canton and account the specificity of every canton. Therefore, on the short notice only larger cantons were able to provide answers either in the email or in scheduled phone conversation.

The scope of this research did not allow to have an exchange with the **local level** (Municipal Social Services) which provide direct support such as social assistance, housing, and integration services. At the same time, we had exchanges with some public-private partnership initiatives and collaborations that provide trainings and job placements to create employment opportunities through collaborations with businesses, SEM and cantons (such as Capacity Zurich and Powercoders). Also, we talked to Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as SFH. Our discussions with these organisations were presented in the previous chapter. Here we would like to shortly provide the information that we received from SEM and cantons.

#### 5.2.3.1 State Secretariat for Migration (SEM)

SEM informed that the "Support measures for persons with protection status S" (Program S) was initiated by the Federal Council on April 13, 2022, to aid individuals from Ukraine. The program promotes integration through education, employment, and social participation, supporting the "dual intent" approach. The State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) provides financial support to the cantons, offering CHF 3,000 for initial integration and CHF 5,000 for vocational training and employment measures. Cantons ensure these measures align with the Swiss Integration Agenda, offering tailored support similar to that for refugees and temporarily admitted persons.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Volkswirtschaftsdirektion / Département de l'économie / Dipartimento dell'economia

<sup>29</sup> German: Regionales Arbeitsvermittlungszentrum (RAV)

French: Office Régional de Placement (ORP)

Italian: Ufficio Regionale di Collocamento (URC)

<sup>30</sup> Federal program "Support measures for persons with protection status S" (Program S) (admin.ch)

<https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/en/home/integration-einbuengerung/integrationsfoerderung/programm-s.html>

The report on the implementation of support measures as part of the Programme S in the cantons dated 27 September 2023 states that by the end of 2022, nearly CHF 119 million had been allocated to cantons. Significant funding is dedicated to language learning, with 70% of the total expenditures focused on language courses. 14% of the budget (CHF 8,402,151) is allocated to measures aimed at improving employability and providing vocational training. Specific programs for early childhood education and support for families constitute 2% of the expenditures. The SEM, in coordination with cantonal authorities, monitors the implementation of Programme S to ensure effective use of funds and address any emerging needs (SEM, 2023 and Annex 1).

The same report found a certain discrepancy between the proven experience and training of people with S protection status and the sectors in which they mainly work. Also, for status S holders the cantons do not receive an integration lump sum from the Confederation (CHF 6'000-18'000). It is only issued when a type B residence permit is granted which has not been yet decided for status S holders. Despite Status S is aimed at return, the promotion of integration, in particular participation in training and work, should begin as quickly as possible. The knowledge and skills acquired in Switzerland can be transferred to the country of origin once the person has returned home. The cantons' costs for accommodation, social assistance and medical care are reimbursed by the Confederation through a lump sum of around CHF 1,500 per person per month. Between March 12, 2022, and December 31, 2022, a total of CHF 118,760,500 was allocated to cantons under Programme S, based on the number of people with protection status S in each canton.

According to the circular relating to Programme S, cantons have the flexibility to implement various support measures for individuals with protection status S. This includes measures designed for migrants and those specific to the Agenda for Integration Switzerland. While cantons can choose their approach, the SEM strongly advises following the Agenda for Integration Switzerland. They are, however, required to prioritize measures that enhance language skills, facilitate access to the labor market, and provide support for children and families.

Case-by-case management is mandatory for recognized refugees and those provisionally admitted under the Swiss Integration Agenda. This intensive, individual follow-up ensures the continuity, relevance, and goal orientation of integration measures, as all personal situations differ. Some cantons had adapted and simplified their case-by-case management systems for individuals with protection status S, mainly due to resource constraints.

