

Career Coaching Across Borders:

Pilot Program Supporting
Ukrainian Refugees in Poland



I. Executive Summary

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Upwardly Global (UpGlo) engaged our network of workforce organizations and corporate partners to track the efforts of employers in welcoming displaced Ukrainians. Rapid response efforts from multinational corporations to hire and provide temporary housing and childcare to Ukrainian employees provided short-term relief as millions were forced to flee their homes.

We know access to opportunities for skill-aligned employment is key to social inclusion and economic mobility for immigrant and refugee professionals. Here in the U.S., UpGlo extended our career services to newly arrived Ukrainians to help them rebuild their lives. But as we continued to watch the displacement of Ukrainians throughout Europe, we recognized the growing need for workforce inclusion infrastructure globally. UpGlo and long-term partner Accenture saw an opportunity to pilot a program supporting Ukrainian refugees who fled to Poland.

The Poland Workforce Inclusion Program is a special pilot launched in 2022 in partnership with Information Society Development Foundation (FRSI) that brings UpGlo's proven career coaching model to Europe. In collaboration with key corporate partners like Accenture, J.P. Morgan, and Oliver Wyman, the program supports refugees and displaced professionals reclaiming their careers through structured coaching, employer engagement, and workforce integration. The program pledged to train 1,000 jobseekers, with 500 to be placed in professional careers by summer 2025. Two years after the start of the Ukraine war, we've exceeded this goal, helping thousands of refugees restart their careers in Poland.

“Upwardly Global provided me and other participants with a lot of useful training on resume building, cover letters, and interviews.”

— Lillia Yelnikova, Ukrainian refugee

II. Context: Why Poland, Why Now

Labor Market and Demographic Reality

Since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, more than [5.9 million people have sought refuge in other countries across the globe](#). As a close neighbor, Poland welcomed more than 1 million Ukrainian refugees in four years. Monthly, more than 10,000 newcomers enter Poland, with the majority from Ukraine, primarily women and children.

Poland is one of the fastest-aging countries in the European Union and has seen [eight consecutive years of population decline](#) with persistent low birth rates for the last three decades. If current trends hold, there will be a projected shortfall of 2 million workers for the country by 2030.

The population and labor challenges in Poland reflect broader trends across Europe: rapidly aging populations and widespread labor shortages. Even as immigrants and refugees move to new countries, access to opportunity is not guaranteed. Without interventions to open paths for newcomers to secure skill-aligned jobs in their fields, the risk of [brain waste](#) increases.



In contrast to its low birth rates, Poland has recorded some of the highest levels of migration within the EU, the majority of whom are from Ukraine. The country initially welcomed the influx of immigrants and refugees, adopting policies to encourage legal, sustainable labor immigration as a means to strengthen their economy. With [changing sentiments towards immigrants and refugees with protected status](#), it is critical to continue championing workforce inclusion.

The Opportunity

When refugee professionals can fully contribute their talents in their new homes, everyone benefits. What UpGlo has seen first hand in the U.S. — that workforce inclusion drives economic advancement — serves as a model for Poland. Immigrant and refugee talent is essential to filling gaps across the labor market and building a more resilient economy.

Newcomers, despite having professional experience, face barriers that leave them unemployed or underemployed while employers struggle to fill jobs that require specific experience and skillsets. Structured workforce integration efforts can build the bridge between these groups. In just 2024, [Ukrainian refugees have boosted Poland's GDP by an estimated 2.7%](#) — a testament to the value of their socioeconomic contributions. By investing in infrastructure that helps refugees navigate an unfamiliar workforce culture, often in a different language, everyone is better off.

III. Program Overview

Program Objective

Since 2000, Upwardly Global has supported more than 35,000 immigrant and refugee professionals in obtaining skill-aligned jobs in the U.S. For 25 years, we have worked alongside workforce organizations

and employers to open doors for jobseekers to fully contribute their talents and thrive.

