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Liudmyla PETRENKO
doctor of economic sciences, professor,
Kyiv National Economic University named after Vadym Hetman

Людмила ПЕТРЕНКО
д.е.н., професор кафедри бізнес-економіки та підприємництва,
Київський національний економічний університет імені Вадима Гетьмана,
liudmyla.petrenko.3@kneu.ua

WAR IN UKRAINE AND THE LABOR MARKET

ВІЙНА В УКРАЇНІ ТА РИНОК ПРАЦІ

Abstract. The full-scale war in Ukraine has profoundly disrupted the national labor market. This article examines the war's impact on employment, the transition to remote and platform-based work, the effects of mass mobilization on workforce participation, regional disparities in job opportunities. The analysis draws on official labor statistics and research from Ukrainian institutions, data from major online job portals, and freelance platform reports. In the initial months of the invasion, unemployment surged and millions lost their jobs amid economic shock. The article discusses how the wartime mobilization drive in 2024 exacerbated labor shortages by pulling men out of the workforce and how employers adapted by hiring exempt groups. It also explores the geographic reallocation of labor demand, with western regions experiencing a post-war hiring boom while eastern regions remain depressed. Finally, the resilience of Ukraine's labor market is highlighted by the expansion of online freelance work, which provided a critical livelihood for many and now constitutes an important segment of employment during the war.
Keywords: war; labor market; Ukraine; unemployment; remote work; freelancing; regional disparities

Анотація. Повномасштабна війна в Україні суттєво дестабілізувала національний ринок праці. У статті досліджено вплив війни на зайнятість населення, перехід до дистанційної та платформенної роботи, наслідки масової мобілізації для робочої сили, а також регіональні диспропорції на ринку праці. Аналіз ґрунтується на офіційній статистиці ринку праці та дослідженнях українських інституцій, даних провідних онлайн-порталів з пошуку роботи та фриланс-платформ. У перші місяці після початку вторгнення рівень безробіття різко зріс, мільйони людей втратили роботу внаслідок економічного шоку. Розглянуто, як воєнна мобілізація 2024 р. посилила дефіцит кадрів через відтік чоловіків з ринку праці та як роботодавці змушені пристосовуватися, наймаючи працівників із числа тих, хто не підлягає призову. Також проаналізовано географічне перерозподілення попиту на робочу силу: західні області відчувають бум вакансій після релокації бізнесу, тоді як схід і південь залишаються в депресивному стані. Нарешті, підкреслюється стійкість вітчизняного ринку праці завдяки розширенню онлайн-фрилансу, який став для багатьох критичним джерелом доходу і нині є важливою складовою зайнятості в період війни.
Ключові слова: війна; ринок праці; Україна; безробіття; дистанційна робота; фриланс; регіональні диспропорції

Introduction. Ukraine's labor market has been severely disrupted by the war that began in 2022. In the first months after the full-scale invasion (February 2022), unemployment spiked to around *30%* – roughly double its pre-war level – and millions of people abruptly lost their jobs [1, 4]. This initial employment shock was driven by the deep economic contraction and widespread destruction caused by the Russian invasion. By the end of 2022, according to estimates

summarized by the National Institute for Strategic Studies (NISS), the unemployment rate had reached approximately one-third of the labor force [1]. At the same time, over 7 million Ukrainians fled abroad in the first six months of the war, greatly reducing the domestic workforce. Despite these dire conditions, Ukraine's labor market began to adapt in innovative ways. Notably, the online gig economy emerged as a critical safety net for displaced workers. Ukraine became one of the world's leading sources of online freelance labor, reflecting an accelerated shift toward remote and platform-based work. This paper analyzes these wartime labor market transformations across several dimensions: the surge in remote work and freelancing as alternative forms of employment; the impact of mass military mobilization on labor supply and hiring practices; the uneven regional effects of the war on job opportunities; and the rapid growth of the online freelance sector as a form of economic resilience. The study draws on data and analyses from a range of sources, including official Ukrainian research institutions (such as NISS and the Razumkov Centre), statistics from major job search platforms (Work.ua, Robota.ua, OLX Jobs), and reports from the largest freelance marketplace in Ukraine (Freelancehunt).

