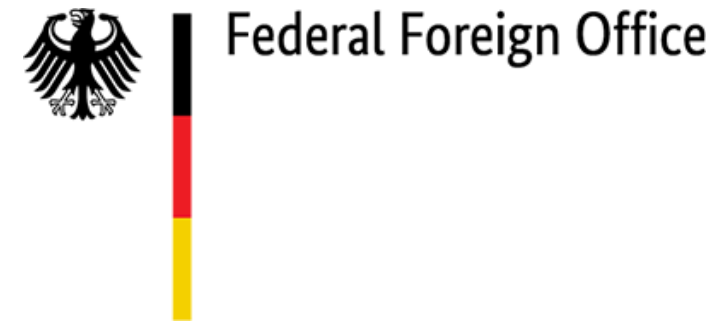




# Youth Migration from Mukachevo Territorial Community

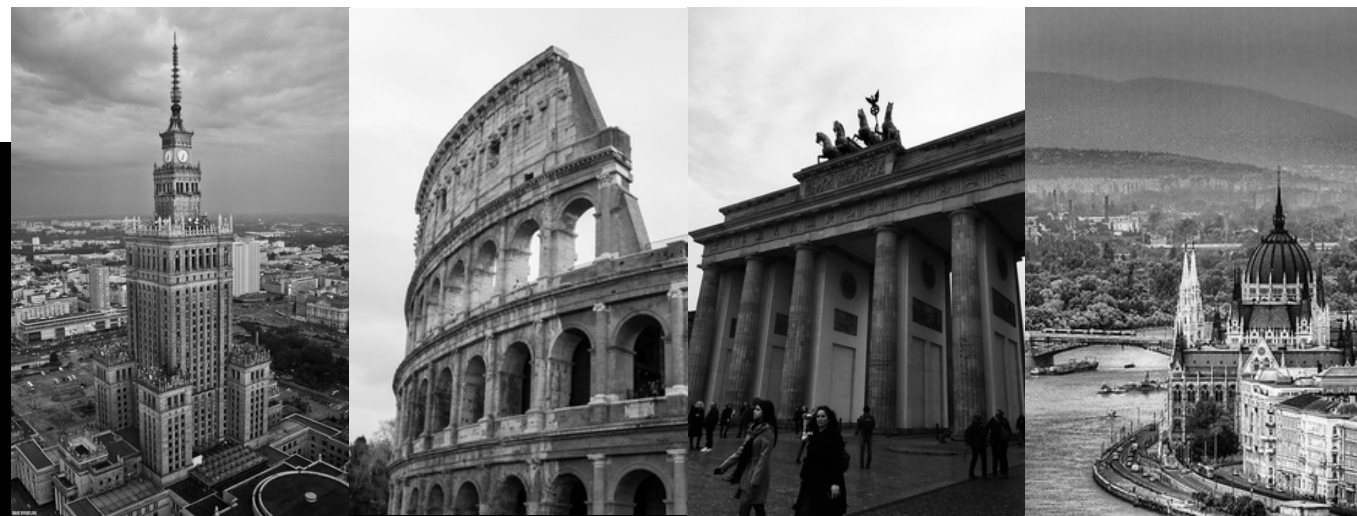
**Current Dynamics, Reasons, Challenges and Opportunities**



# CONTEXTUALIZATION OF RESEARCH

Since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014, migration trends in Ukraine have undergone significant changes due to a range of socio-economic and political factors (Drobohlava and Jaroszewicz, 2016) [1]. Key among these are the military conflict in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, which forced approximately 1.5 million Ukrainians (Slovo i Dilo, 2021) [2] to leave their homes. Internal migration became a significant phenomenon, with many people relocating to the central and western regions of Ukraine.

Apart from the security situation in the east and its direct consequences, economic difficulties have also encouraged Ukrainians to seek better opportunities abroad.



Unlike the period before 2014, the main destinations for labor migration, where Ukrainians relocated, became European Union countries, particularly Poland, the Czech Republic, and Italy [3]. A similar trend can be observed in the search for opportunities to receive education abroad. Given the economic and security situation at home, the number of Ukrainians studying at foreign higher education institutions increased in 2014-2015. A 2016 study showed that the most attractive destination countries for Ukrainian students were Poland, Germany, Russia, Canada, Italy, the Czech Republic, the USA, Spain, Austria, France, and Hungary (Stadnyi and Slobodyan, 2020)[4]. Meanwhile, as the war in the east continued to rage but the front line temporarily stabilized, overall mobility of Ukrainians, including tourism, increased dramatically with the signing of the visa-free regime between the European Union and Ukraine in 2017.

6 million of  
Ukrainian  
refugees

With the start of the full-scale Russian invasion, the situation with Ukrainian migration abroad grew significantly larger in scale. As of February 15, 2024, the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) [5] estimated 6 million Ukrainian refugees who fled Ukraine since February 24, 2022, residing in European countries, including the Russian Federation and Belarus. An additional 475.6 thousand refugees were located outside of Europe.

[1] Drobohlava, D. and Jaroszewicz, M. (eds.), 2016. Українська міграція в часи кризи: вимушена та трудова мобільність, на основі статистичних і польових досліджень, виконаних у рамках проекту "Моніторинг міграції в Україні: вимушена та трудова мобільність (2015-2016)". [pdf] Available at: <https://europewb.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Migr-mobility-ukr.pdf> [Accessed 4 Oct. 2024].

[2] Slovo i Dilo, 2021. Pereselentsi v Ukraini: skilky yikh ta v yakyx oblastyakh prozhyvayut? [online] Available at: <https://www.slovoidilo.ua/2021/08/26/infografika/suspilstvo/pereselenci-ukrayini-skilky-yix-ta-yakyx-oblastyax-prozhyvayut> [Accessed 4 Oct. 2024].

[3] Market Infrastructure, 2016. Analiz suchasnykh tendencij ta faktoriv vplyvu na ekonomyku Ukrainy. [pdf] Available at: [http://market-infr.od.ua/journals/2016/2\\_2016\\_ukr/8.pdf](http://market-infr.od.ua/journals/2016/2_2016_ukr/8.pdf) [Accessed 4 Oct. 2024].

[4] Stadnyi, Y. and Slobodyan, O., 2020. Українські студенти за кордоном: скільки та чому?. [online] Cedoss. Available at: <https://cedos.org.ua/researches/ukrainski-studenty-za-kordonom-skilky-ta-chomu/#description> [Accessed 4 Oct. 2024].

[5] UNHCR, 2024. "Ukraine Situation." [online] UNHCR. Available at: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine> [Accessed 4 Oct. 2024].

