

Local Migration Security and Human Capital Retention: Institutional Responses of Ukrainian Communities Under War Conditions



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Citation: Mulska, O., Bil, M., Leshchukh, I., Baranyak, I., Dubyna, M., & Babych, L. (2026). Local migration security and human capital retention: Institutional responses of Ukrainian communities under war conditions. *Theoretical and Practical Research in Economic Fields*, 17(3), 923–938. [https://doi.org/10.14505/tpref.v17.3\(39\).21](https://doi.org/10.14505/tpref.v17.3(39).21)

Article info: Received 28 March 2026;
Received in revised form 19 May 2026;
Accepted 22 July 2026;
Published 30 September 2026.

Abstract: The wartime displacement of Ukraine's population has intensified the need for territorial communities to retain human capital and integrate internally displaced persons (IDPs). This study examines how representatives of local self-government bodies (LSGs) assess the institutional and managerial capacity of communities to respond to these challenges. The empirical evidence comes from an online expert survey of 51 LSG representatives from 51 urban, settlement, and rural communities in 11 regions of Ukraine, conducted in April - May 2025. Descriptive and inferential statistics, including a one-sample t-test, a Wilcoxon signed-rank test, and normalized Shannon entropy, were applied to analyze the survey results. Respondents most frequently associated community capacity to retain human capital with youth, transport, and medical infrastructure; cultural and recreational spaces; industrial parks and innovation hubs; and housing development. The findings also reveal limited local analytical capacity: 10% of respondents reported systematic migration monitoring, 44% reported monitoring that required improvement, and 46% reported no monitoring. The results characterize institutional perceptions and practices rather than residents' migration intentions. The study extends the territorial resilience perspective by showing how decentralized wartime governance links migration security with youth policy, social infrastructure, IDP integration, local employment, intersectoral cooperation, and migration monitoring. The findings can inform local migration-security strategies and human-capital retention programs, subject to the limitations of an institutionally homogeneous, cross-sectional expert sample.

Keywords: security; human capital; communities; local self-government bodies; tools; migration; Ukraine; war.

JEL Classification: F22; J61; O15; R23.

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Introduction

The intensification of migration processes in the conditions of war, protracted socio-economic crisis, depopulation and intensification of interterritorial competition for human resources forms one of the key security and development challenges for Ukraine. For territorial communities, migration increasingly determines not only demographic dynamics, but also the prospects for economic growth, the functioning of the local labor market, the reproduction of human capital, the ability to maintain social cohesion and ensure post-war recovery. Under such conditions, migration security becomes important not as a narrow regulatory direction, but as a systemic characteristic of the ability of communities to retain the population, integrate internally displaced persons, stimulate the return of migrants, minimize the loss of labor and intellectual potential, and create conditions for sustainable local development.

The relevance of the study is enhanced by the fact that the existing institutional and managerial mechanisms for regulating migration processes at the community level often do not correspond to the scale of modern challenges. Insufficient coordination between levels of government, weak migration monitoring systems, limited resource base of communities, uneven institutional capacity, as well as the lack of a holistic strategy for preserving human capital reduce the effectiveness of local migration policy. As a result, community responses to migration consequences often remain situational, whereas current conditions require a proactive governance model focused on youth development, family support, employment opportunities, the integration of mobile populations, and the creation of a safe and attractive living environment.

The article examines migration security as a condition for the reproduction of community human capital and assesses the institutional and managerial mechanisms used by Ukrainian local governments under war conditions. Existing studies largely address the securitization of migration at national and supranational levels, whereas evidence on the role of decentralized local governance in a migrant-donor country experiencing war remains limited. The study therefore focuses on the perceived capacity of communities to retain and develop human capital through social, educational, medical, transport, digital, and security infrastructure; youth policy; cooperation with business and state institutions; and local migration monitoring.

The aim is to determine how representatives of Ukrainian local self-government bodies assess the institutional and managerial mechanisms that support migration security and human-capital retention under war and macroeconomic instability. The objectives are to identify the infrastructure and organizational measures considered most relevant to limiting population outflow; describe current local practices in youth support, IDP integration, employment development, and business cooperation; assess the state of migration monitoring; and clarify the contribution of decentralized wartime governance to territorial resilience. Because the survey did not measure residents' migration intentions or subsequent migration behavior, the study identifies institutional priorities and perceived associations rather than causal effects on emigration.

The first section summarizes theoretical approaches to the interpretation of migration security and its connection with the reproduction of human capital of communities. The second section presents the research methodology and characteristics of the empirical base. The third section presents the results of the survey on institutional and managerial mechanisms for preserving human potential in communities of Ukraine. The fourth section substantiates the priority areas for strengthening migration security at the community level. In the final part, conclusions are formulated and prospects for further research are outlined.

1. Literature Review

The problem of migration security largely depends on the object of study. For recipient countries of migrants, the concept of 'the securitisation of migration' prevails, which explains the relationship between migration and security. In receiving states, securitization frames migration as a policy issue associated with perceived risks to social stability, identity, border governance, and political cohesion (Huysmans, 2000; Bigo, 2002; Ceyhan & Tsoukala, 2002).

As migration flows and the associated policy challenges have intensified, scholarly attention has increasingly focused on securitization practices concerning forced and economic migration, particularly in the context of border governance (Léonard, 2010). Despite the widespread perception of migration as a way of 'self-help from below', it is the state that plays a key role in ensuring the positive impact of migration on development (de Haas, 2010). In the context of the migration crisis, attention is increasing to the relationship between migration, security and resilience, as the challenges of migration lead to the adaptation of response policies, because of which migration is considered not only as an object of securitization, but also as a factor in strengthening resilience (Bourbeau, 2015). Migration aspects should be integrated into security policy, forming a common security strategic culture (Estevens, 2018).

