



# Is There a Conflict in Employment? Integrating Highly Educated Ukrainian Immigrant Women into the Czech Labor Market

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## ABSTRACT

The migration and integration of highly educated Ukrainian women immigrants into the Czech labor market is a serious problem in our increasingly global society. Exploring the influence of active labor market policies (ALMPs) on their integration uncovers both possibilities and challenges, emphasizing the need to understand how government actions may help or impede their professional development. The decision-making processes of these Ukrainian immigrant women will be investigated in this study, with an emphasis on the ways in which ALMPs impact their work integration and migration experiences. Using expert analysis and qualitative interviews, this study explores the institutional and personal dimensions of immigrant women's integration experiences, shedding light on the systemic challenges and challenges they encounter. The findings indicate that, despite existing integration efforts through ALMPs, significant challenges persist, such as bureaucratic inefficiencies and fragmented support services. These problems can delay access to crucial resources, resulting in underemployment and job mismatches. This study emphasizes the urgent need for a more coordinated policy approach to better support the distinct decision-making processes of highly educated migrant women, ultimately fostering improved outcomes in labor market integration.

**Keywords:** Labor Market Integration, Migration Decision-making, Active Labor Market Policies, Highly Educated Immigrant Women, Ukrainian Immigrants

**JEL Classifications:** F4, J8

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This research investigates migration decisions made by educated Ukrainian women permanently wishing to settle in the Czech Republic in regard to the recent developments witnessed in the Czech Republic with regard to active labor market policies (ALMPs). Migration decision-making is a rather submerged and exclusively studied phenomenon in migration studies today, which is not the case since recent migrations throughout Europe. To fill this gap, the research investigates the interplay of female emigrants' agency and institutional context in the case of highly qualified Ukrainian women immigrants, and how their professional integration is influenced by gender relations and other mechanisms of the state.

The recent war between Ukraine and Russia has caused many Ukrainians to turn into refugees. The number of these educated

and skilled Ukrainians seeking asylum in Europe, and particularly the Czech Republic, has risen due to the country's increasingly skilled labor shortage (Gheorghiev et al., 2020; Novotný, 2020). The Czech Republic's ALMPs and policy frameworks such as career counseling and training and integration and placement of skilled migrant workers were expected to help the highly skilled foreign nationals. To make matters worse, these policies usually do not consider the specific concerns of many highly educated Ukrainian women immigrants who more often than not remain underemployed or overqualified for available jobs, thus rendering them as not being effective to the economy of the Czech Republic.

This study seeks to determine how the women's decision-making processes are shaped by a combination of gender, immigration, and constraints of current practices. We aim to explain the role of policies and integration programs of the Czech labor market in

terms of their endeavors to attain stable and meaningful work. The research question posed in the framework of this investigation is as follows: What are the effects of structural barriers and intersectional challenges on the migration strategies and professional adaptation of highly educated Ukrainian immigrant women within the labor market of the Czech Republic?

Our research goes in a bit of a different direction but, as Krejčí wrote, it is necessary to pay attention to how migrants such as Ukrainian refugees, who currently exist and are trying to integrate into society, are being integrated (2019). The context of this study also raises the importance of reviewing how poorly developed the policies already in place are for managing women's migration decisions and emphasizes the necessity of considering migration policies that do not revolve around the often-studied concepts of voluntary and forced migration. In this regard, this study fills an important gap in existing research by addressing the issue of migration and labor market integration of highly educated Ukrainian women immigrants, a specific group that is poorly represented in the literature. It examines how intersecting systemic barriers and gendered contexts inform women's migration choices and their ensuing settlement in the Czech labor market. In this way, this research also addresses the additional implications of Czech Active Labor Market Policies (ALMPs) in practice, by evaluating their effectiveness, providing evidence of their effects and highlighting shortcomings in current practice. The relevance of this focus is made clearer by the context of the recently increased Ukrainian migration and its subsequent reconfiguration.

In the next sections, we give a contextual history of the Czech labor market policies, explain the hypotheses which guided our study as well as provide empirical data which point out some of the strengths and weaknesses of the existing support systems. In the end, we also explain the meaning of our results and suggest some modifications to the policies which aim at improving the integration of highly skilled immigrants into the Czech labor market – adjustments to the policies which reflect the difficulties of the decision processes related to social change factors.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Highly Qualified Immigrants in the Czech Labor Market

Despite having a high level of education, highly qualified Ukrainian women immigrants seeking cost-effective labor in the Czech Republic often encounter serious challenges during the migration decision-making process. It is necessary to take into account not only the individual factors, but also the structural ones specifically related to the Czech labor market and migration policies. The history of labor migration in the Czech Republic has been governed by a “guest worker” concept, which perceived migrants as a temporary remedy for the lack of certain qualifications instead of a long-term asset (Novotný, 2020; Ager and Strang, 2008). From this view, two drastic labor markets were created- high-wage low skilled jobs, usually meant for immigrants, and university educated professionals whose services are rendered at poverty level wages. Such fragmentation supports a naive and primitive view of how migration works which is not

accurate because it ignores the selection, compulsion, and agency involved in the decision-making processes surrounding migration (Gheorghiev et al., 2023; Kohli, 2004; Berry et al., 1992).

