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of the Ukrainian Western Frontier Areas
in the Context EU Enlargement**

(based on the survey's results in Volyn, Zakarpattya and
Lviv oblasts)

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Neighbouring countries are the most common destinations for Ukrainians going abroad for various purposes. In the West, these are primarily Poland and Hungary. According to the State Frontier Service of Ukraine, the highest entry rate to Poland was registered in 2001, when Ukrainian citizens visited the country 4.6 mln times; the highest entry rate to Hungary was registered in 2003 (2.2 mln visits).

In terms of permanent emigration of Ukrainians (registered by the State Statistics Committee of Ukraine) Poland and Hungary are not in the top of the list. However, these countries are among the major destination countries for emigrants from the Western border areas. Specifically, up to 90% migrants from Ukraine to Hungary come from Zakarpattya, and one in five Ukrainian migrants to Poland comes from Lviv oblast.

Population of the frontier areas performs temporary migrations to the neighbouring countries. Until recently, simplified border crossing procedure facilitated this phenomenon: inhabitants of the frontier area settlements were allowed to visit the neighbouring country without foreign passport, only with a special enclosure in the national passport, through local crossings, including pedestrian crossings. In Zakarpattya oblast only, 65.5 thousand enclosures were issued in 2001. The daily number of border crossing with simplified procedure amounted to 13-13.5 thousand individuals and 7-8 thousand vehicles.

In addition to the geographic proximity, developed transportation, and close historical ties, special characteristics of population structure in the frontier areas also facilitate higher rates of migration to the neighbouring countries; specifically, frontier areas are characterized by high percentage of national minorities currently deepening and broadening their ties with mother nations. For instance, in Zakarpattya with 151 thousand citizens of Hungarian nationality comprising 96% Hungarians in Ukraine, there are 15 Hungarian associations, Hungarian educational establishments, and newspapers; broad cultural, educational, and business contacts with Hungary are maintained.

Ukrainians resettled from Poland in the post-war period and their successors, widely present in the Western region, are also systematically involved in transborder contacts. Democratization of the Polish and Ukrainian societies provided them an opportunity to visit the places of burial of their ancestors and Ukrainian sacred places in the neighbouring country.

Strong friendly ties with Hungary and Poland, cooperation between governments of frontier areas, contacts between businesses and organizations (in particular, activities of Bug and Carpathian Euroregions which include the Western oblasts of Ukraine as well as frontier area administrative units of the neighbouring countries) facilitate development of various international exchanges in frontier areas.

At the same time, transborder migration mainly originates from individual initiatives. In the years of economic crisis, decreasing income of the population, and growing unemployment, numerous Ukrainians made their living by carrying small amounts of goods through the border to receive income due to difference in prices. While this 'shuttle' business became less popular as economic situation improved, it still remained relevant for the frontier areas. This business is justified from the economic point of view, due to the geographic proximity, developed transportation, access to direct information on the state of affairs in the neighbouring countries, and close personal ties with their citizens.

Very much like the 'shuttle' trips, temporary, seasonal, and even long term foreign employment actively practiced by frontier areas population has economic grounds. According to estimates of the Zakarpattya Oblast State Administration, at least 150 thousand people from the oblast, or 13.4% of the economically active population, work abroad; in rural areas, this share reaches 23%. The number of people practicing foreign employment in Lviv oblast is estimated at 150-180 thousand, amounting to at least 10% of the working age population. Significant part of those seeking foreign employment go to the neighbouring countries.

Special features of life in the frontier areas were demonstrated in certain characteristics of population identified in the population survey in the frontier areas of Volyn, Zakarpattya, and Lviv oblasts carried out after the neighbouring countries of the Central Europe joined the EU in summer 2003 (538 survey questionnaires contain the data on 1577 adult members of households). According to the data received, almost half of the respondents had relatives who permanently resided abroad; in Zakarpattya, the share of such respondents was around 70%. Over half of adult members of the surveyed households (comprising 70% people of working age) had foreign passports, while this rate for the general population of Ukraine comprises around 20% only. Knowledge of the neighbouring countries languages is typical for the population of frontier areas. In the frontier areas of Lviv and Volyn oblast, over one third of respondents spoke Polish; in Zakarpattya oblast, almost 17% ethnic Ukrainians spoke Hungarian.