The Poland Workforce Inclusion Program applies proven tools, resources, and methods from UpGlo's work in the U.S. to support Ukrainian refugee professionals in securing sustainable, meaningful employment while strengthening Poland's workforce and economic resilience.

Delivery Model

The program is delivered through on-the-ground organizations like FRSI with established local networks and cultural competency that adapts UpGlo's strategy — high-touch career coaching, skilling and reskilling opportunities, and employer engagement — to meet the needs of Ukrainian refugees in Poland.

The streamlined, high-impact hybrid model ensures targeted support for refugee professionals with a focus on:

- One-on-one coaching with an experienced career advisor.
- Polish and English language support.
- Free access to certifications from platforms like Microsoft, Google, Splunk, Udemy, and Coursera.
- Connections with top employers and professional mentors.

IV. Program Design and Core Components

a. Career Coaching: The Core Engine

At the core of the program, jobseekers are paired with career coaches who understand the unique challenges refugee professionals face. The high-touch, structured coaching model helps increase job placement rates and keeps participants engaged through data-driven

“Thank you very much for the opportunity to participate in the Business Polish language group. I enjoyed it very much, especially because it was not only about reading materials, but also about having the opportunity to discuss them in person and receive advice from the mentor. That was invaluable.”

— Yuliia Bakuta, Program Participant

strategies. Coaches undergo weekly pipeline reviews and are encouraged to communicate with participants across multiple channels including by phone, email, Telegram, or LinkedIn to ensure high retention and satisfaction rates.

Working with jobseekers on everything from resume and cover letter writing to interview prep, coaches deliver personalized support that provides participants with an active advocate who knows their story and believes in their potential. Career coaching is consistently cited as the top factor in employment outcomes, helping increase placement success for the over 2,000 jobseekers served.

b. Language and Professional Communication Support

For many refugee professionals, Polish and English language support are critical to overcoming employment barriers. Recognizing this, the program runs a Business English Speaking Club and Business Polish Speaking Club weekly for jobseekers.

To date, the Business English Speaking Club has delivered 71 sessions. Led by U.S.-based volunteers, the club focuses on building confidence in professional English communication — 92% of participants report increased confidence when speaking English. The Business Polish Speaking Club has delivered 52 sessions, where career coaches in Poland support jobseekers in strengthening their workplace-ready Polish language skills. Of the club's participants, 95% report increased confidence when speaking Polish.

c. Digital Peer and Community Support

Once accepted into the program, participants gain access to digital groups that help build community.



The LinkedIn group that connects jobseekers with our employer network in Poland has 900+ members, the Telegram group for jobseekers boasts over 1,000 members, and the program's YouTube channel has more than 300 subscribers. Across these digital peer-to-peer networks, participants share learning opportunities and resources, provide motivation and encouragement to each other, and build camaraderie.

V. Employer Engagement and Workforce Integration

Employer Partnerships

Employers with offices in Poland are key partners in helping place refugee talent in skill-aligned roles. Acknowledging the need for workforce integration, employer partners like Amazon, Workday, Oliver Wyman, Brown-Forman, Sora Union, and J.P. Morgan have participated in information sessions where they showcase their company and share insights on the hiring process. Companies with direct hiring pipelines like J.P. Morgan support program participants on training-to-employment pathways that can result in successful job placements.

“Thousands of highly skilled Ukrainian professionals have been forced to leave their homes and start over in Poland, often facing language barriers, unfamiliar job markets, and uncertainty about their future. By providing training, career support, and access to employment opportunities, we are helping individuals regain stability and strengthening the communities and economies they become part of.”

— Karolina Cikowska, Upwardly Global's Project Manager in Poland

Mentorship Programs

With access to employer partner networks, jobseekers are able to build meaningful professional connections in fields such as project management, law, and business. To date, 50+ Accenture volunteers and over 15 Oliver Wyman volunteers in Poland have been matched with mentees from our program. These mentorship programs provide direct career guidance, mentorship, and professional support to Ukrainian jobseekers.