As a result, migration has become a powerful challenge, the response to which requires the use of new management approaches, not limited to the security of the borders of the recipient state. The concept of 'hypergovernance' describes transnational interventions in countries of origin through economic assistance, humanitarian support, and educational programs (Humphrey, 2013). Migrant-receiving states also use outsourcing and externalization practices that transfer elements of migration control to transit or origin countries (Pacciardi & Berndtsson, 2022). However, such practices may restrict access to protection and reveal tensions between migration control and human-rights obligations (Faist, 2018).

The scale of forced migration after 2022 caused by Russian armed aggression against Ukraine and other armed conflicts requires a revision of approaches to migration regulation, considering security goals. Thanks to the accumulation of scientific knowledge and practical experience in the field of securitisation of migration, a system of

traditional ideas about security has been formed, which is complemented by the latest concepts of humanism, risk and resilience, forming a 'securitising tapestry' (Stepka, 2022). In the discourse of humanism and freedom of mobility, securitisation remains the main approach. As an example, the concept of "the migrant other" (the concept of Othering) has emerged, which has begun to be actively used in political and informational influences, acquiring predominantly negative connotations (Kabata & Jacobs, 2023).

For migrant donor states, migration security problems are often considered through an individual dimension. Security can be a factor in decision-making about migration, which leads to its forced forms and the emergence of so-called 'uprooted migrants' (Zwingmann & Pfister-Ammende, 1973). Forced migration has a direct impact on security due to the risks of loss of state control and requires interdisciplinary research and transnational management approach (Castles, 2003). Forced migration increases with fear of persecution (Moore & Shellman, 2004). The factor of armed conflict has both a direct and indirect impact on the choice of flight due to the consequences for the economy, infrastructure and social conditions (Prakash, 2012). Periodic waves of forced migrations stimulated the establishment of an international regime for the protection of forced migrants (Braithwaite *et al.* 2019).

For migrant donor states with a better security situation, where migration is relatively voluntary (usually due to economic reasons), the issues of the impact of migration on the well-being of the population and the possibility of meeting basic needs due to migration incomes are raised (Choithani, 2017; Obi *et al.* 2020). If for receiving and transit states the main issue is security at the national level, then for donor states the issues of human security are relevant: in fact, in the antagonism of the interests of the state and a person, the impact of migration on security is determined (Wohlfeld, 2014).

Migration is an investment in human capital and can lead to both growth and losses depending on the quality of education, professional experience, and conditions for the use of skills (Bowman & Myers, 1967). Despite the risks, migration involves new experiences and knowledge for migrants (Williams, 2006; Lulle, Janta & Emilsson, 2021). Migration redistributes human capital and has a significant impact on the economy and well-being of the population (Sasin & McKenzie, 2007). Migration intentions tend to contribute to the accumulation of human capital at the individual level but lead to brain drain for the donor state (Di Maria & Strykowski, 2009). The acquisition of knowledge and 'skill accumulation rate' combined with the return of migrants can not only compensate for brain drain, but also provide brain gain if re-emigrants contribute to the 'expansion of local skills' (Dustmann *et al.* 2011). Since human capital needs largely determine migration policies, donor states should develop the internal labor market, make effective use of remittances and social capital of migrants, orient educational training to the needs of both national economies and destination economies to prevent brain waste (Beenstock *et al.* 2015). Migration has different effects on human capital development depending on its nature: temporary migrants are more likely to accept low-skilled labor, while long-term migrants may accept lower wages to gain knowledge and experience, investing in their own human capital (Adda *et al.* 2022).

Individual-level optics on migration security issues actualize scientific research on response policy at the community level. As a result, a separate direction of research on migration security of territorial communities is being formed, within which their ability to regulate migration processes so that they are assets of development is determined.

The study of migration at the community level allows for a more substantive understanding of migration effects – using remittances, business development, changes in the social structure and well-being of the population (Taylor *et al.* 1996). Migration is an asset for host communities if in dyadic interaction value, cultural and linguistic differences do not lead to the exclusion of migrants (Hardin, 2005). To reduce the risks associated with migration, it is necessary to consider the characteristics of transnational communities through the activities of migration civil society institutions (Theodore & Martin, 2007).

The different territorial context of the migration experience determines the importance of the local level of its regulation: the formation of a 'forced migration economy' if the community receives forced migrants, which allows for long-term benefits (Ruiz & Vargas-Silva, 2013); ensuring integration and social interaction between migrants and the local population, taking into account the multivariate experience (Phillips & Robinson, 2015).

High human capital migration has a particular impact on the economies of regions, which requires an assessment of the consequences for both donors and recipients (Kooiman *et al.* 2018). Migration significantly affects the territorial distribution of human capital stocks between regions and communities, since people with a higher level of education are characterized by increased spatial mobility, therefore, their migration attractiveness and preservation of their own educated population. The advantages of decentralization in the securitisation of migration in theory give communities significant powers. In practice, this does not correspond to their capabilities,

although international organizations often adopt a top-down approach, expecting community resources to be mobilized to resolve migration issues ('bottom-up') (Lacroix, 2022).

Despite the contradictions, the preservation of the subjectivity of territorial communities in the securitisation of migration remains noticeable. It acquires exceptional relevance for productive areas, from the local authorities of which even minor incentives for migration have significant effects (Selod & Shilpi, 2021). The same applies to migration-attractive metropolitan cities. These processes generate different challenges for recipient and donor communities, including pressures on social integration in destination areas and the cumulative effects of human-capital loss in places of origin (Awasthi, 2021).

Other challenges are faced by donor communities, a significant share of which are formed by rural areas. Counter-urbanization processes after the Covid-19 pandemic have partially reduced migration risks for rural communities, due to the suspension of youth emigration, internal migration with 'second homes' and the spread of remote work (González-Leonardo *et al.* 2022). However, rural communities continue to suffer in the 'urban-rural migration' system. To ensure their development using migration capital, it is necessary to implement social protection measures for vulnerable categories of migrants (Lagakos *et al.* 2023).

