

Ukraine's Reconstruction Pathways: Agriculture, Migration, Education, and the Europeanisation of Post-War Recovery

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Abstract

This article examines Ukraine's reconstruction through the lens of post-conflict recovery, European integration, and sectoral transformation. Drawing on comparative cases from the Balkans, Caucasus, and East Asia, it identifies five interdependent domains that shape Ukraine's trajectory: agriculture, rural development, trade and EU integration, labour migration, and education. The analysis highlights how Ukraine's recovery is unfolding in the midst of war, requiring parallel rather than sequential reforms. Europeanisation provides a unique anchor, aligning domestic transformation with accession incentives. Findings emphasise the need for demining, inclusive rural revitalisation, diversification of exports, circular migration strategies, and youth-centred education reform. The discussion underscores that reconstruction must be mutually reinforcing across sectors, locally embedded through decentralised governance, and safeguarded by transparency and equity. By synthesising comparative insights and policy frameworks, the article argues that Ukraine's reconstruction represents both a national imperative and an important priority for European states. It concludes that success will depend on transforming vulnerabilities into opportunities, sustaining reform momentum under war conditions, and institutionalising inclusive, interdependent, and human-capital-centred recovery strategies.

Keywords: Ukraine reconstruction, post-conflict recovery, European integration, agriculture, labour migration, education reform, trade, Europeanisation

JEL codes: F15, O10

Introduction

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has caused the most severe economic, social, and humanitarian crisis in Europe since the Second World War. The destruction has been systemic rather than incidental: agricultural land has been mined or occupied, critical infrastructure has been destroyed, millions have been displaced, and Ukraine's economy contracted by more than 30% in 2022. Beyond the immediate wartime collapse, the conflict has interrupted Ukraine's process of European integration, diverted trade away from traditional routes, and created long-term challenges for rural livelihoods, labour markets, and human capital development. At the same time, it has clarified the country's trajectory: Ukraine's future lies in rebuilding as a modern, resilient, and European state.

Post-conflict reconstruction is never a purely technical exercise. It is inherently political, reflecting choices about governance, economic models, and international alignment. Ukraine's reconstruction has already been framed within the logic of European integration, with the European Union, the G7, and international financial institutions pledging multi-year assistance packages. Yet the debate so far has been dominated by macro-level questions of financing and geopolitical positioning. Less attention has been devoted to the principles of reconstruction in specific sectors that are critical to Ukraine's long-term resilience, especially agriculture, rural development, trade alignment with the EU, labour migration, and education. These domains are not only central to Ukraine's recovery but also to its identity as a future EU member state and global food supplier.

To fully grasp this challenge, it is important to recognise the limitations of Ukraine's pre-war development model. Economic growth was based on three pillars: large-scale agricultural exports, energy-intensive heavy industry (particularly steel and chemicals), and remittances generated by substantial labour migration (World Bank, 2020). While these elements ensured basic stability, they left the economy dependent on raw material exports, exposed to volatility in global markets, and heavily reliant on Russia for trade and transit (Kuzio, 2015). Structural reforms remained incomplete, productivity growth lagged behind that of Central and Eastern European neighbours, and convergence with EU living standards was limited.

The war has effectively dismantled this model. Agriculture has been disrupted by mined farmland and blocked ports, industry has been crippled by targeted destruction, and labour migration has turned from a gradual phenomenon into a mass exodus. What emerges from this collapse, however, is the opportunity to design a new Ukrainian development model that is more resilient, diversified, and aligned with European integration. Such a model would rest on three key elements: the modernization of agriculture into a sustainable and technologically advanced "Green Food Hub of Europe"; the diversification of industry toward renewable energy, logistics, defense-related production, and digital services; and the centrality of human capital, with policies that support diaspora engagement, labor

reintegration, and investment in youth and STEM education. This transformation would allow Ukraine not simply to restore pre-war structures but to embark on a catch-up trajectory comparable to that achieved by the Visegrád countries in the 1990s and 2000s.

The case of Ukraine offers a unique laboratory for studying reconstruction under conditions of ongoing conflict and accelerated Europeanisation. Historical precedents — from Croatia's post-war demining to Poland's EU-funded rural transformation and South Korea's "Saemaul Undong" village modernisation — provide useful reference points, but Ukraine's situation is unprecedented in both scale and context. No other post-war state has attempted such an ambitious reconstruction while simultaneously negotiating EU accession, navigating global food security disruptions, and managing a massive refugee outflow. Understanding how Ukraine can translate broad commitments into concrete, sectoral strategies is therefore essential both for scholars of post-conflict development and for policymakers shaping the next decade of European enlargement.

The focus on agriculture, rural development, trade integration, labour migration, and education is deliberate, as together these sectors constitute the backbone of Ukraine's developmental model, both before and after the war. Agriculture has long been Ukraine's comparative advantage, shaping its role as a global food supplier and anchor of rural livelihoods. Rural development, in turn, is essential for addressing regional inequalities and ensuring that reconstruction extends beyond metropolitan centres. Trade and EU integration form the external dimension of Ukraine's development trajectory, linking the domestic economy to European and global markets. Labour migration reflects the centrality of human capital: remittances and the mobility of workers sustained households before the war, while return migration and diaspora engagement will shape the country's recovery. Finally, education represents the long-term foundation of any developmental model, as it determines whether Ukraine can generate the skills and social cohesion necessary for sustainable convergence with the EU. Examining these five domains thus allows the article to capture both the material and human dimensions of Ukraine's reconstruction and to assess how they interact in shaping the contours of a new Ukrainian development model.

This article makes two contributions. First, it synthesises the emerging principles of Ukraine's reconstruction as outlined in the CEPR Paris Report *Rebuilding Ukraine: Principles and Policies* (2022) and subsequent policy initiatives, with a particular focus on agriculture, rural development, trade, labour, and education. Second, it situates these sectoral strategies within the broader literature on post-conflict recovery, Europeanisation, and sustainable development. The analysis demonstrates that Ukraine's recovery is not only about repairing wartime damage but about reconfiguring the economy and society to align with EU standards, green transition goals, and the demands of global markets.

Three research questions guide the analysis:

1. How has the war reshaped Ukraine's agriculture and rural economy, and what principles should guide its reconstruction?
2. Which policies can support sustainable EU integration, labour reintegration, and youth empowerment in post-war Ukraine?
3. How can Ukraine capitalise on its agricultural and human capital potential to become both a resilient EU member state and a global food supplier?