Most cantons report having opened many existing cantonal integration programs (PIC) and the Swiss Integration Agenda (AIS) measures to individuals with protection status S to enhance their employability. According to the SEM survey, as of March 31, 2023, 10 cantons offer such measures for individuals with protection status S, 12 cantons offer them in a reduced form compared to AIS, and 4 cantons do not offer or plan to offer such measures. One of the main challenges mentioned by the cantons is the **limited language skills** of individuals with protection status S, affecting their chances of finding jobs that match their qualifications or skills. The majority of cantons offer integration encouragement measures in the training domain, many of which are implemented and financed jointly with regular structures. In the canton of Zurich, the transitional program START! by EB Zurich prepares participants for apprenticeships. Across Switzerland, 1,088 young people with protection status S participated or had participated in such integration encouragement offers, representing about 13% of adolescents and young adults with protection status S in Switzerland as of March 31, 2023.

To facilitate regular exchange and encourage the development of best practices, the SEM and the Conference of Cantonal Directors of Social Affairs (CdC, Conférence des directrices et directeurs cantonaux des affaires sociales) organize monthly teleconferences focused on implementing support measures for people with S permits. Topics and needs of the cantons are addressed upon request, such as supporting host families, access to scholarships for individuals with protection status S, or support during foreign diploma recognition processes.

Overall, SEM reports that **the influx of people in a short time posed significant challenges to integration support structures**, including a shortage of qualified personnel, especially for language courses, and material limitations like inadequate infrastructure and insufficient available spaces. **These issues pressured the cantons and possibly delayed Programme S implementation. Cantons have**

**worked intensively to rapidly increase the capacity of integration support offers. The unpredictability of protection status S caused uncertainty among the cantons,** although they aimed to implement an integration encouragement program from the start of the crisis. Communicating the Programme S approach took time to establish. **Many cantons desired a clearer signal from the Confederation regarding the integration mandate.**

There are significant differences between cantons in implementing Programme S. Therefore, establishing a direct link between Programme S implementation and the professional and social integration success of individuals with protection status S is not possible. As part of its monitoring and examination of cantonal integration programs (PIC), the SEM will engage with all cantons on Programme S implementation.

However, different actors show a high level of cooperation benefitting people with protection status S. As shared by SEM, since the end of 2023, the SEM and SBFJ have supported three pilot projects aiding highly qualified recognized refugees, temporarily admitted persons, and individuals with protection status S in entering the labour market through job coaching towards recognition of their qualifications via partnering with Pro Act by Découvrir, SRK: Innovationsprojekt Langzeitpflege and HEKS: Project MosaiQ.<sup>31</sup>

As of May 8, 2024 the Federal Council took note of a package of national measures intended to support people with protection status S integrating into the labour market. Measures include better recognition of qualifications, improved services at regional employment centers (RAVs), and closer cooperation with the private sector. The Federal Department of Justice and Police (FDJP) has appointed a labour market integration officer (Mr. Adrian Gerber) to oversee these efforts and to connect employers with job seekers (SEM, 2024 may 8).

At the National Impulse Conference on June 20, 2024, it was discussed to enhance labour market integration for individuals with protection status S. The Swiss authorities plan various measures, including improving collaboration among integration, social assistance, and public employment services. The Path2Work platform, developed by ETH Zurich and the University of Lausanne, offers job search assistance and skill profiling, is at the finalization stage (SEM, 2024 June 20). In September 2024 SEM will present new proposals that are linked to the decision of the Federal Council to allow cantonal authorities to mandate integration and employment programs (e.g., language courses) for individuals with protection status S. Measures include exploring incentives related to departure deadlines to enhance labour market integration and potentially requiring cantonal social welfare authorities to register unemployed individuals with public employment services (RAV). (SEM 2024a).

### **5.2.3.2 Cantons**

About third of the cantons answered our request. Not all cantons had the possibility to cooperate on the short notice. Several cantons answered that they either do not have time or human resources, or just cannot answer these questions on other reasons. Here is the example of one detailed answer: “Our task here at the Asylum Seekers’ Office is to take care and mentor the 8’000 refugees from Ukraine, Afghanistan, Turkey, etc. living in the canton. Helping students in their research how interesting this may be, none above us can at the time being do. Furthermore, in English”.

