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4.1. System of prerequisites for the return of labour migrants

Migration processes are an integral part of today's globalised world, and labour migration is one of the most widespread forms of population mobility. For Ukraine, which has been primarily a donor of labour in recent decades, the issue of returning labour migrants is particularly important in the context of demographic security, social cohesion and economic growth. The issue of the return of citizens who have worked abroad for a long time encompasses not only purely economic aspects, but also social, cultural, institutional and psychological factors that shape the preconditions for this process.

On a global scale, the return of labour migrants is part of cyclical migration, which plays an important role in regional development, the transfer of knowledge and capital, and the formation of new models of employment and entrepreneurship. Many countries around the world, particularly developing countries, view the return of labour migrants as a resource for inclusive growth, digitalisation of the economy, and recovery from crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic and military conflicts. With the right policies, return can be a catalyst for positive transformations in human capital, regional development and innovation potential.

The issue of returning labour migrants is of particular importance for Ukraine in the context of the full-scale war unleashed by the Russian Federation in 2022. The war has significantly transformed migration flows: a large part of the population left not only for economic reasons, but also for security reasons. At the same time, some citizens who were abroad before did not return due to threats to their lives, loss of infrastructure, and reduced economic stability. This exacerbates the problem of labour, demographic, and social losses, while emphasising the need to develop a strategy for the return of Ukrainians, taking into account post-war reintegration, reconstruction of territories, and human capital.

Studying the system of prerequisites for the return of labour migrants is a necessary condition for developing an effective state reintegration policy, as well as for creating an appropriate social and economic environment capable of providing sustainable incentives for return. In this context, it is important not only to identify the key factors influencing the decision to return, but also to understand their interrelationships, structural integrity and potential for systematic implementation at the level of state policy.

The issues of returning labour migrants, developing mechanisms for their reintegration, and ensuring a favourable environment for their return are addressed in the works of both domestic and foreign scholars. Among Ukrainian researchers actively engaged in migration issues, the works of the following authors are particularly noteworthy: O. Baluyeva, P. Bezuglyi, Ya. Kichuk, I. Kukuruza, T. Romashchenko, O. Chupryna, and others. Their research focuses on the socio-economic factors of migration, the consequences of the loss of labour potential, and the prospects for the return of citizens in the context of changes in the labour market.

At the same time, the works of researchers such as V. Kovach, O. Malynovska, I. Pishulina, S. Shadrina, N. Yakimova, the emphasis is on the formation of reintegration policy, assessment of the effectiveness of state programmes to support returning migrants, institutional support for re-adaptation processes and stimulation of economic activity among returnees.

Among foreign scholars researching global and regional aspects of migrant return, particularly from developing countries, the works of authors such as Abdul-Talib A. N., Jean-Pierre Cassarino, A. Constant, D. Massey, Hein de Haas, Mohamed-Abdullahi M., K. Kuschminder, D. Wiktor-Mach, who analyse motivational factors, social risks and institutional interaction in the field of return. Their works pay considerable attention to transnational ties, the phenomenon of temporary return, and the role of diasporas and international organisations in the reintegration process.

The aim of the study is to scientifically substantiate the essence, structure and content of the system of prerequisites for the return of labour migrants, taking into account current global transformations, the state of war in Ukraine and foreign experience in shaping reintegration policies.

To achieve this goal, the following tasks must be accomplished:

- 1) reveal the theoretical foundations of the concept of “system of preconditions for the return of labour migrants”, determine its structural components, typology of factors and mechanisms influencing the behaviour of migrants;
- 2) analyse the key social, economic, political, institutional and cultural factors that determine the return of labour migrants in the context of contemporary challenges, in particular the consequences of full-scale war in Ukraine;
- 3) develop a set of recommendations and practical measures aimed at creating the preconditions for the return of labour migrants and their successful reintegration into the socio-economic environment of Ukraine.

The concept of migrant return has developed in scientific literature in parallel with the evolution of ideas about migration processes in general. While classical migration theories of the 19th and 20th centuries focused primarily on the departure (emigration) and reception (immigration) phases, the return of migrants was long considered a secondary, unstructured phenomenon. It was either perceived as a natural conclusion to the migration trajectory or ignored due to its irregular nature.

It was only in the second half of the 20th century, especially in the context of intensifying globalisation processes, that researchers began to consider return as an independent object of study. Return has acquired the status of a complex social phenomenon that requires the integration of economic, sociological, cultural, legal and psychological approaches. This issue has received particular attention in the works of scholars who have analysed migration flows from developing countries, as well as in studies on transnationalism, adaptation and reintegration.

Today, there is a variety of interpretations of return in scientific discourse – both temporary and permanent, voluntary and forced – which necessitates the systematisation of existing approaches and the understanding of return as a dynamic element of the global migration process. Let us consider in more detail the classification of theoretical models for analysing migration processes (Table 1).

Table 1

Classification of theoretical models for analysing migration processes (*source: supplemented by the authors [1]*)

Theoretical model	Characteristics	Examples of use in research/countries
<i>1. Theories that consider the factors and causes of migration</i>		
1.1 Neoclassical economic theory	Low standard of living, limited economic opportunities, unemployment, low wages, leading to the inability to meet human needs.	Migration from Ukraine to EU countries due to income differences.
1.2 Neoclassical microeconomic theory	Individual rational calculation of the “cost-benefit” of migration: 1) financial costs; 2) psychological costs.	Temporary labour migration with subsequent return.
1.3 The concept of spatial self-organisation of the population	The incentive for migration is the discrepancy between a person's desire for a certain standard of living and the possibility of achieving this in their place of residence.	Internal migration in Ukraine from depressed regions to large cities.
1.4 The concept of a new economy of labour migration	The importance of family environment for migrants, responsibility for the well-being of the family, desire to provide material support to the family.	Male migration as a strategy for supporting families.
<i>2. Theories focusing on the analysis of mechanisms of self-development and self-sustainability of migration</i>		
2.1 Social capital theory	Individuals with high-quality human capital are more likely to migrate: abilities, talents, knowledge, skills, experience, education, qualifications, awareness, physical and mental health.	Return of specialists to Ukraine after relocation (e.g., IT sector).
2.2 D. Massey's theory of migration networks	The presence of family and friends abroad increases the likelihood of migration. Migration networks lead to broader coverage and differentiation of migrants by age, gender, qualifications and social background.	Return through the support of the diaspora (e.g. in Poland and Canada).
2.3 D. Massey's theory of cumulative causation	Over time, the process of spreading migration networks becomes self-perpetuating, as each instance of migration contributes to the creation of a social infrastructure that stimulates further migration.	Increase in returns to Ukraine due to the establishment of cross-border ties.
2.4 Sociological theory of risks	Illegal migration, compared to legal migration, is more likely to be associated with risks in the areas of employment, socio-psychological risks, and human rights violations.	Returning from dangerous regions due to risks (COVID-19, war).
2.5 Institutional theory	The expansion and increase in labour emigration leads to the emergence and growth of institutions that provide formal and informal assistance in finding employment abroad (self-support of migration processes).	The activities of employment agencies that influence circular migration.
2.6 The theory of the three stages of the migration process	Migration mobility depends on accumulated migration experience.	Modelling refugee return based on their previous experience.

According to Table 1, the classification of theoretical approaches to the analysis of migration processes allows us to structure our understanding of the factors influencing labour migration and the return of migrants to their country of origin. Each model reflects a specific aspect of migration behaviour: from rational economic choice to the action of social networks and the influence of institutions. In particular, microeconomic models focus on the individual motives of migrants, while the concepts of new institutionalism, social capital and the network approach take into account the influence of the environment, family, diaspora and society as a whole. The application of these approaches in the practice of migration management allows us to explain the mechanisms of return and formulate effective policies for the reintegration of migrants.