In the context of the dual labor market system in the Czech Republic, Ukrainian immigrants with high education are facing many difficulties. Many of them are found at the situation of underemployment which is the third stage where a transition from low-skilled or temporal positions to one's ability and aspirations is quite difficult. The problem is compounded by the absence of targeted outreach programs, resulting in people being overqualified for the available opportunities. This “brain sprinkling” in which employment in the host country is disproportionate to the migrant's qualifications, has become a problem in all of Europe, but for the Czech case, is quite problematic because of the increasing dependence on migrant labour to fill in the gaps for difficult and growth promoting abilities (Andrijasevic and Sacchetto, 2017; Novotný, 2020).

The Czech Republic has implemented ALMPs as services designed to assist certain groups such as immigrants, in which these individuals are provided with guidance on career development, employment placement, training, and where firms are compensated financially for employing such individuals. These policies are important in terms of assisting in the improvement of any career development and job placements, however, there are limitations in terms of how effective these policies can be. This includes, lack of sufficient funding, informal job search, and the inability to meet the requirements of highly skilled immigrants. The conservative welfare regime in the Czech Republic makes these issues more difficult by linking benefits with work history closely, which is challenging for immigrants working either informally or at risk employment.

The fact that ALMPs have such limitations marks a significant lack of other available sources of assistance for highly skilled immigrants, which further emphasises the need to target the problem more comprehensively and integrally. Such an integration should, however, not be limited to only satisfying the current economic requirements of the immigrants but should include the their more global, distant professional and personal needs as well. This understanding of the formulating motivations enables this research to situate itself within the emerging literature on migration decision making, and attempts to provide a more nuanced lens incorporating both the agency and the sociodemographic determinants of migration among highly skilled women from Ukraine. In such a framework, this research intends to assess the impact of ALMPs on the labor market outcomes of these women, and examine their structural and societal hurdles. This research, by putting emphasis on the aspects of choice and forcing nature in their migration decision, not only describes the weaknesses of a particular policy, but also contributes to its improvement in the context of the needs of the target population in order to enhance their career growth and integrating efficiently into the labor market of the Czech Republic.

### 2.2. Theoretical Framework

Using a holistic theoretical architecture, this study investigates the migration decision-making process of highly educated Ukrainian

women immigrants and their integration into the labor market in the Czech Republic. The conceptual framework combines migration decision making theories, Human Capital Theory, the theory of 'brain waste', labour market segmentation theory, intersectionality theory, feminist theory and opportunity structures theory. Through an analysis of these concept relations, this study aims to explain the intricate factors influencing decision making as well as the envisaged migratory and these women's labour market experiences.

Decision-making processes within migration intentions and activities are ideally encapsulated by migration decision making theories. These theories explain that migration decision cannot be viewed as a static process since it is made only one in an individual's lifetime, thus a number of economic, social, and psychological influences are at play. Key in the understanding is push-pull theory. In simple terms, people emigrate due to certain factors which are associated with their home country (push factors) while they consider migrating because of certain factors that are associated with the host country (pull factors) (Lee, 1966). Some of the push factors for highly educated women of Ukrainian nationality is economic insecurity, the limited scope of professional realization as well as the Russo-Ukrainian War. Pull factors might include better employment opportunities and greater salaries along with a better overall security in the Czech Republic. This completes the picture as it has been proposed before that Human Capital Theory suggests that people acquire skills and education with the aim of increasing their chances of being productive (Becker, 1964). There are cases however whereby the expected benefits from such an investment are low due to numerous factors such as underemployment and job mismatch, and in such cases, people may look for other opportunities that would maximize their human capital. This hypothesis is especially useful in the explanation of the highlighted issue of citizens' brain waste, when educated migrants, regardless of their qualifications, find themselves employed in occupational posts that do not make full use of their potential. In relation to the Ukrainian females' movement towards Czech Republic, the problem of brain waste is pertinent in that their level of education and qualifications may not be properly recognized in the labor market of the host country (Becker, 1964; Mattoo et al., 2008). This leads to the further assumption that these women in all likelihood will move to regions where their skills will be fully appreciated and there will be no underemployment as would be the case in their home countries.