Those cantons which provided more detailed answers were Bern, Zurich, Zug, Ticino, Aargau and St. Gallen. Canton Geneva proposed to share the information at the personal meeting as a continuation of this research. In fact, the general information on integration and employment support of people with status S is available at the websites of the cantons. Not all websites are well-structured and user friendly. A good example could be canton Aargau where all essential information and contact persons as for the support of Ukrainians in Aargau is given at one place.<sup>32</sup>

**The focus of this research was to identify how the cooperation between different stakeholders is ongoing to provide employment for Ukrainians.**

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.news.admin.ch/news/message/attachments/87508.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.ag.ch/de/verwaltung/dvi/migration-integration/integration/programm-s?jumpTo=MjI3MjE5NS83OTdkMGYxNi05MjkyLTQzNDMtYWRIOS04NzYz00MWQxNGM>

At **canton Aargau** good examples of coordination are provided directly at the website. As an example, the Regional Integration Facilities (RIF), established on January 1, 2022, focus on social integration and volunteer coordination for asylum seekers and refugees (KFA). They support municipalities and voluntary organizations by managing volunteer placements and serving as communication hubs within regional networks. Funding for RIF will be temporarily increased, with start-up funding available for regions without RIF. E.g., in Q2 2024, RIF and Migration and Integration Office in the canton of Aargau (MIKA) jointly coordinated information events for those seeking protection, covering Program S, job search, and the education system.

The Aargau website further indicates that companies that want to hire a refugee from Ukraine can contact “Contact point integration Labour market”<sup>33</sup> and already at the website they can learn about the cooperation with the canton in hiring refugees from giving them short work assignments to internships, apprenticeships and permanent contracts with an average 40% compensation for the investments of time in the qualification and training of the refugee undertaken by the company.<sup>34</sup> Also the labour market integration webpage provides a lot of supplementary information with success stories and importance of integration, legal matters on employment and other relevant documentation. Additionally, canton Aargau has a separate Integration of Aargau webpage<sup>35</sup>

In general, many cantons have several webpages and agencies dedicated to integration and support of migrants (i.e., **Competence Centres for Integration**)<sup>36</sup>. However, for newcomers (Ukrainians with status S) it is very difficult to find them and to navigate. This information is not provided by social workers and in questions and answers for Ukrainians at SEM website.

The listed below cantons provided information via emails or telephone conversations.

**Canton Zug** highlighted that many issues related to Ukrainian refugees are confidential and tied to personal data protection. Generally, the Sozialamt (social services office) handles social assistance calculations, residence in host families, and healthcare for refugees. Challenges often stem from misunderstandings about the work of the Swiss system in healthcare or social assistance. Regarding employment, the Integration department deals with individuals transitioning to independence while still needing partial social assistance due to low earnings. This phase typically lasts three to six months, after which most refugees achieve financial independence. However, some cases require extended partial assistance for various reasons. Overall, **efforts are being made to support the integration and self-sufficiency of refugees.**

**Canton Ticino.** The Office of Asylum Seekers and Refugees, part of the Department of Health and Social Welfare (Ufficio dei richiedenti l’asilo e dei rifugiati, Dipartimento della sanità e della socialità, URAR), has established a system to facilitate integration through various steps and cooperation with labor market service providers, implementing dedicated measures:

1. Regional integration desks provide consultancy services on general issues across three sub-regions to facilitate access to Italian language courses and address the integration needs of all individuals, regardless of age and financial situation. Special measures have been created to accommodate the significant number of incoming S-permit holders, who have *different starting skill levels compared to the previous URAR target population.*
2. APSI (Psycho-social accompaniment to integration/ Accompagnamento psico-sociale all’integrazione): a team of social care professionals is working on the territory, taking care of particular needs of the people with issues related to health or psychological fragilities that don’t allow access to the consultancy desks. Juridic cases and relations to specialized authorities are also taken in charge by this service.
3. Regional labour integration desks: once S-permit holders having reached the needed level of Italian language proficiency, a special team was established to facilitate their full integration into the labor market. This is organised regionally in the same physical locations as the general integration