In domestic scientific discourse, the issue of the return of labour migrants began to be intensively studied after 2014, in connection with geopolitical changes, the migration crisis and the strengthening of diaspora activity. However, the problem became particularly relevant after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation in 2022. Thus, O. Malynovska [2] analyses the political and legal aspects of the return of citizens in the context of a new wave of external labour migration. The author emphasises the insufficient development of the reintegration system in Ukraine and the lack of clear coordination between ministries and regional authorities, which complicates the return even when there is motivation. The report of the International Organisation for Migration [3] presents systematic data on the volume, directions and socio-demographic composition of Ukrainian labour migrants. The report separately highlights the complexity of the return of migrants from Poland, the Czech Republic, Italy and other countries due to the social ties and integration they have formed in their host countries.

The ICMPD report [4] highlights the role of the Ukrainian diaspora in return processes. The authors emphasise that social capital preserved through diaspora networks can play a decisive role in supporting reintegration initiatives, business activity and knowledge transfer from abroad. A study [5] analyses the situation of forced migrants after the military invasion. The authors note that for this category of the population, return is not only a social or economic act, but often a psychologically traumatic process that requires targeted support. Researchers [6] studied the experience of Ukrainian migrants' readaptation in an urban environment. Attention is paid to the infrastructural, legal and communication barriers faced by people trying to return in the context of the country's post-war transformation.

In global science, the topic of the return of labour migrants has a developed conceptual basis, which has been formed since the 1990s. One of the leading researchers is J.-P. Cassarino [7-8], who developed the theory of "prepared return". He argues that return cannot be explained solely by external circumstances or motivation: the resources accumulated by the migrant, their knowledge of conditions in their home country, and the availability of institutional support are critically important.

In their joint work, A. Constant and D. Massey [9] conducted a comparative analysis of neoclassical and new economic theories of return. The authors argue that the decision to return often depends not on the achievement of economic goals, but on a comprehensive family strategy for risk management, investment in housing, education or entrepreneurship. K. Kuschminder [10] proposes a three-component model of reintegration: economic, social and psycho-emotional. This model allows us to analyse return not as a single act, but as a long-term adaptation process in which state support plays an important role. The essence of the concept of "prerequisites for the return of labour migrants" and its systemic nature are gradually entering scientific circulation in both Ukrainian and foreign academic circles. Under the influence of global challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian-Ukrainian war and demographic shifts, the return of migrants is seen not as a spontaneous phenomenon, but as the result of the interaction of a complex of socio-economic, institutional and psychological factors. In the domestic scientific field, the issue of reintegration and return of migrants is receiving the most attention from specialists in the fields of demography, sociology, and labour economics.

Thus, O. Balueva and O. Chupryna [11] emphasise the need for a comprehensive approach to reintegration, where the prerequisites for return are interpreted as an interconnected system of social, legal and economic instruments that must be synchronised with each other in order to achieve a stable effect. A similar position is held by N. Yakimova and S. Shadrina [12], who point to the critical role of the institutional environment, in particular coordination between state authorities and regional structures in managing the return of labour migrants.

A different approach is demonstrated by I. Kukuruza and T. Romashchenko [13], who in their monograph analyse the system of prerequisites for return in the context of global and national migration trends. They emphasise that the macroeconomic situation, regional development strategy, state policy on the labour market and the image of the country of origin are key components of the system of conditions that determine migrants' readiness to return.

In foreign academic discourse, the concept of the systematic nature of the preconditions for return is also being actively developed. In particular, K. Kuschminder [10] proposed a conceptual model of reintegration that encompasses three key components: economic security, social ties and the psycho-emotional stability of the returnee. Within this model,

the prerequisites for return are not seen as isolated factors, but as a dynamic system of influences that are formed both in the country of residence and in the country of origin. In the context of systematic preconditions, particular attention is drawn to J.-P. Cassarino's concept of “prepared return” [7], which argues that effective return is only possible if a certain set of resources is available: knowledge, connections, legal status and trust in the state. A similar logic is followed by Hein de Haas H. [22], who in his work interprets the prerequisites for return as the result of the external context: political stability, economic policy, and institutional climate, with which the migrant correlates his expectations.

To summarise the above, it can be argued that contemporary scientific discourse focuses on a comprehensive, interdisciplinary interpretation of the concept of the “system of prerequisites for the return of labour migrants”. This refers to a multi-level, interrelated structure of elements that should not only facilitate return, but also ensure its sustainability, success and compliance with the interests of migrants and the state. Its analysis requires a clear distinction between the constituent elements that form a coherent structure of interrelated groups of factors influencing migrants' decisions to return. Both the analytical capabilities of the researcher and the effectiveness of the practical implementation of state policy measures in the field of reintegration depend on understanding this internal structure. Let us consider in more detail the structural elements of the system of prerequisites for the return of labour migrants (Table 2).

Table 2

Structural components of the system of prerequisites for the return of labour migrants (*source: compiled by the authors based on [7, 10, 14]*)

System components	Descriptive characteristics
1. Economic	Wage levels, availability of jobs, opportunities for entrepreneurship, financial incentives.
2. Social	The existence of family ties, access to housing, healthcare, education, social infrastructure.
3. Institutional	Availability of state reintegration programmes, support from local authorities, legal guarantees.
4. Psychological	Personal readiness to return, sense of security, emotional attachment to homeland.
5. Cultural	Linguistic identity, cultural community, the possibility of preserving one's way of life and values.

The economic component is determined by material incentives to return: competitive wages, a stable labour market, support for small and medium-sized businesses, preferential taxation for those who return, etc. The existence of an attractive economic environment is the main motivation for most economic migrants. The social component concerns access to basic social benefits and includes housing conditions, the availability of medical services, quality education for children, as well as family ties, which can serve as a powerful factor of emotional attraction to the homeland.

The institutional component is related to the activities of state and municipal authorities, namely the implementation of reintegration programmes, legal support for return, overcoming bureaucratic barriers, assistance in finding work, retraining or starting a business. The psychological component encompasses an individual's inner readiness to return, which is formed on the basis of a sense of security, trust in the state, and positive expectations about life at home. It is also important to overcome anxiety associated with social change, especially in conditions of post-war uncertainty. The cultural component manifests itself through the preservation of language, traditions, mental attitudes, and a sense of belonging to the Ukrainian socio-cultural space. This factor is particularly important for second-generation migrants or those who have spent a long time in a multicultural environment.

In accordance with the structural elements of the system of preconditions for the return of labour migrants, P. Bezuglyi identifies “push” and “pull” factors that influence population migration. We will supplement them with two more groups of factors: institutional and psychological (Table 3).

Table 3

Factors influencing population migration (*source: supplemented by the authors based on [1]*)

Push factors	Pull factors
	<i>Economic</i>
Low wages. Low quality of life. High unemployment. Economic instability. Burdensome tax system. Low social benefits.	High salaries. High quality of life. Availability of job vacancies. Stable economic development. Liberal taxation system.

<i>Social</i>	
Low quality of education. Poor working conditions. Inaccessible healthcare system. Lack of opportunities for professional self-fulfilment. Low level of social benefits.	High quality education. Good working conditions. Affordable and high-quality healthcare system. Opportunities for professional self-fulfilment.
<i>Cultural</i>	
Religious persecution. Ethnic discrimination. Racial discrimination. Discrimination based on nationality in the country of residence. Lack of conditions for observing religious traditions.	Freedom of religion. No ethnic discrimination. No racial discrimination. Favourable living conditions for returnees in the receiving country.
<i>Political</i>	
Lack of democracy. Political instability. Corruption in government structures High crime rate. Low level of compliance with fundamental rights and guarantees provided for by law.	Developed democracy. Stability of the political system. Absence of corruption. Low crime rate. High level of compliance with fundamental rights and guarantees provided by law.
<i>Ecological</i>	
Polluted environment. Environmental disasters, natural disasters. Poor quality drinking water and food.	Better environmental situation. Clean drinking water and environmentally safe food.
<i>Institutional</i>	
Lack of state policy on migrant reintegration. Low level of access to administrative and social services. Distrust of institutions (courts, police, civil service). Lack of support from local authorities Bureaucratic procedures.	The existence of effective state repatriation programmes. Simplified access to administrative, social and educational services. High level of trust in state institutions. Active participation of communities and local authorities in reintegration. Digitisation of public services.
<i>Psychological</i>	
Fear for the safety of family members. Feeling of alienation within the community. Emotional burnout caused by war or uncertainty. Breakdown of social ties in the country of residence. Lack of prospects.	The need to return to family, loved ones, home. A sense of patriotism, a desire to rebuild the country. Support from society and the host community. A sense of personal safety and stability. Optimism about the future in Ukraine.