Nevertheless, once the authors settle in the host country, these women mostly face the opposite phenomenon of Labor Market Segmentation. According to this theory, there is a division of the labor market into two segments or areas, where the first is a core area with secure jobs that pay well and have potential for further advancement, while the second area consists of peripheral employment that is low paying, lacking in job security and potential for growth (Doeringer and Piore, 1971). Highly educated Ukrainian women may remain in the Czech secondary labor market for instance because of barriers beyond their qualifications such as unrecognized foreign qualifications, language differences or even discriminatory employment practices (Reyneri and Fullin, 2011). This segregation of labor markets in turn leads to brain waste, for

those women are never based in occupations that are suitable for their educational backgrounds and work experience which only reinforce their position at the periphery of the labor market.

As if their integration is not complex enough, intersectionality theory can be used to critically analyse how their experiences are exacerbated by the changing intersections of their identities such as gender, nationality and immigrant status. Intersectionality argues that the problems which these women encounter cannot be analyzed from a single-axis perspective; it is their gender and their status as immigrants which discriminate against them in acquiring suitable employment (Crenshaw, 1991). Highly qualified however, the women, will be expected to perform traditionally feminine roles within the host country and their professional opportunities may be curbed by culture. This intersectionality is important in explaining why these women tend to end up in low skilled and poorly paid jobs despite their higher education degree.

The dimension of feminist theories offers a fresh twist to the argument by stating what has been missing in the labor market which is the issue of gender roles and social expectations. This view holds that women's work, and especially that of immigrant women, is usually underappreciated and that women get stuck in a hierarchy of occupations that are low paying and low protected (Acker, 2006; McDowell, 2008; Creese and Wiebe, 2012). In the Czech Republic such situation is most pertinent, where the gendered aspects of labor markets and the stereotypes of migrant workers add to the existing burdens on the already educated, professional Ukrainian women seeking to enter better working class. Intersectionality together with Feminist theories explains the structural character of the obstacles confronted by these women and thereby supports the need for such hybridised approach explaining gender hierarchies and migration status.

Lastly, opportunity structures theory builds on these frameworks by looking into societal and institutional factors that extend or restrict the chances for migrants. In the Czech context, these are such factors as provision of language courses, validation of foreign credentials and provision of on-the-job training which are very important in achieving effective integration into the labor market. Nevertheless, whenever these opportunity structures are non-existent or out of reach, they may importantly preclude the chances of highly educated Ukrainian women from pursuing their professional goals, thus, reinforcing their position in the secondary labor market for women (Kitschelt, 1986; Cloward and Ohlin, 1964; Phillimore, 2021). This theory has tended to focus on structural aspects of how opportunities for migration are taken and would argue that availability of such supportive institutions is key in achieving successful integration of migrants into the labor markets.

To conclude, the theoretical model presented in this context tends to be useful in elucidating the ways of making migration decisions and integrating the highly educated female migrants from Ukraine into the labor market environment in the Czech Republic. The relations of such theories widens the angle of view at the systemic as well as individual level reasoning's on forcible movement of people and their experiences and outcomes in the labor market.

Therefore, as this theoretical framework elaborates, the authors of this study argue that the migration patterns of these women are influenced by a complex interplay of factors including push-pull factors and the desire to avoid wastage of skills, however their successful settlement into the labor market remains consistently undermined by labour market positioning intersectionality and opportunity structures. The authors empirically test these hypotheses by way of data collection and analysis with the aim of providing new insights into existing debates surrounding migration, gender relations and labor markets.

### 3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to assimilate highly educated Ukrainian women migrants into the Czech Republic's labor market, a qualitative research approach was employed in order to understand complex aspects of the participants' lives. Personal interviews were chosen as the main source of data so as to study an individual's experiences regarding their job searching attempts, their integration, and their relationship with labor market policies. The interviews granted us the opportunity to 'touch' different phases of their employment transactions and the broader feelings attached to the transactions.

This research is about first-generation, highly educated Ukrainian female immigrants who are facing difficulties in labour market's integration while also looking for assistance. The research aims to address the disparity between the requirements of this particular group and the plans which would allow other immigrants to assimilate into the labour market more effectively. Earlier studies, including Garkisch et al. (2017), Obeng-Odoom (2021), and Davis et al. (2021), have also called attention to these challenges.

The subjects of this research, first in our case, used a phenomenological approach to conduct and relate the study which is focused on the understanding of human experiences from the level of the participants. This approach, therefore seeks to provide an in depth understanding of the phenomenon under the study by concentrating on participants' understanding of the events. We interviewed 30 highly educated female Ukrainian immigrants who lived in Brno and were in the process of or actively trying to integrate themselves into the Czech labour market (Table 1). In this case the intent of the selection of the people was to make sure that there is a wider representation of the backgrounds of the people aimed at that long-term integration (Patton, 2015).