“I came across a Facebook post about Upwardly Global that ultimately changed the trajectory of my professional life. From the very first response to my application, through personalized coaching sessions, practical webinars, CV workshops, and meaningful networking events, I felt genuinely supported, empowered, and welcomed. Thanks to this program, I not only strengthened my professional profile and interview skills, but also successfully secured a role at Oliver Wyman. I am sincerely thankful for the continued encouragement, mentorship, and alumni connections that extend far beyond job placement and continue to inspire my growth.”

— Maria, Program Participant

VI. Case Study: Oliver Wyman Partnership

Overview

A leading international management consulting firm, Oliver Wyman brings expertise, innovation, and a collaborative approach to support organizations undergoing transformative moments. Their alignment with UpGlo's values and work have made Oliver Wyman one of our most engaged employer partners since 2022, actively supporting our refugee inclusion efforts in Poland. The company has actively embraced refugee professionals, delivering two professional development workshops for program participants and co-hosting a mentoring program that matched Oliver Wyman recruiters with jobseekers. So far, there have been eight successful jobseeker placements in the Oliver Wyman Warsaw office.

Impact

The program's partnership with Oliver Wyman demonstrates the impact of strengthened employer commitment to inclusive hiring. When provided access to opportunity, refugee professionals can fully share their talents and apply their experience and knowledge to support communities and the economy. On World Refugee Day in June 2025, Oliver Wyman publicly recognized the impact refugee jobseekers have on their company, demonstrating a long-term commitment to inclusive hiring. The successful relationship with Oliver Wyman highlights the importance and viability of private-sector partnerships to help sustainably scale workforce inclusion and integration.



VII. Strategic Partnerships and Ecosystem

Institutional and NGO Partners

The Poland Workforce Inclusion Program relies on a strategic network of partnerships that form an ecosystem of innovation and support for Ukrainian refugees. Across Poland and the neighboring region, we actively collaborate with this cohort called the Skills Alliance, which includes UNHCR, TENT, IOM, CARE, Right to Protection, the U.S. Embassy in Poland, and academic institutions. This Skills Alliance cohort works in conjunction with local NGOs and workforce agencies on the ground who can deliver needed programming directly to refugee communities.

Purpose of the Ecosystem

The ecosystem brings together institutional and NGO partners who, like UpGlo, understand the challenges refugees face after leaving their home countries. By sharing best practices and collaborating on skilling pathways we can address systemic barriers for jobseekers, enabling them to enter the Polish workforce with confidence and at a job they are qualified for. Strategic alignment and knowledge sharing are critical foundations for long-term workforce integration efforts and Ukraine's post-war reconstruction needs. This pilot shows how cross-sector partnerships can address humanitarian crises and integrate proven models of workforce inclusion that help refugee professionals rebuild their lives and reclaim their careers.

“I was surprised about how much support this program offers. My coach is great; she taught me how to present myself in interviews, how to talk about myself, and she motivates me to keep going”

Veronika Hrudzynska, Ukrainian refugee



VIII. Recognition and Impact

In 2025, Upwardly Global's Poland Workforce Inclusion Program was recognized by the Anthem Awards, an annual event celebrating purpose and mission-driven work from people, companies, and organizations worldwide. Our partnership with FRSI was named a [Bronze Winner of the Anthem Awards in the Product, Innovation, or Service Categories \(Nonprofit\)](#) for Human & Civil Rights Service.

Since the launch of the pilot we have seen incredible success for our Ukrainian jobseekers in Poland:

- **2,000+ participants** connected to coaching, mentorship, workshop, networking, and more professional development services.
- **600+ participants** upskilled through training partnerships with Coursera, LinkedIn, Udemy, and other platforms.
- **750+ participants** placed in skill-aligned roles across critical sectors like IT, Finance, Accounting, and more.