The system of “push” and “pull” factors presented in the table allows for a deeper understanding of the motivational structure of labour migration. These factors, grouped according to economic, social, cultural, political, environmental, institutional and psychological criteria, form the initial environment in which an individual makes a decision about migration or return.

At the macro level, it is the combination of push and pull factors that determines the intensity and direction of migration flows. Thus, low living standards, unemployment, limited access to social services, political instability and environmental degradation are typical push factors. At the same time, economic attractiveness, security, access to healthcare and education, cultural tolerance and a high level of legal protection create conditions that “pull” people to other countries.

Particular attention should be paid to analysing how these factors influence the return of labour migrants. If, during emigration, the “pull” factors of the recipient country dominate, then for return to occur, it is necessary for the country of origin to become an attractive rather than a repulsive destination. This means that return mechanisms must be based on overcoming push factors and forming a system of pull motivations through increased economic stability, regional development, reduced corruption, improved living standards, and social comfort.

The formation of “push” and “pull” factors is the result of a number of interrelated macro- and meso-level processes covering social, economic, political, institutional, psychological and cultural transformations in both the country of origin and the destination countries. In particular, economic factors are shaped by the overall level of development of the national economy, the structure of employment, the efficiency of the labour market, the purchasing power of the population and access to financial resources. Social factors depend on the state of health care, education, social security and housing policies, as well as on social cohesion and the level of trust in society.

Political factors are influenced by internal political stability, the existence of democratic institutions and the rule of law, as well as the international geopolitical position of the state. Cultural and mental aspects that influence decisions about migration or return are determined by historical experience, ethnocultural attitudes, the level of tolerance in society, freedom of religion, and the preservation of identity. Environmental factors, in turn, are shaped by the state of the environment, environmental policy, the frequency of disasters, and the availability of clean water, air, and food. Thus, migration factors reflect the underlying processes that determine the quality of life of the population, its security, and prospects for socio-economic development. Their impact is dynamic, and this is precisely why there is a need for an adaptive, scientifically based system of public policy capable of transforming barriers to return into incentives for return and reintegration.

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation in 2022 radically transformed the nature and dynamics of labour migration factors. Before the war, the key “push” factors were economic instability, low wages and social security, but after the start of hostilities, security factors came to the fore, including direct threats to life, destruction of infrastructure, forced displacement of the population and loss of livelihoods. Thus, economic motives were supplanted by existential and humanitarian ones. The changes also affected social and political aspects. The severing of social ties, loss of access to education, medical services and guaranteed housing became the dominant factors of emigration. At the same time, in many regions that remain under Ukrainian control, mutual assistance mechanisms have been activated and the patriotic narrative has intensified, which has partially mitigated the impact of disintegration factors. Pull factors have also changed. Countries that have accepted Ukrainians (Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic, the Baltic states) have introduced simplified procedures for employment, access to social services, education and temporary protection, which has significantly increased the attractiveness of migration even among citizens who previously had no such intentions. For part of the population, these conditions began to be seen not as temporary shelter, but as a basis for long-term relocation. In the context of return, these changes mean that the process is becoming more complex. Returning to a country where fighting continues or the consequences of destroyed infrastructure remain unresolved requires significant and convincing pull factors: stabilisation, security guarantees, access to housing, economic recovery, and reintegration support programmes. Otherwise, there is a risk that temporary migration will become permanent.

Particular attention should be paid to institutional and psychological factors in the system of determinants of labour migrants' return, as they often play the role of the “last link” in making the final decision to return or stay abroad. Institutional factors act as intermediaries between the state and the citizen, facilitating or hindering access to key services, programmes and guarantees. In conditions of martial law and post-crisis recovery, it is institutions that become an indicator of the reliability and ability of the state to fulfil its social contract. If a labour migrant faces bureaucratic barriers, a lack of coordinated reintegration policies, underdeveloped support services or distrust of the authorities, such factors create a feeling of being “pushed out” even when the basic economic conditions for return are in place. At the same time, effective return programmes, digital services, transparent procedures and community support can act as powerful “pull” incentives.

Equally important are psychological factors that are shaped by personal attitudes, emotional state, sense of security, and social belonging. These factors can outweigh purely economic considerations, especially in times of war, when emotional burnout, fear, loss, but also patriotism, nostalgia, and the need to be close to family play a key role. Psychological aspects determine the long-term stability of the decision to return, because even under favourable external conditions, insufficient internal motivation or psycho-emotional vulnerability can lead to a relapse into emigration.

Thus, the inclusion of institutional and psychological factors in the overall system of return analysis allows for a better understanding of why some migrants decide to stay despite positive signals from the state, or, conversely, return despite objective difficulties. This underscores the need to combine material, managerial and mental strategies in the

formulation of return policy. The push and pull factors discussed above create the initial conditions that form the general context for migration decisions. At the same time, to fully understand migrants' motivations, it is necessary to move from describing the factors themselves to analysing the mechanisms by which they influence the behaviour of a particular individual or household. After all, the mere existence of objective incentives does not guarantee a decision to leave or return: the decisive factor is the ways in which these incentives are perceived, interpreted, and correlated with individual goals, values, risks, and expectations.

In today's world, the behaviour of labour migrants is shaped by many interrelated factors, ranging from economic logic to socio-cultural ties, from the actions of state institutions to the psychological state of the individual. That is why it is advisable to analyse not only the factors that initiate or inhibit migration, but also the mechanisms that mediate the transformation of these factors into specific forms of behaviour, i.e. into decisions to emigrate, stay abroad or return to the country of origin.

In scientific discourse, there is growing interest in analysing not only the factors influencing migration processes, but also the mechanisms by which these factors are transformed into specific migrant behaviour. An individual's behavioural responses in the context of migration are the result of a complex interaction between objective circumstances (economic, social, political), subjective assessments and the actions of the institutional environment. That is why the question of mechanisms influencing migrant behaviour occupies a key place in the study of labour migration.

Among domestic scholars, V. Kovach [15] has made a significant contribution to this issue, emphasising in her works the importance of state regulatory instruments, in particular tax and legal incentives, as means of influencing migration intentions and willingness to return. I. Pishulina [16] analyses the role of gender and sociocultural factors in changing the behavioural patterns of female migrants, pointing to family strategies as a mechanism for shaping decisions about return. Institutional and behavioural mechanisms are highlighted in IOM reports [17], which emphasise the importance of access to basic services, humanitarian programmes and state guarantees for the formation of positive expectations. Research by the NISD [18] and the Razumkov Centre [19] demonstrates that social capital, trust in institutions and state communication directly influence the assessment of risks and benefits that shape migration behaviour.

In foreign science, J.-P. Cassarino [7] pays considerable attention to this issue and has developed the concept of “prepared return”. K. Kuschminder [10] proposes a model in which economic, social, and emotional resources are considered the basis for reintegration behaviour. O. Stark [20] explores the cognitive aspects of behaviour, while T. Niedomysl and J. Amcoff [21] point to social ties as a key motivator. M. Mohamed-Abdullahi and A. Abdul-Talib [22] summarise scientific approaches to return mechanisms, focusing on institutional support, information networks and the structure of expectations. Thus, the mechanisms influencing migrant behaviour encompass both material conditions and subjective expectations, as well as state actions and the structure of the social environment. Understanding these mechanisms is critical for developing effective return policies that take into account not only external incentives but also internal decision-making logic.