## § CONTEXTUALIZATION OF RESEARCH

The full-scale Russian invasion has accelerated depopulation and caused a true demographic catastrophe—tens of thousands dead and wounded, millions of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and emigrants. The birth rate across the country has fallen below 1.0, making it one of the lowest in the world, while Ukraine's already extremely low life expectancy has further declined, especially among men, and migration patterns have changed drastically. The mass displacement of people within the country and abroad has led to the depopulation of certain regions and an aging nation, as most refugees are women, youth, and children.

In over 2.5 years of full-scale war, Ukraine's population has decreased by more than 10 million, with around five million people now residing in territories currently occupied by Russia (UNFPA, 2022) [6]. Without strategic intervention focused on labor integration and other work with IDPs (OPORA, 2023) [7], facilitating the return of forced migrants from abroad, stimulating birth rates, and combating early mortality, this deep population decline may have generational consequences.



**Ukraine loses approximately \$2 billion each month due to the outflow of the working population, who became refugees following the full-scale invasion by the Russian Federation**

Minister of Finance Serhii Marchenko spoke about serious economic losses due to mass migration (Borg Expert, 2023) [8].

[6] UNFPA, 2022. Amid war, Ukraine facing demographic crisis. [online] UNFPA. Available at: <https://eeca.unfpa.org/en/news/amid-war-ukraine-facing-demographic-crisis> [Accessed 4 Oct. 2024]

[7] OPORA, 2023. Кількість українців та їх міграція за кордон через війну: дослідження Громадянської мережі ОПОРА. [online] OPORA. Available at: <https://www.oporaua.org/viyna/kilkist-ukrayintsiv-ta-yikh-migratsiia-za-kordon-cherez-viinu-doslidzhennia-gromadianskoyi-merezhi-opora-24791> [Accessed 4 Oct. 2024].

[8] Borg Expert, 2023. Економіка України щомісяця втрачає близько 2 мільярдів доларів через масову міграцію громадян. [online] Borg Expert. Available at: <https://borgexpert.com/news/ekonomika-ukrainy-shchomisiatsia-vtrachae-blyzko-2-miliardiv-dolariv-cherez-masovu-mihratsiiu-hromadian> [Accessed 4 Oct. 2024].

## § CONTEXTUALIZATION OF RESEARCH

With the economic development of Western neighboring countries and the strengthening of socio-economic ties between Ukraine and the European Union, particularly with the countries bordering Ukraine, these countries have become attractive destinations for Ukrainian migrants from border regions. The study "Myths and Facts about Ukrainian Labor Migration to Visegrad Group Countries" (Sushko, 2019) showed that before Russia's full-scale invasion, Poland was the main destination for Ukrainian labor migrants (38.9%). According to Eurostat, in 2017, the highest number of first residence permits (a total of permits for work, study, and family reasons) issued to Ukrainians was in Poland (585.4 thousand), the Czech Republic (18.9 thousand), Hungary (7.8 thousand), as well as in Italy, Germany, Slovakia, Spain, and the United Kingdom. Among the surveyed Ukrainians who were planning to emigrate, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Germany were the top destinations, with Hungary also making the top ten. [9]

[9] Sushko, I., 2019. Міфи про трудову міграцію в Україні. [pdf] Available at: [https://europewb.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Mify\\_trud\\_migrac.pdf](https://europewb.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Mify_trud_migrac.pdf) [Accessed 4 Oct. 2024].

## § CONTEXTUALIZATION OF RESEARCH

Such comprehensive research can contribute to the development of specific national and regional policies that effectively address individual reasons for migration while reflecting the social dynamics within communities. This aims to help understand the complex reasons that drive people at various stages of life, starting from youth, to leave their region, which would support the development of effective cross-sectoral measures aimed at preventing and addressing this issue. [6].

#CONSTRUCTION

#IT

#MEDICINE

#LOGISTICS

SERVICE SECTOR

#AGRICULTURE

#STUDENTS

#BUSINESS



Between Competition with EU Neighbors for  
Labor and Generational Experience in Migration

Regional Focus  
on Zakarpattia

## § FOCUS ON ZAKARPATTIA

While the Russian invasion has created a push factor, especially for eastern regions of Ukraine, it overshadows the long-standing issue of youth emigration from Western Ukraine, which predates Russia's full-scale offensive. **Varga and Gvozdecka (2021) [10]** highlight that the youth of Zakarpattia viewed migration as a strategy for securing better economic and social opportunities even before the full-scale war began.

Since 2022, the situation has become more complicated. Zakarpattia, which already had prevalent emigration sentiments, has also become a destination for many internally displaced persons (IDPs) from regions in eastern and southeastern Ukraine. According to the International Organization for Migration and the National Institute for Strategic Studies, the peak of IDP arrivals in Zakarpattia occurred between late February and April 2022. **[11]**

In Mukachevo and other rural or small neighboring communities of Zakarpattia, migration has become a typical life path across generations, driven by economic necessity and social expectations. Research particularly emphasizes economic motivation. **Koruchev (2021) [12]**, in his studies of economic conditions and migration trends, underscores that economic factors are the primary reason why people seek better opportunities abroad, both in Ukraine as a whole and in Zakarpattia. The region's economic situation, characterized by high unemployment and low wages, pushes people to work and study abroad.

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**[10]** Hvozdetzka, B.H. & Varha, N.I., 2021. Moods and Preconditions of Migration Among Youth in Transcarpathia. *Migration & Law*, 1(1), pp.42-49.

**[11]** National Institute for Strategic Studies (NISS), 2023. New Residents of Transcarpathia: The Situation and Needs of Displaced Populations. NISS. Available at: <https://niss.gov.ua/news/statti/novi-meshkantsi-zakarpattya-sytuatsiya-ta-potreby-peremishchenoho-naselennya> [Accessed 6 Oct. 2024]

**[12]** Kostadinov Koroutchev, R., 2021. Economic situation and migration trends of Eastern Slovakia and Transcarpathian Ukraine. *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs*, 5(3), pp.9-26. Available at: <https://ejlia.com/index.php/jlia/article/view/161> [Accessed 6 Oct. 2024].

## § FOCUS ON ZAKARPATTIA

These local push factors interact with the pull factors created by neighboring states, whose economies are growing within the European Union and require labor, thus competing through incentive programs. For example, there is a program offering free first-year education at Slovak universities for Ukrainians, with a simplified admission process for specializations compared to Ukraine, which is actively promoted in the Mukachevo community **[13]**. In light of this competition, municipalities, in collaboration with businesses and civil society, need to develop attractive living and development conditions for their citizens and potential residents to avoid mass emigration. To preserve and develop local potential, it is necessary to identify and actively respond to the identified migration causes, improve welfare, education, and employment systems, as well as formulate effective local strategies for attracting and retaining human capital.