Impact of War on Employment and Remote Work

The outbreak of war in early 2022 caused an immediate collapse in traditional employment. With factories and offices destroyed or shut down due to active hostilities, vast numbers of Ukrainians found their jobs disappearing virtually overnight. By the spring of 2022, millions of workers were displaced either abroad or as internal refugees, further depleting the active labor force. In the face of these sudden losses, many people *"moved online" to earn a living*, turning to whatever remote work or digital freelancing opportunities were available. Ukraine's sizeable base of information technology professionals and other skilled freelancers helped facilitate this transition. According to a study by the Freelancehunt platform, *40.7% of current Ukrainian freelancers started freelancing after the invasion began*, while another 43% had already been freelancing before the war [2]. This indicates that almost half of the nation's freelancers entered the gig economy due to the war's disruptions, highlighting how online freelancing became a crucial fallback for those who lost stable jobs or faced insecurity during the conflict.

Employers, for their part, also *embraced remote work on an unprecedented scale*. Even companies that had previously been reluctant to allow telecommuting were forced by wartime conditions to operate remotely. Statistics from job portals illustrate this shift. In 2023, the number of remote job vacancies *in Ukraine's online job market increased by 39%.* By Mar 2024, remote roles were *8% of all vacancies (up from 5% pre-war)* [3]. Although an 8% share might seem modest, this increase in remote job availability is significant given that overall employment had not fully recovered; it shows that thousands of roles transitioned to a remote format. Surveys of Ukrainian job seekers further reveal a lasting change in *worker preferences*: only an estimated 8% of active job seekers say they prefer to work in an office full-time, whereas the vast majority now favor flexible or home-based roles. Companies that offer remote or hybrid working options reportedly receive up to five times more applicants than those requiring full-time presence on-site, indicating that flexibility has become a highly attractive attribute of jobs in the wartime context.

For the millions of Ukrainians who became refugees abroad or were internally displaced from their home regions, *online work became a lifeline*. Many skilled professionals who left the country continued working remotely for Ukrainian firms or foreign clients, effectively contributing to Ukraine's economy from exile. This phenomenon – a virtual diaspora workforce – helped sustain household incomes and preserved human capital that might otherwise have been lost. By some accounts, Ukraine's share of global online freelancing activity rose markedly in 2022 and 2023, as Ukrainian specialists flooded international freelance marketplaces. In essence, the war dramatically accelerated the country's ongoing digital transformation of work, pushing both individuals and businesses to adopt remote and platform-based employment arrangements out of necessity. What began as an emergency response has evolved into a structural change, with *freelancing and remote jobs* now firmly entrenched as major components of Ukraine's labor market during the war.

As of March 2024, there were about 8,184 remote vacancies out of ~106,000 total active vacancies on Robota.ua, compared to 5,914 remote vacancies out of ~105,000 total in February 2022 [3].

Effects of Military Mobilization on the Labor Market

As the war continued into its second year, a new shock hit the labor market: the *mass mobilization of citizens into the armed forces.* In April 2024, the Ukrainian government enacted an expanded mobilization law (*effective May 18, 2024*) which broadened the categories of individuals eligible for conscription. This development had immediate and far-reaching repercussions for employers and workers. In particular, many working-age men – especially those ages 18–60 who were potential draftees – began to *avoid formal employment* in order to evade military registration or conscription notices. Companies were now legally required to verify the draft status of male employees, and there were fears that appearing in official employment databases could make it easier for enlistment offices to locate and draft individuals. As a result, anecdotal reports noted that some men chose to withdraw from visible job search activities and formal jobs. "People hide in the shadows rather than post CVs," observed one commentator, capturing how a portion of the male labor force retreated into informal or gig work to remain off the authorities' radar.