We followed a qualitative design that involved semi-structured interviews which allowed for some exploration into various aspects of the participants' viewpoints. We included open-ended questions which favored discussion so as to provide qualitative data (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). The interviews were carried out from August to November 2023, and participants decided the locations in which to conduct the interviews, namely their workplaces, cafes and parks in Brno. This helped ease communication as these places encouraged the interviewers to talk freely (Seidman, 2013). The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed for analysis. Brno with a population of about 500,000 is the second most populous Czech Republic city and has unique spatial situations in terms of internal migration. It has quite above the average national level of refugees

and migrants. Brno has developed into a well-known educational and economic center which explains the influx of skilled workforce to its universities and a lot of foreign companies (Novotný, 2020; Grimshaw et al., 2017; Kovářová, 2018).

The city of Brno opens its doors for migrants to find within its boundaries opportunities for work and social engagement, but also poses certain challenges. With these two factors, the city benefits from specialized programs such as 'Integration of Foreigners' which facilitates career counseling, language training and job placement services. Further initiatives like the "Brno for All" program has been launched in order to promote integration through community-based activities and support networks for newcomers or any person non conforming to the Bulgarian society. These gap filling measures do not seem to be achieving the intended purpose. Educated and career focused Ukrainian woman are known to experience a few challenges including underemployment which posed by some policies as stated by Krejčí (2019). For instance, women can be offered counselling on their careers and courses on the language but these cannot deal with subtle problems such as soft skill requirements and appreciation of foreign credentials. The city fosters a mature approach to the integration of migrants and coordination of programs that address these other gaps exist. Enormous divisions particularly for Ukrainian women who possess great educational background and even worked in professional fields before migration exist thus calling for reform in the policy frameworks to enable fast integration of the women into the Brno society.

The data was contextualized thematically by using thematic content analysis whereby major themes were noted integration issues, policy effectiveness, and relating to job market, psychological aspect. The analysis was conducted in such a way as to thematic coding which in this case focused on political ideologies and the perceptions and real experiences of the participants on how integration was done. This technique assisted us in recognizing and understanding relationships among and between the interviews conducted and the perceptions of the respondents regarding the policies on the labor market as currently operational. As the researcher was fluent in both Ukrainian and Russian, interpreter services were unnecessary. Such language skill gave the participants the opportunity to express their experiences and opinions in simple and understandable language without the need for translation. Translation problems were however avoided but knowledge of these languages by the researcher enabled the participants' experiences to be appreciated better and the overall quality of the research to be enhanced further.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed during the entire study. The Research Ethics Committee of Masaryk University granted ethical clearance and ensured that there was strict confidentiality of participant information and free prior informed consent. Participants were briefed about the aim of the study, how their data would be utilized and their rights to withdraw themselves at any given time. As described above data collection was carried out in a manner that protected the participants' anonymity and dispelled any assumptions as to the place or situation of the interviews (Winkelmann and Winkelmann, 2015). Expert



**Table 1: Sample of respondents**

No	Pseudonym	Age	Educational attainment	Labor market status	Migration year	Family status
1	Irina	34	MA	Employed, housekeeper	2020	Single, two children
2	Tanya	40	MA	Unemployed, income support	2020	Married, two children
3	Anastasia	45	BA	Employed, cleaner	2020	Divorced, one child
4	Sasha	46	MA	Employed, shop assistant	2021	Married, two children
5	Vasylina	40	BA	Employed, tour agent	2019	Single, no children
6	Olena	37	BA	Unemployed, income support	2021	Married, no children
7	Viktoria	48	MA	Employed, housekeeper	2020	Married, one child
8	Galyna	36	MA	Employed, cleaner	2021	Single, no children
9	Nataliya	43	BA	Employed, cook in a restaurant	2020	Widowed, two children
10	Ivanna	34	BA	Unemployed, academic	2020	Married, no children
11	Daryna	52	MA	Employed, cleaner	2019	Married, one child
12	Kateryna	39	BA	Employed, hotel receptionist	2021	In a relationship, one child
13	Angelina	42	MA	Employed, shop assistant	2021	Married, one child
14	Alona	34	MA	Unemployed, income support	2020	Married, three children
15	Diana	29	BA	Employed, factory worker	2021	Single, no children
16	Khrystyna	50	MA	Unemployed, income support	2021	Married, one child
17	Inna	49	MA	Unemployed, income support	2020	Married, two children
18	Antonina	32	MA	Employed, IT field	2021	Single, no children
19	Olha	30	BA	Employed, waitress	2019	Single, no children
20	Leysa	32	BA	Employed, barmen	2019	Married, no children
21	Alina	46	MA	Employed, cleaner	2021	Married, one child
22	Yana	32	BA	Employed, waitress	2021	Single, no children
23	Lyudmyla	36	MA	Employed, cleaner	2020	Married, one child
24	Halya	50	MA	Employed, factory worker	2021	Married, two children
25	Solomia	46	MA	Unemployed, income support	2021	Divorced, one child
26	Nadiya	34	MA	Unemployed, income support	2020	Engaged
27	Nina	42	MA	Employed, housekeeper	2021	Married, one child
28	Yoraslava	36	MA	Unemployed, income support	2020	Married, one child
29	Klara	48	MA	Employed, factory worker	2020	Married, two children
30	Vira	44	BA	Employed, factory worker	2020	Married, one child

Source: Author's elaboration

interviews were also directed to deepen the understanding of the integration difficulties expressed by the respondents (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Massey et al., 1993). These experts representing both state and non-state organizations in Brno provided opinions regarding labor market policies and assistance to immigrants (Table 2). This additional layer of data helped situate the findings from the interviews with the Ukrainian women in relation to the processes of integration which were more occurred during the course of the research.