The article proceeds in six sections. Following this introduction, Section 2 reviews the relevant literature on post-conflict reconstruction, Europeanisation, and sectoral development policies, highlighting gaps that Ukraine's case can fill. Section 3 outlines the methodology, which combines policy analysis, secondary data, and comparative-historical references. Section 4 presents the findings across five thematic areas: agriculture, rural development, EU trade integration, labour migration, and youth education. Section 5 discusses the interconnections between these domains and situates Ukraine's reconstruction within broader theoretical and policy debates. Section 6 concludes with key policy recommendations and directions for future research.

By linking immediate post-war recovery needs with long-term integration strategies, this article argues that Ukraine's reconstruction must be understood not as a return to pre-2022 conditions but as a transformative process. The destruction of war, paradoxically, provides an opportunity to leapfrog into greener, more technologically advanced, and more inclusive development models. Whether Ukraine succeeds will depend on the coherence of its domestic policies, the reliability of international support, and the resilience of its citizens.

1. Literature review and policy background

1.1. Post-conflict reconstruction: principles and challenges

The study of post-conflict reconstruction has developed around several recurring themes: security stabilisation, institutional reform, economic recovery, and social reconciliation. Early work in international relations emphasised the importance of security guarantees and state-building (Paris, 2004; Doyle & Sambanis, 2006). Later studies highlighted economic reconstruction as a pillar of peace-building, with particular attention to the sequencing of reforms (Collier, 2009).

Case studies demonstrate that reconstruction is shaped by context. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, international oversight and heavy donor involvement created a dependency cycle that limited local ownership (Chandler, 2000). In Iraq, large-scale financial transfers without effective governance mechanisms resulted in corruption and inefficiency (Barakat, 2005). In contrast, Croatia's post-war recovery illustrates the importance of targeted demining, EU accession incentives, and gradual sectoral rebuilding (Stubbs & Zrinščak, 2015). These comparisons show that reconstruction requires not only financial resources but also governance capacity, local buy-in, and long-term institutional integration.

For Ukraine, these lessons are highly relevant. The war's ongoing nature means reconstruction must begin in parallel with conflict management (Tankovsky, 2020). Moreover, Ukraine's aspiration to join the European Union introduces a conditionality framework largely absent in earlier cases. Unlike post-Yugoslav states, Ukraine must simultaneously achieve post-war stabilisation and align with EU standards, making it a hybrid case of recovery and accelerated Europeanisation.

1.2. Europeanisation and enlargement as a reconstruction framework

Europeanisation — the process by which EU rules, norms, and practices shape domestic institutions — has been widely studied in the context of enlargement (Grabbe, 2006; Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005). The literature identifies two main mechanisms: conditionality (rewards for compliance with EU criteria) and socialisation (internalisation of EU norms). Central and Eastern European (CEE) states experienced rapid transformation due to conditionality-driven reforms, particularly in governance, trade liberalisation, and rural policy (Vachudova, 2005).

For Ukraine, the EU accession perspective announced in June 2022 creates both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, the EU provides a roadmap for institutional reform, access to financial instruments, and the promise of eventual integration into the single market. On the other hand, Ukraine must implement these reforms under wartime constraints, with limited fiscal space and severe institutional strain, which makes the task significantly challenging.

Comparative studies of candidate countries (e.g., Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia) suggest that EU leverage is strongest when linked to tangible benefits such as trade access and financial transfers (Börzel & Schimmelfennig, 2017). Ukraine's case differs in scale: the EU has already mobilised the Solidarity Lanes initiative, macro-financial assistance, and recovery funds in ways that go beyond traditional enlargement tools. This hybridisation of reconstruction and enlargement makes Ukraine an unprecedented case for Europeanisation scholarship.

1.3. Agriculture and rural recovery in post-conflict settings

Agriculture plays a central role in many post-conflict economies, both as a livelihood source and as a stabilising factor. Studies of post-war show that restoring land rights, improving access to credit, and rebuilding rural infrastructure are essential for both food security and social stability (Jayne et al., 2003). In the Balkans, agricultural restructuring was closely tied to EU rural development policies, particularly through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) instruments (Swain, 2013).

Ukraine's case is distinct because of its global importance as a food exporter. Before the war, Ukraine was the world's top sunflower oil supplier and among the top five exporters of wheat, maize, and barley. The disruption of these exports created ripple effects across global food markets, particularly in Africa and the Middle East. Unlike smaller post-conflict states, Ukraine's agricultural recovery is therefore not just a domestic priority but also a matter of international food security.

The CEPR Paris Report (2022) emphasises three principles for agricultural reconstruction: (1) demining as a precondition for production, (2) integration into EU supply chains via the Solidarity Lanes, and (3) modernisation through AgTech investment. Comparative experience suggests these principles are sound: Croatia's demining programs provide a model for clearing farmland, while Poland's EU accession experience highlights how CAP funds and structural adjustment can drive modernisation.

1.4. Labour migration, human capital, and diaspora engagement

Labour migration is a defining feature of post-conflict societies. Large-scale displacement often results in brain drain, but it can also generate remittances and transnational networks. In post-war Kosovo, for example, remittances became a lifeline for rural households, though dependency limited domestic job creation (Gashi et al, 2021). Armenia and Israel illustrate more positive trajectories, where diaspora engagement became a driver of capital inflows and technological upgrading.

Ukraine faces one of the largest refugee outflows in modern Europe, with more than six million citizens abroad. The challenge is twofold: preventing permanent loss of skilled workers while creating incentives for return migration. The literature emphasises policies such as credential recognition, housing support, and targeted reintegration programs (Dustmann et al., 2017). Importantly, labour reintegration must align with broader reconstruction strategies — for example, channelling returnees into infrastructure projects, agri-processing, or IT hubs.

Human capital development is equally central. Post-conflict societies require not only rebuilding schools but also adapting curricula to new realities. Rwanda's post-genocide education reform, for instance, combined trauma recovery with civic education and skills training. For Ukraine, the emphasis on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) reflects both immediate reconstruction needs (engineers, IT specialists) and long-term aspirations for a knowledge-based economy.

1.5. Policy background: current initiatives in Ukraine

Since 2022, multiple frameworks have been launched to coordinate Ukraine's recovery. The Lugano Principles (July 2022) outlined seven guiding principles: partnership, reform focus, transparency, democratic participation, gender equality, sustainability, and accountability. The Multi-Agency Donor Coordination Platform (2023) was established by the EU, G7, and IFIs to align financing. Sector-specific initiatives include:

- **EU Solidarity Lanes:** €1 billion investment in rail, road, and river export corridors.
- **Land Reform (2021–2024):** phased liberalisation of the farmland market, supported by digital cadastral systems.
- **Decentralisation Act (2014–present):** fiscal autonomy for 1,400+ local communities, which proved crucial during the war.
- **Mobile clinics and hybrid schooling:** scaled up with UNICEF, WHO, and the Red Cross.