The chilling effect of mobilization on labor supply was apparent in the data from online job platforms. *Immediately after the new law was introduced, the number of job applicants plummeted.* In May 2024, Work.ua (the largest job website in Ukraine) reported that the labor market *"resembled a desert"*, as active job seeker count fell sharply [8]. The volume of new résumés uploaded by candidates on Work.ua dropped by 5% in May compared to April, marking the fifth consecutive month of decline in job seeker activity. In fact, competition for jobs (measured as the number of applicants per vacancy) hit its lowest level since 2021 during that month. This happened despite the demand for labor remaining robust – paradoxically, employers posted over *113,000 vacancies in May 2024*, the highest monthly vacancy count since the invasion, yet there were often *fewer than one applicant per job on average*, whereas before the war each vacancy would attract roughly three candidates. This situation of *high vacancies but scarce applicants* reflected an acute labor shortage in the formal sector. Employers in many industries suddenly found it extremely difficult to fill openings, as large portions of the workforce were either mobilized, had left the country, or were choosing not to engage in formal job search due to conscription fears.

With conscription drawing heavily on the male workforce, *employers adjusted their hiring strategies* to tap into categories of workers exempt from the draft. Businesses increasingly sought out women, older workers, and other non-draftable groups to fill roles traditionally held by men. For example, some job postings in 2024 began explicitly inviting *women* to apply for positions in fields like logistics, manufacturing, or IT where male candidates would normally dominate. Companies also raised age limits or looked at *pensioners (retirees)* and persons with disabilities as potential hires, since these groups were not subject to mobilization. By broadening recruitment to these underutilized labor pools, employers aimed to mitigate the manpower shortage caused by the war.

Ironically, even as women were stepping into roles vacated by mobilized men, the mobilization law itself started to affect certain groups of women. In late 2023, new regulations required women with medical or pharmaceutical training to register for potential military service. This led to anxiety among qualified women in healthcare fields and reportedly prompted many to *quit their jobs* rather than risk future conscription. Work.ua data showed a *23% surge in vacancies in the Medicine and Pharmaceuticals sector* around that time, which was attributed to women in that field leaving their positions en masse to avoid being registered as potential draftees. Thus, the mobilization wave introduced new strains on the labor market, not only by pulling men out of civilian employment but also by indirectly causing attrition in some female-dominated occupations.

In summary, the *2024 mobilization drive significantly tightened the labor supply* in Ukraine. A large segment of working-age men either entered military service or chose informality over

formal employment, leading to a sharp decline in active job seekers. This created a highly unusual labor market situation in which employers had record-high vacancies open, but far too few candidates to fill them. The *balance of power shifted in favor of workers* with in-demand skills or safe demographic status, while employers had to become more flexible and inclusive in hiring. Ukraine's wartime labor market, once characterized (in the immediate post-invasion phase) by surplus labor and scarce jobs, was by mid-2024 facing the opposite problem: plenty of jobs, but a *deficit of available workers* due to mobilization and migration. This extreme labor shortage compelled adaptations such as hiring older workers, recruiting women for roles traditionally held by men, raising wages, and offering remote work or other incentives to attract the limited pool of candidates. The long-term implications of mobilization – including the challenge of reintegrating demobilized soldiers into the workforce in the future – remain critical issues for Ukraine's post-war recovery.

Regional Disparities in Job Opportunities

The impact of the war on employment has *varied dramatically across different regions of Ukraine,* leading to a highly uneven geography of labor market conditions. In broad terms, areas of the country that are farther from active combat and have remained under firm Ukrainian control (especially the western and some central regions) have experienced a rebound – and even growth – in job vacancies, in part due to the relocation of businesses to these safer regions. In contrast, regions that have been frontlines of fighting or under Russian occupation (in the east and south) have suffered a collapse in employment opportunities. This *regional divergence* has become more pronounced as the war continues.

By mid-2024, many western oblasts (provinces) were reporting *more job vacancies than they had before the war*. For example, Ivano-Frankivsk region had roughly *180% of its pre-war level of vacancies* by mid-2024, and Zakarpattia (Transcarpathia) region had about *187% of its pre-war vacancy level [4]*. In other words, these regions now had nearly double the number of open positions compared to February 2022. Lviv region, a major economic hub in the west, also saw vacancies at approximately 130% of its pre-war baseline. According to data compiled by NISS, at least eight regions – primarily in Western Ukraine – had *surpassed their pre-invasion job advertisement counts* as of mid-2024 *[4]*. This remarkable growth in labor demand in certain regions can be attributed to several wartime shifts. First, many companies from war-torn eastern areas *relocated their operations to western Ukraine*, bringing jobs with them. Cities like Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Uzhhorod became hosts to transplanted businesses (manufacturers, IT firms, service companies) seeking safer locations to operate. Second, the relative stability and security in the west allowed local businesses to resume more normal activity and even expand in some cases, especially to serve the needs of the huge influx of internally displaced people (IDPs) who moved west. The presence of millions of IDPs increased demand for goods and services in western regions, which in turn spurred hiring in retail, construction, education, healthcare, and other sectors. As a result, western Ukraine by 2024 had something of a *"job-seekers' market,"* where vacancies outnumbered active candidates in many fields and employers competed to attract workers.