Overall, the variety of methods used, such as semi-structured research interviews, thematic analysis, and expert consultations helped us to develop complex and multidimensional comprehension of Ukrainian highly educated females' immigrants in Czech Republic work force. This framework enables us to understand not only the individual characteristics of the integration process, but also the more general aspects, which we believe assist us in understanding the problems currently facing the target group and the efficacy of existing policies.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this part, there is a specific scope regarding the examination of the particular support services available to highly educated Ukrainian women immigrants living in the territory of the Czech Republic. Building upon my empirical and theoretical knowledge, we propose ways to expand and improve such services. Therefore, this discussion integrates the narratives of immigrant participants

**Table 2: Sample of experts**

No	Pseudonym	Type of institution	Interviewee function
1	Alena	NGO	Career consultant
2	Veronika	Local government	Social worker
3	Alice	Public administration	Director
4	Jana	Public administration	HR specialist
5	Aneta	Local government	Social worker

Source: Author's elaboration

and the findings from expert interviews and analyzes the existing policies addressing the needs of such a group and suggest practical changes to suit the needs of the targeted group.

### 4.1. Implementation of Active Labor Market Policies (ALMPs) in the Czech Republic

The practice of carrying out individually oriented programs, including the consulting and guiding one in relation to work, especially in the context of ALMP's which the head of the Polish – Czech Centre for Integration Negotiations has promoted is an effective tool of facilitating processes of Labor Market Integration concerning job seekers. However, the success of these policies is often criticized, in this case mostly those who came to Czech Republic already highly educated – it would include these, for example, Ukrainian women. Although the intention of ALMPs is to attend to the unique needs of the target audience, they oftentimes need to focus on more serious issues than the needs per se, such as finding a way to acknowledge foreign qualifications.

The experiences of the participants brought out the defects found in the present ALMP framework. Most of the career and employment mentoring program participants had reported that although these services extended some help at the beginning, their finer issues and needs were not attended to properly. One of the respondents who participated in a job mentoring program in Brno remarked, “The support was too basic and the more complex issues like qualification recognition were not tackled” (Respondent 8: 36 years old, MA, employed, cleaner). This criticism of low expectations of the ALMPs is evident with many respondents, albeit with much concern, that the measures are far too vague to be effective for educated immigrants who have particular challenges in the labour market. Another respondent vented his/her frustration towards the disparity between the nature of assistance given and what he/she actually required in terms of the career support; “I thought that there would be a different type of assistance from the one offered. Career consulting was useful, but it did not consider my qualifications or experience’s level” (Respondent 17: 49 years old, MA, unemployed, income support). It means that these services are still not what they are supposed to be – functional and goal oriented consultations capable of resolving the specific barriers encountered by the highly-skilled migrants.

Overarching challenge, as reported by the respondents, was the recognition of foreign qualifications. One of the respondents expressed, “I am still working below my qualifications because getting my credentials recognized is a procedure which I cannot afford in time or money” (Respondent 4: 46 years, MA, shop assistant). This statement illustrates an acute weakness of ALMPs’ approach: Absence of assistance related to the recognition of credentials. This is especially the case for qualified immigrants whose qualifications and experiences are often not directly usable in the local job market. ALMP accessibility fails because of the administrative bottlenecks further necessitating the integration process. As one of the respondents commented, “I was just sent from one office to the other, without any help. And this was just frustrating and demotivating” (Respondent 26: 34 years, MA, occupation: unemployed). This situation stresses the fact that there are indeed coordination barriers in the support services where processes and activities are unconnected and sporadic for job seekers.

The theoretical model of ALMPs suggests, however, that superficial support is ineffective; intensive and individual interventions are required that influence immediate and long term career aspirations (Kluve, 2010; Ressler et al., 2017). Finally, labor market integration theories prescribe the need to have support mechanisms that assist in solving such complicated problems as reconciling and accessing authority structures (Schmid, 2008). In terms of ALMPs, efforts have been made to provide personalised assistance although respondents remark that this has often been insufficient to attend to the more challenging integration issues.