For communities that are in crisis conditions for various reasons (security, economic, political, environmental, etc.), strengthening migration security is a matter of preserving human capital necessary for recovery and gaining resilience. In the communities of Ukraine, the problem of migration security is largely related to the need to preserve human capital. EU Member States have demonstrated the capacity to integrate more than 4 million refugees from Ukraine into education and labour systems (Guild & Groenendijk, 2023). Communities that were able to expand local labor markets after the arrival of forced migrants from Ukraine became a place of their integration without further secondary migration (Zuchowski, 2025). In contrast to the effective policies of the host states, the state and local authorities of Ukraine can restrain external emigration by directing migration flows to the internal dimension – to regions and communities with a better security situation (Voznyak *et al.* 2023). Re-emigration to Ukraine is promising, which should be stimulated by evidence-based reintegration policies (Jauhiainen, 2026). To understand such opportunities, it is necessary to identify the potential of communities in strengthening migration security and implementing an effective migration strategy aimed at developing human capital.

2. Materials and Methods

An expert survey of representatives of local self-government bodies was conducted to assess the institutional and managerial mechanisms used by territorial communities to strengthen migration security under war and macroeconomic shocks. The unit of observation was an LSG representative involved in local policy design or implementation. Accordingly, the survey measured institutional perceptions and reported practices; it did not measure the migration intentions or behavior of residents, youth, IDPs, or entrepreneurs.

The purposive sample comprised 51 representatives of 51 territorial communities in 11 regions of Ukraine (Volyn, Lviv, Ternopil, Vinnytsia, Kyiv, Chernihiv, Sumy, Poltava, Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, and Odesa), with one respondent representing each community. Respondents were selected according to professional competence and functional involvement in local decision-making. The community sample included urban, settlement, and rural communities, with four or five communities represented in each region. Respondents included council heads and heads or specialists of local-government units responsible for education, culture and leisure, social protection, economic development, investment, and legal support. The design provides variation in territorial and administrative contexts but does not constitute a probability sample of all Ukrainian communities.

The field stage was conducted in April - May 2025 using a standardized online questionnaire administered through Google Forms (Table 1). Participation was voluntary, and the same wording and response options were presented to all respondents. Standardization of the instrument and reporting results only in aggregate reduced interviewer effects and the risk of attributing answers to individual officials. Nevertheless, institutional self-assessment and social desirability bias cannot be excluded because all respondents represented LSGs. The questionnaire contained multiple-response items, single-choice items, and a five-point assessment of community cohesion.

The analysis used descriptive statistics appropriate to the questionnaire design. For single-choice questions, percentages were calculated relative to the 51 respondents. For multiple-response questions, each selected option was recorded as a separate mention, and the percentage reported for an option represents its share in the total number of selections for that question; it should not be interpreted as the percentage of respondents. The analysis ranks perceived institutional priorities and reported practices but does not estimate causal effects. Factor or

structural models would additionally require respondent-level item data and a larger sample suitable for stable parameter estimation.

Table 1. Structure and measurement framework of the expert survey

No.	Analytical domain	Survey item	Response format and measured variables
I	Infrastructure for human-capital retention	Which infrastructure projects or measures are considered most appropriate for reducing population emigration from the community?	<i>Multiple response</i> : transport infrastructure; housing development; safe shelters; medical infrastructure; youth centers; cultural, recreational, and open spaces; Internet and mobile connectivity; industrial parks, research and innovation clusters and hubs; environmental modernization
II	Local policy implementation	Which measures are implemented by LSGs to reduce population emigration during the war?	<i>Multiple response</i> : entrepreneurship support; job creation; social infrastructure; transport accessibility; environmental programs; youth support; business relocation; IDP integration; veteran integration and entrepreneurship; investment attraction; creative-economy development; territorial image-building
III	Youth policy	Which youth-support instruments are used in the community?	<i>Multiple response</i> : youth councils; youth mayor; youth public organizations; youth centers; access to quality education; extracurricular activities; sports facilities and playgrounds
IV	Social cohesion	How do you assess the level of cohesion in your community?	<i>Five-point ordinal scale</i> : 1 is very low; 2 is low; 3 is moderate; 4 is high; 5 is very high
V	Human-capital retention strategy	Which strategic priority should guide the preservation of human resources in the community?	<i>Multiple response</i> : entrepreneurship and job creation; infrastructure and quality of life; family and youth support; educational and medical services; social housing
VI	Migration-security priorities	Which measures should be implemented to strengthen migration security in the community?	<i>Multiple response</i> : reducing emigration; stimulating return migration; integrating IDPs; attracting immigrants; migration monitoring; ensuring equal access to services; strengthening cooperation with state authorities
VII	Migration monitoring	Does the community monitor migration processes?	<i>Single choice</i> : systematic monitoring; monitoring that requires improvement; no monitoring
VIII	Intersectoral cooperation	How do LSGs interact with businesses and other institutions to reduce population emigration from the community?	<i>Single choice</i> : joint job-creation programs; labor-market monitoring; partnerships with educational institutions; support for social enterprises and SMEs; absent or unstructured cooperation
IX	Agglomeration effects	How do urban agglomerations affect population mobility, business activity, and human-capital retention in the community?	<i>Five-category ordinal assessment</i> : negative; partly negative; neutral; partly positive; positive

Note: LSGs is local self-government bodies; IDPs is internally displaced persons; SMEs is small and medium-sized enterprises. Items I-III, V, and VI allowed multiple responses; Items VII and VIII required a single response. Items IV and IX were measured using ordinal scales. Multiple-response items included an open 'Other' option.

Descriptive results were supplemented with inferential and structural-distribution analysis. For the perceived significance of emigration, measured on a 0–10 scale, the mean, standard deviation, median, and 95% confidence interval were calculated. A one-sample t-test was used to determine whether the mean assessment differed from the scale midpoint of 5. Since community cohesion was measured on a five-point ordinal scale, the median and interquartile distribution were analyzed, and a one-sample Wilcoxon signed-rank test was applied relative to the neutral midpoint of 3. The concentration of responses to multiple-response questions was assessed using the normalized Shannon entropy index. Statistical significance was evaluated at $p < 0.05$.