Together, these initiatives highlight the blend of local reforms and international support shaping Ukraine's recovery. However, they also raise questions of sequencing, coordination, and long-term sustainability, particularly as international attention may wane.

1.6. Internal Ukrainian debates on reconstruction

Ukraine's reconstruction discourse extends far beyond academic circles to encompass robust debates within policy, think-tank, and expert communities. These internal perspectives illuminate the contestation over the country's post-war development model, adding nuance and legitimacy to academic frameworks. A prominent thread comes from economic policymakers and intellectuals advocating for strategic industrial engagement. Advocates such as economist Dmytro Natalukha have called for a "healthy economic nationalism" and the "return to pragmatic Keynesianism," emphasising protectionist measures where necessary to nurture domestic processing and value-added sectors rather than simple raw material exports. Similarly, Yuri Poluneev champions competitiveness as a "national idea", arguing for a breakthrough driven by high-tech and strategic sectors (Pasichnyk, 2024). These positions challenge the prior neoliberal consensus and suggest a more state-guided industrial transformation.

Public intellectual voices further critique the post-Soviet economic legacy. Sociologists like Volodymyr Ishchenko have described Ukraine's 1990s trajectory as "de-modernising," where privatisation failed to lead to productive modernisation and instead entrenched oligarchic structures (Ischenko and Zhuravlev, 2022). This critique extends into reconstruction debates: as the neoliberal paradigm is questioned, new platforms such as Vox Ukraine propose rebuilding not just infrastructure but political institutions and civic culture, advocating for media reform, anti-trust regulations, and stronger public oversight. Think tanks and economic experts have also developed practical futures-oriented strategies. A coalition involving Ukrainian economists and the CEPR proposes that a robust financial architecture — compliant with EU integration and built to support banking, capital markets, and insurance — will be critical in catalysing domestic and international investment in the reconstruction process. Others, such as those cited in the Wilson Center summary, recommend starting reconstruction with a clear vision around Ukraine's

long-term comparative advantages, including agriculture, renewables, and technology, and embedding governance reforms early in the process to ensure institutional transformation.

Finally, there are growing calls within Ukrainian expert networks for more sophisticated spatial and economic reconfiguration. Analysts stress the importance of building industrial parks, logistics hubs, and regional innovation clusters that mirror Poland's or the Czech Republic's post-transition trajectories, while leveraging digital governance tools like the Diia platform for transparency and decentralised reconstruction planning. Together, these internal perspectives reflect a lively and pluralistic debate about Ukraine's development path — a debate that ranges from economic nationalism and restructuring of state-business relations, to financial reform, spatial planning, and civic empowerment. Incorporating these voices enriches the analysis by anchoring policy prescriptions in the Ukrainian reform discourse itself, rather than external frameworks alone.

1.7. Synthesis

The literature underscores three key insights for analysing Ukraine's reconstruction. First, post-conflict recovery requires more than financial transfers; it depends on governance, local ownership, and sectoral strategies. Second, Ukraine's path is uniquely intertwined with EU accession, making Europeanisation both a constraint and an opportunity. Third, sectoral domains — agriculture, rural development, trade, labour, and education — are deeply interlinked, and failure in one risk undermining progress in others. This article builds on these insights to develop a sectoral analysis of Ukraine's recovery. By combining policy documents, comparative cases, and theoretical perspectives, it aims to bridge the gap between broad reconstruction principles and the practical, sectoral strategies that can sustain Ukraine's transformation.

2. Methodology

This article employs a qualitative, comparative, and policy-oriented research design. The approach is motivated by the dual constraints and opportunities created by the ongoing war: on the one hand, systematic primary fieldwork is impossible, while on the other, the urgency of reconstruction and the abundance of policy documents provide a rich basis for analysis. The study, therefore, synthesises secondary data from official reports, international organisations, and academic scholarship, while also drawing on comparative-historical cases that illuminate potential pathways for Ukraine.

The empirical foundation rests on three broad categories of sources. First, policy reports and official documents constitute a core reference point, above all *Rebuilding Ukraine: Principles and Policies* (CEPR Paris Report 1, 2022), which provides the conceptual orientation for reconstruction debates. These are complemented by European Commission materials on the Solidarity Lanes initiative, Ukrainian government publications on land reform and decentralisation, and assessments

from the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the International Monetary Fund, and United Nations agencies regarding financing, labour markets, and education. Second, the article engages with academic literature on post-conflict reconstruction and Europeanisation. The work of Roland Paris on sequencing and institutionalisation, Paul Collier on the political economy of war and recovery, and David Chandler on critical approaches to post-conflict governance provides the theoretical underpinnings for understanding reconstruction processes. In parallel, the Europeanisation literature, particularly Heather Grabbe's analysis of the EU's transformative power and the conditionality framework elaborated by Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, informs the discussion of Ukraine's accession trajectory. Finally, research on labour migration, diaspora engagement, and hybrid education in conflict contexts offers additional conceptual resources for interpreting Ukraine's experience.

Comparative-historical cases further enrich the analysis by providing empirical benchmarks. Croatia's post-war demining and agricultural recovery illustrate the preconditions for revitalising rural economies. Poland's accession experience demonstrates how EU funds and regulatory harmonisation can accelerate rural modernisation and labour reintegration. South Korea's Saemaul Undong movement offers an instructive example of how physical infrastructure and human capital development can be pursued in parallel. Armenia and Kosovo highlight strategies for engaging diasporas and managing migration flows, while Rwanda's post-genocide reforms show how trauma-informed education can be integrated into reconstruction. These cases are not treated as direct analogies, since Ukraine's size, EU candidate status, and geopolitical centrality make it unique, but rather as heuristic devices that shed light on possible directions and pitfalls.

Analytically, the article applies a thematic synthesis approach. Reconstruction is organised into five interconnected pillars: agriculture, rural development, trade, labour migration, and education. These domains are examined not in isolation but in relation to one another, with attention to how progress in one area reinforces or constrains another. The analysis is guided by three overarching principles. The first is sequencing, understood as the recognition that certain reforms or interventions are preconditions for others, such as demining before agricultural revival. The second is Europeanisation, meaning that recovery is situated within the framework of EU accession and the regulatory, institutional, and financial standards that this entails. The third is interdependence, which stresses that sectoral reforms must be pursued in a mutually reinforcing fashion: rural job creation is tied to trade integration, education reform is linked to labour reintegration, and agricultural modernisation intersects with sustainability and the Green Deal.

Inevitably, the methodology is constrained by several limitations. The fluidity of the war produces incomplete and shifting data, and reliance on secondary sources restricts insights into the local perspectives of Ukrainian communities. Moreover, while comparative cases provide valuable orientation, they cannot fully capture the distinctive scale and geopolitical stakes of Ukraine's recovery. To address these limitations, the article uses cases selectively and heuristically, focusing on insights that illuminate structural principles rather than offering prescriptive models.