In stark contrast, the *east and south of Ukraine have seen their labor markets devastated*. Frontline regions such as Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson – areas that have experienced heavy fighting or occupation – report only a small fraction of the job vacancies that existed before the war. According to estimates, *vacancy levels in Luhansk and Kherson regions fell to under 20% of their pre-war volume [5]*, effectively meaning four out of five jobs that once existed in those local economies have disappeared (or at least are no longer being advertised). Ongoing conflict, physical destruction of industry, mass evacuation of the population, and the difficulties of conducting business under wartime conditions have all contributed to a near collapse of formal employment in these frontline areas. Even major cities like Kharkiv or Mykolaiv, which have partly recovered after initial assaults, remain far below their peacetime labor activity. Employers in these regions either shut down, moved away, or cannot hire due to security risks and workforce depletion. The *occupational structure* of jobs has also shifted; for instance, any

remaining labor demand in conflict zones may be limited to essential services or reconstruction efforts, while professional and service jobs have largely vanished.

This *regional disparity* is vividly illustrated by data on business registrations. By early 2025, it was reported that the number of new business registrations in Luhansk region was *85% lower than in early 2022*, and in Kherson region about *67% lower* than pre-war *[5]*. These figures, which reflect severe contractions in entrepreneurship and economic activity, align with the dearth of job postings observed in those areas. Essentially, entire local economies in parts of eastern Ukraine have been hollowed out by war. Conversely, some western regions experienced a boom in new business registrations as entrepreneurs relocated or started ventures in safer provinces.

The *mass internal migration* of people from east to west during the war is a key factor behind these trends. Western Ukraine has absorbed millions of displaced people, some of whom have skills and started working or opening businesses there, alleviating labor shortages and fostering economic growth in the host communities. However, the flip side is that the east and south have lost a large portion of their workforce (either to displacement or military service), making any economic revival extremely challenging while the war continues. This has created a *dual labor market* in Ukraine: a relatively dynamic, tight labor market in the west (characterized by labor shortages and rising employment) and a depressed, stagnant labor market in the conflict-affected east/south (characterized by high unemployment and scarce vacancies). Policymakers recognize that this regional imbalance will pose a major challenge for post-war recovery – efforts will be needed to rejuvenate the economies of heavily affected regions and to encourage the return of both businesses and workers to those areas when conditions allow. In the meantime, the *relocation of economic activity* to safer regions has been a rational short-term response to war, albeit one that leaves parts of the country economically marginalized. Any comprehensive labor market strategy for Ukraine must take into account these spatial disparities, ensuring support for rebuilding livelihoods in the hardest-hit regions while sustaining employment gains elsewhere.

Wartime Trends on Online Job Search Platforms

Throughout the war, Ukraine's major online job search platforms have provided real-time insight into labor market dynamics. The three largest job portals – *Work.ua, Robota.ua, and OLX Jobs* – each experienced unusual trends that mirror the broader disruptions in the economy. Overall, online data confirm a paradoxical situation by 2023–2024: labor demand (vacancies posted by employers) in aggregate had *recovered to or even exceeded pre-war levels*, while labor supply (active job seekers and applications) remained depressed compared to before the war. This imbalance resulted in historically low competition for jobs and persistent worker shortages in many sectors.