An H_n value close to 0 indicates that responses are concentrated around a few priorities, whereas a value approaching 1 indicates a more even distribution across response options.

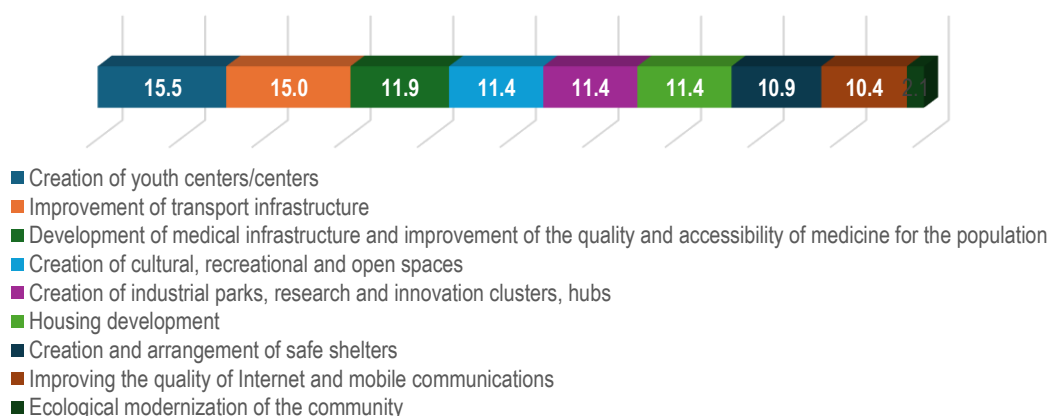
3. Research Results

The perceived significance of emigration for territorial communities averaged 6.37 points on a 0–10 scale ($SD = 2.39$; median = 6.00). The 95% confidence interval ranged from 5.70 to 7.05. A one-sample t -test showed that the mean assessment was significantly higher than the scale midpoint of 5 ($t = 4.10$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, LSG representatives generally perceived emigration as a substantial community-level problem.

Reducing population outflow from Ukrainian territorial communities requires coordinated spatial, social, and economic measures. The distribution of responses identifies the infrastructure priorities perceived by LSG representatives. The creation of youth centers accounted for the largest share of all selections (15.5%), indicating that local officials associate youth-oriented spaces with opportunities for non-formal education, civic participation, and local self-realization. These results represent the relative prominence of options in institutional assessments and do not demonstrate their causal effect on migration behavior.

Improvement of transport infrastructure constituted 15.0% of all selections and ranked second among the proposed infrastructure measures (Figure 1). Development of medical infrastructure accounted for 11.9%, while cultural, recreational, and open spaces; industrial parks and research or innovation hubs; and housing development each accounted for 11.4%. Safe shelters represented 10.9% of selections. Together, these priorities indicate that respondents link human-capital retention with access to services, employment opportunities, housing, connectivity, and physical security. Improving Internet and mobile connectivity represented 10.4% of all selections, reflecting its relevance to remote employment, online education, and access to public services. Environmental modernization accounted for 2.1%. The lower relative frequency of this option indicates its position in the surveyed officials' immediate wartime priorities; it does not establish that environmental conditions are unimportant for long-term community attractiveness.

Figure 1. Infrastructure measures considered relevant to migration security in Ukrainian communities, 2025 (share of total selections, %)



In the context of the aggravation of the migration crisis, local self-government bodies are forced to adapt the policy of local economic development to the challenges related to the preservation of human potential and socio-demographic stability. Empirical data on the implemented measures demonstrate multi-vector approaches, at the same time reflecting the limited resource base and the uneven institutional capacity of territorial communities in Ukraine.

According to the results of the expert survey, it was found that the largest share among the implemented measures are initiatives aimed at improving the quality of social infrastructure (11.9%). This includes investments in the health care system, education, housing and communal services, as well as the development of cultural and sports infrastructure. This approach forms the basis for improving the quality of life, reducing the outflow of the population and keeping young people and families with children in the community.

Transport accessibility and mobility accounted for 11.4% of all selections among measures reported as being implemented by LSGs (Figure 2). Youth-support programs represented 10.5%, while veteran integration and support for veteran entrepreneurship represented 9.6%. Environmental improvement and IDP integration each accounted for 8.7%; entrepreneurship support, communal job creation, and attraction of relocated enterprises each accounted for 8.2%. Investment attractiveness represented 6.4%, creative-economy development 5.0%, and community image-building 3.2%. The distribution indicates the relative emphasis reported by officials and should not be interpreted as an evaluation of the measures' effectiveness.

Figure 2. Measures implemented by local self-government bodies to limit population outflow, 2025 (share of total selections, %)

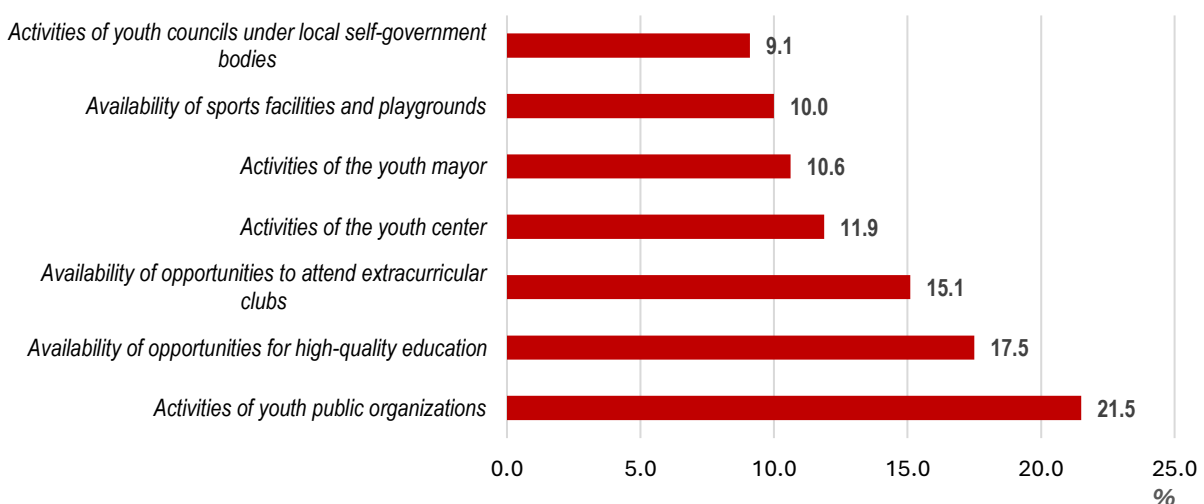


Therefore, the current set of measures in Ukrainian communities has the potential to reduce emigration, but requires strategic coherence, strengthening institutional support, focusing on long-term tools for human capital development, and more active communication with counterparties (NGOs, business entities, local population, etc.).

