

Border Migration Processes in Ukraine: Developing Responses to Emerging Vulnerabilities

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Abstract

The paper analyses specifics of Ukrainian migration to Poland in terms of the scale, scope and dynamics of population migration at national and sub-national levels. The author reveals the main push factors for the residents of border areas stimulating population movements towards Poland, namely the economic disparities in the analysed regions, living standard vulnerability, varying levels of labour market attractiveness, social security differences, and policy imperfections. This calls for crucial measures for minimising migration risks and challenges, given the loss of a substantial share of Ukraine's human potential in border regions. It is defined that Podkarpackie Voivodeship and Lviv Oblast are the most cooperating border regions greatly contributing to the total Ukrainian-Polish relations. The new priorities of the policy for cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and Poland are detailed in specific measures improving the functioning of the "Lviv Oblast – Podkarpackie Voivodeship" migration system and human resource development in border area.

Keywords: Border regions; migration system; human resources; push factors; cross-border cooperation

Introduction

1. Introduction and literature review

Cross-border cooperation of border areas is a crucial force of the integration process, which is based on an optimal combination of the resource potential in border regions of countries for joint solving urgent problems and common socio-economic growth. According to Kurowska-Pysz et al. (2018), local cross-border cooperation allows for acceleration of levelling the disparities of regional development and equalisation of life quality of the population in border regions, creating prerequisites for free movement of free movement people, goods, services and capital across borders. Such cooperation concerns all spheres of civil society activities, but the migration component is one of the least studied in terms of its effect on border regions. There is some discussion on border migration in recent literature. Häberlein (2019), Hataley and Leuprecht (2018) argue for the role of borders in migration processes and consider their multidimensionality at state and regional levels. Some scholars focus on political, geopolitical, social and anthropological processes, which produce and govern borders and give rise to diverse border migrations (Ribas-Mateos and Dunn, 2021). Some of such migrations have destructive effects and may lead to negative practices or attitudes. One of the examples is the southwest border conflict in the US and Mexico regional

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migration system (Kudeyarova, 2019), where the border Wall has gained a symbolic meaning in internal and foreign policy. There is also an opposite point of view (Fauser et al., 2019) focusing on the historical, local specificity of the complex relations between migration and territorial boundaries aiming at denaturalisation of the concept of the border. In this context, Pécoud et al. (2007) substantiate the possibility of “migration without borders” scenario and analyse the ethical, human rights, economic and social implications of the free movement of people. This idea raises questions about new migration policies, given new perspectives and challenges of “open borders” and the regional dynamics. For countries that form unions and groups with a single market and free movement of resources, the mentioned scenario seems even more relevant. Thus, in the case of the East Asian regional integration, new regional collaborative mechanisms, involving national and local governments and national and international NGOs, to respond to the challenges of East Asian migrations have been recently developed (Morris-Suzuki, 2007). Considering Ukraine and its role as one of the largest sources of migration to Europe, it is important to develop joint policy-making practice in this area both at the national and regional level.

Migration processes in Ukraine involve diverse internal and external flows. One of the most intensive migration flows is concentrated at the Ukrainian–EU border. In recent years, Ukraine has faced a new wave of emigration because of the state’s economic stagnation, escalation of the armed conflict in the East, and a decrease in the level of public life. Migration from Ukraine is often connected with student mobility towards more attractive EU countries, resulting in the loss of a large part of the working population and Ukraine’s labour potential (Vakhitova and Coupe, 2013). Thus, Commander, Nikolaychuk and Vikhrov (2013) confirm that a new hybrid form of emigration has recently emerged in Ukraine. The following labour migration commonly replaces educational mobility and population migration has become a way of life.

