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**The association between quantitative workload,
person-job fit, and career sustainability among
Ukrainian hidden expatriates in Czechia**

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ABSTRACT:

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, an unprecedented wave of Ukrainian citizens has entered the Czech labour market. Despite many of them possessing robust levels of human capital and advanced educational or career backgrounds, systemic and institutional barriers have structurally pushed many of the highly skilled professionals into low-status, physically demanding employment roles. This forced occupational displacement has led to the emergence of a highly vulnerable workforce demographic conceptualised as "hidden expatriates." Unlike traditional expatriates, who may benefit from extensive organisational support or utilisation of their professional skills, these individuals may frequently face severe underemployment and possibly a profound "brain waste" phenomenon.

Anchored in the sustainable careers framework and supported by the job demands-resources (JD-R) model, this thesis empirically examines the career sustainability of this specific expatriate group. Specifically, the research aims to investigate how two primary work-related antecedents, namely quantitative workload and person-job fit, may be associated with the core career sustainability indicators. These indicators include health (measured through job exhaustion), happiness (evaluated via subjective career success) and productivity (assessed through perceived internal and external marketability).

To address these objectives, a quantitative, cross-sectional research design is employed. Primary data has been collected via a digital survey from a non-probability sample of 103 Ukrainian hidden expatriates who are currently employed in manual, service, or entry-level roles in Czechia. By focusing strictly on these demanding employment roles, the research strives towards uncovering possible mechanisms threatening this displaced workforce. The collected data is then analysed using multiple linear regression analyses to test the theoretical hypotheses.

The findings suggest that quantitative workload is positively associated with job exhaustion and negatively associated with subjective career success and internal marketability. Person-job fit, in contrast, is positively associated with subjective career success and perceived marketability, and negatively associated with job exhaustion. These results indicate that demanding work conditions and the underutilisation of workers' skills may be important factors in understanding the career sustainability of Ukrainian hidden expatriates in Czechia.

Finally, this study aims to contribute to the international human resource management (IHRM) literature by applying the sustainable career lens to a frequently overlooked expatriate group. The thesis highlights a possible managerial need for host-country employers and policymakers to implement systemic changes. It is argued that by actively mitigating work requirements

resulting in high quantitative workload and proactively utilising the latent human capital of displaced workers, organisations may prevent workforce degradation and support a more sustainable career ecosystem within the researched demographic group.

KEYWORDS: Ukrainian expatriates, hidden expatriates, career sustainability, expatriation, international human resource management, brain waste, perceived overqualification

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Abbreviations

AE	- Assigned Expatriate
HR	- Human Resources
HRM	- Human Resource Management
IHRM	- International Human Resource Management
RQ	- Research Question
SIE	- Self-Initiated Expatriate

1 Introduction

"I have found that a great enterprise can be best built when the entrepreneur sets out to serve his customers and employees, because only then will the customers and employees serve him and his vision." — (Baťa, 1932, p. 205)

The philosophy of the Czechoslovakian industrialist Tomáš Baťa highlights that an organization's success depends on sustaining the well-being and potential of its workforce. Recently, this ideal has faced new challenges within the Czech labour market. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Czechia has become one of the largest recipients of Ukrainian citizens relative to its population, hosting approximately 396,820 Ukrainians as of January 2026 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2026). The Czech labour market, historically defined by exceptionally low unemployment (World Bank, 2026), received an influx of a highly skilled workforce (Postepska & Voloshyna, 2025, p. 7).

However, despite their high levels of human capital, many Ukrainian workers in Czechia are often underemployed. Due to institutional barriers and the fact that Ukraine is not a part of the European Union, many highly skilled professionals are unable to utilise their acquired education and are structurally pushed into low- and entry-level industries (CEDEFOP, 2024, p. 17). This work below one's qualification has impacted approximately 58% of Ukrainians in the country, including 63% of women and 45% of men (PAQ Research, 2023, p. 12). The lower-level roles they frequently accept are characterized by high physical demands and low wages, often treating workers as easily replaceable (Holý, 2023).

Within modern international human resource management (IHRM) literature, individuals employed in such roles due to institutional or contextual barriers are conceptualized as "hidden expatriates." Despite their critical role in host economies, hidden expatriates seem to remain underexplored in IHRM research. Furthermore, we currently know very little about their health, happiness, and productivity as sustainable career indicators. To

address this, this thesis utilises the concept of sustainable careers as defined by De Vos et al. (2020) as its central theoretical framework. The primary objective of this study is to empirically examine the career sustainability of Ukrainian hidden expatriates working in Czechia.