In the context of preserving human potential, especially in the youth segment, representatives of local governments emphasize the importance of introducing targeted tools to support the younger generation. Talking about measures aimed at strengthening the social activity of young people, their educational development, access to quality leisure and involvement in decision-making processes at the local level. Experts emphasize that young people are the most mobile and vulnerable group to emigration, so creating conditions for their self-realization within the community is considered as a key factor in increasing the socio-economic sustainability of territories.

The results indicate a diverse but uneven set of youth-support instruments. Activities of youth public organizations accounted for 21.5% of all selections, followed by access to quality education (17.5%) and opportunities to attend extracurricular clubs (15.1%) (Figure 3). Youth centers represented 11.9%, the youth-mayor mechanism 10.6%, sports facilities and playgrounds 10.0%, and youth councils under LSGs 9.1%. These figures show the relative prominence of institutional tools in officials' responses; they do not measure young residents' participation in or satisfaction with these instruments.

Figure 3. Youth-support instruments reported in Ukrainian communities, 2025 (share of total selections, %)



The normalized Shannon entropy values were high for infrastructure measures ($H_n = 0.968$), measures implemented by LSGs ($H_n = 0.981$), and youth-support instruments ($H_n = 0.977$). The proximity of all values to 1 indicates a dispersed distribution of responses without a single dominant policy option. The highest diversity

was observed for measures implemented by LSGs, while infrastructure priorities were relatively more concentrated. Overall, the findings indicate that local human-capital retention is perceived as a multidimensional governance task requiring a combination of infrastructure, social, economic, youth, and institutional measures.

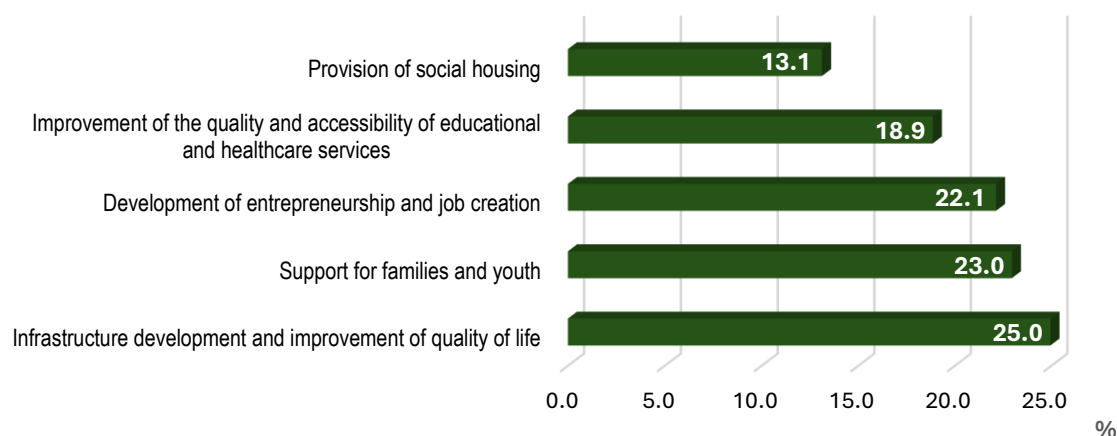
LSG experts also note the importance of developing non-formal education and leisure as components of youth support in communities. A significant share of the tools is the ability to visit circles (15.1%) and the activities of youth centers (11.9%), which create conditions for non-formal learning, creative expression, social interaction and preservation of mental health of young people. According to the respondents, the institutions of the youth mayor (10.6%) and youth councils under local self-government bodies (9.1%) are important mechanisms for involving the young generation in management processes. Their functioning demonstrates the readiness of communities to develop youth self-government, form managerial skills in young people, promote the development of civic activity and create feedback mechanisms with local authorities. This, in turn, increases the level of trust in institutions and contributes to more effective consideration of the needs of young people in decision-making. The presence of sports facilities and playgrounds (10.0%) complements the general system of support for young people, providing physical development, the formation of teamwork skills and organized leisure. This is an important preventive factor that reduces the risks of antisocial behavior, promotes social integration and improves the quality of life of young community residents.

In general, the results indicate the formation of an integral, albeit uneven in scale and intensity, field of youth policy instruments, focused on both the development of competencies and involvement in public administration. In the context of war, migration crisis and significant socio-demographic imbalances, such a policy should become a strategic tool for preserving human capital in the community.

Community cohesion received an average assessment of 3.86 points out of 5 (SD = 0.92; median = 4.00; 95% CI: 3.60–4.12). The Wilcoxon signed-rank test showed that the distribution was significantly above the neutral midpoint of 3 ($W = 17.0$, $p < 0.001$). Specifically, 37.3% of respondents selected 3 points, 31.4% selected 5 points, and 27.5% selected 4 points, whereas assessments of 1 or 2 points were rare. These results reflect the institutional perceptions of LSG representatives and should not be interpreted as an objective assessment of cohesion by community residents.