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.ag.ch/de/verwaltung/dvi/wirtschaft-arbeit/unternehmen/mitarbeitende/kontaktstelle-integration-arbeitsmarkt>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.ag.ch/media/kanton-aargau/dvi/dokumente/awa/awa/mitarbeitende/flyer-fluechtlinge-web.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.integrationsaargau.ch/>

<sup>36</sup> [https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/de/home/sem/kontakt/kantonale\\_behoerden/kantonale\\_ansprechstellen.html](https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/de/home/sem/kontakt/kantonale_behoerden/kantonale_ansprechstellen.html)

desks. Several dedicated measures were and are about to start. These measures are complimentary to the existing cantonal measures-catalogue. They were developed to optimize competences evaluation and a fast-working integration. In this regard in strategic meetings URAR is cooperating with other involved public services, such as unemployment office and education department, to make cooperation more effective despite the big challenge represented by the targeted public.

Like all other Cantons that include a national border, and that are heavily concerned with a trans-border labour importation, Ticino is facing structural challenges in trying to achieve the goal of 40%. The general labour market is at the moment not very captive for native population either. The fact that **there is no certainty about the future of actual S-permits poses an important challenge in finding long-term working integration**. Uncertainty makes potential employer quite resilient in choosing to embrace S-permits in their labour forces.

**Canton Zurich.** As far as applications for work permits from people with S status are concerned, the admission requirements are checked according to the guidelines of the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM). The experience shows, the necessary authorisation can usually be granted. At least one person in every Office of Labour of the Canton of Zurich (RAV) specialises in advising people with protection status S. The counselling is provided in German or English and is aimed at integration into the labour market.

Zurich's Department of Economic Affairs and its Work Permits Division is also in close contact with the social partners (Cantonal Social Welfare Office, Canton of Zurich Social Conference, Integration Office, Zurich Asylum Organisation, etc.) in order to achieve the target of a 40% employment rate.

Protection seekers with S status are also part of the IAZH (Integrationsagenda Zürich/ Zurich Integration Agenda) target group. This is a support system for refugees that focuses on their integration into Swiss society. The IAZH program includes various measures to facilitate the social and professional integration of refugees, such as language courses, vocational training, and employment support. It is a collaborative effort involving multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, non-profit organizations, and educational institutions, aimed at providing comprehensive support to refugees and asylum seekers in Zurich. The measures are based on the support measures for refugees from Ukraine decided by the Federal Council in April 2022. There is currently active cooperation between the RAV and the municipalities responsible for integration planning for 40% of all registered refugees from Ukraine. Additionally, on the occasion of a National Impulse Conference on 20 June 2024, the next steps for the best possible cooperation between the institutions and with employer networks were defined.

In a separate discussion, RAV Zurich shared that they have initiated a new internal project focused on cooperation with private businesses and international companies. They are conducting conference calls and webinars to explore how these companies can accommodate refugees. It is important to note that Ukrainian refugees cannot be prioritized over other refugees, as equal treatment must be maintained. RAV is still in the early stages of developing these collaborations with the private sector, and it is too soon to discuss the results.

**Canton Bern.** Following our requests, in canton Bern we had detailed discussions with the Career Information Centres (BIZ) and Bern RAV.

RAV Bern shared that they are closely working with companies and coordinate their activities with other responsible structures. Recently, a person responsible for the employment of Ukrainians was assigned. His main concern is that roughly there are 3000 of unemployed and able to work Ukrainians residing in canton Bern. While only 129 of them are active participants in RAV. Therefore, he will be working to attract more Ukrainians to cooperate with RAV.

Moreover, he will recommend to revise some RAV policies, which are not applicable to Ukrainians. In particular, five years ago language courses were moved out from the agenda of RAV. If RAV's clients decide to attend language courses, the respective hours will be deducted from the monthly payments the unemployed person receives from RAV. As language barrier is very significant for Ukrainian refugees, language courses should become a part of the measures applied by RAV.