The implementation of ALMPs, as noted by the experts, has been a matter of concern because the ‘one-size’-fits-all model espoused by the inclusion cannot be applied to highly educated immigration. An expert in public administration remarked, “The existing career consulting services are a good starting point, but they need to

be expanded to cover more complex issues, such as credential recognition and personalized career planning” (Expert 4: Public Administration, HR Specialist). This critique again stresses the fact that there needs an adequate layer of support encompassing more than just guidance, focused towards tackling pointed barriers. Another expert noted, “While the mentoring programs are well-intentioned, they often fall short in providing the comprehensive support required to fully integrate skilled immigrants into the labor market” (Expert 3: Public Administration, a Director). This comment is to the specific concern that the boundaries of ALMPs are further deep creeping towards the nature of ALMPs. That is the boundaries of ALMPs are their most disseminated support dependent on degrees of attachment which are most likely to be ridiculous attachments such as bureaucratic politics, and bureaucratic conflict.

As it seems from the respondents, the active labor market programs (ALMP) implemented in Czech Republic primarily provide mechanisms of support in career consultancy and job mentoring but require a more holistic support with regards to integration processes. Credential recognition and some bureaucratic inefficiencies are two of the most important challenges that impact the success of these policies. The respondents comment highlight the importance of offering a more rounded package that would offer some preliminary attention but most importantly, address the intricate and multifaceted nature of educated immigrants. The lessons of the integration into the labor market amplify the need for more elaborate and advanced mechanisms of support. The aforementioned critiques by the experts also make it clear that the ALMPs executed are not geared towards addressing structural concerns (Schmid, 2008). In order to eliminate the consequences of such deficiencies, it is necessary to intensify activities aimed at recognition of qualifications, make the administrative procedures less bureaucratic and organize all comprehensive measures aimed at importing highly skilled immigrants (Bauder, 2003; Kanfer, 2001). Adopting this positions will bridge the current qualitative gap of missing links- the support services on needed in employment circumstances enhanced by the employment itself (Chauvin, 2018).

#### **4.2. Impact of Active Labor Market Policies (ALMPs) on Czech Labor Market Outcomes**

Active labor market policies (ALMPs) are interventions or programs that are aimed at helping job seekers find and obtain suitable employment through constituent measures like career advice, job coaching, and retraining. Such measures are directed at helping workers shift from less favorable positions in the secondary labour market to better ones in the primary basin. However, not all ALMPs have the same effect on these outcomes. While a number of these migrants benefit from them, a great number experience problems related to the type and stability of employment even with the support they render.

From the discussion with the respondents, the impact of ALMPs on the labor market outcomes for Ukrainian migrant women is however mixed. Some participants indicated of the better circumstances such as finding better employment due to support they received. For instance, one respondent observed, “The

consulting helped me understand the job market better and I was able to find a job that was a slight improvement from my previous position” (Respondent 20: 32 years old, BA, employed, barmen). This indicates that beneficiaries of ALMPs can be placed in jobs that are most appropriate for them, especially if they can utilize the needed support efficiently. However, many respondents reported that they continued to experience underemployment even with sustaining participation in ALMPs. One of the frequently recurring complaints in the feedback, however was the ongoing problem of getting a job commensurate to one’s qualification. As one of the respondents explained it: “I am still working below my qualifications because I am unable to spare neither time nor money for recognition process of my credentials” (Respondent 1: 34 years old, MA, employed, housekeeper). This provided sufficient evidence that there is a crucial aspect which these ALMPs do not always cover as much as they would be ideal for them to do: while they may promote entry into the labor market, the potential for those workers to climb the career ladder is very much limited in the absence of having their credentials acknowledged.

A different respondent noted that there are still challenges even with the support of ALMPs, emphasizing that ‘The job mentoring program might have helped me prepare my CV and cover letter, but it did not solve the problem of many employers not recognizing my qualifications’ (Respondent 28: 36 years old, MA, unemployed beneficiary of aim income support). Such comments illustrate one of the shortcomings of ALMPs: the failure to address foreign qualification recognition as a key systemic challenge for many migrant women from Ukraine who want to achieve better employment results.

Theoretical approaches to labor market policies in general, state that in order to have the desired effect, ALMPs will need to satisfy the current employment requirement as well as the future employment-related aspirations (Kluve, 2010; Bastia, 2014; Busk et al., 2016). Labor market integration theories view it slightly differently emphasizing that effective measures should aid the transition from insecure jobs to secure occupations and should also enable the unemployed to optimally utilize their skills (Schmid, 2008; Forsander, 2002; Hori, 2009). It is important to note that while ALMPs have been devised to assist the aim of securing service, their efficiencies depend on their ability to offer both lower level assistance such as rapid job placement as well as higher order functions like certification validation and career advancement. Due to lack of effectiveness of the ALMP provisions in providing stable and secure occupations, for instance, alluded policies have been ineffective in addressing Foreign Employment integration gaps. The unresolved issue of underemployment after receiving the ALMP support indicates how wide the disconnect is between policies and the ground realities particularly pertaining to the migrants including recognition of their qualifications and availability of secure jobs. They spoke specifically about the adverse effects of the ALMPs and their outcomes within the labor market.