Among proposed strategies for preserving human resources, infrastructure development and improvement of quality of life accounted for 25.0% of all selections. Support for families and youth represented 23.0%, followed by entrepreneurship development and job creation at 22.1% (Figure 4). The distribution reflects LSG representatives' strategic priorities rather than direct assessments by community residents. Improving the quality and accessibility of educational and medical services accounted for 18.9% of all selections, while social housing represented 13.1%. These priorities link human-capital retention to employment, service accessibility, housing availability, and support for younger households. Their relative ranking provides evidence about local officials' policy preferences but does not establish the magnitude of their influence on migration decisions.

Figure 4. Strategic priorities for preserving human resources in Ukrainian communities, 2025
(share of total selections, %)



Thus, the results of the survey emphasize the urgent need to form a multidimensional and balanced community development strategy that would integrate infrastructural, social, economic and educational components. Such an integrated approach should be focused on the preservation, attraction and reproduction of human resources, in particular youth, IDPs, re-emigrants and skilled professionals. In the long term, the

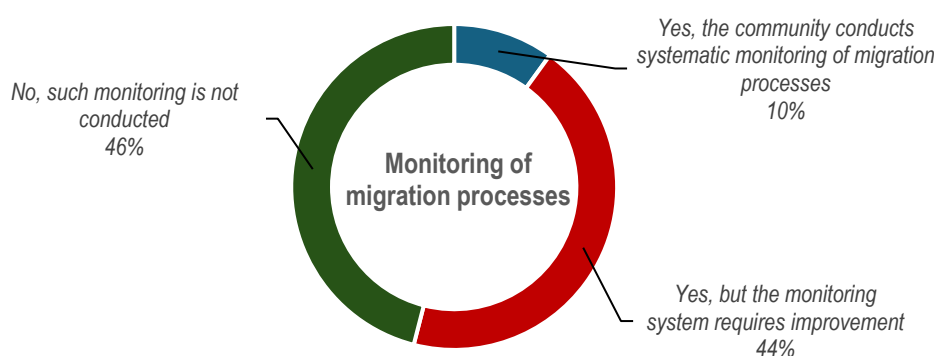
implementation of the migration strategy will contribute to increasing the demographic resilience, economic capacity, social cohesion and competitiveness of communities, ensuring their ability to adapt to macroeconomic and other shocks.

LSG representatives assessed community cohesion predominantly at medium or high levels. A score of 3 out of 5 was selected by 37.3% of respondents, 5 by 31.4%, and 4 by 27.5%; scores of 1 or 2 were rare. These results describe officials' perceptions of social cohesion. Because residents were not surveyed and no external cohesion indicator was used, the distribution cannot be treated as an objective measure of social integration or as evidence that social divisions are absent.

For effective management of migration processes and the development of a proactive policy for the preservation of human potential in Ukraine, an important prerequisite is the availability of systematic monitoring of these processes at the level of territorial communities. Monitoring allows timely identification of migration trends, assessment of demographic risks and implementation of timely measures to minimize the negative consequences of the outflow of human resources. The absence or insufficiency of such a tool significantly complicates the planning and forecasting of the economic development of communities, reducing their ability to respond to migration challenges.

Only 10% of respondents reported systematic monitoring of migration processes in their communities; 44% reported that monitoring existed but required improvement, and 46% reported that it was not conducted (Figure 5). This distribution indicates limited and uneven institutionalization of local migration monitoring. It also constrains communities' capacity to diagnose population movements and incorporate migration evidence into local planning.

Figure 5. Availability and status of migration monitoring in Ukrainian communities, 2025
(% of respondents)



In the context of modern challenges related to migration processes, ensuring migration security is becoming a priority for local self-government bodies. It covers not only control over the movement of the population, but also the creation of conditions for social integration, preservation of demographic potential and the formation of an attractive environment for various categories of the population, in particular IDPs and immigrants. Appropriate measures should be systematic and comprehensive and consider regional and local specifics. Thus, equal conditions for residents, IDPs, and immigrants accounted for 19.9% of all selections, while IDP integration represented 18.8%.

Figure 6. Proposed measures to strengthen migration security in Ukrainian communities, 2025
(share of total selections, %)

Ensuring equal conditions for residents, IDPs, and immigrants, 19.9	Measures for the integration of IDPs into the community, 18.8	Measures to stimulate immigration to the community in the long term, 17.8	Organization of comprehensive migration monitoring across all directions, 16.9	Strengthening cooperation with state authorities in migration regulation, 10.6	Measures to stimulate re-emigration (return migration) of population, 10.0
Measures to reduce the scale of population emigration, 8.1					

Measures aimed at stimulating future immigration to the community accounted for 17.8% of all selections, while the organization of systematic migration monitoring represented 16.9%. The prominence of these options

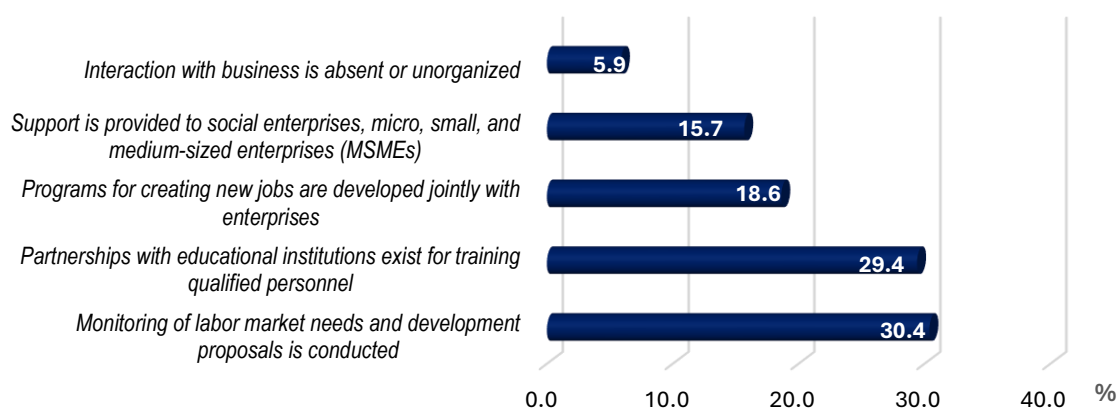
indicates that LSG representatives associate migration security with both the attraction of human resources and the development of local analytical capacity (Figure 6).

