

# **Determinants and Consequences of Female Labor Migration from Rural Areas: The Case of Ukraine**

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**Abstract:** The period of transition in Ukraine is characterized by very intensive international labor migration, taking on special significance in rural areas. The fact that 65% of migrants are women let us speak about “female face” of migration in Ukraine. This paper aims at analyzing the scale of international female migration from rural areas of Ukraine, finding out factors which affect it and ascertaining its consequences for Ukrainian society. The research is based on data provided by Ukrainian State Committee of Statistics. We also use the results of the survey conducted by NGO “Women’s perspectives” among Ukrainian female migrants working abroad.

**Keywords:** female migration, mobility, rural areas, agriculture, rural development

## **1. Introduction.**

The migration of labor geographically, out of rural areas, and occupationally, out of farm jobs, is one of the most pervasive features of agricultural transformations and economic growth. This is true both historically in developed countries and currently in less-developed countries (Taylor and Martin, 2001). This problem is of great concern for modern Ukraine which agricultural sector is experiencing in-depth transformations accompanied by intensive labor out-migration. The fact that 65% of labor migrants are women let us speak about so called “female face” of migration in Ukraine.

In spite the fact that this is a hot-bottom issue, a little has been done to explore it. The majority of the existent studies analyze migration processes without taking into account gender perspectives. Those studies which deal with female migration analyze it on the whole or regarding urban areas. With respect to rural areas the problem of female migration is unexplored and needs further in-depth investigation.

Thus, the main objectives of this paper are the following: to assess the scale and analyze peculiarities of female labor migration from Ukrainian rural areas to foreign countries, to find out what factors affect it, to ascertain socio-economic and demographic consequences of this process for Ukrainian society.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides all-in-all description of data used for the study and research design. Section 3 sets out main trends and peculiarities of international female migration out of Ukrainian rural areas, its determinants and consequences for the society. The last section gives general conclusions.

## **2. Data and research design.**

The scale, sex and age-specific structure of international migration flows from rural areas of Ukraine are analyzed on the basis of the data published in Statistical Yearbook “Migration of Ukrainian Population 2007” (concerning registered migration) and data provided by Ukrainian Ministry of External Affairs as well as diplomatic representatives of Ukraine in foreign countries (concerning illegal migration). Moreover, we use the results of the survey conducted by NGO “Women’s perspectives” among Ukrainian female migrants working abroad in order to find out and explain factors which make them to look for a job in a foreign country and establish consequences of such experience for their families. By using

information published in Statistical Yearbook of Ukraine we ascertain socio-economic and demographic consequences of international labor migration from rural areas for Ukrainian society.

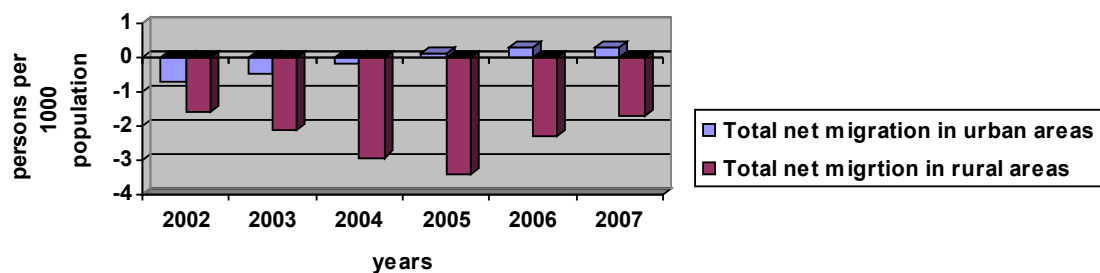
In order to analyze external factors influencing international female migration from rural areas of Ukraine we organize them in three groups: economic (low wage, high unemployment, poor living and working conditions), social (lack of educational opportunities, poor health care infrastructure, lack of career opportunities etc.) and political (distorted democracy, political instability and high level of corruption).

Consequences of international female migration for rural migrant-sending areas are presented from socio-economic and demographic perspectives.

### 3. Results.

#### 3.1. The scale of international female migration from rural areas of Ukraine.

According to the official data provided by Ukrainian Ministry of Statistics, since 2005 total net migration in Ukraine has been positive due to high number of immigrants coming from the CIS countries. However, net migration is positive only in urban areas while it is very negative in rural ones (figure 1). In 2007, for example, migratory growth in cities and towns was equal to 0.3 people per 1000 inhabitants whereas the number of dwellers in countryside decreased by 1.7 per 1000 population due to intensive external migration.