On the demand side, the *total number of vacancies posted online has rebounded strongly* from the 2022 crash. Robota.ua reported that in January 2022 (just before the invasion), employers posted an average of about 90,000 job vacancies per day nationwide. By March 2024, this daily average had risen to around *106,000 vacancies [3]*. Work.ua similarly had over 100,000 active job listings in spring 2024 on its platform at any given time. In fact, by early 2024, the overall volume of help-wanted ads on major Ukrainian job boards *surpassed the levels of February 2022*, indicating that many employers across the country were hiring again despite the ongoing war. This recovery in labor demand is attributable to several factors: businesses adapting to wartime conditions, partial economic rebounds in sectors like trade and services, reconstruction and repair works creating new jobs, and pent-up demand for workers as firms tried to make up for war losses. The robust vacancy numbers show that the *willingness of employers to hire* returned relatively quickly once initial uncertainties passed – a positive sign of resilience in the business sector.

However, on the supply side, *job seeker activity did not keep pace* with the growth in vacancies. According to NISS analysis of Work.ua data, about *304,000 résumés were active or updated on Work.ua in June 2024*, which was 47,000 fewer than the number of active résumés in January 2024 *[4]*. This decline suggests that many Ukrainians were not actively job-hunting through official channels. There are several reasons for the *lagging labor supply*. As discussed, the mobilization of hundreds of thousands of men into the military removed a significant segment

of the workforce. Additionally, the large-scale *migration abroad* – millions of Ukrainians (mostly women and children, but also working-age individuals) remain abroad as refugees – has reduced the pool of available workers domestically. Some people who are internally displaced within Ukraine may not be actively seeking jobs due to temporary living situations or because they are in regions with poor employment prospects. Moreover, anecdotal evidence indicates that fear of conscription led some job seekers, particularly men, to *avoid public job websites* (which require personal details) and instead look for work via informal networks. All these factors contributed to a situation in which by mid-2024 there were roughly *0.9 active candidates per job vacancy nationwide*, less than half the ratio seen before the war (which was over 2 candidates per vacancy on average). The *competition for jobs* thus dropped to an unprecedented low – essentially, in many cases, one could say jobs were competing for workers rather than workers competing for jobs. A think-tank report by the Razumkov Centre noted this sharp decline in job competition, reflecting how the labor market flipped from excess labor to labor shortage over the course of the war [6].

The consequence of high demand and weak supply has been a *pervasive labor shortage* across many industries. Employers frequently complained of "not enough CVs" being submitted for their openings, even after raising offered salaries or lowering experience requirements. Sectors like manufacturing, construction, and retail, which traditionally rely on a steady influx of workers, found it difficult to recruit enough staff in 2023–2024. The National Bank of Ukraine in its communications also pointed out that labor supply constraints – resulting from migration abroad, mobilization, and the slow resettlement of internally displaced persons – were creating *imbalances in the labor market*, whereby certain skills were in acute shortage and wage pressures were building. In effect, Ukraine's wartime economy began to experience *structural labor mismatches*: some regions and sectors have unfilled jobs waiting, while simultaneously there are groups of unemployed or underemployed people who cannot easily fill those jobs due to location, skill mismatch, or opting out of formal labor channels.

Another wartime trend was the *increased use of alternative recruitment channels* outside the main job portals. Given that posting a public résumé on Work.ua or Robota.ua could expose a candidate's identity, some cautious job seekers turned to more discreet methods. People resorted to personal networks, Telegram and Viber groups, or niche platforms to find work opportunities. Even new specialized job sites emerged, such as "Lobby X," which caters to defense sector employment and allows a degree of anonymity. Meanwhile, *OLX Jobs* – a classifieds platform traditionally used for informal or gig job ads – remained popular for quick odd jobs and day labor, where formal procedures are minimal. Precise data on these informal channels are hard to obtain, but both recruiters and candidates have indicated a shift toward *less traceable job-search methods* during 2023–2024. This suggests that the official job boards might understate actual employment activity because a portion of matching between employers and workers moved "underground" or into closed networks during the mobilization period.

In summary, Ukraine's online labor markets during the war revealed a *paradox of many vacancies but few applicants*. By late 2023, the total demand for workers (as signaled by online vacancies) had largely recovered, demonstrating employers' determination to hire and continue operations. Yet the supply of active job seekers remained well below normal, resulting in unprecedented tightness in the labor market. This forced companies to *adapt in innovative ways* – from increasing remote work options and wages to recruiting non-traditional labor pools – to attract the scarce candidates. The full resolution of this mismatch likely hinges on an end to the conflict: the return of refugees, the demobilization of soldiers back to civilian life, and the revival of business activity in currently devastated regions. Until then, labor market conditions in Ukraine will continue to be shaped by the extraordinary pressures of war, with *online platforms serving as a key barometer* of these evolving conditions.