The realities faced by migrant communities, shaped by economic factors and dynamics passed down from generation to generation, are not unique to Ukraine. Various studies indicate a significant impact of parents' transnational lives on migration decisions. **Kandel and Massey (2002)** highlight how migration becomes part of family life plans in the countries of origin of migrants, demonstrating that in Mexico, the prospect of migration affects children's behavior, often reducing their motivation to learn, as migration is perceived as a viable alternative to achieving economic stability. **[14]**

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**[13]** Osvita, 2023. Opportunities for Ukrainian students to study abroad: programs and scholarships. Osvita.ua. Available at: <https://osvita.ua/abroad/79987/> [Accessed 6 Oct. 2024].

**[14]** Kandel, W. & Massey, D.S., 2002. The culture of Mexican migration: A theoretical and empirical analysis. *Social Forces*, 80(3), pp. 981-1004. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2002.0009>



# Economic factors are the main reason why people look for better opportunities abroad

Equally important as family decisions is the influence of the education system and teachers. This study also refers to **Michael Corbett's** concept of "learning to leave" (2000) as an unintended consequence of the education system in rural areas and demonstrates how it applies in the context of Zakarpattia. Corbett illustrates the importance of understanding how educational institutions shape migration decisions in rural areas and how schools and teachers, alongside family influence, affect children's career and migration choices, inadvertently preparing students to leave rather than take advantage of local opportunities.[15]

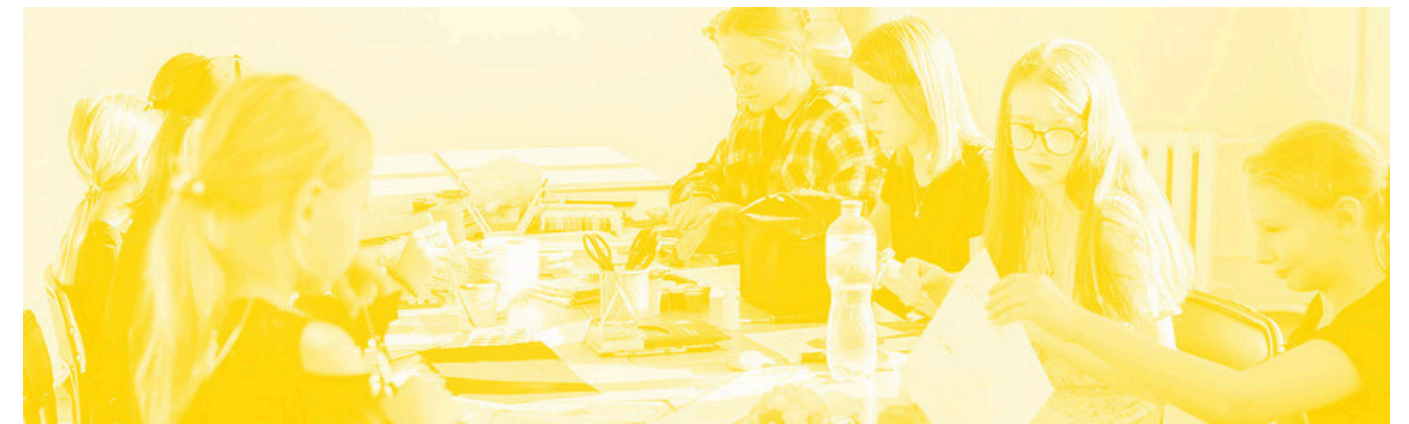
**Heffner and Solgi (2024)** provide valuable insights, particularly on how cross-border mobility affects youth. Their approach, which focuses on the impact of migration on regional labor markets and social structures, serves as a useful lens for analyzing the context of border regions in Ukraine. Youth in these regions often navigate a dual socio-economic reality, where opportunities and cultural exchanges with neighboring countries shape their aspirations, education, and career choices. Such mobility can lead to clear patterns of "brain drain" or "brain gain," depending on whether young people migrate temporarily or permanently.

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[15] Corbett, M., 2000. Learning to leave: The irony of schooling in a coastal community. Vancouver: University of British Columbia.

## § FOCUS ON ZAKARPATTIA

The Zakarpattia region, similar to the Opole Voivodeship in Poland [16], can be seen as a space of opportunities and marginalization, where the life choices of young people are influenced by economic instability and the allure of a better future abroad. Additionally, the dynamics of remittances, return migration, and the formation of transnational identity play a significant role, affecting not only the decisions of youth but also the social cohesion within their communities. By adapting Heffner and Solgi's methodology, researchers can uncover how migration shapes individual trajectories and broader regional development in Ukraine's border areas.



Moreover, rural communities in Zakarpattia face an even greater risk of depopulation. **Sherman and Sage (2011) [17]** argue that rural areas often experience a "brain drain" as young people seek better opportunities in wealthier neighboring EU countries, creating challenges for the survival and economic development of the community. This risk is exacerbated by the social environment in Zakarpattian communities, where migration has become an established family norm over many generations. For example, in **Victoria Ryul's (2013)** study "Features of the Socialization of Children of Transboundary Labor Migrants in Zakarpattia," it is emphasized how migration affects the identity and life opportunities of young people in these families.

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[16] Heffner, K. & Solga, B., 2024. The emigration-region concept, emergence mechanism and characteristics: A case study of the Opolskie Voivodeship. Central and Eastern European Migration Review. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17467/ceemr.2024.01> [Accessed 6 Oct. 2024].

[17] Sherman, J. & Sage, R., 2011. Sending off all your good treasures: Rural schools, brain drain, and community survival in the wake of economic collapse. Journal of Research in Rural Education, 26(11).

The study highlights the significant impact of parental migration on children's social and psychological development, as well as the transmission of a lifestyle associated with cross-border migration from generation to generation, reinforcing the notion of migration as a normative way of life. This socialization in communities underscores other factors driving migration, such as the pursuit of economic prosperity abroad. [18]



## Migration, as a way of life, is passed down from generation to generation

However, there are some specific aspects of the situation in Ukraine that create different dynamics compared to the aforementioned contexts, influencing individual decisions, national and municipal policies, as well as national and local budgeting: ongoing Russian aggression.

Significant impacts on the community's ability to develop economic potential and finance initiatives that support local businesses and create new jobs have also arisen from other factors and decisions made by public authorities. The revenue part of the city budget in 2024, compared to 2023, will be reduced by UAH 1 billion 110.2 million, or 42.6%. [19].