**Figure 1. Total net migration (external and internal) in urban and rural areas of Ukraine (persons per 1000 population)**

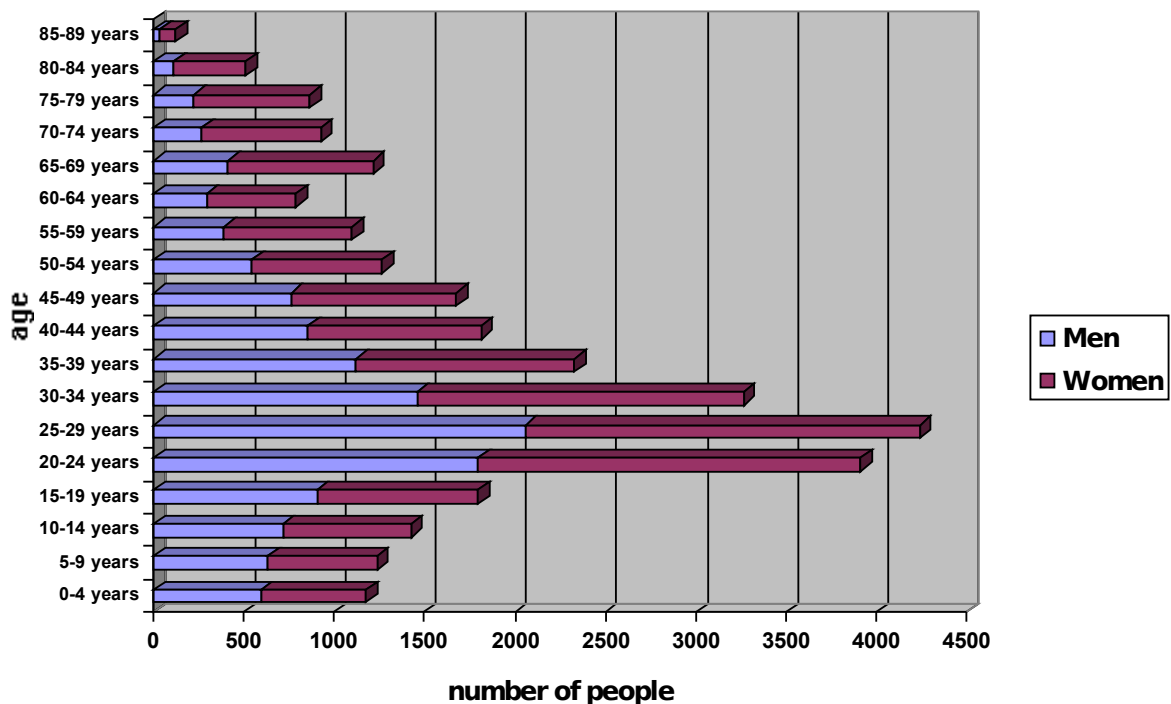
The analysis of international migration flows reveals positive balance of migration both in urban and rural areas of Ukraine. Nevertheless, it is much lower in countryside than in cities (0.2 as compared with 0.5 persons per 1000 inhabitants). Such disparity can be explained by a small number of foreigners who want to settle in rural area. Thus, in 2007 the number of people arrived in Ukrainian cities from abroad was 1.2 per 1000 population while in countryside this figure was two times smaller – 0.6 per 1000 inhabitants.

The majority of those who immigrate to Ukraine are from the CIS countries. Moreover, the share of people who have arrived in Ukraine from these countries is much higher in rural areas than in urban ones – correspondingly 94% and 70%. Such figures testify that rural territory of Ukraine looks relatively attractive only to immigrants from the former Soviet block while it is absolutely uninviting for immigrants from other countries, especially from well-developed. In contrast, 27% of those who leave Ukrainian countryside in order to look for a place of living abroad come to West European or North American states. All in all, the number of people who leave Ukrainian villages for well-developed countries is three times higher than the number of people who arrive from there in Ukraine.

The majority of those who arrive in Ukraine from abroad settle in the Crimea or Odeska region which belong to health-resort zone. In contrast, the majority of those who leave the country come from western regions.

The distribution of migrants by sex reveals very interesting evidence: 56% of foreigners who settle in Ukraine are men while 56% of those who legally emigrate abroad are women. Larger outflows of females, as compared with males, make a peculiarity of migration of rural population in Ukraine.

Distribution of emigrants by age shows that the majority of them (46%) are at the most reproductive age (20–39 years old) (figure 2). Besides, migration activity of both women and men increases as they become older and achieves its peak at the age of 25–29.



**Figure 2. Distribution of Ukrainian emigrants by gender and age (2007)**

In addition to emigration, rural areas of Ukraine are facing mass temporary labor migration, which is mostly illegal in nature. As a result, there is no official data concerning this issue. All that we have are rough estimates made by authorities or researchers.