According to survey data, almost 80% adult members of the surveyed households had experience of travel to Poland and Hungary. Moreover, only 2% reported to visit these countries once in several years, and 5.6% - once a year. One third of respondents reported to cross the border 2 to 10 times a year, 14.8% travelled monthly, 17.5% - 2-3 times a month, 17.7% - once a week, and 8.7% - several times a week. In other words, respondents usually visited the neighbouring countries once a month or more often.

In 2003, before introduction of visas, for the majority of trips to Poland and Hungary performed by respondents, the purpose was to buy or sell goods (57.9%); 8.7% trips were made for the purpose of foreign employment; 12.7% respondents travelled to visit relatives and acquaintances or places of burial of family members; tourism was the purpose of 8.5% trips, business meetings – of 7% trips; 3% trips were performed to participate in cultural, sports, religious, and other events.

Accordingly, foreign trips were mostly of economic nature. Coming to Poland or Hungary with a block of cigarettes and 2 litres of alcohol allowed by the customs rules, or with a full tank of gas, one could have earned up to 20 USD per day; being employed at the other side of the border, one could have earned 200-300 USD per month. This was the 'road of life', as no other opportunities to make a living existed. A group of 'professional' commuters was established who regularly went abroad and had no other business. In the survey, 40% respondents named commuting to foreign countries among additional sources of income for their households, while 15.2% named it as a main source of income. Foreign trips were of a special importance for households with the unemployed, with retired people, and with those who did not work.

It can be assumed that relatively high subjective assessment of family well-being is related to visits to foreign countries: 19.7% families described themselves as being well off, 63.6% - as living 'at a normal level'. Only 13.6% described their well-being as bad, and 3.2% provided no answer. These assessments differ dramatically from those received in the national sociological monitoring, where only 1.1% Ukrainians described themselves as rich, 45.6% as poor, and 53% as being at a medium level. In other words, the share of those satisfied with their level of well-being appeared to be 19 times higher in the frontier areas, and the share of those who described themselves as poor was 3.5% times lower.

Therefore, the area of free travel established in 1990-s in the Central Europe due to democratic reforms in Ukraine as well as in the neighbouring countries was of a large importance not only for development of friendly neighbour relations and cooperation between countries, but also for survival of a certain category of Ukrainian citizens, primarily the population of frontier areas which mainly were considered depressive regions that experienced the strongest impact of the economic crisis.

However, in the beginning of the new century, introduction of visa regime for Ukrainian citizens' visits to the neighbouring countries that joined the EU threatened the opportunity of free border crossing for population of the Western frontier areas.

In 2000, visa regime for Ukrainians was introduced by Slovakia. As a result, the number of visits of Ukrainian citizens to this country decreased significantly, from 800 thousand in 1999 to around 400 thousand in 2004. Their share in the total number of foreign visits of Ukrainians in the respective time period decreased from 6.6% to 2.4%.

Part of the transborder flow was redirected to Hungary and Poland that maintained free entry regime until the autumn of 2003. Taking into account the scope of transborder migration, these countries agreed to issue visas to Ukrainians free of charge. In return, Ukraine maintained free entry regime for citizens of these countries. However, this did not prevent the notable decline in transborder migration, especially in the first months after introduction of visas. In 2004 Ukrainians performed 1.6 mln visits to Hungary, compared to 2.2 mln in 2003. While the total number of visits to Poland remained in 2004 at the previous level of 3.8 mln, their share decreased from 24.5% to 24% due to the increased total number of foreign trips.