A public administration expert remarked on the effectiveness of the ALMPs in these terms: “Although ALMPs have enhanced job transitions for some immigrants, they typically do not solve the

more fundamental problem of recognition of qualifications and career progression”. (Expert 1: NGO, Career Consultant). This appraisal considers the concern regarding the impact of ALMPs on improvement of job quality and job security in considerable degrees, as these rarely manage to address the basic constraints which stop migrants to move into better jobs. An alternative approach was proposed by another specialist: “The existing ALMPs are effective in responding to short-term needs. But in the future, these programs should change in order to foster growth of participants’ professional career and solve structural problems in the labor market” (Expert 4: Public Administration, HR Specialist). This outlook, however, brings into focus the need for ALMPs to assist immediate employment opportunities but address the enabling factors that would help migrants secure and maintain stable employment opportunities of higher quality.

Evaluation of ALMPs with regard to the labor market outcomes of Ukrainian migrant women offers a rather complicated narrative. It has been noted that better job placements have been facilitated by these policies for a few, however, many of them often have key obstacles such as long term career growth and foreign skills recognition that remain unaddressed. Experience of the respondents illustrates that although there is appreciation for the initial support that is offered by ALMPs, enhancement of the quality or the stability of the jobs is often lacking or only minimal. Due to the exogenous factors triangulated, policymakers and practitioners including researchers should appreciate that policies should have immediate and longer term measures including credential recognition and career development. There has also been palpable frustration about the limitations of ALMPs in these areas which reflect the incongruity between the intention and actual practical problems that face migrants. There have been expert based evaluations as well which have argued for the improvement and transformation of the original ALMPs in order that they might be more holistic in addressing the systemic challenges. It is proposed that in order to advance the integration of Ukrainian migrant women into labor market, one should address three aspects: the level of ALMPs which should overcome — obstacles such as foreign skill recognition, job quality and stability, and the correct policies for effective employment in the labour market integration targets.

#### **4.3. Barriers and Challenges in Implementing Active Labor Market Policies (ALMPs)**

There are a number of factors and challenges that considerably impede the implementation of Active Labor Market Policies (ALMPs). Among the most important of these are inefficiencies in the bureaucracy—for instance, processing of qualifications takes too long—and poor interservice collaboration. Such structural problems do not only hinder the availability and the responsiveness of the support provided but also result in a poorly integrated and mostly uncoordinated and ineffective service delivery.

It is essential to overcome these barriers to increase the potential effectiveness of ALMPs and ensure that the needs of the target population are fully met by the ALMPs. The experiences gained by the respondents were instrumental in providing the focal point on the barriers to ALMP engagement. Many of the participants



reported encountering red tape when attempting to access the required services. One of the respondents noted this challenge; “I was moved from one office to the next without being given any real assistance. It was demotivating and, at worst, quite irritating” (Respondent 30: 44, BA, in employment, factory worker). This does not only make it annoying but is also perceived by many as an embodiment of a bigger problem in the system. People tend to go through several layers of bureaucracy which makes it almost impossible if not hard to get the help required in a timely manner. Other participants also cited difficulties in obtaining key documents including delays as major hindrances. One of them noted that; “The documents took quite a long time to be processed, which made it difficult for me to obtain the support in the right time”. Not only does this cause delays in the integration into the labor market but the instability of migrants themselves is also stretched further deep, frustration in the process is also aggravated. Most of the respondents mentioned the poor organization of the interconnections among the different services. A participant of the survey argued, “Different offices provided opposing views, and I wasted a great deal of time trying to determine what was right” (Respondent 25: 46 y o, MA, unemployed, receiving income support). Such fragmentation of messages and actions among the services adds to the challenges of the migrants, resulting in disorder and wastage in the process of seeking support.

Scholars in the realm of public service delivery theorize that policies can only be successfully executed with sufficient procedures and coordinated efforts (Hoření, 2019). Such perspectives argue that policy alternatives tend to be ineffective because of bureaucratic loads and sprawled service provision which create insurmountable barriers to access and further complicate support systems (Hood, 2000; Bettio and Verashchagina, 2009; Koopmans et al., 2005). In instances where services are poorly coordinated, the lack of appropriate integration further adds to other challenges that individuals may experience in trying to make full use of the available support (Smith, 2021). Applied to ALMP situations, these theoretical perspectives advocate for the need to tackle the existing bureaucratic weaknesses and the existing vacuum in service delivery coordination as essential in policy effectiveness enhancement. The comments provided by the respondents concerning the fragmentation and delays abounded in these theoretically expected circumstances expose a problem in the relationship between policy making and implementation. Experts have provided quite a number of relevant opinions towards the barriers implicating ALMPs. An expert in public administration spoke, “The inefficiencies in the bureaucracy do not only impede timely support access but even undermine the focus of immigrants on their integration efforts, a situation compounded by their bureaucratic inabilities”. (Expert 2: Local Government, Social Worker). This analysis stresses the attention focusing role of bureaucratic load on emotions and psychology of migrants, which jeopardize their chances of successful integration. The same expert pointed out that it is important, “The absence of coordination among the different support services means migrants are helped but in a piecemeal manner which diminishes the whole purpose of the support system”. (Expert 4: Public Administration, HR Specialist). This is valid as it further stresses on the integration of the services

and ensuring that sustained and dependable backing is provided to improve the situation of the migrants.