Thus, according to estimations made by Ukrainian Ministry of External Affairs, at present more than 2 mln. citizens of Ukraine illegally work abroad. These data tightly corresponds with the estimations performed by Ternopil regional employment center, while other analytics declare even larger figures. The experts of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy of Ukraine, for example, estimate external labor migration in 2.5-3 mln. persons, considering people at productive age, who have “disappeared” from the national labor market. The specialists of the State Statistics Committee of Ukraine estimate the number of labor migrants in 2.4–3 mln. persons taking into account the number of people employed and unemployed in Ukraine, full-time students and some other population categories. The report of the Ombudsman of the Verhovna Rada of Ukraine on human rights presents the figure in 5 mln. labor migrants (Maidannyk, 2007).

According to Ukrainian population census 2001, the majority of labor migrants are employed in the CIS countries (54.8%). The EU states provide employment for 31.5% of the Ukrainian external labor migrants, while other former post-socialist states of Europe – for 9.4% of migrants. Russia dominates among CIS countries, while South Europe dominate among European countries. It is also worth noting that 65% of Ukrainian labor migrants, working abroad illegally, are women.

### 3.2. Determinants of female labor migration from rural areas of Ukraine.

The analysis of external factors influencing international labor migration from rural areas of Ukraine shows that at present the key role among them is played by economic factors such as low wage, high unemployment, poor living and working conditions.

According to data provided by the State Committee of Statistics, in 2007 an average monthly wage in agricultural sector of Ukraine was equal to 154 US dollars. It was the lowest among all branches of economy (figure 3). For comparison, during the same year in industry workers received on average 310 US dollars per month, in construction – 297, in trade – 229 US dollars. Taking into account the fact that the majority of rural inhabitants are employed in agriculture, low wage appears to be the key factor which forces them to look for a better place of work not only in urban areas of Ukraine, but also in foreign countries.

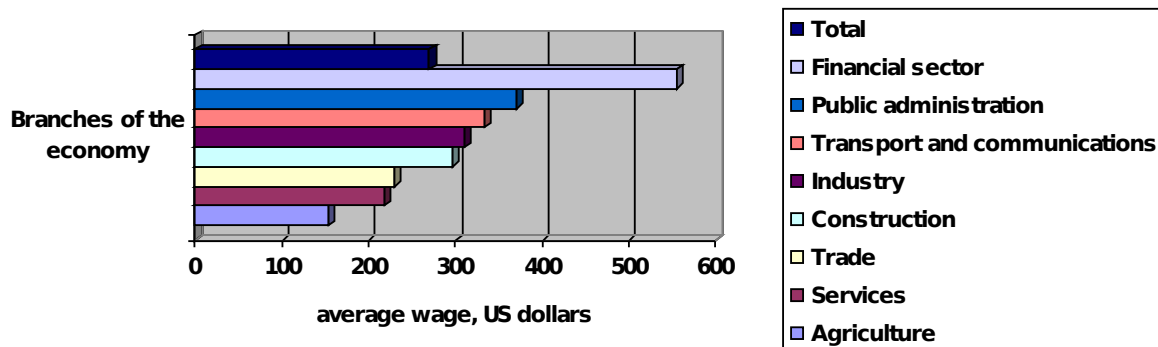


Figure 3. Average monthly wage in different branches of economy in Ukraine (2007)

Low average wage in agricultural sector of Ukraine leads to poor living conditions of rural people. Thus, distribution of population by the level of monetary income shows that 57.4% of rural citizens receive monthly income which is lower than living wage. About 15% of people in Ukrainian villages live for up to 60 US dollars per month. In cities and towns the situation looks quite different: monthly income lower than living wage is received by 31.3% of population while only 3.8% of dwellers live for less than 60 US dollars per month. Such figures testify the spread of poverty among working people, which is especially severe in rural areas of Ukraine.

It is worth noting that even such low monthly income of rural households is formed mainly from other sources than wage. The share of the latter in its structure is only 40%. Almost the same part of monetary income is composed from pensions and other social payments (32.4%) together with financial aid received from relatives (8.4%). Thus, employment in rural areas can not guarantee even normal standard of living.

Along with low wage, farm workers are confronted with poor working conditions. The most part of equipment is out-of-date while almost all buildings are half-ruined. In 1991–2007 the number of tractors dropped by 62%, combine harvesters – by 61%, lorries – by 59%. It makes working conditions in agriculture unattractive for potential workers, especially if they are young.

Another significant factor which makes people to look for a place of work out of rural areas is high unemployment. On the one hand, official unemployment rate is lower in rural area than in urban. On the other hand, the majority of those who are considered as employed in rural settlements are occupied in housekeeping. It can be proved by the fact that labor supply in agriculture is 25 times higher than labor demand. There is no such disparity in any other branch of economy. Thus, real unemployment rate is very high in rural areas of Ukraine which make rural dwellers to look for free work places somewhere else.

Migration spirits of people living in villages are also influenced by social factors such as lack of educational opportunities, poor health care infrastructure, lack of career opportunities etc. These factors are especially important for young people and very often play the key role in pushing them out of rural areas.