RAV Bern supported the fact that employers are not always aware of what does it mean to employ a (Ukrainian) refugee. Therefore, RAV expressed the appreciation if such awareness raising campaign and targeted work with companies is conducted. RAV has no capacity to conduct this work in the nearest future.

Overall RAV Bern applies all labour market measures to Ukrainian refugees as to other unemployed persons, who are clients of RAV.

The Career Information Centres (BIZ Bern) shared that it contributes to the federal government's goal of achieving 40% employment for Ukrainian refugees by the end of 2024. BIZ Bern provides comprehensive career counseling tailored to refugees' needs. BIZ Bern assists refugees in validating their foreign qualifications. In this way, BIZ Bern not only contribute to the employment of Ukrainian refugees, but also to their social integration. A consolidated view of BIZ at national level is not possible to provide taking into account this short time.

The BIZ Canton Berne has the task of providing information, counselling and support to people who are about to make a career or training choice or who are considering a career change, further training or a career re-entry. They also sensitive people of all ages. Due to the changed situation in Ukraine and the increased demand from Ukrainian refugees, specific information and offers were created by the BIZ Canton Bern from spring 2022 in order to meet demand in a targeted and bundled manner in line with the mandate.<sup>37</sup> Similar measures are also provided by the other cantons.

BIZ Bern does not make any follow-up studies on the people they provided counselling to. Therefore, they are not aware if their services were useful to people in finding an employment. BIZ Bern is currently lacking the resources to support such investigations but in principle will support the idea of conducting such research.

**Canton Geneva** expressed the interest in the research in the context of professional integration programmes in Geneva for people with a protection S permit. They suggested to arrange a meeting in mid-August involving other stakeholders to discuss these issues. As the date suggested is beyond the deadline of the current study, the results, conclusions and policy recommendations will be shared and discussed with Canton Geneva at the personal meeting.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The Swiss labor market structure and support systems have demonstrated mixed effectiveness in integrating Ukrainian refugees, primarily due to the need for a swift response to the sudden influx of tens of thousands of refugees, coupled with limited human resources and a short implementation timeframe. While there are significant efforts undertaken and budgets spent to provide housing, social assistance, and employment opportunities, substantial barriers remain. **Language barriers, non-recognition of qualifications, and the temporary nature of Status S hinder long-term employment and integration.** Financial dependence on social aid is prevalent, and many highly educated refugees work below their qualifications. **Enhanced policies focusing on language acquisition, qualification recognition, and clearer pathways to permanent residency are crucial for improving employment outcomes and integration of Ukrainian refugees into Swiss society.** Additionally, the support systems must address the discrimination and financial challenges faced by the refugees to facilitate their smoother transition into the labor market.

The work of SEM, in collaboration with various levels of Swiss authorities, has demonstrated a robust commitment to integrating Ukrainians through the Program S. Initiated by the Federal Council, this program focuses on integration via education, employment, and social participation. SEM's financial support to cantons, with substantial funding dedicated to language learning and vocational training, underscores its alignment with the Swiss Integration Agenda. Despite challenges such as language barriers and discrepancies between qualifications and employment sectors, **the program S has fostered significant cooperation among cantonal authorities, leading to tailored integration measures.**

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<sup>37</sup> <https://www.be.ch/fr/start/themen/ukraine.html>

Regular teleconferences organized by SEM and the Conference of Cantonal Directors of Social Affairs (CdC) facilitate the exchange of best practices, addressing specific needs and enhancing support measures. Additionally, pilot projects and initiatives like the Path2Work platform exemplify efforts to improve labor market integration. The collaboration between SEM, cantonal authorities, and private sector partners, along with the appointment of a labor market integration officer, highlights a coordinated approach to addressing integration challenges and ensuring effective use of resources. However, the implementation differences among cantons indicate a need for ongoing monitoring and support to achieve consistent integration outcomes across Switzerland.