Expansion of the Online Freelance Market as a Resilience Mechanism

Beyond traditional employment, the war has dramatically accelerated the growth of Ukraine's *online freelance economy*, turning it into an important pillar of the labor market. Even before the invasion, Ukraine was known for its large pool of freelance IT professionals, designers,

writers, and other gig workers engaged on global platforms. The war, however, has supercharged this trend by pushing both workers and employers toward the freelance model out of necessity. Freelancing has provided a *flexible and resilient source of income* for many Ukrainians during the turbulence of war, and it has allowed skilled individuals to continue working from anywhere (including from bomb shelters or foreign countries) as long as they have internet access.

The largest domestic freelancing platform, *Freelancehunt,* experienced record growth in its user base and activity during 2022–2024. According to Freelancehunt's internal statistics, the number of Ukrainian *freelancers registered on the platform rose from 790,000 in 2023 to 904,000 in 2024*, which is a 14.4% increase in just one year [7]. To put this in context, over *354,000 Ukrainians have joined Freelancehunt since the war started* in 2022 – that represents more than one-third of all freelancers ever registered on the platform in its 19-year history [7]. The platform's founder, Oleg Topchyj, noted that the war and resulting economic crisis turned out to be *"the most powerful catalysts for the popularity of freelancing"* among Ukrainian specialists. Faced with job losses or relocation, many professionals sought independent contract work as a viable alternative. This led to a surge of new entrants in categories like IT programming, graphic design, writing, marketing, and other remote-friendly services.

At the same time, the *demand side of the freelance market* also proved resilient. The count of *clients (employers) using Freelancehunt* recovered to approximately 269,000 active clients in 2024, up 11.6% from 241,000 in 2023, reaching roughly the pre-war level of client engagement [7]. Early in the war, many Ukrainian businesses had frozen projects or stopped outsourcing due to uncertainty. But by late 2022 and into 2023, both local businesses and international clients returned to hiring freelancers, partly because traditional hiring was difficult. Some foreign companies found Ukrainian freelancers particularly attractive during this period, given their high skill levels and now even more competitive rates due to the economic downturn. Furthermore, companies within Ukraine that faced labor shortages or could not maintain full-time staff turned to freelancers to meet specific needs. By the end of 2024, the volume of freelance jobs posted had largely normalized, indicating *renewed demand for freelance services* as businesses adapted and resumed operations.

In terms of work volume, the *total number of projects posted on Freelancehunt in 2024 was slightly lower than in 2023* (approximately 144,000 projects in 2024 versus 154,000 in 2023) [7]. This small dip (about 6.5% fewer projects) suggests that while more freelancers and clients were on the platform, projects may have been smaller in scope or some short-term gigs diminished during the second year of war. Nonetheless, the *aggregate budgets (payments) on the platform grew by about 26%*, from ₴420 million in 2023 to ₴528 million in 2024 [7]. This indicates that even with a minor decline in project count, the *total freelance earnings increased substantially*, implying either larger projects on average or higher-value contracts being awarded. In other words, the freelance economy not only expanded in participants but also in *economic output,* providing a significant income stream for tens of thousands of Ukrainians.

The war-driven surge in freelancing had multiple drivers. For workers, freelancing became a form of *employment resilience* – it allowed them to generate income despite displacement, to work flexible hours amid air raid disruptions, and to engage with a global market not limited by Ukraine's local wartime economy. For many households, a freelance gig (or multiple gigs) taken up by a family member became crucial for financial survival when other jobs were lost. The *ability to work from anywhere* was especially valuable: a designer or software developer who fled to a safer region or to Poland could continue serving clients remotely. This not only helped individuals maintain livelihoods but also brought in hard currency (dollars or euros) from international clients, bolstering Ukraine's economy during a time of crisis. Freelancehunt's management observed that freelancing became a vital coping strategy, enabling people to "adapt to changes and maintain financial stability" under extreme conditions.