Regarding a substantial loss of the country’s human potential, there is an objective need for constant monitoring of the population movement not only within large regional migration systems but also within small (including border) ones. Analysing the scale and consequences of migration’s influence on the socio-economic development of border areas is equally important in regional and state dimensions. There are many diverse country-specific studies on border migration issues (Cappellano and Rizzo, 2019; Caglar, 2011; Chang et al., 2019; Şahin Mencütek, 2020; Schwabe and Weziak-Białowolska, 2021; Skraba and Nowicka, 2018), however in Ukraine, the amount of comprehensive analytical and empirical studies ascertaining the role and impact of border migration is insufficient. Such research should be a basis for developing effective mechanisms for regulating migration processes in border regions.

The current research aims to analyse the scale and types of Ukrainian migration to Poland in border areas. The conducted analysis helps suggest relevant measures for minimising risks and challenges from increasing external migration enhanced by an active immigration policy in Poland, propose measures for mitigating regional disparities in labour markets, and seek for responses to emerging vulnerabilities.



2. Data and method

The analytical strategy of the study relies on a comparative analysis of migration processes in the Polish-Ukrainian migration system. The algorithm of the used method provides for the comparison of quantitative data on migration processes between Poland and Ukraine and between their border regions with high migration activity. This approach involves deduction proceeding from general analysis to specific conclusions. Using this analytical method, the author systematises the quantitative data on scale, scope, and dynamics of population migration at national and subnational (namely, the border territories) levels. Particular attention is paid to Podkarpackie Voivodeship and Lviv Oblast as the most cooperating border regions. However, the poor statistical reporting regarding regional migration from Ukraine limits the research in evaluating the migration turnover between Podkarpackie Voivodeship and Lviv Oblast. In the case of the Polish system of monitoring, regional migration towards Ukraine or its specific regions is also underdeveloped. This point must receive more attention given the growing cross-border connections of Ukraine and considering the close relations of its western regions with the neighbouring ones in Poland.

The article is mainly based on statistical data in 2010-2020 from the Ministry of Family and Social Policy of Poland, Ministry of Development, Labor and Technology of Poland (dynamics of registered applications on hiring foreign workers in Poland and its regions), State Statistics Service of Ukraine, Statistics Poland (dynamics of issued work permits granted to Ukrainian nationals by the officials in Poland), Statistical Office in Rzeszów (data concerning Ukrainian labour migration in Podkarpackie Voivodeship), and the Main Statistical Office in Lviv Region (regional statistics on the in- and out-migration by country of origin and purpose of stay, namely tourism, education or business). Another source of information involves legal documents concerning the Ukrainian-Polish cooperation in terms of migration governance.

In this research, the author concedes that a new border migration system between Ukraine and Poland is being shaped today. Lviv Oblast and Podkarpackie Voivodeship are the driving regions in its development.

3. Results

3.1. Prerequisites and factors of current migration processes in Ukraine

Due to the favourable geopolitical location, Ukraine has an abundant potential of cross-border cooperation. Most of its regions are border ones and the external border is 6,993 km long. The dynamics and peculiarities of modern cross-border relations of Ukraine are greatly affected by military and political factors, which define the migration vectors of Ukrainian citizens. The most dynamic population movements are observed in the western border regions of the country. The prerequisites for these trends are: (1) the growing socio-economic inequality in comparison with EU countries resulting in emerging vulnerabilities, (2) poor employment opportunities in Ukraine, (3) the deficit of decent work, social protection, economic and civil freedoms. In addition, most EU countries signed the agreement on local border traffic, which significantly stimulates the pendulum of labour migration. These factors are crucial in persistent disparities in population mobility between different regions of Ukraine.