This occurred due to the reallocation of the so-called military tax on personal income (PIT) from the local budget to the state budget.

[18] Rühl, V. (Ryul', V.), 2013. Соціалізація дітей трудових мігрантів Закарпаття: монографія (Socialization of Children of Labor Migrants in Transcarpathia: Monograph). Серія «Studia Regionalistica», № 7. Ужгород: Видавництво ФОП Брега А.Е. Available at: <https://dspace.uzhnu.edu.ua/jspui/handle/lib/36027> [Accessed 6 Oct. 2024].

[19] Mukachevo.net, 2023. Мукачівська громада отримала бюджет на 2024 рік. Available at: [https://mukachevo.net/news/mukachivska-hromada-otrymala-biudzet-na-2024-rik\\_5900101.html](https://mukachevo.net/news/mukachivska-hromada-otrymala-biudzet-na-2024-rik_5900101.html) [Accessed 6 Oct. 2024].



Since a significant part of the budget of Mukachevo city comes from PIT collected from the military unit registered in the city, this has led to a decrease in the size of the local budget by over 42%, reducing the potential for investment and community support for businesses and programs. As a result, for example, in 2024, there was no funding for the unique and currently sole "Program to Promote the Development of Youth Entrepreneurship in the Mukachevo City Territorial Community for 2023–2027," [20] which included funding instruments for young entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship skill development among children and youth, as well as other financial and educational tools aimed at promoting and developing entrepreneurial skills among young people.[21]


To explore the complex dynamics between family socialization, external influencing factors, the impact of teachers and educational systems, and the local political and economic context, an in-depth analysis of the local community was conducted through focus groups in this study. This method provided unique insights into the local social dynamics, offering an illustrative example for other communities in the Transcarpathian region facing similar issues. The results obtained may contribute to the creation of tailored responses to specific challenges faced by these communities.

[20] Рішення сесії міської ради від 17 серпня 2023 р. № 1227. Про затвердження Програми сприяння розвитку молодіжного підприємництва Мукачівської міської територіальної громади на 2023-2027 роки. Детально тут: <https://mukachevo-rada.gov.ua/npas/pro-zatverdzhennia-prohramy-spriannia-rozvytku-molodizhnoho-pidpriemnytstva-mukachivskoi-miskoi-terytorialnoi-hromady-na-2023-2027-roky-2>

[21] Mukachevo City Council, 2023. Про затвердження Програми сприяння розвитку молодіжного підприємництва Мукачівської міської територіальної громади на 2023-2027 роки. Available at: <https://mukachevo-rada.gov.ua/npas/pro-zatverdzhennia-prohramy-spriannia-rozvytku-molodizhnoho-pidpriemnytstva-mukachivskoi-miskoi-terytorialnoi-hromady-na-2023-2027-roky-2> [Accessed 6 Oct. 2024].




# METHODOLOGY




The aim of this research is to identify the reasons that stimulate young people from the Mukachevo community to migrate abroad, as well as the factors influencing their decision to stay in Ukraine. The relevant research tasks are as follows:

- 1 To determine the main reasons why young people leave the Mukachevo community.
- 2 To formulate a general/typical profile of a young person who migrates in search of education or career opportunities.
- 3 To develop possible strategies and initiatives to reduce youth outflow and encourage them to stay or return to the community after completing their studies and working abroad.



This research was conducted in several stages. Initially, during the preparatory stage, a literature review and analysis of secondary data sources were carried out. Particular attention was paid to sources highlighting migration dynamics in Ukraine and studies on regions characterized by significant migration flows. This knowledge served as the basis for developing focus group guides, which specifically focused on the role of family, as well as pull and push factors in border or rural communities and other economically challenging areas. **The next stage involved data collection. Data were collected through focus group discussions and surveys.**


# FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS (FGD)



A total of 9 FGDs were conducted, involving 100 students from grades 10-11 in educational institutions of the Mukachevo territorial community, 16 students from the 1st and 2nd years of vocational and technical education institutions, as well as 30 representatives from teaching staff and school administrations. Each group consisted of 10 to 20 participants.

Participants were recruited using convenience sampling through invitations based on the research team's connections within the studied community. All FGDs were audio-recorded with the consent of all participants.

## Selection of Educational Institutions for FGDs



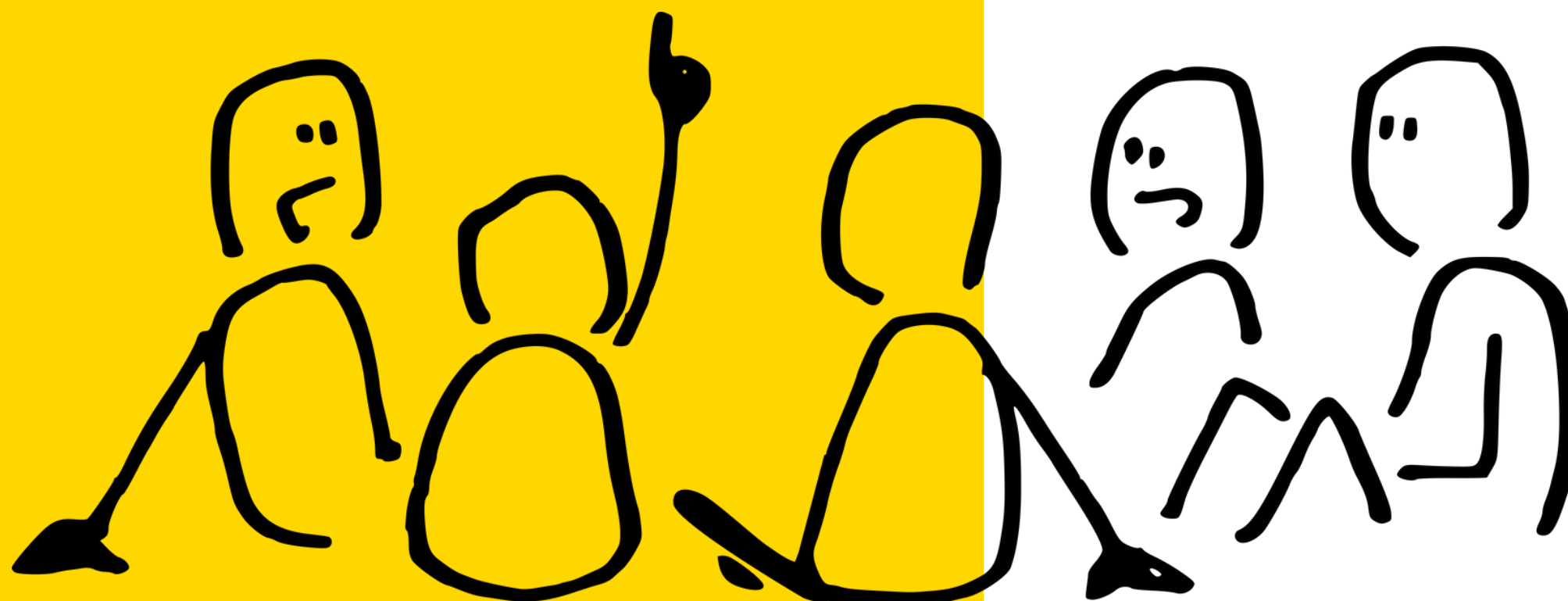
Among the youth participating in the FGDs were high school students from general and specialized educational institutions in the Mukachevo territorial community. Several schools of different types were chosen for the group discussions: those ranked among the top ten general secondary education institutions in the community based on the results of the national multi-subject test in 2022 (e.g., Mukachevo Lyceum) and those lower in the rankings. The geographical factor was also considered: both urban educational institutions and those located in rural areas were selected.