Cooperation with state authorities in migration regulation accounted for 10.6% of all selections, stimulation of return migration for 10.0%, and measures aimed at reducing emigration for 8.1%. These areas are important components of a comprehensive set of measures that ensure the formation of a balanced, adaptive and effective migration policy at the level of territorial communities of Ukraine. Therefore, the results of the study focus on the need to implement a multi-vector migration security strategy that integrates social integration, mechanisms to stimulate population mobility and strengthen analytical capacity for timely and effective response to migration challenges.

It is worth emphasizing that an important component of a comprehensive policy to preserve human potential in wartime is the effective interaction of local self-government bodies with local enterprises and other institutions. Such cooperation contributes to the formation of a favorable economic environment, the development of the labor market and the creation of new jobs, which are key factors in deterring the emigration of the population from the territory of communities.

The most frequently reported form of cooperation was monitoring labor-market needs and preparing development proposals (30.4% of respondents), followed by partnerships with educational institutions for skills development (29.4%) (Figure 7). Joint job-creation programs with enterprises were reported by 18.6%, support for social enterprises and micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises by 15.7%, and absent or unorganized business interaction by 5.9%. Because this was a single-choice item, percentages refer to respondents.

Figure 7. Forms of interaction between local self-government bodies, businesses, and other institutions, 2025 (% of respondents)



The reported forms of cooperation indicate the institutional channels through which LSGs seek to align skills development and employment policy with local labor-market needs. However, the survey did not measure the duration, intensity, or employment outcomes of these partnerships. Their actual effects on employment and migration therefore require separate evaluation.

The concentration of population and economic resources in large urban agglomerations increasingly affects the socioeconomic development of surrounding territorial communities. This impact manifests itself not only in the form of potential economic benefits, such as attracting investment or expanding sales markets, but also in the form of challenges, in particular the outflow of population and skilled personnel, which directly affects the demographic sustainability and competitiveness of regional labor markets. Considering these complex and often opposite effects is key to the formation of effective strategies for regional development, migration security and ensuring socio-economic resilience. Thus, the largest share of the surveyed representatives of local self-government bodies (35.3%) believes that urban agglomerations have a neutral impact, because socio-economic processes in their communities remain stable, and migration trends do not undergo radical changes. At the same time, 31.4% of experts assess the impact of agglomerations as partially negative: on the one hand, they bring certain advantages in the form of investments and expansion of sales markets, but at the same time lead to the outflow of human capital (Table 2).

The position of negative impact associated with the outflow of the population and qualified personnel to large cities in search of better working and living conditions is shared by 21.6% of local self-government representatives. Only a small share of experts (9.8%) admit that their community receives some opportunities for cooperation with

agglomerations, although migration challenges remain. And a very small percentage (2.0%) assesses the impact of agglomerations as positive, noting the development of the community without critical migration losses.

Table 2. Assessment of the impact of urban agglomerations on migration processes and human-capital retention in Ukrainian communities, 2025 (% of respondents)

Answer options	Rate, %
It has a neutral impact – agglomerations do not radically affect socio-economic processes in our community; migration trends remain stable	35.3
Partly negative – the development of an agglomeration can bring certain benefits (investments, sales markets), but at the same time causes the outflow of human capital	31.4
Negatively, the development of agglomerations and large cities leads to the outflow of population and personnel from our community in search of better working and living conditions	21.6
Partly positive – our community receives opportunities for cooperation, but migration challenges remain	9.8
Positively – contributes to the development of our community without critical migration losses	2.0

Expert assessments indicate that LSG representatives perceive the effects of urban agglomerations as mixed. Although agglomerations may expand access to investment, employment, and markets, respondents also associate them with the outflow of working-age residents and skilled personnel. Despite the potential benefits in the form of economic recovery, expansion of investment activities and markets, there are also negative demographic consequences, in particular the outflow of the working population and youth. This actualizes the need to form flexible regional strategies adapted to the local context, with an emphasis on balanced development and increasing the attractiveness of peripheral communities.

Ensuring the migration security of territorial communities requires a holistic and multi-component strategy that would combine the improvement of monitoring tools, the development of the social and infrastructure base, the stimulation of economic activity, the support of human potential and the establishment of effective intersectoral cooperation. The comprehensive implementation of such approaches will increase the socio-economic resilience of communities to migration threats and create conditions for economic recovery and long-term growth.

4. Discussion

The findings extend research on migration securitization by shifting the analytical focus from border control and national threat management to the institutional capacity of migrant-donor communities operating under war. Classical securitization research explains how migration becomes framed as a security concern in receiving states (Huysmans, 2000; Bigo, 2002; Ceyhan & Tsoukala, 2002). In the Ukrainian context examined here, local migration security concerns the continuity of community functions under population loss and displacement: retaining skills, integrating IDPs, sustaining local labor markets, and maintaining access to services. This interpretation avoids presenting migrants or displaced persons as threats and instead locates the security risk in the erosion of human and institutional capacity.

The results also refine the territorial-resilience perspective. Respondents associated human-capital retention with a bundle of mutually dependent local functions: youth infrastructure, transport and health services, housing, employment, cooperation with business, social cohesion, and migration monitoring. This pattern is consistent with resilience as an adaptive capacity embedded in local institutions rather than a single policy intervention (Bourbeau, 2015; Melnyk *et al.* 2023). The original contribution lies in identifying how these functions are assembled at community level within Ukraine's decentralized governance system while local authorities simultaneously manage wartime displacement and prepare for recovery.

Youth centers and youth public organizations occupied prominent positions in the response distributions. This institutional emphasis is broadly consistent with studies linking youth mobility to education, skills, employment opportunities, and place-based prospects (Lulle *et al.* 2021; Vasylytsiv *et al.* 2023, 2024). The present data add the perspective of local policy implementers: officials view youth-oriented civic and educational infrastructure as part of migration-security capacity. The survey does not establish that these instruments reduce emigration intentions, and their effects should be tested directly among young residents.