Population of the frontier areas linked with multiple humanitarian and business ties with the neighbouring countries was most strongly affected by introduction of visa regime. Their migration was complicated by the necessity to obtain visas as well as by the limit of 90 days of stay in the neighbouring country even with multiple entry visa. Mobility of the frontier areas population was also affected by denouncement of agreements on local border crossing resulting from bringing this regime in compliance with EU standards. New rules for entry of the neighbouring countries introduced after the neighbouring countries joined the EU also negatively affected transborder travel. Specifically, according to the resolution of the Minister of Internal Affairs of Poland, availability of significant amount of cash is now a requirement for entering the country. As the neighbouring countries intensified frontier control, border crossing for Ukrainian citizens and vehicles became associated with difficulties and queues at the entry points; also, more severe customs rules caused problems with luggage.

However, the mentioned survey among the frontier areas population demonstrated that only 12.7% respondents planned to stop visiting the neighbouring countries; one third of adult members of households (32.7%) believed they would have to decrease the number of visits, while the majority of respondents intended to travel to the neighbouring countries as often as before.

To implement these plans they would have to apply for visas to the consular departments of the respective countries. To serve the population of the frontier areas, visa departments were opened in the consular agencies of the Republic of Poland in Lviv and Lutsk as well as in the Hungarian consular department in Uzhhorod. Special consular department was opened in Berehove where the Hungarian population resided in Zakarpattya. Certainly, citizens also had an opportunity to apply to the consular departments of these countries in the capital.

According to the survey carried out in 9 months after introduction of visas, only 30% of adult members of households succeeded in receiving visas at that moment. Although the majority of visa owners encountered no problems, 17.4% noted some difficulties in this process, mainly related to tremendous queues in consular departments after introduction of visa regime. To avoid wasting several days or even several weeks in the queue, people had to pay to various intermediaries, for instance, to travel companies, that offered 'visa support' for a specified compensation. 40% respondents who received visas sought help of other individuals or

organizations for this purpose. In average, respondents had to pay USD 10 for free visas, while some respondents paid up to USD 100; additionally, citizens incurred high transportation costs, as residents of frontier areas had to perform many trips to the oblast cities where consular departments were located.

Work of consular departments of the neighbouring countries gradually became better organized (for instance, the consular department of Poland in Lviv currently issues up to thousand visas daily), suspicious intermediaries were approached by law enforcement authorities, citizens got accustomed to the requirements, and the rush gradually faded out. Nevertheless, twice less visits to Poland and Hungary were made by respondents after introduction of visas, compared to the same time period in 2003 before introduction of visas. Visa processing required money, time, and moral efforts. Therefore, according to survey data, representatives of the most mobile age categories were the those who succeeded in received visas first – these were mostly men, and primarily those who had business contacts with foreign countries, entrepreneurs, those who performed regular business trips, and those who assessed their financial state as good. Alternatively, elderly and retired people, students, and those with low income encountered most difficulties in obtaining visas.

Those who encountered difficulties include people deported from Poland in the post-war period, elderly people who faced problems in visiting their native towns/villages, and low-income citizens who sought additional income by crossing the border with some simple goods to sell.

Therefore, some kind of selection among frontier areas travellers took place. Visas helped to push out the weakest and least socially protected categories. However, as survey data demonstrates, they did not result in decrease of individual trade in the frontier area that was one of the key reasons for introduction of visas in the neighbouring countries.

Purchase and sale of goods remained the primary goal of visits to Poland and Hungary for the population of frontier areas after introduction of visas; moreover, the share of such trips has increased from 57.9% before visas introduction to 61.3% after.

The share of trips to visit relatives and acquaintances as well as transit through Poland and Hungary also increased (from 2.7% to 3.1%). Taking into account that the share of trips for the purpose of foreign employment declined from 8.5% to 6.8%, it can be assumed that introduction of visas redirected part of the labour migrants flow to other countries. It is the strongest concern that the percentage of trips for the purpose of participation in cultural, sports, and other events declined after introduction of visas from 2.9% to 1.9%, and the share of tourist visits decreased from 8.5% to 2.7% (see Chart 1).