The lack of educational institutions, such as technical schools and universities, forces young people to move to cities in order to continue their education. It is typical situation for any country of the world. The problem is that after obtaining their degree young people from rural areas do not want to come back home. The reasons are the same – lack of free work places for qualified staff, unacceptably low wages and salaries, lack of career opportunities, poor living and working conditions etc.

Another great problem of Ukrainian rural area, which makes life there very unattractive, is limited access to health care services. Poor remuneration of health professionals does not stimulate them to work in rural medical centers. At present the total number of physicians per 10 000 inhabitants in urban areas of Ukraine is 59% higher than in rural ones and this gap is constantly increasing. Moreover, 386 health care centers situated in Ukrainian villages do not have any health worker at all.

In addition to all mentioned above, rural citizens are motivated to move abroad upon the influence of political factors such as distorted democracy, political instability and high level of corruption.

The most powerful among them is political instability as it not only leads to disappointment in political system but also causes economic instability. For example, frequent reelections in Ukraine together with severe political struggle provoke constant deficit of money in the state budget, their inefficient usage and, as a result, disbalance the economy. Such processes wash out citizens' confidence in their future and leads to deep disappointment in the native country.

Another significant political factor is high level of corruption which takes place in Ukraine. According to the calculation of the Heritage Foundation, the level of economic corruption in Ukraine is equal to 72%. By the index of economic freedom which, in addition to the level of corruption includes 7 other indicators, Ukraine holds today 133 place out of 157 countries.

The research findings stated above are supported by the results of the survey conducted by NGO "Women's perspectives" among Ukrainian women working abroad. Thus, among the key reasons of migration the majority of them name low wage which does not correspond with the cost of living, high unemployment rate, socio-economic and political instability in Ukraine. In addition to it, some migrants (especially those who are 20–30 years old) state that they have migrated in order to study foreign languages, raise educational level, obtain useful working experience or see new countries.

### **3.3. Consequences of female labor migration from rural areas of Ukraine.**

Female labor migration from rural areas of Ukraine has a number of negative socio-economic and demographic consequences.

In 1991–2007 the share of rural dwellers in the total number of population decreased from 35.1% to 31.7%. Such processes were accompanied by worsening of the age structure of rural population in comparison with urban-dwellers. Thus, in 2007 the share of people at the productive age in rural areas was lower than in urban ones by 7.7%. In contrast the shares of children and pensioners were higher – correspondingly by 3.4 and 4.3%. Such figures prove the phenomenon of mass youth migration from countryside which provokes non-stop population ageing in rural settlements.

In spite the fact that a lot of people at the most reproductive age leaves their native villages in order to settle in big cities, fertility rates are much higher in rural areas than in urban ones. In 2007, for example, fertility rate in rural settlements was equal to 10.7 births per 1000 population while in urban area only 9.9. With regard to such evidence we can assume that those women who migrate to cities are confronted with new living conditions and very often decide to postpone delivery. So, intensive female migration from rural areas is among the key factors which prevent fertility growth within a country.

In addition to fertility reduction, intensive youth migration from rural areas leads to decrease in the number of young people employed in agriculture. Thus, in 2007 the share of young people among agricultural workers was equal to 23.9%. It was the lowest indicator among all branches of economy. Such tendencies can provoke labor-scarcity situation in the future.

Due to mass labor migration from rural areas of Ukraine, as well as other factors causing destruction of Ukrainian agricultural sector, its share in gross domestic product is constantly decreasing. Only in 2001–2007 it dropped from 16.3% to 7.6%. In comparison with 1991, the total amount of agricultural production decreased by 39%. In particular, crop production reduced by 25% while stock-breeding decreased by 50%.

Quite contradictive are consequences of migration for female migrants themselves. The survey of female migrants in Ukraine shows that they have different views on their past migrant experience. About 71.5% of them notice that thanks to migration they have improved their living standard, 15.26% have become more broad-minded, 7.23% have improved their language skills and only 13% of migrants can not indicate any positive consequences of their work abroad. At the same time, respondents complain about moral and psychological difficulties of living and working in a foreign country.

#### **4. Conclusions.**

Research results show that female migration is a problem of great concern for contemporary Ukraine. According to different estimations, about 1.3–3.25 million Ukrainian women work abroad, almost 90% of them illegally. The majority of migrants come from rural areas, are at the most reproductive age (between 20–39 years old) and have husbands and children in Ukraine. The most crucial factors which influence women's decision-making concerning international labor migration are the following: lack of employment opportunities, unacceptably low wages, poor working and living conditions. Mass international migration of women has very dangerous socio-economic and demographic consequences such as aging of rural population, fertility reduction, losses in rural labor potential, prevention of further agricultural and rural development.

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