An analysis of migration factors and mechanisms influencing the behaviour of labour migrants shows that the return process is not only a reaction to external incentives, but also the result of a complex interaction of economic, social, institutional and psychological factors. Given the multi-faceted nature of motivations and the volatility of the external environment, there is a clear need for active and targeted intervention by the state. At the same time, current migration dynamics require a shift from a fragmented response to systematic regulation of external labour migration processes. This regulation should be aimed not only at minimising the negative consequences of emigration, but also at creating conditions for voluntary return, effective reintegration and mobilisation of migration potential for the socio-economic development of the country.

In this context, it is important to outline the main tasks of state policy in the field of labour migration regulation, which should be based on current challenges, national development priorities and best international practices. Understanding the mechanisms that influence the behaviour of labour migrants creates the basis for the formation of a comprehensive system of state policy in the field of migration, which not only responds to challenges but also actively shapes the conditions for sustainable development. In particular, the effective return of citizens who have been working abroad requires a comprehensive approach to regulating external labour migration as a systemic phenomenon that encompasses economic, social, security and humanitarian aspects.

In this context, it is extremely important to clearly define the priorities and objectives that should serve as a guideline for state migration policy. Domestic scholars, in particular V. Kovach, emphasise the need for targeted actions in several key areas that ensure both the regulation of labour migration and the creation of favourable conditions for the return and reintegration of migrants into the national socio-economic space. Accordingly, the scientist notes the following main tasks for regulating the processes of external labour migration [15]:

- increasing the competitiveness of the workforce in the international labour market;

- ensuring the return of the process of external labour migration;
- social protection of labour migrants;
- increasing control over labour migration;
- forming and developing an effective system for detecting, preventing and stopping illegal labour migration;
- expanding international cooperation in the field of labour migration.

The implementation of these tasks requires interdepartmental coordination, political will and a strategic vision of the role of labour migration in the socio-economic development of the country. Of particular relevance is ensuring the institutional capacity of the state to support the return of migrants, their professional adaptation, access to social services and mechanisms for re-participation in the national economic life. The successful implementation of these tasks also requires the active involvement of regions, local authorities, the business community and the diaspora. The current approach to regulating external labour migration needs to be transformed from a model of “responding to challenges” to a model of proactive influence, which involves creating a safe, socially just and economically attractive environment for citizens to live, work and develop in Ukraine. Such an approach not only minimises losses from the mass outflow of labour resources, but also creates conditions for voluntary return, maintaining links with migrants and mobilising their potential for the benefit of the state. The issue of the return of labour migrants is closely linked to the quality and focus of state policy in the field of labour migration.

Given the complexity of the interaction between different groups of factors and the individual characteristics of migrants, it is advisable to present a generalised visual model that clearly illustrates the logic of the external environment's influence on the behavioural responses and decisions of migrants. Such a model includes both “push” and “pull” factors, as well as internal cognitive mechanisms through which a person decides to stay abroad or return to their country of origin (Figure 1).

According to Figure 1, the process of shaping the behaviour of a labour migrant is the result of a complex, multi-level interaction between external conditions, personal characteristics and the influence of the institutional environment. The starting point is the presence of a certain set of factors that “push” people out of their country of origin and factors that “pull” them towards their country of destination. These factors can be economic, social, political or cultural in nature and form the objective context in which migrants make their choices. However, these factors do not have a linear or automatic impact on their own. Their perception, reinterpretation and transformation into behavioural responses occur through the prism of individual experience, attitudes, level of education, information awareness, social contacts and emotional assessment of the situation. At this stage, internal assessment mechanisms are formed: analysis of risks, expectations, alternatives, as well as correlation of one's own situation with the situation in the country of origin.

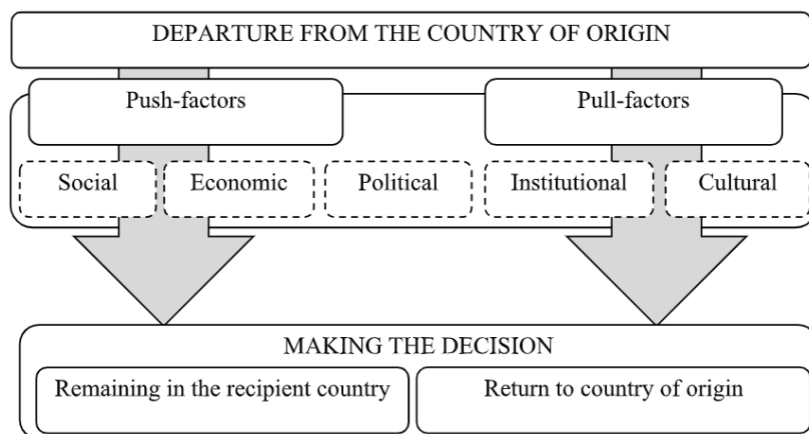


Figure 1. Mechanisms influencing decisions on the return of migrants (source: compiled by the authors)

A key element of the behavioural model is the decision-making stage, which may result in either repeated migration or a conscious return. This choice depends not only on the factors that caused migration, but also on the availability of conditions for return: access to work, housing, social guarantees, psychological comfort, security, and the willingness of the receiving party to ensure successful reintegration. Social networks occupy a special place in the scheme, acting as powerful channels for the transmission of information, norms, expectations, and sources of support. Their influence can be both positive (encouraging return) and restraining (creating perceptions of better prospects abroad).

The role of public policy is also important, as it can strengthen or weaken the impact of individual mechanisms. Specifically, effective reintegration programmes, tax incentives, support for entrepreneurship, information campaigns and legal guarantees can increase trust in the state and change behaviour patterns in favour of return. The model of mechanisms influencing migrant behaviour shows that migration decisions are not a reaction to individual factors, but the result of a holistic process of cognitive, emotional and institutional reflection, which depends on numerous internal and external variables. That is why the formation of return policies should be based not only on material incentives, but also on consideration of the underlying structure of behavioural processes that determine migrants' decisions in the modern world.

For Ukraine, which has been one of the leading sources of labour migration in Europe in recent decades, understanding the mechanisms that influence migrant behaviour is of paramount practical importance. In the context of full-scale war, the destruction of economic and social infrastructure, a demographic crisis and mass emigration of citizens, the issue of the return of labour migrants is becoming not only economic but also existential for the state.

The model of mechanisms influencing migrant behaviour allows us to:

- better understand the logic behind migrants' decisions to return or remain abroad;
- identify key “points of influence” through which the state can effectively shape the behaviour of the population (through economic incentives, security guarantees, communication campaigns, institutional services);
- predict the dynamics of return in different post-war recovery scenarios;
- develop tools to support target groups of migrants, in particular young people, women, professionals with higher education, and long-term emigrants;
- increase the effectiveness of state policy by directing resources to those components that actually influence behavioural attitudes and decisions (trust, expectations, security, stability).

In addition, such a model allows us to move away from simplistic notions of migrants as “economic actors” and take into account psychological, sociocultural, informational and emotional aspects that are no less important in the return process. This is particularly relevant in the context of the formation of a new Ukrainian diaspora, a significant part of which has not yet made a final decision on whether to leave or return.

In terms of the practical application of the model of mechanisms influencing migrant behaviour, it can become a key tool for shaping a modern, flexible and targeted reintegration policy in Ukraine. This approach opens up opportunities to transform the migration challenge into a resource for development, social recovery and demographic strengthening of the state. A preliminary analysis of the factors influencing migrant behaviour, as well as the mechanisms that mediate their decisions to return, allows us to move on to a more detailed study of the conditions and factors that directly determine the motivation to return in specific socio-historical realities. In particular, in the context of the ongoing full-scale war in Ukraine, the structural complexity of the migration environment in which decisions to return are made has increased dramatically. The influence of factors is becoming multidimensional: economic motivations are closely intertwined with security considerations, political assessments, institutional trust, and socio-psychological attitudes.

Economic factors play a significant role among the main determinants influencing individuals' decisions to emigrate or return to their country of origin. They are often the primary impetus for labour migration, prompting people to change their permanent place of residence in search of a more stable and favourable economic environment. Economic factors are conventionally divided into push factors and pull factors, which operate in the country of origin and the country of destination, respectively.