Among all neighbouring countries, Poland is the biggest strategic partner of Ukraine due to their common history, close social and economic relations and cooperation. The development

of boundary regime between Ukraine and Poland confirms the role of Ukraine in the Polish economy. Up to 2003, there was a free movement across the border, during 2003-2007 – a free-of-charge visa regime for citizens of Ukraine supplemented with admission to the Polish labour market. Later on, Poland introduced Pole's Cards confirming belonging to the Polish nation of more than 100 thous. Ukrainians who have visa privileges and the right to exemption from the obligation to have a work permit for foreigners in Poland. In 2008, the agreement on Local Border Traffic between Poland and Ukraine was signed, aiming to simplify border crossing for residents of both countries. The most significant change occurred in summer 2017 when the EU implemented visa-free travel for Ukrainian citizens across EU. New regulations greatly simplified border-crossing procedures and intensified the Ukrainians' mobility. Today, Poland is promoting the development and harmonisation of its visa centres in Ukraine, and is trying to create conditions for the socio-economic security of the Ukrainian labour migrants on its territory. The effect of such policy is the formation of a new migration system between the two countries. According to Bil (2013), such a system is a complex spatial formation that functions in terms of systemic and active territorial movements of human, financial, and other resources based on the corresponding agreements and relations. This concept combines migration networks, formal and informal infrastructure, migration services and resources, which can be framed within the neighbouring countries and regions.

Today Ukraine has the most developed network of inter-regional cooperation with Poland. Almost all oblasts of Ukraine and the voivodeships of Poland signed agreements on regional cooperation. Podkarpackie Voivodeship has certainly the largest number of Ukrainian partners. From the Ukrainian side, the most intensive collaboration is set up with Lviv Oblast. This is undoubtedly an important prerequisite for the formation of the 'Lviv Oblast – Podkarpackie Voivodeship' migration system.

Based on the recent comparative analysis (Levytska, 2016), both the points of regions' convergence and the indicators of significant asymmetry of the regions' development have been found. This means that socio-economic disproportions are the core reasons for population movements. They appear as *push* factors for residents of Lviv Oblast and other border regions, increasing migration flows. The political factor plays an important role in these trends. Over the last seven years, many Ukrainians have left for Poland and other countries because of the armed conflict in the eastern part of Ukraine, which has caused deep inter-regional disparities.

The most significant and critical push factors in the analysed border migration system are as follows:

- The gross regional product per capita in Lviv Oblast is 3 times less than in Podkarpackie Voivodeship.
- There is a threefold difference between the average nominal wages in the regions.
- The disparity in minimum wages by the regions reaches 4 times (BDL, 2019; LvivStat, 2019; USR, 2020).

Therefore, the main *pull* factors in Poland attracting Ukrainians from border areas are better living conditions, a higher income level, geographical and mental closeness, absence of language barriers, lower prices for some goods and services. We can assert that Ukrainian



migrants arrive in Podkarpackie Voivodeship for employment (usually short term), tourism, education or shopping.

3.2. Population migration in Polish-Ukrainian border regions

Intensive development of global integration processes, opening state borders, and simplifying migration procedures have significantly changed the global and regional labour markets. The Polish labour market for Ukrainians means the same as the labour market in Germany or the UK for the Poles – the opportunity to improve their economic security and their families' safety. Therefore, it is not surprising that the lack of specialists in Podkarpackie Voivodeship, who massively go to the West, is filled with workers from Ukraine. Their work is mostly used in agriculture, industry, social services and at construction sites; and the average salary per month is €581 as of 2019, which is much higher compared to the average for the Lviv region – only €320 (Vsetutpl, 2019). The growing dynamics of the foreign workforce attraction into the Polish economy confirms the predominance of labour migration among all other types of mobility. During 2010-2020, the need for foreign workers, claimed by Polish employers, increased by 8.9 times: from 180.1 thous. applications in 2010 to 1,595.4 thous. in 2020, and Ukrainians constitute the largest group of labour migrants in Poland (see Figure 1).

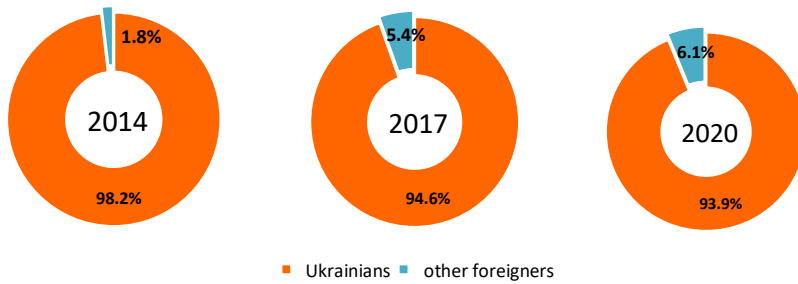
Figure 1. Dynamics of applications on hiring foreign workers registered in labour offices in Poland, 2010-2020



Source: compiled by author based on (MPPS, 2010-2017; PSZ, 2020).