# MOST DISCUSSED TOPICS

Based on the FGDs and their subsequent coding, the research group identified the most discussed topics:

- 1 The main reasons why youth decide to leave their locality / Ukraine as a whole;
- 2 Specific patterns or trends among students who leave their locality in search of education or careers elsewhere;
- 3 Strategies or initiatives that could be implemented to address the issue of youth outflow and encourage more young people to stay or return to the community after completing their studies.



# DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

**Brain Drain:** The loss of individuals with high skills and/or competencies (workers/students) from a region due to permanent emigration.

**Brain Gain:** The increase in individuals with high skills and/or competencies (workers/students) in a region due to permanent immigration.

**Brain Regain:** The return of the same highly qualified workers and/or specialists (workers/students) to a region who were lost due to emigration.

**Brain Circulation:** Continuous and simultaneous inflow-outflow of highly qualified and/or competent specialists (workers/students) in a region. High skills and/or competencies may pertain to the same or different sectors/industries.

**Brain Waste:** The loss of high skills and/or competencies (workers/students) due to emigration to regions where, for various reasons, such skills and/or competencies cannot be utilized properly (e.g., highly qualified workers remain unemployed or are engaged in jobs that do not require their competencies) (Garcia Pires, 2015).

**Sending Regions:** Regions that lose high skills and/or competencies (in one or several sectors/industries) due to permanent emigration over a certain period.

**Receiving Regions:** Regions that gain high skills and/or competencies (in one or several sectors/industries) due to permanent immigration over a certain period.

**Permanent Emigration/Immigration:** Stable emigration/immigration that, nevertheless, is still reversible.

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Source: European Committee of the Regions, Committee on Social Policy, Education, Science and Culture. Report "On brain drain: local and regional dimensions". – © European Union, 2018. – 84 p.

# YOUTH DECISIONS ABOUT LEAVING

## The attractiveness of **the European way of life**

**The impact of mobilization and military dynamics**

## The influence of **family migration experiences** on decision-making

**Economic factors in the community and region**

These topics will be explored in more detail in separate sections.

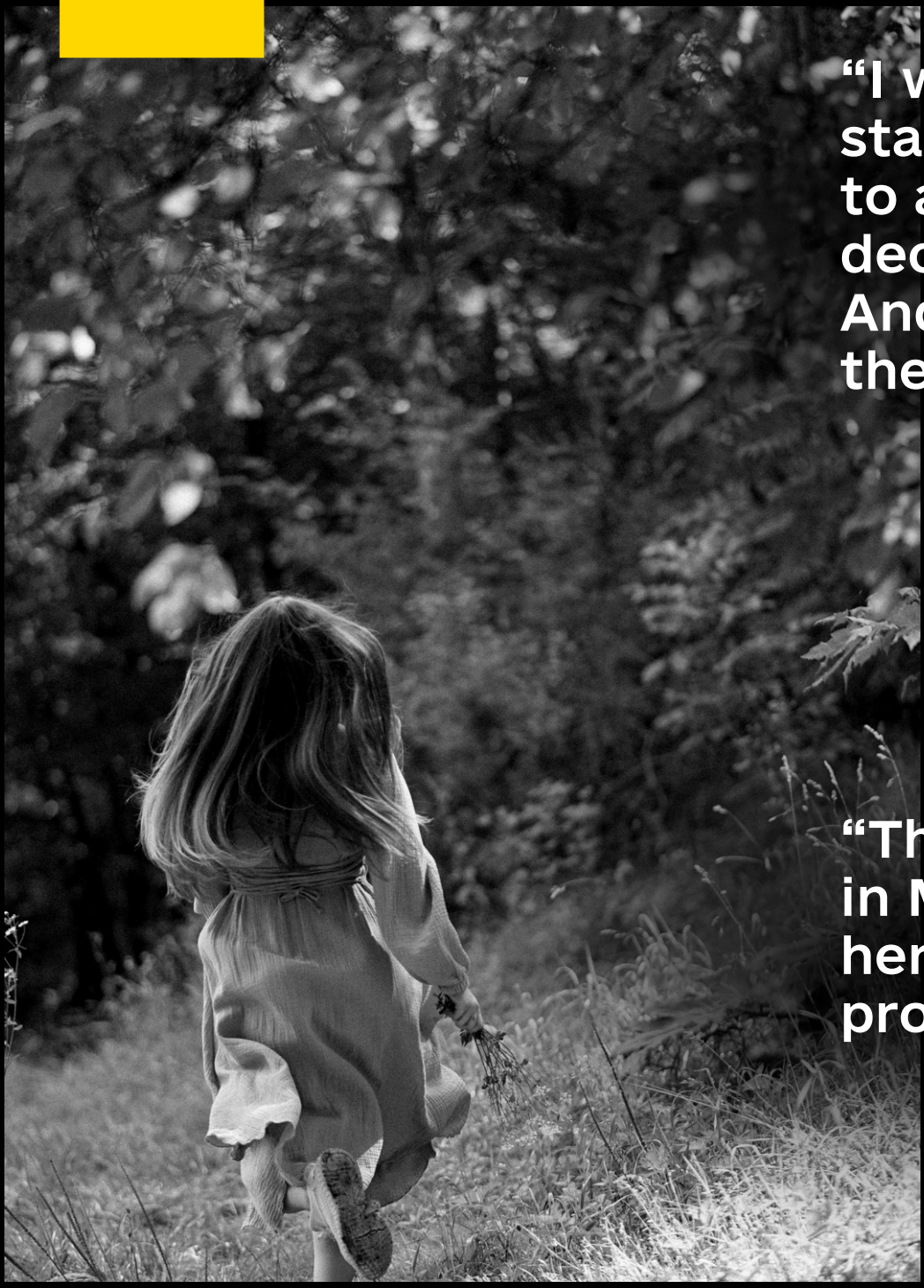
# ATTRACTIVENESS OF THE EUROPEAN WAY OF LIFE

One of the main reasons highlighted in the focus groups is the attractiveness of European values, income levels, and the lifestyle perceived by respondents. However, a significant portion of the information shared by participants regarding neighboring EU countries and the EU as a whole seems to be based on rumors and stereotypes circulating in their environment or in the media.