Push factors that cause population outflows abroad include, in particular, low wages. According to the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, in 2024, the average nominal wage in Ukraine increased by 23.1% and amounted to UAH 21,473. However, real incomes declined due to rising inflation, which is forecast to reach 12.6% in 2025 [23; 24]. According to estimates by the Pension Fund, in July 2024, the real average salary was lower and amounted to about UAH 14,400 [23].

High unemployment remains a significant factor in emigration. According to Info Sapiens estimates, in the first half of 2024, the unemployment rate in Ukraine ranged from 13.1% to 20.9% depending on the region [25]. Among internally displaced persons, this figure was approximately 15% [26]. Although the official number of registered unemployed in December 2024 was only 94,200, this figure does not reflect the real situation, as many unemployed people do not register with the employment service [27].

In addition, the economic situation in Ukraine is complicated by the instability of the macroeconomic environment caused by the war, the growth of public debt and the reorientation of the economy towards military needs. Such uncertainty hinders long-term investment and the development of small and medium-sized businesses, which in turn exacerbates emigration sentiments.

The burdensome taxation system and insufficient social protection, especially for the unemployed, pensioners and vulnerable groups, also create a negative economic backdrop that encourages labour migration. As a result, as of 2023, almost 9 million Ukrainians are abroad, of whom about 3 million are labour migrants [28]. According to data from the National Bank of Ukraine, in 2023, the equivalent of \$11.6 billion was transferred to Ukraine from various parts of the world, with the largest amounts coming from the following countries via payment systems: the United States – 18%, Israel – 17%, Italy – 15%, Germany – 9%, and Ireland – 5%. These are transfers made through both official and unofficial channels [29].

On the other hand, pull factors in the destination countries create an attractive environment for migrants. These include higher wages, the availability of jobs, a stable economy and liberal tax regimes. For example, the average salary of Ukrainian workers in EU countries significantly exceeds that in Ukraine, even for basic types of work. In many cases, Ukrainians have the opportunity to find legal employment thanks to simplified temporary protection procedures, which facilitate rapid integration into labour markets.

As of 2024, the highest wage level among European Union countries is recorded in Luxembourg, where the average income is over €2,300 per month even for unskilled workers. This ensures a high standard of living and contributes to the country's attractiveness for labour immigration from Eastern European countries. In Germany, which is one of the key destination countries for Ukrainian labour migrants, the minimum wage has been set at €12 per hour since October 2022, which is equivalent to an average of around €2,000 per month for full-time employment. This level of income provides basic economic stability and meets the criteria for decent work. Poland occupies a position of compromise between labour market accessibility and wage levels: around €1,000 per month is the “golden mean” for most Ukrainian labour migrants who seek to find a job with satisfactory pay but without significant barriers to entry into the market. At the same time, Bulgaria has the lowest average wage in the EU – around €400 per month, which is a limiting factor for many migrants. However, low taxation (a fixed income tax of 10%) makes this amount more significant in terms of local purchasing power and expenses [30].

Thus, wages as a key economic pull factor play a decisive role in shaping labour migration. High wages in certain EU countries create the conditions not only for short-term labour migration, but also for the long-term socio-economic integration of migrants in the host countries. In addition to economic motives, social factors significantly influence individuals' decisions to leave the country or return to their country of origin. They determine the living conditions of the population, shape perceptions of quality of life, social security, and access to basic services, and are therefore among the key motivational drivers of migration behaviour. Like economic factors, social factors are divided into push factors, which encourage emigration, and pull factors, which attract people to other countries. In the context of modern Ukraine, which is in a phase of full-scale military conflict and post-crisis recovery, social conditions are dual in nature, simultaneously acting as reasons for the outflow of labour resources and barriers to the return of migrants.

With regard to social push factors in Ukraine, at the beginning of 2025, the situation with regard to the provision of basic social rights in Ukraine remains extremely tense. According to the Ministry of Education and Science, as of March 2025, more than 3,373 educational institutions had been damaged as a result of military operations, of which 385 were completely destroyed. In many cities, children study in underground shelters or with long interruptions due to air raid sirens, which significantly affects the quality of education. There have been numerous cases of suspension of education or its transfer to a remote format without adequate technical support [31-32].

The state of the healthcare system is no less critical. According to estimates by international organisations, including the WHO, more than 1,600 medical facilities have been damaged, 214 of which have been completely destroyed. Another 8% of households do not have access to even primary health care, and more than 23% have been forced to change doctors due to displacement or evacuation [33].

Low levels of social protection remain a serious challenge. Due to budget constraints, the level of state support for vulnerable groups (pensioners, internally displaced persons, families with children) is unsatisfactory, which exacerbates feelings of social instability and contributes to increased migration intentions. In addition, in the context of a shrinking labour market and institutional uncertainty, many citizens are losing opportunities for professional self-fulfilment, both due to the destruction of enterprises and job cuts, and due to the lack of mechanisms to support career development.

As for pull factors in destination countries, against the backdrop of these problems, European Union countries are attractive centres of gravity due to their high social standards, stability and the availability of support institutions for migrants. In Germany, Ukrainian children have access to free school education, and adults have access to language courses, retraining programmes and professional integration (Ausbildung). The healthcare system is based on compulsory insurance, which provides high-quality primary and specialised care. Working conditions are regulated by strict labour laws that guarantee protection from exploitation, respect for labour rights and social insurance.

Poland is a good example of how Ukrainians can fit into society. Thanks to the PESEL system, Ukrainians can get healthcare (through the National Health Fund – NFZ), education (including vocational training) and social benefits, like child support (the 500+ programme). A simplified labour market access regime allows them to work without a special permit, which contributes to the rapid economic and social inclusion of migrants. In the Czech Republic, there are language adaptation classes for children, career support centres and comprehensive health insurance. The labour market is open to Ukrainian workers, especially in sectors experiencing labour shortages. In turn, the Baltic countries (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia) provide access to digital education, offer free medical care for persons with temporary protection status, and create special integration centres with legal and psychological support. Italy has become attractive to Ukrainian women in the social care sector. Official registration, basic health insurance, cultural proximity, and active Ukrainian communities contribute to smooth adaptation and gradual integration into society.

Thus, social pull factors in European Union countries form a multidimensional support system covering education, healthcare, employment, and professional development. Combined with a high level of security and transparent rules of residence, these conditions significantly improve the quality of life of migrants and make it difficult for them to return to their country of origin without significant changes in Ukraine's social policy. This poses a challenge for the state not only to restore physical infrastructure, but also to reboot the system of social guarantees and services focused on dignity, accessibility and trust on the part of citizens.

Cultural factors in the structure of determinants of migration behaviour are less formalised, but no less significant in terms of their impact on personal identity, sense of security and social inclusion. They play an important role not only in the decision to leave the country, but also in the choice of a specific migration destination, as well as in further integration or return. Like other groups, cultural factors are divided into push factors and pull factors.

Among the key reasons for cultural push factors is religious persecution. In a world where freedom of religion remains vulnerable to political pressure or social rejection, barriers to religious practice can encourage migration. In Ukraine, despite the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom, incidents related to religious tension have been recorded in recent years, especially in regions with confessional polarisation. Another serious factor is ethnic discrimination, particularly against members of the Roma, Crimean Tatar, African and Asian communities. Racial discrimination, especially in employment, access to housing or social services, is also systemic, although it manifests itself mainly in everyday, indirect forms. An additional factor is discrimination based on nationality, for example, against internally displaced persons from temporarily occupied territories or persons who speak other languages. Finally, the lack of conditions for observing religious traditions (e.g., fasting, organising communal rituals, having places of worship) creates a sense of cultural isolation among part of the population, which, combined with other factors, encourages emigration intentions.