The share of applications on hiring Ukrainians among all the foreigners is dominant – 94.1% and 87.5% in 2010 and 2020, respectively (Figure 1). In Podkarpackie Voivodeship (Figure 2), the situation is quite similar – 93.9% of applications submitted by Polish employers in 2020 were related to Ukrainian workers (98.2% in 2014 and 94.6% in 2017).

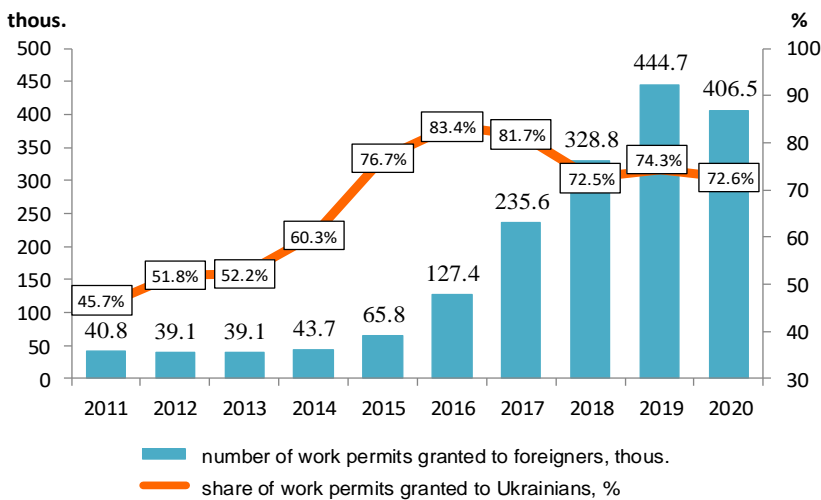
Figure 2. Distribution of applications on hiring foreign workers (including Ukrainians) registered in labour offices in Podkarpackie Voivodeship, 2014, 2017 and 2020



Source: compiled by author based on (MPPS, 2010-2017; PSZ, 2020).

The above-considered data usually concerns a short-term labour migration (mainly seasonal work in Poland, the continuance of which does not exceed 6 months within a year). If foreigners intend to work longer, they must get a work permit by Polish regulations. The general situation with regard to the issued work permits is presented in Figures 3 and 4. It is of note that the number of work permits granted to Ukrainians has also significantly increased over the last ten years: from 18.6 thous. permits (45.7% of all permits granted) in 2011 to 295.1 thous. (72.6%) in 2020.

Figure 3. Distribution of permanent work permits in Poland granted to foreigners (including Ukrainians), 2011-2020