The issues against the implementation of ALMPs show which factors limit the implementation of those policies. Delays in the processing of qualifications or even the entire application process are among bureaucratic troubles which limit the potential migrants’ access to necessary and timely assistance. These waiting periods aggravate the already high volatility and uncertainty levels possessed by the individuals with a quest to penetrate the labor sphere. In the case when one misses the essential components of the support functions, integration into a balanced system of support is also impossible. The provision of these services in isolation contributes to the respondents presenting conflicting information and the delivery of services in a fragmented manner. Solving these problems would be beneficial also for the effectiveness of ALMPs. Theoretical and expert analyses underline the same problems and recommend certain structural changes in the coordination of the offered sets of measures. Solving these problems makes it easier to create a conducive and comprehensive environment for the inclusion of migrants in the labor market which makes it more possible for them to integrate successfully.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The gaps observed shed light on the fundamental weaknesses of Active Labor Market Policies (ALMPs) in the Czech Republic in relation to the specific focus group of highly educated immigrants in this case Ukrainian women. The analysis clearly established that there are gaping holes between the support offered by the ALMPs and the actual requirements of these individuals, making policy reform paramount. First and foremost, the findings bring forth a striking contradiction between the very intention of the ALMPs and the target group – a highly educated immigrant population. Career consulting and job mentoring services, however, are able to provide rudimentary support, and even these does not tackle vital aspects such as credential recognition and how to maneuver through bureaucratic obstacles. This disconnection emphasizes the importance of policies that enhance employment opportunities, and promote career growth including foreign qualification recognition (Kluve, 2010; Deakin, 2013). All this will require ALMPs to begin with basic support and graduate to more elaborate support that will directly address these challenges. This development should also take into account the barriers migrants face and how they affect decision-making, for example how recognition of credentials influences the types of careers embark on or how they go about searching for employment.

Secondly, the current findings identify important structural weaknesses in the integration processes, including service fragmentation and waiting times. They talked about a lot of frustration caused by the fact that services are slow and delivered in a disconnected manner which made it even harder for them to get the help that was needed in an appropriate time. Efficient policy implementation also requires an effective procedure and coordination of services (Hood, 2000). The identified inefficiencies of ALMPs at the practice stage stem from the incorrect agreements between the policy designers and the actors who are supposed to



implement the policies. These kinds of “controversies” require resolution through the streamlining and acceleration of bureaucratic processes to ameliorate delays and enhance the experiences of the applicants. As for these inefficiencies, understanding how they influence migrants’ decisions to stay in or exit the labour markets would be beneficial for improving the policies.

Third, in this case, the job seekers pointed out the emotional and psychological effects that the lack of help had on them. When searching for work jobs and being underemployed is a normal job seeking process, immigration and its effects are addressed in the studies. At this moment, ALMP’s do not pay due attention to the emotional factors that are always there in the case of migrants’ integration into the host society. In this case, ALMPs could be enhanced by including the psychological and stress management strategies in the framework. Specific examples would be helping job seekers manage job search related stress and work related anxiety which tend to be highly debilitating impacts on the emotional well being of the job seekers and their performance in the job market. Relevant to this, also is the influence these emotional barriers have on decision making by migrants with respect to their violent pursuits in job search or looking for other options and how this informs policy design supportive aspects.

Our study reveals that while the ALMPs in the Czech Republic create initial necessary preconditions, this is often not the case when it comes to highly educated immigrants and the more challenging aspects of ALMPs. For an increase in the effectiveness of ALMPs, it is imperative that these measures be redeveloped to address their different needs. These needs include but are not limited to, minimizing bureaucratic red tape, improving the continuity of services, and integrating information about and psychosocial support to the migrants. Furthermore, policies should be concerned with how the migrant interacts with the policy and specific migratory decisions, of a structural nature as well as personal choice. These changes currently are either the missing link in filling the support deficiencies, result in improved labor market participation, and flow into overall improvement in the condition of job seekers. Our research sheds light on the distinct barriers faced by educated immigrants, and the inefficiencies that organize their decision and their experiences with such issues in a more complex way. This research expands the scope of public administration and market integration in relation to the process where the migrant constructs his decision, therefore more granular and in-depth support frameworks are needed.

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