Participants (both students and teachers) often mentioned factors such as higher salaries compared to Ukraine, an active social life, social guarantees, and broader career opportunities associated with a diploma from a European university. In their opinion, obtaining a European diploma and better job prospects are often key factors influencing migration decisions.



The belief that relocation would mean a higher standard of living expected of anyone due to the differences in wages at the individual level, as well as better infrastructure at the level of territorial units, is illustrated by the following quote:



**“I will come [abroad] and already have a better standard [of living] than others. And I will be able to achieve better there. To receive a better and decent salary. I will live there calmly, pay taxes. And be confident that I can afford a decent life there”**

*(high school teacher, 35 years old)*

Other focus group participants under the age of 18 share the view that there are limited opportunities in the community to find interesting and well-paid jobs.

**“There are many opportunities in Ukraine, but not in Mukachevo. I think I don’t see myself fulfilled here in the future. There are no jobs. There are no prospects”**

*(college student, 18 years old)*

## § THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF EUROPE

It is worth noting that when focus group facilitators tried to provide more detailed information about the realities of EU countries, participants often demonstrated only a superficial understanding. Respondents used vague terms like **“there are no opportunities”** or **“there’s nothing to do”** when comparing their community with neighboring countries, without specifying areas or professions. When asked for details, they explained that they often heard such narratives from acquaintances, especially older people who had gone abroad, highlighting the influence of social dynamics, environment, and parents. Many participants mentioned that this perception has been shaped by those living abroad, as well as the broader information space.

Teachers, another influential part of the local social system, explained in the focus groups why they observe their students leaving, for example:

**Young people are looking for peace, seeking comfort. Young people are looking for stability**

*(elementary school teacher, 35 years old)*

A key factor that participants in the FGDs associate with the European way of life and that stimulates them to emigrate is the expectation of **a more inclusive and judgment-free society in developed countries**. Some participants noted that conservative and sometimes biased residents of small towns tend to be critical and judgmental, making young people feel unsafe.

“

**“But I am also concerned about the problem that there are many stereotypes in our city and, so to speak, old views on life. I’ve thought about those countries where there is more free thinking, where there is more freedom. [...] abroad in other countries there is a little more opportunity to express your thoughts”**

*(10th-grade student, 16 years old)*

## § THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF EUROPE

**The participant's opinion was also supported by her peers.**

This indicates the need for systematic efforts to change stereotypical perceptions in society and create a favorable environment for youth self-realization in the community.

It should be emphasized that the full-scale invasion significantly affected the mental health of Ukrainians, significantly increasing their vulnerability to psychosocial stress.

Participants repeatedly noted that their perception of life abroad is shaped both by the motivation and encouragement from residents of the region who have been living abroad temporarily or permanently for years, and by information from the media. In response to questions about patterns or trends among students leaving the region for education or careers in other countries, respondents noted that the image of a better life in Europe significantly strengthened their desire to emigrate.

**“For me, these countries [the USA and Canada] are a model to follow because there is freedom of speech; you can do whatever you want, and no one will judge you”**

*(college student, 18 years old)*

# THE IMPACT OF MOBILIZATION AND FULL-SCALE WAR

One of the main reasons for the departure of young people from the region and Ukraine as a whole, mentioned by the focus group respondents, is the overall security situation in the country, as well as the state of mobilization and the intensified conscription campaign nationwide. These factors significantly influence young people's decisions, especially among men under 18, to leave for abroad.

A study conducted by the analytical center Cedoss and the research agency Info Sapiens revealed that by the end of 2022, 82% of young people reported losses due to the war, including reduced income (36%) and worsening mental health (28%). Issues of physical safety concern 27% of respondents, which is also a significant factor favoring migration. Nearly half of the young people reported problems with electricity and communication at the time of the survey. [22]

Decrease in income

36%

Mental health problems

28%

Physical danger

27%

[22] Cedoss Analytical Center & Info Sapiens, 2023. Вплив війни на молодь в Україні. Доступно тут: [https://mms.gov.ua/storage/app/sites/16/Molodizhna\\_polityka/2023/Socdoslidjenja/Vpliv%20voiny%20na%20molody%20v%20Ukraini.2023.pdf](https://mms.gov.ua/storage/app/sites/16/Molodizhna_polityka/2023/Socdoslidjenja/Vpliv%20voiny%20na%20molody%20v%20Ukraini.2023.pdf) [Accessed 6 Oct. 2024].

The sense of security is further reinforced by family, friends, and teachers, who emphasize that, given these circumstances, opportunities abroad seem much more appealing. In particular, the fear of being unable to leave the country upon turning 18 strengthens the motivation of young men to emigrate before reaching this age.

Both the overall security situation and the legislation and dynamics of mobilization are far from static. In light of the current mobilization situation in Ukraine, it is worth noting that significant legislative changes were adopted after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. According to amendments made to the legislation in May 2024, the mobilization age was lowered, and military registration was intensified to achieve mobilization goals. [23] This creates additional pressure on young men, especially those approaching adulthood. They seek to leave the country before turning 18 to avoid mobilization and associated restrictions, such as the ban on leaving Ukraine for men subject to mobilization.

Moreover, in 2023, changes were made to the Cabinet of Ministers' resolution on "Border Regime," [24] which established restrictions on free entry, residence, work, and movement of people in the border zone. Consequently, checkpoints were set up across a significant territory in Zakarpattia to monitor compliance with the resolution and check the documents of individuals moving within the border zone, where most of the region's central roads are located. These measures, combined with mobilization initiatives, place significant pressure on the local population, complicating their ability to move freely within the region.

*This complicates the possibility of free movement within the region*

[23] Верховна Рада України, 2024. Закон про мобілізаційну підготовку та мобілізацію. Доступно тут: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3543-12> [Accessed 6 Oct. 2024].