About a third of the cantons responded to the research request. Notably, Bern, Zurich, Zug, Ticino, and Aargau provided detailed information. The responses highlighted the challenges and efforts in integrating Ukrainian refugees into the workforce. **Most cantons have shown examples of regular communication and coordination between different structures.** However, due to substantial differences among cantons in general employment levels and specific measures applied to Ukrainian refugees, the integration levels differ. **Programs facilitating cooperation with the private sector might prove to be efficient. Also, the exchange of good practices and lessons learned can be useful for other cantons.** Often, cantons do not prioritize investments in refugee research on which integration measures and training helped them the most. However, such research may produce valuable results for the evaluation of effectiveness of budget spending and revision of programs.

Interviews and **surveys with employers, the private sector, and organizations working in integration** have shown that the **obstacles faced by Ukrainian refugees coincide with the majority of general obstacles shown in the literature review for migrants in Switzerland**, such as language barriers, lack of recognition of foreign qualifications, limited access to language courses (B1+) and vocational training, insufficient tailored job coaching and counseling, discrimination and bias in the job market, limited availability of childcare solutions, limited information and support for navigating the Swiss labor market, competition with Swiss and EU job seekers, inconsistent integration support across cantons, and financial constraints and limited funding for integration programs. The picture differs if to compare Ukrainians with other refugees as most Ukrainians have higher initial qualifications and education, as well as a different gender composition – most are women. **Some employers see very minor differences with EU migrants; however, they are hesitant to employ Ukrainians due to the Status S that is aimed at return.** The meaning of protection permit S makes some employers believe that Ukrainians plan to return. Against the background of the Swiss government's intentions to integrate Ukrainians into the job market, it is important to raise awareness among employers about opinion polls and surveys conducted among Ukrainians, as well as develop a clear transition mechanism for Ukrainians to other work and residence permits. For permanent jobs, it is not possible to force employers to hire a person who is indefinitely temporarily hosted in Switzerland. Employers invest in employees and deserve to demand predictability. Those employers participating in our survey expressed the willingness to cooperate with diverse groups of stakeholders to find solutions for better integration of Ukrainians into the job market.

The survey among 154 Ukrainians has shown that the **majority is concerned about the status S** as many **Ukrainians plan their future in Switzerland**, highlighting the need for robust integration and employment policies. The demographic data of our survey align with previous surveys, indicating that many **Ukrainian refugees in Switzerland are middle-aged women, often with children, and face challenges in family support.** Despite high educational qualifications, **many respondents face language barriers**, affecting their integration and job prospects. The respondents admitted that adequate housing is crucial, but it is not the primary factor influencing employment potential. Other **factors like language skills and qualification recognition are more significant. Discrimination**, particularly in job hiring and due to language barriers, is a notable issue for Ukrainian refugees. **Financial dependence on social assistance is widespread, with many struggling to cover basic expenses, emphasizing the need for better employment support.** While employment is relatively stable, many work below their qualification levels, and the temporary Status S hinders long-term employment stability. Quick job placement was common, but significant barriers remain, particularly in language and qualification recognition, and the **uncertainty of Status S impacts future planning.**

The survey of 99 unemployed Ukrainians in Switzerland revealed that **67.7% are actively searching for work**, with language learning being a common reason for those not searching. **Major employment barriers include** language difficulties, lack of recognition of foreign qualifications, insufficient job coaching, legal restrictions (Status S), financial constraints, and discrimination. **Many respondents seek job search assistance and niche targeted trainings, language courses, recognition of qualifications, and career counseling**. Only 35.4% attempted qualification recognition, with most finding the process unclear or expensive. The majority were high-level professionals in Ukraine, indicating the need for targeted support to transfer skills. Many agree to change occupation fields if adequate training or compensation is provided. Language proficiency remains low, with 54.1% at beginner levels, and 93.8% feel little to no integration into the Swiss job market. **Recommendations for improving employment include** clarifying Status S, encouraging employers to hire Ukrainians, simplifying legal requirements, increasing funding for professional studies, and providing better job search support and professional networks.