In summary, the methodology combines policy analysis, theoretical framing, and comparative learning to construct a coherent understanding of Ukraine's reconstruction trajectory. It integrates international reports, academic debates, and instructive cases into a thematic framework that captures both the specificities of Ukraine's context and the broader principles of post-conflict recovery and Europeanisation.

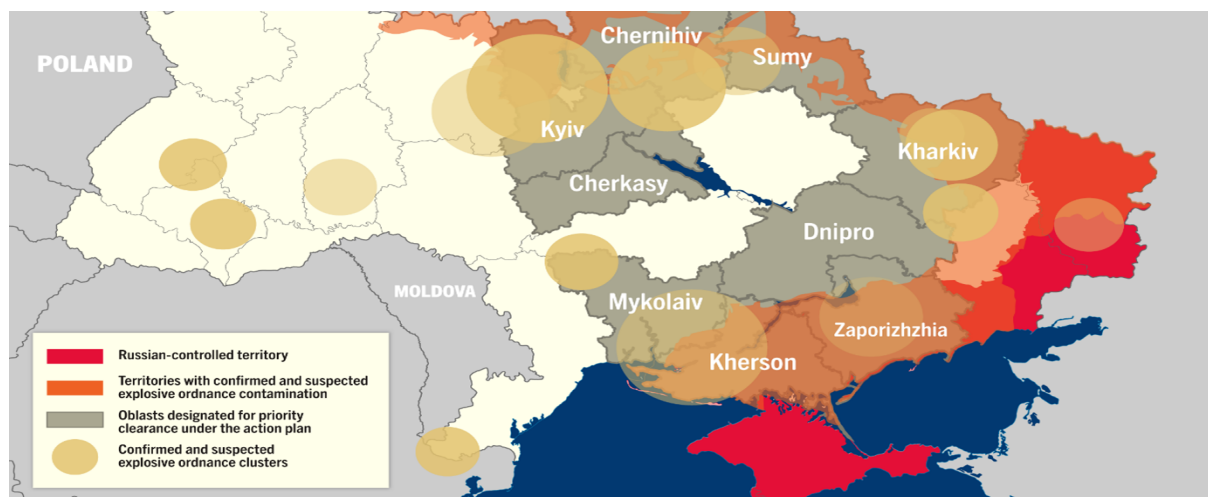
3. Findings

The findings of this study are organised around five interconnected domains that define Ukraine's post-war reconstruction: agriculture, rural development, trade and integration, labour migration, and education. These domains are not discrete but mutually reinforcing, and their trajectories will determine the overall success of Ukraine's recovery. The analysis shows that in each area, Ukraine faces both formidable challenges and unique opportunities, shaped by its European integration path and by comparative lessons from other post-conflict and transformation cases.

3.1. Agriculture and food security

Agriculture is central to Ukraine's economic and geopolitical role. Before the war, the country was among the world's largest exporters of wheat, maize, and sunflower oil, accounting for over 10 per cent of global wheat exports and nearly half of sunflower oil trade. The war has devastated this capacity, primarily through landmines, shelling, and the disruption of supply chains (Figure 1). Estimates suggest that one-third of Ukraine's arable land has been rendered unusable due to contamination or destruction. Without demining, farming cannot resume at scale. Here, comparative experience from Croatia is instructive: its post-war demining took nearly two decades and required coordinated international funding. For Ukraine, the challenge is exponentially greater, but the potential payoff is also global, given the role of Ukrainian grain in stabilising world food markets.

Figure 1. Agricultural land affected by mines in Ukraine

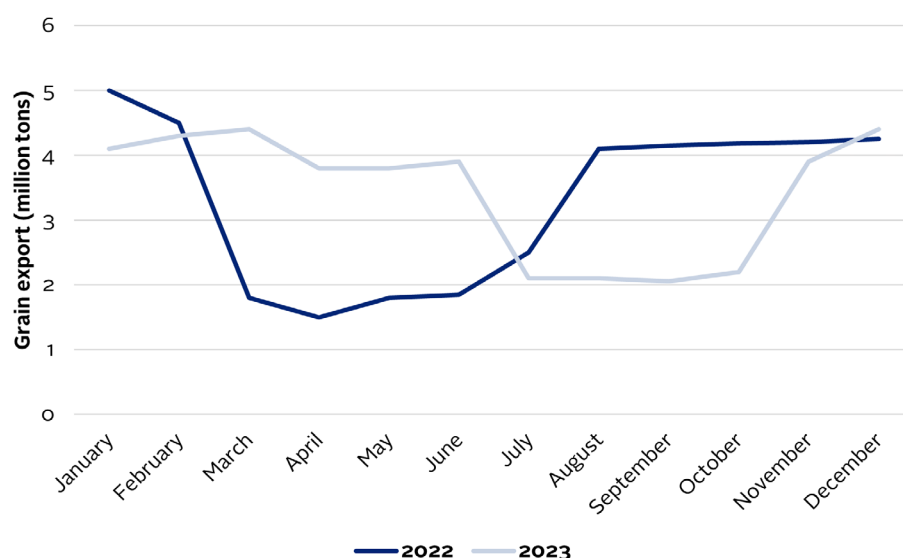


Source: Welsh et al. (2023, p. 4)

Demining is thus not only a national priority but a global public good, and several countries, including Croatia, the United States, Canada, and Lithuania, have already provided expertise and resources. At the same time, recovery will require investment in agricultural infrastructure and logistics. The European Union's Solidarity Lanes initiative, launched in May 2022, demonstrates how trade and infrastructure can be secured even under blockade conditions (European Commission, 2022). By mobilising EU funding to expand border crossings, improve rail connections, and modernise Danube ports, the initiative has enabled the export of more than 45 million tons of agricultural products. These logistical corridors serve not only immediate needs but also provide the foundation for long-term integration with EU supply chains.

Financing agriculture represents another critical dimension (Goetz and Jaksch, 2018). The war has eroded the ability of farmers (Figure 2), especially smallholders, to access credit. International financial institutions such as the World Bank and the EBRD have proposed risk-sharing mechanisms, concessional loans, and political risk insurance to catalyse private investment. Experience from post-war reconstruction elsewhere shows that access to affordable finance, particularly for working capital and inputs, is essential for reviving production. The Ukrainian government has also advanced its land reform, opening the land market in 2021 and allowing individuals to purchase agricultural land, albeit with restrictions on sales to foreigners. This reform creates a more predictable framework for investment, though safeguards are needed to prevent excessive concentration of ownership and marginalisation of small farmers.