[24] Кабінет Міністрів України, 2024. Постанова від 27 липня 1998 р. № 1147 Про прикордонний режим. Доступно тут: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1147-98-%D0%BF#Text>

## § WAR IMPACT

As a result, many respondents—young men—are eager to leave for abroad before reaching adulthood to avoid mobilization and the situation where they can no longer leave. Focus group discussions showed that the young men feel pressure and potential danger to their lives, influencing their decision to leave for abroad, as they see it as the only way to evade conscription and possible involvement in combat.



**“Of course, the emigration of young people abroad is wrong, but the situation here is such that if you stay, you won’t be able to leave again. You can understand them. You can easily be taken away, you might have to fight and could die; everyone is afraid of this”**

*(a 10th-grade student, 16 years old)*

## § WAR IMPACT

Some participants in the focus group discussions stated that they are encouraged to leave the country by their parents due to safety concerns and worries about their children's future. This applies to both boys and girls:

**“First and foremost, I am a mother, and I will worry about my child. You understand? The first thing that drives us away from here is the war. I think we all understand this”**


*(a teacher, mother of an 11th-grade student)*

Some of the universities where the participants planned to study are currently located in frontline areas or in cities that are frequently targeted by missile attacks from Russia, such as Kharkiv and the capital of Ukraine, Kyiv, which in turn encourages the search for new educational opportunities abroad:

**“I have a daughter who is now a graduate of 11th grade; we are also going abroad. Before the war, we didn’t plan to leave the country at all, and it wasn’t even on our minds. We wanted Kharkiv. And now everything has changed. People are fleeing. And now we are planning for a university in Slovakia. I will feel more at ease about my child. Calmly, without these worries, because I have a son at war; I know what he feels”**

*(a teacher, mother of an 11th-grade student)*





**“I have a grandson who is in the 11th grade. He doesn’t want to go abroad, but his parents have already chosen a study direction for him in the Czech Republic, so he has to agree”**

*(a teacher, grandmother of a student)*

For example, a 16-year-old boy noted in the focus group that his parents greatly influence his intentions to study and work in the Czech Republic, although he personally would prefer to stay in Ukraine because of family and friends. Similarly, a teacher noted that parents often take their children abroad due to concerns about the war and future prospects.

**“Well, when the war started, the number of students who left for abroad with their parents clearly increased. For them, it was the only option to protect their children”**

*(a teacher, deputy head of a school)*

One of the focus group participants, who works as the deputy principal of a school, confirms that the decision about studying abroad is often made within the family, where parents provide advice regarding the field of study or specialization in education. This parental guidance reflects the transmission of personal experiences or established stereotypes, as parents convey their experiences and expectations to their children, influencing their migration decisions.

Another respondent, a biology teacher, emphasized that children are still at an age where they cannot make decisions independently, and parental influence is significant.

**“Who do you think has the most influence on students’ decisions? – It is, of course, the parents. They decide what is best for the children because they are afraid for their future in Ukraine.”**

*(teachers, general opinion)*

The family environment, shaped by the experiences of migrant parents, creates a perception in which emigration is viewed as a logical choice, conveying both pressure and a sense of normalcy. Focus group discussions show that both parents and teachers use their influence on children, feeling responsible for their protection. The war has further intensified the pressure on families, forcing them to consider migration as a means to achieve safety and stability. Teachers and parents expressed concerns about the future and a desire to protect their children from uncertainty in wartime.







# ECONOMIC FACTORS IN THE COMMUNITY AND REGION

Focus group respondents in the community identified the lack of or insufficient job opportunities and inadequate wage levels, in their opinion, as one of the key issues prompting them to migrate. Respondents of various ages discussed this, indicating widespread concern among teachers, parents, and students regarding employment opportunities and decent salaries in the city.



**“There are many opportunities in Ukraine, but not in Mukachevo. I think I don’t see myself realizing my potential here in the future. There are no jobs. There are no prospects.”**

*(11th-grade student)*

**“[...] in Ukraine, professions that require a lot of work [receive] very little pay for this labor. For example, doctors mainly earn very little, teachers or emergency service workers, and other services that help during this horror are very important to us, but they do not receive adequate compensation for their work”**

*(college student, 18 years old)*

## § THE INFLUENCE OF THE ECONOMY

Regarding the overall level of economic development in the region, **R. Korutchev’s study “Migration and the Challenges of the Russian Armed Conflict in 2022: The Case of Transcarpathia”** shows that before the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, residents of Zakarpattia had a relatively low average income [27]. The full-scale Russian invasion exacerbated the economic crisis in the region, as it did across the rest of the country. There was a significant decrease in household income levels among internally displaced persons (IDPs), compared to a relatively moderate decrease among local residents. In 2022, trade revived due to the presence of IDPs; however, in 2023, incomes significantly fell. Combined with inflation, this further intensified the challenges faced by the people of Zakarpattia.