By examining Ukrainian hidden expatriates in Czechia, this thesis contributes to international human resource management and sustainable career research by focusing on a group that remains underrepresented in expatriation studies. Specifically, the thesis investigates how quantitative workload and person-job fit are associated with three sustainable career indicators: job exhaustion, subjective career success, and perceived internal and external marketability. In doing so, the study offers a certain empirical insight into how demanding work conditions and human capital underutilisation relate to the career sustainability of displaced international workers.

1.1 Background of the thesis

In the current era's labour market, which may be described as rather turbulent and volatile, the primary challenge for human resource management (HRM) seems to be shifting from simply maximizing performance to ensuring long-term preservation of workforce (Kramar, 2014, p. 1077). For some time, many researchers have increasingly argued in favour of a paradigm shift from traditional "work intensification" towards more sustainable HRM practices aimed at regenerating human and social resources, rather than consuming them (Ehnert et al., 2016, p. 90). Traditionally, career outcomes were primarily evaluated through objective indicators of success, such as salary increases or an individual's promotions. However, the new trends and reality of global employment, such as the growing importance of individual voice or disruptions, like the Covid-19 pandemic along with rapid digitalization, have encouraged a much broader understanding of what individuals and organizations truly value. As noted by Mello, Erro-Garcés, et al. (2025), these paradigm shifts in global mobility emphasize the need to move beyond solely organizational goals to consider what individuals perceive as meaningful and sustainable in their own careers.

Consequently, the conceptual model of sustainable careers introduced by De Vos et al. (2020) provides the central theoretical anchor for this thesis. Rather than viewing career success through external variables, this framework focuses on the absolute necessity of achieving an individual's health, happiness, and productivity to prevent exhaustion and resource depletion (Donald et al., 2024).

This need for career sustainability is exceptionally critical in the context of modern global mobility, particularly for self-initiated expatriates (SIEs). Unlike traditional corporate assignees who receive significant support from their organizations (Shaffer et al., 2012), SIEs relocate and seek work abroad independently (Suutari & Brewster, 2000). While this grants them autonomy, their lack of institutional backing might make them highly vulnerable to economic and geo-political shocks. This fragility was very much highlighted during the Covid-19 pandemic, as a large part of SIEs had to navigate this crisis on their own (Cerdin & Selmer, 2014; Haak-Saheem, 2020; Kelly & Conroy, 2024). The described essential vulnerability might make SIEs a very relevant demographic for applying a sustainable career perspective. Furthermore, their professional lives are frequently characterized by high "work density", conceptually defined as a high concentration of complex job demands, expansive job scope, and intense professional responsibilities compressed into specific timeframes (Mello et al., 2023a, 2024; Mello, Suutari, et al., 2025). When global workers are forced to navigate this rather demanding combination of cross-cultural adjustment and intense professional demands without organizational protection, their long-term health, happiness, and productivity might face certain challenges.

This challenge to career sustainability, affecting expatriate workers, has arguably emerged on quite a large scale following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The conflict triggered a wave of involuntary international mobility, forcing millions to enter foreign labour markets out of necessity (European External Action Service [EEAS], 2022). This situation has created a substantial population of "hidden expatriates", namely workers who are structurally pushed into low-status and often physically demanding jobs in

their host countries (Haak-Saheem & Brewster, 2017). Czechia currently hosts one of the highest proportions of these displaced individuals in Europe relative to its population, which stand for 3.45% of the total population (Konsorcium nevládních organizací, 2025). From an academic perspective, this case might not only be important socially, but even more so theoretically. The above-described situation may provide a unique empirical setting which might help us to examine how the sudden loss of professional employment status and the intense demands of new roles could act as direct antecedents that are associated with an expatriate's subjective career success (happiness), job exhaustion (health), and internal, as well as external perceived marketability (productivity) over time.