Figure 2. Grain export volumes in Ukraine (2022-2023, million tons)



Source: Edited by the author based on Dodd et al. (2024)

Beyond recovery, agriculture offers an opportunity for transformation. Ukraine possesses both the scale and the natural endowments to become the “Green Food Hub of Europe.” Aligning agricultural modernisation with the EU Green Deal implies a shift toward sustainable production methods, digital and precision agriculture, and the integration of renewable energy in farming (European Commission, 2019). The Netherlands, Denmark, and Israel provide models of how technological innovation can generate competitiveness in sustainable food systems. By combining foreign partnerships in AgTech with EU market access, Ukraine can leapfrog from being a bulk commodity exporter to a leader in climate-resilient agriculture.

3.2. Rural development and local resilience

The war has hit Ukraine’s rural communities particularly hard. Many villages in the east and south have been destroyed, while depopulation has accelerated due to displacement and migration. Rural areas were already structurally disadvantaged before the war, marked by lower employment, weaker infrastructure, and declining demographics. Yet rural resilience is crucial: these areas are home to much of the agricultural workforce, and their revitalisation is indispensable for broader recovery.

A critical factor in Ukraine’s rural resilience has been the decentralisation reform launched in 2014 (OECD, 2018). By consolidating local communities into hromadas with fiscal autonomy and managerial capacity, the reform enabled local governments to deliver services and coordinate humanitarian assistance even under wartime stress (Council of Europe, 2020). Unlike in Bosnia, where international imposition weakened local initiative, Ukraine’s empowered municipalities became key actors in resilience. This experience highlights the importance of embedding reconstruction not only in national policies but also in local governance structures.

Job creation will be essential for stabilising rural life and encouraging return migration. The findings suggest that employment programs must be regionally tailored. In the east, where physical destruction is most severe, construction and demining-related employment will dominate. In the central regions, investment in agri-processing can create value-added jobs beyond primary farming. In the West, which has been less affected by direct combat, tourism and cross-border services offer potential. This regional differentiation mirrors the approach of Poland during its EU accession, where cohesion funds were deployed in line with local comparative advantages.

Service delivery is another pillar of rural recovery. The war has demonstrated the effectiveness of mobile clinics, often operated by NGOs with international support, in reaching displaced populations and underserved areas. Hybrid schooling, supported by digital platforms such as the All-Ukrainian Online School, has allowed education to continue despite displacement and destruction. These models illustrate how innovation can maintain social cohesion during a crisis and can be institutionalised for long-term resilience (UNICEF, 2023).

Historical parallels suggest the importance of linking infrastructure with human capital development. South Korea's Saemaul Undong movement in the 1970s combined investment in roads, electricity, and housing with training, community organisation, and civic participation. Ukraine's reconstruction could similarly integrate infrastructure rebuilding with human development, ensuring that physical investments translate into social empowerment.

3.3. Trade and European integration

Trade has been both a lifeline and a vulnerability for Ukraine during the war. The Russian blockade of Black Sea ports initially cut off the primary export route for grain and other commodities. In response, Ukraine and the European Union developed alternative logistical solutions, most prominently the Solidarity Lanes. By mobilising over EUR 1 billion for infrastructure, the initiative has enabled exports through rail, road, and Danube ports, demonstrating how crisis-driven measures can also lay the foundations for long-term integration.

Ukraine's trade future is inseparable from its European trajectory. Since the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement entered into force in 2016, the EU has become Ukraine's largest trading partner, accounting for more than 40 per cent of trade flows. Harmonisation with EU standards remains incomplete but is essential for unlocking further access. The war has accelerated this process: emergency alignment in transport, energy, and customs demonstrates that integration can deepen even under conditions of insecurity (Tankovsky and Endrődi-Kovács, 2023).

At the same time, Ukraine faces the challenge of overdependence on agricultural exports. While these will remain central, diversification into IT services, renewable energy, and light manufacturing is critical to reduce vulnerability to external shocks. The reconstruction phase offers an opportunity to position Ukraine not

only as a food supplier but also as a contributor to Europe's green and digital transitions. This requires strategic investment and regulatory alignment, supported by EU cohesion funds and private-sector partnerships.

3.4. Labour migration and human capital

Perhaps no dimension of Ukraine's war experience has been more socially disruptive than labour migration. More than six million Ukrainians live abroad as refugees, primarily in EU countries, while millions more are internally displaced (UNHCR, 2023). This exodus has raised concerns about brain drain, demographic decline, and the long-term erosion of the workforce. Comparative cases such as Bosnia and Armenia suggest that prolonged outmigration can weaken recovery and entrench dependency on remittances. Yet Ukraine also has opportunities to transform migration into an asset. The fact that most refugees are hosted in EU member states means that they are gaining skills, language competencies, and networks that can be reinvested in Ukraine upon return. Policies that facilitate credential recognition, housing access, and employment opportunities will be essential to attract returnees. Croatia's post-accession experience demonstrates that return migration can accelerate modernisation if institutional barriers are minimised.

In addition to return, diaspora engagement is a critical strategy. The Ukrainian diaspora has already mobilised resources, humanitarian aid, and political advocacy. Institutionalising this engagement through investment funds, tax incentives, or digital participation platforms can turn diaspora networks into long-term development partners. Armenia's mixed experience, where diaspora wealth did not always translate into productive investment, highlights the importance of transparent and efficient frameworks for engagement (Brinkerhoff, 2008). Digital technology also opens new possibilities for circular migration. IT professionals and entrepreneurs can contribute remotely, while skilled workers abroad can engage in temporary or project-based activities in Ukraine. By combining reintegration with transnational engagement, Ukraine can pioneer a model of circular migration that transforms displacement into a developmental resource.

3.5. Education and youth

Education represents both the greatest vulnerability and the greatest potential in Ukraine's reconstruction. The war has destroyed or damaged more than 2,000 schools, displaced millions of students, and disrupted learning across the country. Psychological trauma has compounded the crisis, creating the risk of a lost generation. The literature on post-conflict recovery underscores that neglecting education can undermine peacebuilding for decades, as seen in Rwanda and Sierra Leone.

At the same time, Ukraine has demonstrated remarkable resilience in education provision. Hybrid and online learning platforms, supported by UNICEF, Microsoft, and domestic initiatives, have allowed continuity of schooling even during displacement. The All-Ukrainian Online School, launched in 2020 during the

pandemic, has been scaled up during the war and now serves as a central tool for continuity. These innovations illustrate how crisis-driven adaptations can form the basis for long-term modernisation.

The emphasis on STEM education is particularly significant. Aligning curricula with the skills required for reconstruction — in engineering, IT, renewable energy, and digitalisation — ensures that the younger generation can contribute directly to rebuilding. At the same time, trauma-informed approaches are essential to address the psychological scars of war. Youth organisations and student associations have already played an active role in humanitarian relief, demonstrating agency and resilience. Institutionalising their participation in reconstruction will help transform them from passive victims into active leaders of recovery.