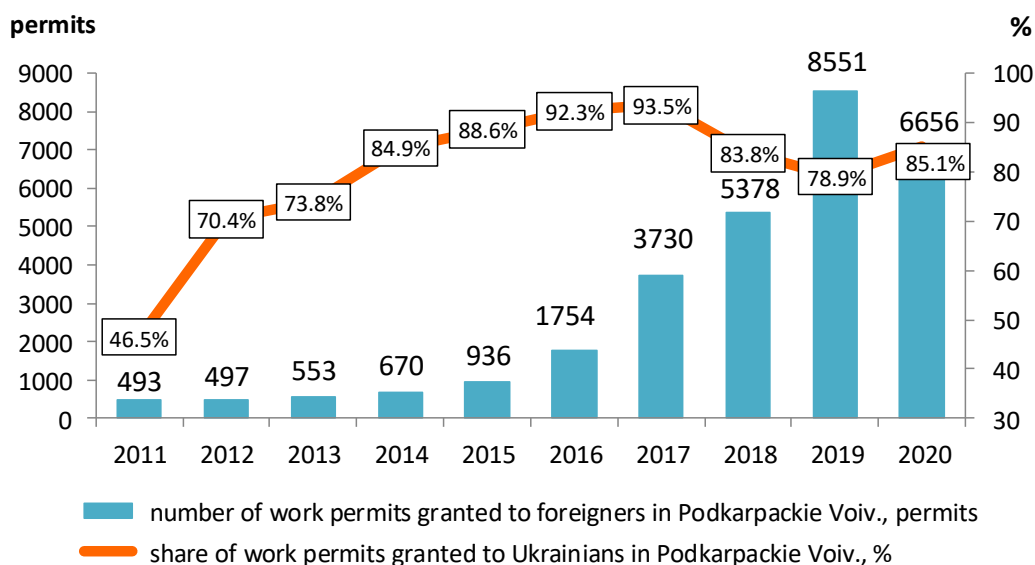


Source: compiled by author based on (MPPS, 2010-2017; PSZ, 2020).



Thus, there is a growing scale of legal labour migration to Poland, especially in border regions, due to their active migration policy. Moreover, the outflow of Ukrainians has been intensified by the recently growing unemployment, poverty and inequality. As for the unemployment rate, the official statistics does not reflect the real extent of this phenomenon in Ukraine. In particular, in Lviv Oblast the unemployment rate among the economically active population in 2020 was 7.5% (in 2010 – 7.8%) (SSSU, 2020). However, there is a high level of hidden unemployment, not covered by the official methodology (especially among rural population). Moreover, the common practice of unpaid leave, part-time work, atypical employment, etc. are not currently taken into account. Employers massively choose such methods of personnel management to save financial resources. According to the experts' opinions (Mulska, 2020), taking into consideration these phenomena all together would increase the unemployment rate in Ukraine and its regions at least twice. Thus, the real employment situation in Lviv Oblast is unsatisfactory. Migration partially improves this statistics (reducing the unemployment level in the donor region), but does not solve the problem.

Figure 4. Distribution of permanent work permits in Podkarpackie Voivodeship granted to foreigners (including Ukrainians), 2011-2020



Source: compiled by author based on (MPPS, 2010-2017; PSZ, 2020).

Compared to other regions of Poland, Podkarpackie Voivodeship is not among those regions encouraging massive employment of foreigners. According to official data, consisting of more than 5.5% of the country's territory, Podkarpackie Voivodeship, numbers between 1% and 2% of foreign workers, 85% of them are Ukrainians. Instead, the long-term employment of foreigners in the region is becoming more prevalent. The general dynamics of the number of work permits for foreigners in Poland during the past decade (2011-2020) has grown in almost 10 times, and in Podkarpackie Voivodeship – in 14 times.

Another type of migration deals with the educational mobility of Ukrainians. Polish educational institutions are very interested in foreign students since a lack of their own (because of natural and migration loss of human resources). Every year there is an increase in the number of Ukrainian students in educational institutions of Podkarpackie Voivodeship, the leaders of which are High School of Informatics and Management in Rzeszów, High School of Law and Administration in Przemyśl, State East European High School in Przemyśl, Rzeszów University, etc. Therefore, in particular, in 2006 there were 359 students from Ukraine, and in 2013 – already 1,459 people (72.1% of all foreign students) (Długosz, 2015; USR, 2016). In 2019, the number of Ukrainian students was 2,063 people (76.4%) in Podkarpackie Voivodeship (USR, 2019). The danger of educational emigration for Ukraine is the outflow of human resources, the loss of a large part of the working population and, respectively, the country's labour potential, as in the future the status of such migrants may change from temporary to permanent.