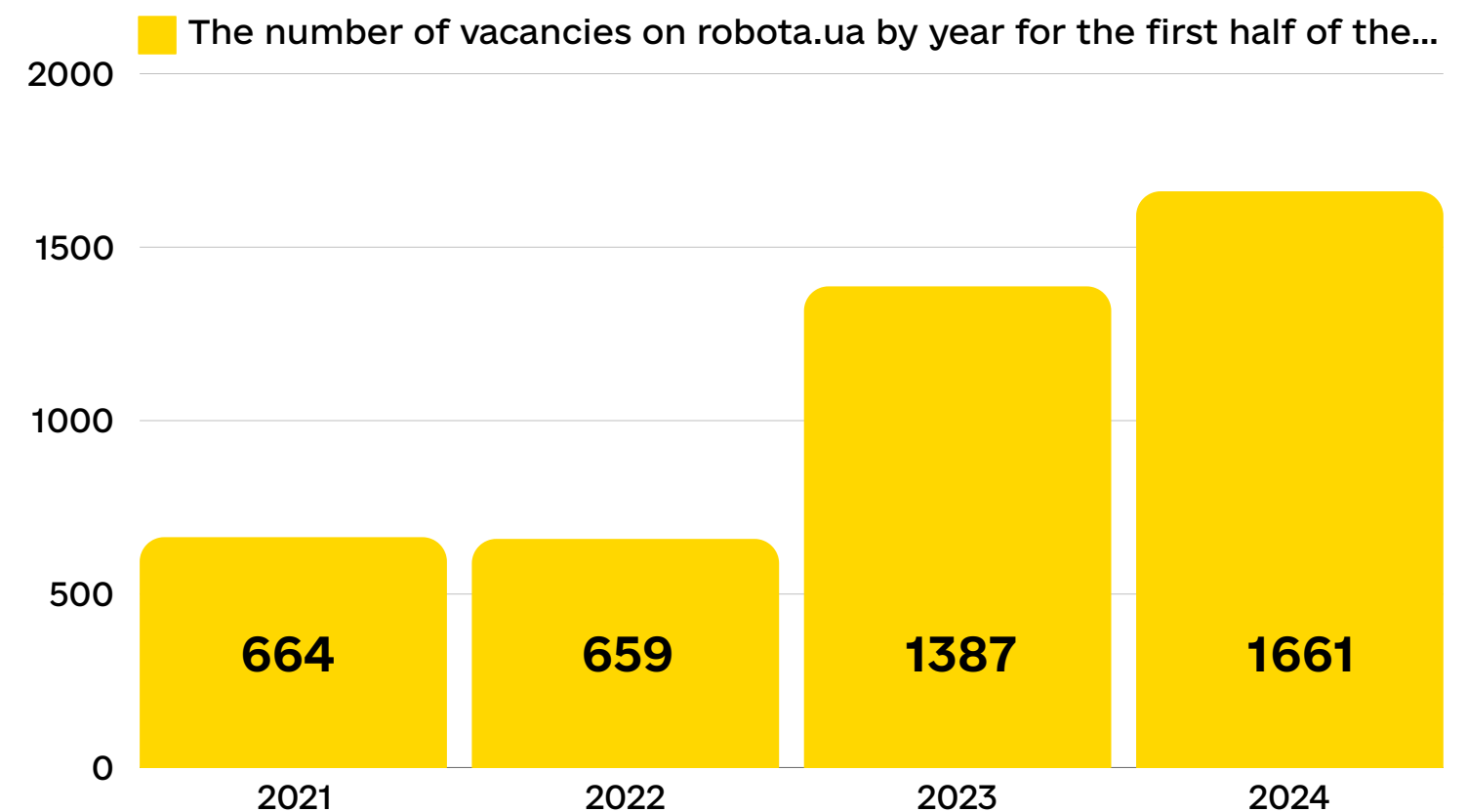
Compared to the eastern and southern regions, Zakarpattia received about 104% of new jobs and demonstrated a significant change in the income structure, resulting in an increase in the average and lower incomes of the local population. During interviews, representatives of the Mukachevo City Council noted that “since 2022, large enterprises in the city, such as FISHER and FLEX, are filled to about half of their maximum staffing capacity.” This indicates that there is a significant reserve for hiring new employees and opportunities for employment.

Additionally, data from the portal [roboota.ua](https://roboota.ua) regarding job vacancies in Mukachevo show that the number of open positions has been steadily increasing compared to the first half of the years 2021–2024. This trend may indicate both an increase in demand for labor, which is a positive signal for the local labor market, and a strong shortage of skilled workers needed to meet the staffing needs of enterprises.

The beliefs of some informants regarding the absence or lack of jobs may be linked to various factors, including insufficient awareness of available vacancies. It is possible that information about existing job openings does not fully reach potential employees. One reason for this is inadequate communication between employers and job seekers.

[28] Р. Корутчев «Міграція та виклики російського збройного конфлікту у 2022 році: приклад Закарпаття». Доступно тут: [https://jbg.s.arphahub.com/article/115315/?fbclid=IwZXh0bG9hZmV9OQqG8q7VBohx0QYmIV9ZxIXvuWjTZDF0UpLK74VXUp\\_PkIHbcIGb9UTMTT1P](https://jbg.s.arphahub.com/article/115315/?fbclid=IwZXh0bG9hZmV9OQqG8q7VBohx0QYmIV9ZxIXvuWjTZDF0UpLK74VXUp_PkIHbcIGb9UTMTT1P)

## § THE INFLUENCE OF THE ECONOMY



Another explanation could be the mismatch between the qualifications of job seekers and the offers on the labor market, caused by significant changes (Mantur-Chubat, 2022) [29] in the Ukrainian labor market since February 2022, where the service sector, represented in part by new, atypical professions such as humanitarian roles, has become strongly dominant over professions requiring "hard" skills.

However, despite the availability of vacancies, the level of wages may not meet employees' expectations, forcing them to seek better opportunities outside the city or region. Teachers who participated in the focus group discussions also indicated that the knowledge, skills, and competencies possessed by job seekers sometimes do not meet employer requirements. Furthermore, there is no quality dual education system or short courses in the region to fill this gap.

[29] Мантур-Чубата О. С., Ваганова Л. В., РИНОК ПРАЦІ УКРАЇНИ В УМОВАХ ВОЄННОГО СТАНУ, 2022. Доступно тут: <https://journals.nupp.edu.ua/eir/article/view/2636/2043>

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# MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



## § CONCLUSIONS

During the focus group discussions, patterns and trends among the views and opinions of respondents were identified. Young people actively plan their futures, taking into account educational opportunities, employment prospects, and security factors in the country, while comparing options in Ukraine and abroad. Many of them look to the experiences of those who have already moved abroad and rely on information from online resources. Parents also have a significant influence on young people's migration decisions, actively supporting their children's intentions to leave the country for safety and a better future.

YOUTH FROM URBAN AND RURAL AREAS demonstrate different priorities in selecting countries for migration. **Students from urban schools tend to focus more on European countries, while young people from rural areas may consider a wider variety of options within the region and the country as a whole.**

# SUGGESTIONS FOR ADDRESSING YOUTH OUTFLOW ISSUES

## 1

### Economic Development and Job Creation:

- Stimulating business development through tax incentives, state grants, and support programs, particularly in strategically important sectors.
- Investing in the restoration and modernization of critical infrastructure to create stable living and working conditions.

## 2

### Creating Educational Programs and Intensives:

- Establishing formal and informal education programs aimed at enhancing the qualifications and retraining of workers.
- Ensuring access to quality education and professional skills development through training and retraining programs.
- Supporting young scientists and entrepreneurs through financial and advisory assistance.

3

## Creating a Favorable Social Environment:

- Developing programs that promote the formation of an inclusive and tolerant society, where youth feel protected and accepted.
- Improving communication strategies between employment centers, employers, and the population regarding current job vacancies and labor market offers.
- Enhancing mechanisms for informing and engaging with the population about available job opportunities, including using additional recruitment tools such as internships, open days, public presentations, etc.

4

## Quality Career Guidance in Schools:

- Individualized approaches for each student, taking into account their interests, abilities, and potential. Providing up-to-date information about the labor market and further education opportunities is also crucial so that students can make informed choices about their future career paths.

**Thus, a comprehensive approach that includes enhancing security, developing the economy, supporting education and professional development, as well as creating a favorable social environment, is key to reducing the youth outflow from Ukraine and ensuring sustainable development in the long term.**

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