3.6. Synthesis

Taken together, the findings show that Ukraine's reconstruction is not a linear process but a complex, interdependent transformation. Agriculture cannot recover without demining, finance, and trade corridors; rural communities cannot stabilise without jobs and services; migration cannot be addressed without education and housing; and all of these depend on alignment with EU norms and institutions. The simultaneity of war, recovery, and Europeanisation makes Ukraine a unique case in the study of post-conflict reconstruction. Its trajectory will depend on its ability to transform vulnerabilities into opportunities: turning mines into fields, displacement into skills, and destruction into the foundation for renewal.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study underscore that Ukraine's reconstruction is not a conventional case of post-conflict recovery. In most historical examples, such as Bosnia or Kosovo, reconstruction began after hostilities ceased and was largely orchestrated by external actors. Ukraine presents a different situation: reconstruction planning and partial implementation are unfolding in the midst of war, with the government, local communities, and international partners already laying the foundations for transformation. This simultaneity of war, recovery, and European integration fundamentally reshapes the dynamics of reconstruction and requires a different analytical lens.

A useful way to situate Ukraine's reconstruction is through comparison with past experiences of post-conflict and post-crisis recovery. Historical precedents such as Croatia, South Korea, Rwanda, and the Central and Eastern European (CEE) EU accessions offer both inspiration and cautionary tales. Yet Ukraine's situation differs in critical ways, which makes it necessary to avoid the mechanical application of earlier models.

Croatia's post-war recovery in the 1990s demonstrates the sheer scale of demining required before agricultural and rural revival was possible. More than a decade of sustained international support was needed to clear landmines, and

progress was uneven. The Croatian case suggests that Ukraine will require not only long-term external expertise but also institutionalised demining agencies and financing mechanisms embedded in national strategies. South Korea's Saemaul Undong movement illustrates how infrastructure investment can be paired with human capital development, especially in rural areas. By combining local mobilisation, civic participation, and state support, South Korea transformed underdeveloped villages into productive communities. Ukraine faces a similar challenge in its war-torn rural regions but must adapt this approach to modern conditions by embedding digital technologies, decentralisation structures, and EU standards. Rwanda's post-genocide experience highlights the role of education and civic reconstruction in sustaining recovery. Its trauma-informed schooling and national reconciliation programs show how rebuilding is not only material but also social. For Ukraine, where millions of children have experienced displacement and psychological stress, such measures are essential to ensure that education underpins national cohesion rather than division. Finally, the cases of Armenia and Kosovo underscore the dual role of the diaspora: both a potential driver of skills and investment and a risk of permanent brain drain if not mobilised effectively. Ukraine's large diaspora in the EU offers a similar duality, highlighting the importance of circular migration policies and targeted diaspora entrepreneurship programs.

An instructive lens for Ukraine's future is provided by Buzogány and Varga's (2025) comparative exploration of rural transitions in CEE countries during EU enlargement. They find that while the EU initially adopted a "one-size-fits-all" rural development model, its effectiveness was shaped by national institutions and governance capacities—a phenomenon they term "institutional monocropping." Importantly, EU conditionality toward Ukraine is even more stringent, demanding deeper market liberalisation than it required of earlier CEE aspirants, even as Ukraine emphasises protectionist strategies to shield nascent industries. This divergence highlights a critical tension: the conventional EU model of rural integration may not be directly replicable in Ukraine without adaptation. Yet the experience of Poland, the Baltics, and other CEE countries shows that long-term convergence in agricultural productivity and rural welfare is achievable where initial conditions, administrative readiness, and strategic policies align (Jambor and Gorton, 2025). For Ukraine, the lesson is twofold: it must build robust administrative and policy capacity while seeking tailored transitional arrangements—potentially more graduated or dual-track—to avoid the pitfalls of premature liberalisation that undermined rural resilience in other new EU members. In short, Ukraine can learn from CEE successes in leveraging EU instruments but must adapt its application to its distinct context of wartime damage, land concentration, and geopolitical vulnerability.

Taken together, these models demonstrate that while Ukraine shares elements with past cases, it also combines challenges at a scale and intensity that are unprecedented. Unlike Croatia, its demining must occur alongside EU accession negotiations; unlike South Korea, it cannot rely on centralised mobilisation but must work through decentralised governance; unlike Rwanda, it faces ongoing conflict

rather than post-conflict stabilisation; and unlike the CEE states, its integration occurs in the midst of war and under stricter liberalisation demands. Ukraine's uniqueness, therefore, lies in the simultaneous layering of war, integration, and global interdependence, which makes its reconstruction not only larger in scale but qualitatively different from earlier experiences (Table 1).

Table 1. Reconstruction lessons and limits

Case	Context	Core strategy	Key lesson	Limits
Croatia (1990s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post-war recovery after the Yugoslav conflict EU accession path 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large-scale demining Gradual EU integration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demining is a long-term precondition for rural revival 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slow progress Heavy reliance on external expertise
South Korea (1970s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Authoritarian modernisation Rural poverty after the Korean War 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Saemaul Undong (village modernisation through civic mobilisation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Link infrastructure investment with human capital development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Context-specific Depended on centralised mobilisation
Rwanda (post-1994)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post-genocide recovery Severe trauma and institutional collapse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trauma-informed education Reconciliation and strong donor support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconstruction must include social and educational healing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risk of authoritarianism; dependent on external aid
Poland & CEE EU accession (2000s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post-socialist transition EU conditionality and funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Absorption of EU funds Agricultural and rural policy reform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EU integration can drive modernisation if administrative capacity exists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Premature liberalisation deepened inequalities in some regions
Armenia & Kosovo (diaspora)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post-conflict/fragile states with large diasporas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diaspora engagement in skills, remittances, and entrepreneurship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diaspora can be a driver, but risks permanent brain drain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult to maintain long-term engagement
Ukraine (current)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing full-scale war EU candidate Global food security implications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Security and reconstruction sequencing EU integration Diversification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconstruction must be transformative, not restorative Integrate EU accession with recovery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unprecedented overlap of war, EU accession, and global interdependence

Source: Author's contribution

A central theme emerging from the analysis is the issue of sequencing. Conventional wisdom in post-conflict studies emphasises stabilisation and security as preconditions for reform. Roland Paris famously warned against premature liberalisation, advocating “institutionalisation before liberalisation.” Ukraine's trajectory, however, demonstrates that sequencing cannot follow a neat linear order. Demining cannot wait for peace, agricultural exports must continue even under blockade, and education reforms must proceed despite displacement. In practice, Ukraine has been forced into a model of parallelism, where urgent stabilisation,

sectoral reform, and Europeanisation are pursued simultaneously. This creates risks of overstretch but also opportunities for acceleration, as reforms that might otherwise take decades are compressed into a much shorter time frame.