4. Discussion

Considering the intensity of population in terms of migration types, we have the following situation on the Ukrainian-Polish border: 93.9% of all applications on hiring foreigners submitted by employers to labour offices of Podkarpackie Voivodeship, are intended for Ukrainians (legal labour migration), 76.4% of foreign students in the Voivodeship are the Ukrainians (educational migration). Due to the agreement between the Government of Poland and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on the conditions of Local Border Traffic and simplified since 21.09.2015 procedure of obtaining “permission for local border traffic” signed on March 28, 2008, the intensity of pendulum migration in the border zone is growing. Meanwhile, the scale of labour migration of Poles to Ukraine is relatively small due to their clear migration orientations towards the West.

There is a partial demographic convergence of the studied border regions, ethnic-mental and cultural closeness, but socio-economic convergence is low because of large disparities in economic indicators of the development, enhanced by the Ukrainian currency “collapse” during the last years, continuous macroeconomic instability and COVID-19 pandemic implications. Social and economic disparities form the corresponding *push* and *pull* factors of migration processes, which enliven the border mobility and increase the demand for migration services. Thus, to align the mentioned disparities and improve life quality on both sides of the border there should be a well-planned and balanced policy of cross-border cooperation, which would allow responding to changes in the economic and political situation on the border (Fig. 5).

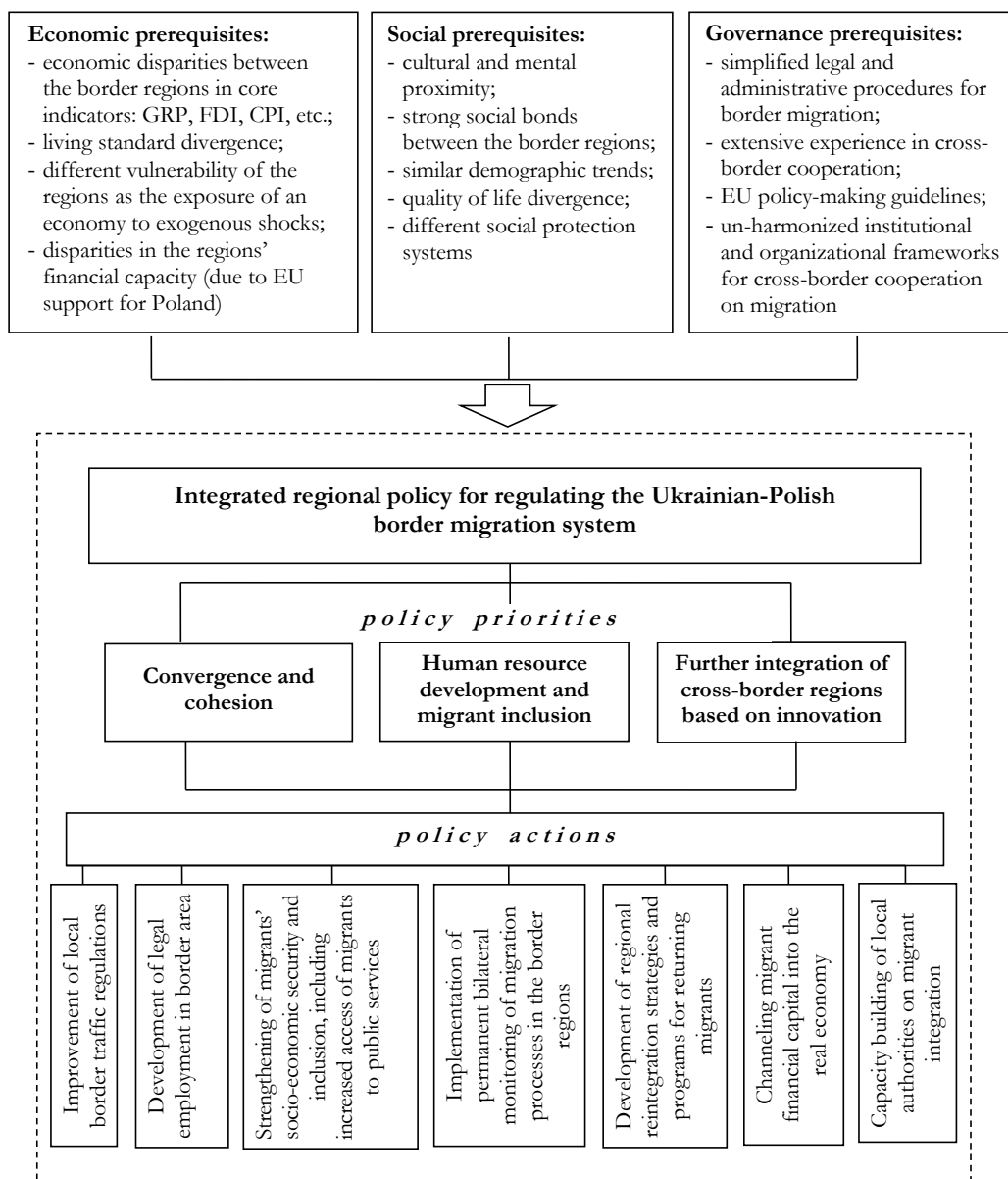
The effective tools of such policies are different kinds of agreements, programs and other strategic documents at the level of states and their regions. Today at the regional and local level, about 500 agreements on inter-regional cooperation are signed between Ukraine and Poland, including specific issues on border area development. There is close cooperation at the level of Lviv Oblast and Podkarpackie Voivodeship.