In turn, pull factors of a cultural nature, destination countries that are oriented towards multiculturalism, inclusion and humanistic policies, form a culturally safe environment that plays an important role as a pull factor for migrants. Thus, freedom of religion, enshrined in the legislation of the European Union and most recipient countries, guarantees the right of individuals to practise any religion, including the possibility of organising communities, opening places of worship and participating in festive events. The absence of ethnic and racial discrimination, enshrined in political documents and human rights protection mechanisms, allows Ukrainian migrants to feel part of the European community regardless of their ethnic origin. For example, Germany and the Netherlands have intercultural coordinators in communities, while France and Italy have state programmes for the adaptation and communicative support of migrants. Countries that provide favourable conditions for repatriates – people with historical or cultural roots in the recipient country – are particularly attractive. This applies, in particular, to programmes for the return of descendants of Polish, Hungarian and Jewish families, as well as workers who integrate through a culturally similar environment. In the context of contemporary cultural transformations caused by globalisation, war and mass population displacement, cultural security is becoming a key element of successful integration. It is important for Ukraine to take cultural aspects into account both in its strategies for the return of labour migrants and in its national unity policy: to guarantee the protection of cultural diversity, counteract discrimination, support dialogue between cultures and promote the formation of a tolerant environment.

The cultural processes of assimilation of labour migrants include various aspects that contribute to their integration into the cultural and social environment of the host country, in particular the following [34]:

- 1) learning the local language. One of the first cultural steps towards assimilation is learning the language of the host country. This helps migrants better understand the local culture and interact with local residents.
- 2) familiarisation with traditions and rituals. Migrants can learn and adopt local traditions, holidays and rituals, which helps them feel part of the cultural environment and community.

3) participation in cultural events and activities. Migrant workers can participate in local cultural events, festivals, concerts and exhibitions, which helps them to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural spirit of the host country;

4) cultural exchange with local residents. Interaction with local residents allows migrants to learn about the local culture, lifestyle and values, as well as share their own cultural traditions;

5) acceptance of local cultural norms and values. Migrants can accept and adapt local cultural norms and values, which helps them integrate into the society of the host country;

6) creation of cultural mixes. Migrants can also bring their own cultural traditions and customs, which contributes to the formation of cultural mixes and diversity in the local community.

The political situation in the country of origin is decisive in the structure of motives for migration behaviour, especially in cases of protracted crises, military conflicts, and violations of human rights and freedoms. In this context, political factors act as both push and pull factors, stimulating population movements in search of a predictable, fair and safe environment. With regard to political push factors, in the early 2020s Ukraine faced large-scale political challenges that became a powerful push factor for migration. In particular, the absence of stable democracy in many periods of national history has led to low levels of trust in institutions among the population, exacerbated by administrative abuses, a weak judicial system and violations of electoral rights.

Political instability, exacerbated by full-scale war, led to the reformatting of institutions, changes in the functioning of parliament and local government bodies, and restrictions on political competition. According to international think tanks, Ukraine's Democracy Index in 2024 was 5.89 points (out of a possible 10), which corresponds to the status of a “hybrid regime” [35].

Corruption in government structures remains a systemic problem. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, Ukraine ranked 104th out of 180 countries in 2023, scoring 36 points out of 100, which indicates a chronic violation of transparency standards in governance [36].

High crime rates and distrust of law enforcement agencies also have an impact on migration. According to Numbeo, in 2024 Ukraine's crime index was 47, which is average, but in some regions – especially in the temporarily occupied territories – the situation is much worse [37]. Low level of respect for human rights and freedoms: during the hostilities, violations of humanitarian law, restrictions on freedom of speech, and pressure on certain media outlets and civil society initiatives were recorded.

Together, these factors create a sense of threat, powerlessness and hopelessness among citizens, prompting them to seek a more politically stable environment outside the country.

As for political pull factors in EU countries, in contrast to these threats, European Union countries are powerful centres of political attraction that guarantee basic democratic values, legal protection and transparency of governance. The key political pull factors are:

1) developed democracy – according to the Democracy Index (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2024), the average score for EU countries is 8.15 points. For example, Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands and Ireland have scores above 9.0, indicating deeply rooted democratic institutions [35];

2) political stability – multi-party competition, an independent judiciary and effective parliamentary control mechanisms ensure the predictability of the political process;

3) absence of corruption – EU countries consistently top transparency rankings: Denmark, Finland, Sweden and the Netherlands have 80+ points in the Corruption Perceptions Index, which creates trust in the state and stimulates the desire to immigrate [36];

4) low crime rates – Germany, the Netherlands and Austria have crime rates below 30 (on the Numbeo scale), which provides migrants with a sense of physical security [37];

5) high level of respect for rights and freedoms – all EU countries are obliged to comply with the European Convention on Human Rights, and there are effective mechanisms for protection through courts, ombudsmen and public organisations.

Political factors play a key role in shaping the migration orientation of the population, as security, human rights and stability are fundamental needs of the individual. In the context of Ukraine, this is particularly important: the restoration of statehood, legal mechanisms and the fight against corruption are necessary prerequisites not only for the return of migrants, but also for preventing new waves of emigration. Institutional factors of migration behaviour shape citizens' perceptions of the effectiveness, openness and ability of the state to provide basic public functions. They mediate decisions on both leaving the country and the possibility of returning, through the presence or absence of support, accessibility of services, transparency of procedures and trust in the authorities. These factors are divided into push and pull factors, which interact with socio-psychological and political motivations. With regard to institutional

push factors in Ukraine, in the early 2020s, the institutional capacity of the Ukrainian state remained vulnerable in a number of areas, which created a sense of detachment between the state and the needs of its citizens.

Firstly, Ukraine has virtually no effective state policy for the reintegration of labour migrants. Despite numerous strategies and declared documents, in particular the “Strategy of Migration Policy of Ukraine for the Period until 2025”, they remain fragmentary and largely declarative [38].

Secondly, access to administrative and social services remains low, especially for internally displaced persons, rural residents and communities affected by hostilities. According to UNHCR estimates, more than 40% of IDPs do not have permanent access to official services due to technical, territorial or staffing barriers [39].

In addition, distrust of institutions (especially the judicial system, police and civil service) is a persistent problem. Sociological surveys (KMIS, 2024) show that only 8% of respondents believe in the fairness of the courts, and trust in local authorities is less than 30% [40].

The lack of support from local authorities in matters of reintegration, resettlement, employment and social adaptation also affects migrants' intentions to return. Many communities lack even the basic institutional capacity to provide support to migrants. Finally, the bureaucratic nature of procedures – from obtaining certificates to submitting applications for assistance – creates a sense of insurmountable administrative barriers, which reinforces citizens' desire to leave the country permanently.

With regard to institutional pull factors in EU countries, the situation is reversed: European Union countries demonstrate a high level of institutional openness, digitalisation and support for migrants, which creates a powerful pull effect. Among the most significant factors are the existence of effective state programmes for the return or support of migrants. For example, Germany has the Reintegration & Emigration Programme (REAG/GARP), which includes material, organisational and psychological assistance for return [41].

Simplified access to administrative, social and educational services is one of the key advantages. Thanks to digital identification systems and integrated portals, such as eGov in Estonia and gov.pl in Poland, migrants can access services remotely, without queues or wasting time. The high level of trust in institutions in most EU countries is ensured by the transparency of procedures, the independence of the judiciary and an effective public service system. It is also worth noting the active participation of communities and municipalities in the integration of migrants. In the Netherlands, Sweden and France, there are local programmes providing social housing, language courses and mentoring initiatives for new arrivals. Finally, the digitisation of public services is one of the most notable institutional advantages of the EU. Estonia, Lithuania, and Poland provide full electronic access to registrations, medical records, and tax returns, which lowers the barriers to entry for migrants.

Industry 4.0 will not only have an impact on business and society, but will also affect most processes in cooperation with government agencies and provide the state with additional tools to influence the country's public life [42].

The institutional capacity of the state to ensure comfortable, understandable and fair access to services plays a decisive role in building citizens' trust. That is why countries with high levels of digitalisation, community involvement, reintegration programmes and minimal bureaucracy have a significant advantage in the competition for human capital. Ukraine must focus its efforts on strengthening institutional capacity and overcoming mistrust in order to ensure not only the return but also the stable integration of migrants into their own country.