On the client side, the *pressures of war pushed organizations toward freelancers* as well. Some Ukrainian companies, unable to sustain full-time staff or in need of temporary expertise, outsourced tasks to freelancers. Foreign companies, meanwhile, increasingly tapped into

Ukraine's talent pool remotely – partly out of solidarity and partly due to cost effectiveness. By late 2022, combined data from platforms like Upwork, Work.ua, and Freelancehunt suggested that the number of Ukrainian freelancers active in the global online labor market was *40–50% higher than before the war* (this includes those on international platforms), underscoring Ukraine's growing role in the worldwide gig economy.

It is also worth noting how *freelancing contributed to societal resilience*. Many highly skilled professionals (IT engineers, digital creatives, consultants, etc.) could have been lost to permanent emigration, but the availability of remote freelance work allowed some to remain engaged with Ukrainian businesses or to support Ukraine's economy from abroad, maintaining ties that could facilitate eventual return. Additionally, freelancing often provided a degree of psychological relief – a sense of purpose and normalcy – for people amid the chaos of war, as they could continue practicing their profession and earning income.

By the end of 2024, Ukraine's freelance sector had firmly established itself as a *critical component of the labor market.* More Ukrainians were earning a living as independent contractors than ever before, and total freelance earnings were higher than pre-war levels [7]. This online labor supply has essentially acted as a *labor market safety valve,* absorbing those who were squeezed out of traditional employment and offering them opportunities in the digital marketplace. While freelancing cannot fully replace all lost jobs (especially in sectors like manufacturing or hospitality), it has become an indispensable source of employment for a substantial segment of the workforce. Moving forward, the skills and global client connections developed by Ukrainian freelancers during the war could become a significant asset in the country's economic recovery. The challenge will be to continue supporting this sector – through reliable internet infrastructure, education, and financial services for freelancers – and to integrate the freelance economy with broader workforce and development strategies.

Conclusion. The war in Ukraine has wrought unprecedented changes in the country's labor market, simultaneously destroying traditional employment in many areas while catalyzing new forms of work and adaptation. In summary, the *destruction and displacement caused by the war triggered a massive shift towards remote work and freelancing* as alternative livelihoods. Faced with the collapse of normal jobs in 2022, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians turned to online platforms and gig work, allowing them to earn income despite upheaval. By 2023–2024, Ukraine emerged as one of the world's leading sources of online freelance talent, a development directly accelerated by wartime necessity. The war also induced extraordinary policy and demographic shocks – most notably the 2024 mass *mobilization*, which greatly tightened the labor supply. The draft led many men to withdraw from official employment, creating acute labor shortages and forcing employers to alter hiring practices (for example, by focusing on women, older workers, or other non-draftable groups). This dynamic flipped the labor market from one of excess labor in 2022 (when unemployment was extremely high) to one of *labor scarcity in 2024*, with record vacancies and historically low competition for jobs.

Another key takeaway is the pronounced *regional imbalance* that has developed: western Ukraine now enjoys a surplus of vacancies and something akin to a "job-seeker's market," thanks to business relocations and relative safety, whereas the east and south face a collapse in formal employment opportunities due to active conflict and occupation. This geographic divergence means that any recovery strategy must address the needs of lagging regions – massive investment and reconstruction will be required to regenerate jobs in devastated areas, and incentives may be needed to draw workers back to those regions. At the same time, supporting the booming labor markets in safer regions (through housing, training for IDPs, etc.) will remain important to prevent bottlenecks.

In conclusion, the wartime labor market in Ukraine has demonstrated both *extraordinary resilience and severe strain.* The rapid expansion of remote work and freelancing provided a critical buffer against unemployment and helped maintain incomes for many, underscoring the importance of digital infrastructure and skills. However, the war's pressures – mobilization, migration, regional disruption – have also led to mismatches and shortages that limit economic

capacity. As the conflict eventually abates, policymakers will need to transition from short-term coping mechanisms to long-term strategies: demobilizing soldiers back into civilian careers, encouraging refugees to return with their acquired skills, rebuilding businesses in hard-hit localities, and integrating the gains of the gig economy into a revitalized post-war labor market.

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