An active border cooperation is carried out not only at regional but also local levels, including the cooperation in economy, investment, education, culture, tourism, sports, health and environment. There are more than 15 Agreements on cooperation between the city and district councils of Lviv Oblast and gmina or powiat authorities of Podkarpackie Voivodeship since 1992 (CEP, 2017). Inter-regional agreements are certainly of strategic importance for



the development of Lviv Oblast and Podkarpackie Voivodeship as they involve specific socio-economic relations between the regions, and contribute to solving common problems on the way to cross-border convergence. An important aspect in this case is to preserve the identity of regions by simultaneous convergence of mechanisms of their competitiveness increase.

Figure 5. Configuration of integrated regional policy for regulating the Ukrainian-Polish border migration system



Source: author's elaboration.

Conclusions

The inter-regional (including cross-border) cooperation should facilitate the migration process at all stages to enable legal flows. People have the right to improve the level and quality of life through migration implementing their goals abroad. Border cooperation, supported by relevant documents, is a tool of direct impact on trends in the border migration system as a complex category. In continuation of the above, the author suggests measures to improve the functioning of the “Lviv Oblast – Podkarpackie Voivodeship” migration system. These measures concern the Ukrainian-Polish border cooperation on:

1. Improving the procedures of regulating local border traffic, in particular through the expansion of the territory covered by appropriate regulations.
2. Intensifying the collaboration of employment centers, trade unions, employers' associations, recruitment agencies of the two countries, especially in border regions, for the growth of legal employment of Ukrainian citizens in Podkarpackie Voivodeship.
3. Increasing the level of migrants' socio-economic security in the studied areas, particularly within a basic Ukrainian-Polish agreement on social insurance for migrants.
4. Setting up permanent bilateral Ukrainian-Polish monitoring of migration processes in the border area.
5. Strengthening the efforts to reintegrate returning migrants, to develop regional strategies and programs.
6. Promoting an effective use of migrants' earnings through channelling them into the real economy.

The proposed configuration of integrated regional policy for regulating the Ukrainian-Polish border migration system is of practical importance in terms of the regional convergence and cohesion provision, human resource development and migrant inclusion in border area, further integration of cross-border regions based on innovative ideas and solutions.

Hence, the migration activity of the population in border regions of Poland and Ukraine, the European integration vector of Ukraine, close inter-regional cooperation, supported by appropriate conditions in Lviv Oblast and Podkarpackie Voivodeship, – are the key factors shaping a new migration system between the two countries, which has strong development prospects.

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