International experience, especially from countries affected by natural disasters, emphasises the importance of stability and restoring trust in local authorities and infrastructure [43].

Unlike economic, social or institutional factors, the psychological factors of migration behaviour are internal and subjective in nature, but their influence on decisions to leave or return is no less powerful. In times of war and crisis, it is a person's psychological state – their emotions, anxiety, fear, hope or faith in the future – that often acts as the decisive motive for displacement.

As for psychological push factors, the leading factor driving Ukrainians to migrate is fear for the safety of their families. Constant threats of shelling, occupation, mobilisation or separation from loved ones create a sense of vulnerability that prompts people to seek a safer environment abroad. According to surveys by the International Organisation for Migration, more than 60% of people who left after 24 February 2022 cited the protection of children and family as the main reason for evacuation [44].

Emotional burnout and chronic anxiety caused by war, loss, and prolonged uncertainty are equally powerful factors. In 2023, the number of patients with PTSD increased almost fourfold compared to 2021, and in the first two months of 2024, the diagnosis was made for virtually the same number of patients as in the whole of 2021 [45].

Feelings of alienation in the community, which can arise as a result of displacement, loss of social status or professional fulfilment, also encourage people to leave. This is particularly acute among those who have returned but have not found their place in a changed society. The breakdown of social ties in the country of residence, in particular

the loss of work, the breakdown of families, and the death of loved ones, destroys the emotional foundation that kept a person in a certain environment. In such conditions, emigration or re-migration is perceived as a psychological escape from pain, loss, and memories. Finally, the lack of prospects, hopelessness, information fatigue from the news and constant “expectations of change” create destructive emotional scenarios in which leaving the country is seen as the only alternative to maintaining personal balance.

In turn, psychological pull factors can also encourage return. First and foremost, this refers to the need to restore emotional ties with family, loved ones and home, which for many Ukrainians becomes dominant after a long stay abroad. Feelings of nostalgia, combined with the desire to be close to loved ones, especially in times of crisis, become a strong motivator for return.

Another important factor is a sense of patriotism, which is fuelled by both personal convictions and collective narratives about rebuilding the country, helping the front lines, and responsibility to society. According to Gradus Research, as of 2023, more than 30% of Ukrainians abroad indicated that they want to return “for the sake of rebuilding the state” [46].

Support from society and the host environment also plays an important role: if migrants do not feel integrated into their new environment, even economic stability can lead to emotional alienation, which intensifies their desire to return home. Another factor is the sense of personal security and stability in Ukraine – in regions where the level of threats is decreasing, infrastructure is being restored, and trust in local authorities is growing. People are beginning to perceive their country as a place where they can once again “live, not just survive”. Finally, optimism about the future in Ukraine, even if cautious, but supported by government messages, information campaigns, and examples of successful returns, creates an emotionally positive backdrop that is gradually changing the narrative from “country of origin” to “country of hope.” Psychological factors determine not only a person's reactions to external events, but also their ability to adapt or seek a new environment in which they feel protected. In the case of Ukraine, it is particularly important to understand the impact of trauma, severed ties, and loss of control as key components of internal motivation to leave. To create conditions for return and reintegration, it is necessary not only to ensure security and stability, but also to develop an emotionally supportive environment and cultivate narratives of dignity, participation, and joint restoration of the country.

An overview of the five groups of factors that determine the migration behaviour of the population allows us to form a comprehensive picture of the motivational structure of labour migration of Ukrainians in the context of contemporary challenges. Economic, social, political, institutional and cultural conditions, both in the country of origin and in the countries of destination, form a multi-vector pressure and attraction, which manifests itself in the form of push and pull factors, as well as in internal psychological decision-making mechanisms. At the same time, it is important to realise that migration is not only a reaction to external stimuli, but also a conscious choice based on a subjective assessment of a variety of conditions: from income levels to the level of trust in the authorities, from family security to the prospects for professional self-fulfilment.

The development of effective policies for the return of labour migrants requires a departure from simplistic approaches that take into account only one or a few isolated factors. Migrants' decisions to return to their home countries are influenced by a complex set of interrelated socio-economic, political, institutional, psychological and cultural determinants. That is why the introduction of a formalised model based on a multi-factor approach is appropriate and necessary for objective forecasting and justification of management decisions. The need to implement the model is explained by the following aspects:

1) systematic analysis, since the return of migrants is a multidimensional process that depends on the economic situation, the quality of institutions, social ties and political stability. Ignoring the interrelationships between these factors leads to inaccurate assessments and ineffective reintegration programmes;

2) quantitative assessment, as the model makes it possible to formalise the influence of various groups of factors, allowing the probability of migrant return to be determined on the basis of statistical data, sociological research and expert assessments;

3) decision support, as the results of modelling can be used by government agencies to identify policy priorities and develop economic incentives and social programmes aimed at increasing the attractiveness of return.

To this end, the following section considers a formalised model based on a multifactorial approach that allows the probability of return (P) to be interpreted as a function of the interaction of five key groups of factors. In general terms, this model is represented by the formula:

$$P = \alpha E + \beta S + \gamma P + \delta I + \varepsilon C - \theta R \quad (1)$$

where E – economic factors;

S – social factors;

P – political factors;

I – institutional factors;

C – cultural factors;

R – risks/barriers to return (external and internal);

$\alpha, \beta, \gamma, \delta, \varepsilon, \theta$ – weighting coefficients reflecting the relative influence of each factor.

Each group of factors is considered as a set of specific indicators reflecting economic conditions, social environment, political situation, institutional capabilities, cultural and psychological aspects, and risks associated with return. For each block, relevant data sources and methods of information collection are identified – from official statistics and international indices to sociological surveys, expert assessments and qualitative research. A generalised presentation of groups of factors, examples of factors that shape them, and tools that can be used to obtain the necessary results for a quantitative assessment of the impact of each block on the probability of labour migrants returning is presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Structure of the multifactor model (*source: compiled by the authors*)

Group of factors	Specific indicators	Sources of data	Tools for obtaining results
1. Economic	Average salary (USD), unemployment rate (%), ease of doing business index, per capita investment	State Statistics Service of Ukraine, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Ease of Doing Business Index	Econometric analysis, statistical reports, regression models
2. Social	Quality of life index, number of social programmes, housing provision (square metres per person), proportion of households with children/elderly relatives	Numbeo, State Statistics Service of Ukraine, surveys by sociological centres (KMIS, Razumkov Centre)	Sociological surveys, analysis of demographic data, focus groups
3. Political	Political Stability Index, Democracy Index, Security Rating (Global Peace Index)	World Bank Governance Indicators, Economist Intelligence Unit, Global Peace Index	Political stability indices, expert assessments, international ratings
4. Institutional	Public administration quality index, time and cost of administrative procedures, number of reintegration programmes	World Governance Indicators, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Doing Business, national reports by the Ministry of Economy	Assessment of the effectiveness of public administration, analysis of regulatory acts, content analysis of reports
5. Cultural and psychological	Percentage of respondents who identify themselves with the country, level of participation in cultural events, indicators of civic engagement	Sociological surveys (KMIS, Rating Group), UNESCO cultural studies	Surveys, interviews, psychological tests, qualitative research
6. Risks and barriers	Number of corruption cases, administrative service costs, mobility security index, proportion of migrants without social insurance	Transparency International, National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, International Organisation for Migration	Expert assessments, risk analysis, data from international organisations

The systematisation of factors, indicators, data sources and assessment tools presented in the table provides a basis for the practical application of the formalised model. A clear definition of each group of factors and corresponding indicators allows not only to identify the key determinants of labour migrants' return, but also to ensure their quantitative measurement based on reliable and verified sources of information. By combining official statistics, international rankings, sociological surveys and expert assessments, it becomes possible to comprehensively cover both objective economic and institutional conditions and subjective aspects related to the motivation and expectations of migrants. This allows not only to calculate the integral indicator of the probability of return (P), but also to assess the impact of each individual factor on the final result. The next stage of applying the model involves determining the

weighting coefficients for each group of factors using econometric methods or expert weighting, as well as constructing scenarios that demonstrate changes in the P indicator under different conditions of socio-economic and political development. This approach ensures the formation of scientifically sound strategies and programmes aimed at increasing the attractiveness of return for labour migrants. For the practical application of a formalised model, it is important not only to identify the list of factors and indicators, but also to establish their relative weight, reflecting the degree of influence of each group on the final result. The weight coefficients ($\alpha, \beta, \gamma, \delta, \kappa, \theta$) of the model reflect the relative importance of each group of factors in the migrant's decision to return. Correctly determining these weights is critical because they directly affect the accuracy of the probability of return (P) forecast (Figure 2).