Transport, medical, and housing infrastructure were also prominent, suggesting that officials perceive human-capital retention through the accessibility and quality of everyday services. This complements research showing that migration reallocates human capital across territories and responds to spatial differences in opportunity (Faggian *et al.* 2018; Selod & Shilpi, 2021). In a wartime setting, service accessibility and physical security acquire additional significance because communities must accommodate displaced populations while maintaining services for existing residents.

The monitoring results expose an institutional gap: 46% of respondents reported no local migration monitoring, while another 44% considered existing arrangements insufficient. This finding qualifies expectations that decentralization automatically produces effective bottom-up migration governance (Lacroix, 2022; Halkiv et al, 2021). Formal authority without regular data collection, analytical routines, and coordination with state institutions limits anticipatory action. For territorial-resilience theory, the implication is that adaptive capacity depends on information infrastructure and feedback mechanisms as well as material resources. The emphasis on equal conditions for residents, IDPs, and immigrants further distinguishes the Ukrainian local model from security approaches centered on exclusion or externalization. The surveyed priorities align more closely with integration and human-security objectives, including equitable service access, social cohesion, and the incorporation of mobile populations into local labor markets (Voznyak *et al.* 2023). Under decentralized wartime governance, migration security can therefore be conceptualized as a community's institutional capacity to manage mobility while preserving rights, human capital, and essential local functions. These interpretations remain bounded by the research design. The evidence concerns reported practices and perceived priorities among LSG representatives. It cannot establish whether particular measures change residents' migration intentions or actual mobility. Causal testing would require a linked design combining administrative community indicators with representative surveys of residents, youth, IDPs, and economic actors, preferably observed over time.

The mean assessment of emigration was significantly above the scale midpoint, confirming that LSG representatives perceive population outflow as a substantial community-level problem. At the same time, the high normalized entropy values indicate that respondents did not associate human-capital retention with a single dominant policy measure. Instead, they perceived it as a multidimensional task combining infrastructure, employment, social services, youth support, and institutional cooperation.

Overall, the study contributes an empirically grounded local-governance dimension to the international literature on migration, security, and resilience. It identifies migration monitoring, youth policy, accessible services, integration, employment, and intersectoral cooperation as components of perceived community capacity under war. The Ukrainian case shows how decentralization places migration-related adaptation within everyday territorial governance and highlights the institutional conditions required for that responsibility to support post-war recovery.

Conclusions and Further Research

The survey shows that representatives of Ukrainian LSGs perceive migration security as closely connected with the reproduction of community human capital and territorial resilience. Under war, depopulation, external emigration, and internal displacement, respondents linked local capacity to youth policy, social and transport infrastructure, employment, integration, intersectoral cooperation, and migration monitoring. These findings describe institutional assessments in the sampled communities; they do not demonstrate direct causal effects on residents' migration behavior.

For multiple-response questions, the largest shares of selections concerned youth centers and transport infrastructure, followed by medical infrastructure, cultural and recreational spaces, innovation-oriented facilities, and housing. Among reported local practices, social infrastructure, transport accessibility, youth support, veteran integration, IDP integration, entrepreneurship, and job creation were prominent. The results support treating human-capital retention as a cross-sectoral local-governance task whose components require coordination rather than isolated interventions.

Migration monitoring remains the clearest institutional weakness: 10% of respondents reported systematic monitoring, 44% reported arrangements requiring improvement, and 46% reported no monitoring. Respondents prioritized equal conditions for residents, IDPs, and immigrants; IDP integration; future immigration; systematic monitoring; cooperation with state authorities; return migration; and reduced emigration. These priorities provide an agenda for local strategy development, but their effectiveness must be assessed using outcome data.

The practical value of the study lies in the fact that its results can be used by local self-government bodies in the development of migration security strategies, programs for the preservation and development of human capital, mechanisms for the integration of IDPs, stimulation of re-emigration, support for youth, development of partnerships with business and the formation of a system for monitoring migration processes at the local level.

The scientific contribution is a community-level interpretation of migration security for a migrant-donor country under war and decentralized governance. Whereas much of the international securitization literature focuses on borders, control, and receiving-state risks, the proposed perspective defines the relevant local security challenge as the loss of human and institutional capacity. The empirical results specify the institutional domains through which LSG representatives understand that capacity: youth policy, accessible infrastructure and services, integration of displaced populations, local employment, intersectoral cooperation, and migration monitoring. This

links migration governance to territorial resilience while avoiding the treatment of migrants and IDPs as security threats.

The study has five limitations. First, the purposive sample includes only LSG representatives; it captures an institutional perspective and may be affected by social desirability and institutional self-assessment bias. Standardized wording, voluntary participation, and aggregate reporting reduce some response pressures but cannot eliminate this bias. Second, residents, youth, IDPs, and entrepreneurs were not surveyed, so their migration intentions and evaluations of local policy remain unknown. Third, the sample of 51 communities is not statistically representative of all Ukrainian territorial communities and limits subgroup and cross-regional inference. Fourth, the cross-sectional design records assessments in April–May 2025 and cannot establish temporal order or causal effects. Fifth, the study relies on self-reported practices rather than administrative indicators of implementation intensity or outcomes.

Further research should combine a larger stratified sample of communities with parallel surveys of residents, youth, IDPs, and economic actors. A repeated or longitudinal design could link migration intentions and observed mobility to administrative indicators of employment, services, housing, security, and local policy implementation. With an adequate respondent-level sample, factor analysis could validate the latent dimensions of community capacity, while multilevel or ordinal models could estimate associations between individual migration intentions and community conditions. Such a design would support construction and validation of a local migration-security index and permit stronger causal analysis.

Declarations

Credit Authorship Contribution Statement: Authors have contributed equally to this research

Declaration of Competing Interest: The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Declaration of use of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies: The authors declare that they have not used generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process before submission.

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