Europeanisation plays a distinctive role in shaping this process. Unlike post-war states in Africa or the Middle East, where reconstruction was largely donor-driven, Ukraine's recovery is anchored in the EU accession perspective. This provides a long-term horizon that aligns domestic and external incentives. Croatia's experience illustrates how accession conditionality can structure post-war reforms, from demining to rural modernisation, while also providing access to EU funds. For Ukraine, the candidacy granted in 2022 transforms reconstruction from an open-ended aid project into a convergence process. Yet this also raises challenges, as EU standards require extensive institutional capacity, and the war has eroded administrative resources. The credibility of accession conditionality, long debated in enlargement studies, will thus be a decisive factor in determining whether reconstruction produces lasting transformation or temporary stabilisation.

Another major theme is the interdependence of reconstruction pillars. Agriculture cannot recover without secure trade corridors; rural communities cannot be revitalised without jobs and services; labour migration cannot be addressed without housing, education, and reintegration policies. The case of South Korea's Saemaul Undong highlights the dangers of focusing solely on infrastructure without parallel human development, while Bosnia illustrates the problems of fragmented governance that undermine service delivery. Ukraine's decentralisation reform provides a counterpoint: empowered municipalities have proven capable of responding flexibly even under war conditions, showing that local governance can be an asset rather than an obstacle. The lesson here is that reconstruction must be designed as a mutually reinforcing system, rather than a collection of isolated projects.

The role of external actors also requires careful consideration. International partners have already mobilised substantial resources, from the EU's Solidarity Lanes to World Bank financial packages and bilateral military and humanitarian aid. Yet comparative cases warn of the dangers of donor fatigue, coordination failures, and dependency. The experience of Afghanistan, where massive inflows of aid produced short-term outputs but weak institutions, highlights the risks of excessive reliance on external funding. Ukraine's strong domestic ownership, visible in the government's reform agenda and the resilience of local governance, provides a degree of protection against such risks. However, transparency, anti-corruption measures, and alignment with EU standards will be essential to sustain donor confidence and avoid the pitfalls of fragmented assistance.

Labour migration illustrates both the vulnerabilities and the opportunities of reconstruction. The mass displacement of Ukrainians is reminiscent of post-Yugoslav migration flows, which in many cases became permanent. Yet the EU context offers a different dynamic: Ukrainians in Poland, Germany, and other member states are embedded in environments that could facilitate circular migration, skills ac-

quisition, and eventual return. The challenge is to create institutional frameworks that make returns attractive. Policies such as credential recognition, housing support, and targeted reintegration programs are therefore not marginal but central to ensuring that human capital becomes an asset rather than a liability.

Education represents another domain where interdependence is evident. Neglecting education, as seen in Sierra Leone and Afghanistan, undermines recovery for generations. Ukraine's capacity to sustain hybrid schooling and expand digital platforms despite war conditions demonstrates resilience and innovation. However, this must be matched by a commitment to trauma-informed education and youth empowerment. The younger generation is not only the most affected by the war but also the most critical to future recovery. Their integration into decision-making processes, rather than treating them solely as beneficiaries, will be a key determinant of whether reconstruction fosters long-term social cohesion.

A coherent reconstruction strategy must also include a renewed and comprehensive industrial policy—one that transcends support for isolated sectors and instead reconfigures the entire economic structure of post-war Ukraine (Rodrik, 2004). Recent studies, including Milakovsky and Vlasiuk (2024), emphasise that Ukraine needs a “crash re-industrialisation” to counter decades of deindustrialisation, reclaim industrial sovereignty, and build resilience against external shocks.

This entails not only fostering arms manufacturing for defence but also investing with the EU in decarbonising metallurgical and key industrial systems to prevent Ukraine from being marginalised in the transition toward a Green Deal Europe. Complementing this, a “smart specialisation” approach—advocated by the German Marshall Fund and others—urges Ukraine to focus on scaling up sectors where it maintains a competitive edge: green energy, critical minerals, IT services, defence-related production, and advanced agribusiness. Strategic scenario planning, as outlined by Kushnirenko, Gakhovich, and Venger (2023), further supports this by acknowledging wartime uncertainties and recommending flexible long-term development paths that align industrial reconstruction with sustainability and technical modernisation. Together, these perspectives illustrate that an industrial policy in Ukraine must be more than classic state intervention—it should provide strategic direction, support value-added diversification, promote green and digital competitiveness, and embed reconstruction in a longer-term European convergence trajectory.

Finally, the discussion highlights the importance of balancing urgency with inclusiveness. Rapid recovery is politically necessary, but if small farmers, rural communities, displaced populations, or marginalised groups are left behind, reconstruction risks deepening inequalities (Table 2). The history of land reforms in Eastern Europe illustrates both the benefits and dangers of liberalisation: while markets can stimulate investment, they can also entrench concentration and exclusion if safeguards are weak. Ukraine's 2021 land reform, though limited in scope, provides a framework for balancing efficiency with equity, but its success will depend on transparent implementation and continued monitoring.

Table 2. Reconstruction priorities by sector

Sector	Key challenges	Proposed priorities
Agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over 10 million hectares are contaminated by mines and unexploded ordnance Blocked or unreliable export corridors Limited access to credit and risk insurance Damage to storage and logistics infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large-scale, internationally supported demining (Croatia as precedent) Secure and expand EU “Solidarity Lanes”; invest in port and rail capacity Political risk insurance and concessional loans for farmers Promote AgTech adoption and green transition in farming practices
Rural development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Depopulation due to displacement and migration Destruction of local infrastructure and housing Limited job opportunities outside agriculture Unequal regional development (East vs. West) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen decentralised governance (hromadas) for local-level recovery Job creation tailored regionally (demining & reconstruction in East; agro-processing/ logistics in Central regions; tourism & SMEs in West) Mobile clinics and hybrid schooling to restore services quickly Link physical rebuilding with human capital development (Saemaul Undong logic)
Trade / EU integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trade disruption from closed Black Sea routes Heavy dependence on agriculture for exports Need for regulatory harmonisation with the EU Infrastructure bottlenecks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deepen DCFTA alignment and accelerate acquis harmonisation Expand Solidarity Lanes into long-term transport integration Diversify exports into IT, renewables, and manufacturing Embed sustainability (EU Green Deal) in trade policy to secure EU market access
Labour migration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over 6 million Ukrainians are displaced abroad Risk of permanent brain drain, especially of skilled workers Fragmented policies for return and reintegration Housing shortages and limited social safety nets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policies for circular migration and diaspora engagement Recognition of qualifications earned abroad Housing and social reintegration support for returnees Diaspora entrepreneurship and targeted tax incentives EU partnerships for managed labour mobility
Education and youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over 2,000 schools damaged or destroyed Millions of children in hybrid/remote education Trauma and psychological stress among youth Risk of “lost generation” if education gap persists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rebuild and modernise schools, combining in-person and digital infrastructure Expand STEM education to align with reconstruction and modernisation needs Trauma-informed curricula and teacher training Civic education to support cohesion and democratic participation International partnerships (UNICEF, Microsoft, Erasmus+) for hybrid schooling models