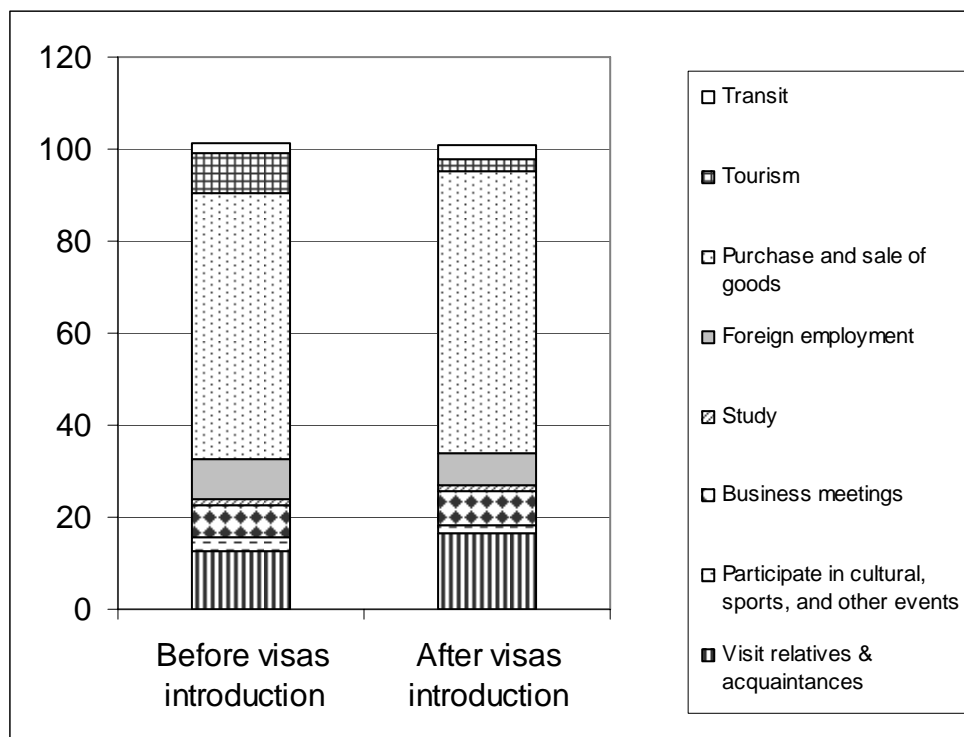


Chart 1. Breakdown of the last trips by members of the surveyed households to Poland and Hungary before and after introduction of visas, %

Dynamics of foreign travel among population of frontier areas was demonstrated through respondent's assessment of impacts of visa introduction. Over half of the respondents (52.6%) claimed that many people lost the opportunity to earn money that their families needed, and 22.1% noted the negative impact on their well-being. These were predominantly the elderly people, women, unemployed, citizens with low educational level, and representatives of families with many children.

Almost 47% respondents believed that introduction of visas infringed the Ukrainians' right for free movement. The feeling of offence at citizens of the neighbouring countries who entered Ukraine freely as before was aggravated by the fact that Polish and Hungarians started to take on the frontier area 'shuttle' trade earlier practiced by Ukrainians, in this way used their right to enter Ukraine without visas, while prices for consumer goods in their countries increased dramatically. In a number of cases, dissatisfaction resulted in open protests. For instance, several times population of the frontier area villages in Lviv oblast, mostly elderly women, blocked activities of the entry points at the Ukrainian-Polish border to demonstrate their protest against limiting their opportunities to enter this country.

Therefore, while introduction of visas did not result in renewal of the iron curtain in the centre of Europe, it introduced paper barriers that especially affected certain categories of population in the frontier areas. Problems of a larger scale should be expected after the neighbouring countries join the Schengen zone that will result in an essentially more severe procedure of

visas processing for Ukrainians. Successful Ukraine's integration to the EU is the only way to address the citizens' problems with visas in a radical way. However, systematic diplomatic efforts are required today to soften visa requirements – specifically, introduction of special simplified border crossing procedure for the population of frontier areas.

Center for International Relations

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