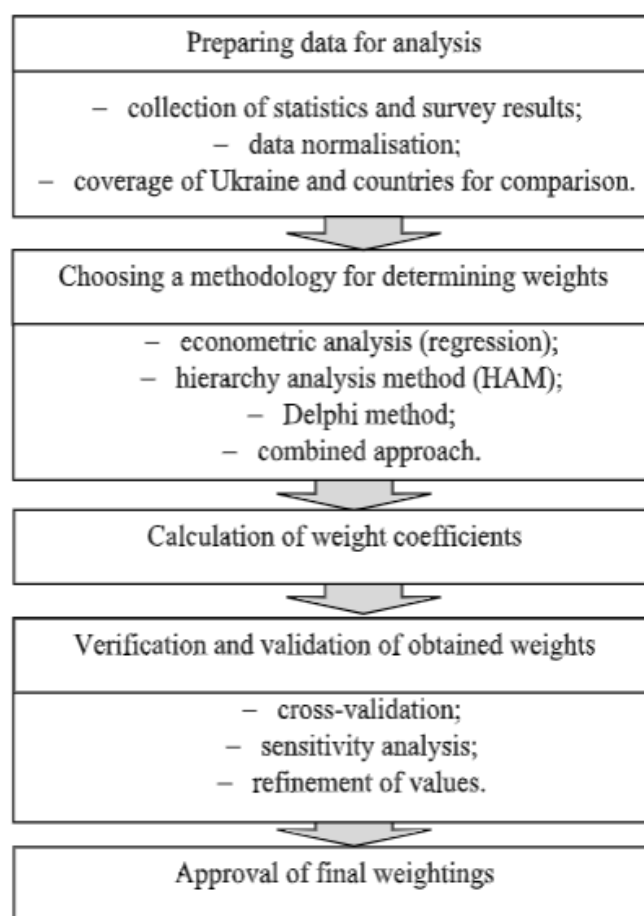


Figure 2. Stage of determining weight coefficients (source: constructed by the authors)

The Figure 2 shows the sequence of key steps needed to figure out the weighting factors in a formalised model. This approach makes sure the results are both objective and realistic, as it combines statistical data, international indicators, and expert assessments. Once the weighting coefficients have been obtained and validated, the model can be used to calculate the integral indicator of the probability of return of labour migrants (P) and to construct scenarios demonstrating changes in this indicator depending on variations in individual factors. This creates a basis for informed policy decisions and allows for the assessment of the effectiveness of possible government policy measures to encourage the return of migrants.

The development of effective policies for the return of labour migrants requires a comprehensive approach that covers economic, social, political, institutional and cultural-psychological aspects. General recommendations for creating the conditions for the return of labour migrants, including the main directions, specific measures, the expected effect of their implementation and the approximate time periods for implementation, are listed in Table 5.

Table 5

Recommendations for creating conditions conducive to the return of labour migrants (*source: compiled by the authors*)

Direction	Key measures	Expected effect	Implementation period
1. Economic prerequisites	Increasing income levels, creating high-productivity jobs, supporting SMEs, developing investment incentives, programmes for start-ups	Increasing employment and income levels, encouraging return through economic attractiveness	Medium- and long-term perspective
2. Social prerequisites	Development of housing, medical and educational infrastructure; social programmes for migrant families; support for ties with the diaspora	Improving quality of life and social support, reducing barriers to family return	Short- and medium-term perspective
3. Political prerequisites	Ensuring stability and security; rebuilding infrastructure; international agreements on social guarantees; predictable government policy	Increased trust in the state, sense of security and social guarantees for migrants	Medium-term perspective
4. Institutional prerequisites	Simplify bureaucratic procedures; create a single electronic service; reintegration programmes, retraining and business incubators	Reduce administrative barriers, rapid adaptation and employment after return	Short- and medium-term perspective
5. Cultural and psychological prerequisites	Cultural projects for the diaspora; information platforms for communication; campaigns featuring success stories; identity support programmes	Increasing motivation to return, strengthening identity and ties with Ukraine	Short-term and ongoing support

The recommendations listed in the table reflect a comprehensive approach to creating conditions that will facilitate the return of labour migrants and their successful reintegration into Ukrainian society and economy. The combination of economic incentives, social support, political stability, effective institutions and measures to strengthen cultural and psychological identity creates a basis for long-term influence on migration processes. It is important to emphasise that none of the proposed areas can be effective in isolation. The greatest results are achieved when they are implemented comprehensively, as economic opportunities without adequate institutional support or social support do not guarantee a lasting effect. Similarly, cultural or information campaigns alone, without real economic and political change, will have limited impact.

An important element of the multifactorial model is the consideration of risks and barriers that may deter the return of labour migrants even in the presence of favourable economic, social or political conditions. Risks vary in nature, ranging from economic instability and bureaucratic obstacles to the lack of social guarantees or a sense of insecurity. Identifying such risks and developing ways to minimise their impact allows for the formulation of more effective public policies that not only create incentives for return but also reduce the likelihood of re-emigration.

The main risks and barriers, their possible consequences for the return of migrants, as well as the proposed ways to reduce the negative impact of these factors are listed in Table 6.

Table 6

Main risks for the return of labour migrants and ways to minimise their impact (*source: compiled by the authors*)

Risk/barrier	Possible consequences	Ways to minimise impact
1. Low level of economic stability after return	Lack of motivation to stay in Ukraine, re-emigration	Employment incentives, tax breaks for businesses that employ migrants
2. High bureaucratic burden during document processing	Delays in obtaining documents, reduced trust in institutions	Creation of a single electronic service for document processing, reduction of procedure times
3. Lack of employment guarantees	Rising unemployment among returning migrants	Development of state programmes for employment, retraining and support for entrepreneurship
4. Insufficient access to social services (healthcare, education)	Social insecurity, reduced quality of life	Expanding access to healthcare and education, increasing funding for social programmes
5. Lack of housing or difficulties in acquiring it	Difficulties in adapting and integrating into economic life	Mortgage programmes with preferential terms for migrants, state support for renting housing
6. Political instability and sense of insecurity	Pessimistic expectations about the future, migration sentiments	Ensuring stability, security guarantees, transparent information policy
7. Corruption and lack of transparency in state institutions	Disillusionment with state institutions, unwillingness to participate in the socio-economic life of the country	Anti-corruption measures, increased transparency, digitisation of services

The risks and barriers listed in the table reflect key obstacles that can significantly reduce the likelihood of labour migrants returning. Minimising these obstacles is an integral part of a comprehensive state policy aimed at encouraging the return and successful reintegration of citizens. The proposed ways to reduce the impact of risks involve a combination of economic, institutional, social and political measures. They should be implemented in parallel with strategies to increase the country's attractiveness to returning migrants. Only a comprehensive approach can achieve a lasting effect that will not only encourage return but also reduce the likelihood of re-emigration in the future. An effective migrant return policy should combine incentives (economic, social, cultural) with the removal of barriers that hinder this process. This will create balanced conditions for attracting the human capital necessary for Ukraine's post-war recovery and long-term development.

Thus, the proposed measures should become part of a unified state strategy based on the principles of evidence-based policy and regular monitoring of results. The use of a formalised multi-factor model allows for a quantitative assessment of the effectiveness of each area and the adaptation of policy in line with changes in socio-economic conditions, which creates the basis for the formation of effective mechanisms for the return of labour migrants and the strengthening of Ukraine's human potential in the context of post-war recovery and further development.

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