Source: Author's contribution

In sum, Ukraine's reconstruction reveals a unique combination of pressures and opportunities. It is occurring in the midst of war, under the anchor of EU accession, and across multiple interdependent sectors. Comparative experiences illuminate both what is possible and what should be avoided, but Ukraine's scale, geopolitical importance, and integration prospects make it distinctive. The discussion, therefore, suggests that Ukraine is not only a test case for post-conflict reconstruction but also for the future of Europeanisation as a transformative process under conditions of war. Its success or failure will reverberate beyond its borders, shaping both global debates on reconstruction and the trajectory of the European project itself.

Conclusion

This study has explored Ukraine's reconstruction through the lenses of agriculture and rural development, EU integration, labour reintegration, and youth empowerment. The findings demonstrate that the war has not only destroyed infrastructure and livelihoods but has also accelerated structural choices that will determine whether Ukraine emerges as a resilient European state or remains trapped in cycles of dependency. Three insights stand out in revisiting the research questions.

First, the war has reshaped Ukraine's agriculture and rural economy in ways that make recovery dependent on sequencing and external support. Demining is the single most urgent precondition, with an estimated ten million hectares affected and a likely cost exceeding \$30 billion. Without this step, agricultural productivity will stagnate. In terms of importance, demining must be considered high, both for domestic food security and for export revival. Beyond security, the Solidarity Lanes initiative has proven a moderately effective emergency measure, facilitating over 45 million tons of exports. Yet its long-term sustainability depends on heavy investment in rail and port modernisation, which should be rated medium-high importance. By contrast, policies for farm-level credit access and risk insurance, while essential, are best understood as medium-level priorities, since they presuppose a functioning trade and logistics framework. Taken together, the evidence suggests that agriculture can become the backbone of recovery only if sequencing is respected: mines cleared, corridors secured, credit and technology introduced, and finally, sustainability integrated. The vision of Ukraine as a "Green Food Hub of Europe" thus remains aspirational but achievable, contingent on prioritising basic security first.

Second, EU integration, labour, and youth policies will determine whether reconstruction is transformative. The research shows that EU accession functions as both a political anchor and a framework for policy coherence. This is a high-priority factor, as it both attracts investment and disciplines reforms by tying them to a long-term goal. Within this framework, labour migration management emerges as equally significant. With over six million Ukrainians abroad, the risk of demographic decline is serious. Policies such as credential recognition, housing support, and diaspora entrepreneurship are crucial. These can be ranked as highly impor-

tant because they directly affect whether Ukraine retains its human capital base. By contrast, broader diversification policies — e.g., developing IT or renewable energy alongside agriculture — are medium-priority: important for resilience but dependent on stability and human resources being secured first.

Youth empowerment illustrates the interdependence of human and institutional recovery. The destruction of thousands of schools and the shift to hybrid education have revealed both fragility and adaptability. Investment in STEM education should be rated high, as it directly conditions Ukraine's ability to rebuild infrastructure and develop modern sectors. Trauma-informed schooling and civic education are medium-high priorities, essential for cohesion but harder to measure in economic terms. The broader insight here is that youth are not simply a vulnerable group but a strategic resource. Unless they are mobilised as active participants, reconstruction risks producing a recovery without renewal.

Third, the synthesis of agricultural and human capital potential suggests that Ukraine has the opportunity to position itself simultaneously as a global food supplier and as a resilient EU member state. Agriculture is Ukraine's comparative advantage, but its future lies not in volume exports alone, but in efficiency, sustainability, and integration into European supply chains. This should be considered a high-potential but medium-feasibility pathway: the resources exist, but realisation requires alignment with EU Green Deal standards and significant technology transfer. Human capital, by contrast, is both a vulnerability and an opportunity. The risk of permanent emigration is real, yet diaspora networks could provide skills, investment, and advocacy abroad. This duality should be rated as medium-risk, high-reward: success depends on effective policy instruments to encourage return and engagement.

From a comparative perspective, Ukraine's situation is unique but not without precedents. Croatia demonstrates the feasibility of long-term demining; Poland illustrates how EU accession can accelerate modernisation; South Korea highlights the gains from linking infrastructure to human capital; Rwanda offers lessons in trauma-informed education; and Armenia and Kosovo show how diasporas can be mobilised. These cases confirm that transformation is possible, but only if sequencing, coordination, and inclusivity are respected. The article, therefore, contributes to both policy and theory. Empirically, it identifies which interventions should be prioritised, and at what level of urgency, across Ukraine's reconstruction agenda. Theoretically, it demonstrates that post-conflict recovery, when embedded in Europeanisation, can move beyond restoration toward systemic transformation.

In this sense, Ukraine's reconstruction must also be understood as the foundation of a new Ukrainian development model. The pre-war economy, built on agricultural exports, heavy industry, and labour migration, provided stability but did not enable sustained convergence with the EU. The war has dismantled these pillars, but it has also created the possibility of transformation. The new model will likely rest on three interdependent elements: the modernisation of agriculture into a sustainable, high-value "Green Food Hub of Europe"; the diversification of industry toward renewable energy, logistics, and digital sectors aligned with

EU industrial strategies; and the centrality of human capital, fostered through labour reintegration, diaspora engagement, and investment in youth and education. If pursued coherently, this trajectory can place Ukraine on a genuine catch-up path with its Central European neighbours and ensure that reconstruction becomes not only recovery but long-term convergence.

In conclusion, Ukraine's reconstruction rests on three pillars of highest importance: large-scale demining, EU integration as an anchor, and human capital investment through labour reintegration and youth education. These should be pursued with urgency and coherence. Medium-priority interventions include credit mechanisms, diversification policies, and civic education reforms, which gain traction only once the preconditions are secured. Lower-priority but still relevant measures, such as small-scale entrepreneurship programs, will matter most at the regional level rather than nationally. If sequencing is respected and resources are mobilised effectively, Ukraine can emerge not only as a functioning EU member but as a symbol of renewal: a society that transformed war-induced devastation into sustainable recovery and global relevance.

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