Overall, the strategic outlook follows the right direction with improved coordination and monitoring of measure implementation. Targeted professional trainings, more intensive language support, qualification recognition, and a decision on the future of Status S can improve the contribution to a 40% employment target for Ukrainians by the end of 2024.

## 7. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### Status S Resolution

#### 1. Clarification and Communication:

- Clearly define and communicate the implications of Status S for both employers and refugees to reduce uncertainty.
- Establish a timeline for potential transition from Status S to more stable residence permits, facilitating long-term planning for both refugees and employers.

#### 2. Pathway to Permanent Residency:

- Develop a streamlined process for transitioning from Status S to permanent residency, especially for those who secure long-term employment.
- Provide legal and administrative support to help refugees navigate this process.

### Niche Trainings and Targeted Support

#### 3. Professional Training Programs:

- Implement targeted professional training programs tailored to the qualifications and career aspirations of Ukrainian refugees. Focus on underserved groups like culture and art specialists, as well as high-demand sectors such as healthcare, IT, engineering, and education.
- Partner with industry associations and employers to create internships, apprenticeships, and job placements that align with these training programs. The ultimate result of every such training should be employment.
- Conduct regular monitoring and request feedback surveys from those trained. Based on the feedback adjust and revise the programs if needed.

#### 4. Intensive Language Support:

- Increase funding and access to advanced language courses (B1+), ensuring that refugees can reach proficiency levels required for their professional fields.
- Offer language courses integrated with vocational training to enhance practical language use in professional settings.

- Design groups according to their educational and capability levels and adjust the speed of learning based on the group performance. Allow group members to switch between performance groups during the course to speed up the learning.

**5. Recognition of Qualifications:**

- Simplify and expedite the process for recognizing foreign qualifications, reducing administrative barriers and costs.
- Provide financial support for refugees to cover the costs of qualification recognition and necessary bridging courses.

**Employment and Integration Support**

**6. Job Search Assistance:**

- Enhance job search assistance programs, including career counseling, resume and interview preparation, and networking opportunities targeted to qualification and education level.
- Utilize digital platforms like Path2Work to match refugees with job openings and provide continuous support throughout the job search process.

**7. Employer Engagement:**

- Raise awareness among employers about the benefits of hiring Ukrainian refugees and provide more support to them for doing so.
- Introduce financial incentives for employers who hire and train Ukrainian refugees, ensuring fair competition with Swiss and EU job seekers, as well as other refugees.

**8. Addressing Discrimination:**

- Implement anti-discrimination training for employers and staff of public institutions to foster inclusive workplaces.
- Establish clear reporting and support mechanisms for refugees who face discrimination in the job market.

**Financial and Social Support**

**9. Financial Assistance for Professional Development:**

- Increase funding for professional studies and certifications to help refugees gain qualifications recognized in the Swiss labor market.
- Offer grants or low-interest loans to support self-employment and entrepreneurial ventures among refugees.

**10. Comprehensive Support Services:**

- Expand access to childcare, healthcare, and mental health services to enable refugees to focus on their job search and professional development.
- Ensure that social workers are adequately trained and informed about the specific needs of Ukrainian refugees, particularly those with high qualifications.

**Continuous Monitoring and Improvement**

**11. Ongoing Evaluation and Adaptation:**

- Regularly monitor the effectiveness of integration programs and adjust strategies based on feedback and outcomes.
- Facilitate the exchange of best practices and lessons learned between cantons to ensure consistent and effective support across Switzerland.

**12. Research and Data Collection:**

- Invest in research to evaluate which integration measures and training programs are most effective, using this data to inform policy decisions and budget allocations.
- Encourage cantons to share data and collaborate on large-scale studies to better understand the needs and successes of refugee integration efforts.

By implementing these recommendations, Switzerland can enhance the integration and employment outcomes for Ukrainian refugees, ensuring that they can contribute meaningfully to the Swiss economy and society.

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