The integration of this, in many cases, highly skilled workforce into the Czech labour market seems to present a significant managerial paradox. While many Ukrainian workers possess advanced education or training, the systemic mismatch between their "white-collar" human capital and the "blue-collar" roles they are currently fulfilling may create a phenomenon of significant "brain-waste" (Macková et al., 2025, p. 67), resulting in a missed opportunity for Czech businesses (Szkudlarek et al., 2021, p. 31) and economy as a whole. This thesis aims to apply the sustainable career perspective to this arguably under-researched and vulnerable expatriate population. By doing so, it seeks to uncover how modern HRM, as well as government organizations, can better understand and mitigate the challenges related to the career sustainability of hidden expatriates in an era of crisis-driven global mobility in host countries which seem to be increasingly relying upon such workforce (d'Albis et al., 2018; Newman et al., 2018).

1.2 Research gap and problem statement

Despite the growing recognition of self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) in managerial literature, a specific research gap remains.

Firstly, expatriate research has historically mainly focused on highly skilled corporate or self-initiated expatriates (Andresen et al., 2013; Biemann & Andresen, 2010; Cerdin &

Selmer, 2014; Haslberger & Vaiman, 2013; Suutari & Brewster, 2000), while hidden expatriates remain underexplored. As Haak-Saheem & Brewster (2017) demonstrate, a vast segment of global expatriates actually consists of "hidden expatriates" who are structurally forced into low-earning industries requiring less formal education. Despite their critical importance to host economies (Haak-Saheem & Brewster, 2017, p. 13), such as in Czechia, where Ukrainian workers contribute significantly more to the state than they receive in support (Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí [MPSV], 2025), this demographic remains largely overlooked in mainstream IHRM literature.

Secondly, research on Ukrainian workers in Czechia has focused more on legal, social, or labour market integration than on career sustainability. While an increasing amount of socio-economic literature documents the influx of Ukrainian citizens to Czechia, this research primarily addresses short-term legal integration, social welfare, or basic employment statistics (International Organization for Migration, 2024; Mentzelopoulou & Orav, 2025). Consequently, there is a profound lack of research examining this population through the lens of HRM, specifically regarding the factors that define their workplace welfare (Piwowar-Sulej et al., 2022, p. 600).

Thirdly, we know little about how specific work-related antecedents, such as quantitative workload and person-job fit, relate to health, happiness, and productivity among this group. While significant emphasis is placed on initial labour market inclusion, very little empirical research targets the specific career trajectories, potential overqualification, and career satisfaction of this highly vulnerable subgroup (Adamovic & Cooney-O'Donoghue, 2025, p. 91; Usanova et al., 2023, p. 2).

Problem statement:

The central problem addressed in this thesis is the limited empirical understanding of how work-related conditions are associated with the career sustainability of Ukrainian hidden expatriates in Czechia. Although Ukrainian workers play an important role in the Czech labour market, many are employed in roles that do not fully utilise their education,

skills, or previous professional experience. This raises important questions about their health, happiness, and productivity as sustainable career indicators.

1.3 Research objectives and questions

The primary objective of this thesis is to empirically examine the career sustainability of Ukrainian hidden expatriates working in Czechia. Specifically, the thesis aims to investigate how two specific work-related antecedents (quantitative workload and person-job fit) are associated with the three core indicators of career sustainability, namely health (job exhaustion), happiness (subjective career success), and productivity (perceived internal and external marketability) (De Vos et al., 2020).

To achieve this objective and maintain a cohesive theoretical narrative, this study is guided by one primary research question, supported by two specific sub-questions:

Main Research Question (MRQ): How are work-related antecedents associated with the career sustainability of Ukrainian hidden expatriates in Czechia?

To systematically answer this main question, the following sub-questions are addressed:

Sub-Question 1 (SQ1): To what extent is quantitative workload associated with health, happiness, and productivity among Ukrainian hidden expatriates in Czechia?

Sub-Question 2 (SQ2): To what extent is person-job fit associated with health, happiness, and productivity among Ukrainian hidden expatriates in Czechia?

1.4 Definitions of key terms

In this chapter, the key terms related to this thesis are defined to provide conceptual clarity for the reader and to establish how these concepts are specifically operationalized within this study's theoretical framework.

Sustainable Career: Serving as the central theoretical framework of this thesis, a sustainable career is a trajectory characterized by the continuous preservation and renewal of personal resources over time. Rather than being just a single variable, it represents the overarching lens through which the employee's experience is evaluated. In this study, it is structurally measured through three core outcome indicators: health (job exhaustion), happiness (subjective career success), and productivity (internal and external perceived marketability), following the theoretical framework proposed by De Vos et al. (2020).

Self-Initiated Expatriate (SIE): An individual who is highly educated or skilled, follows international work experience by their own initiative, without the structural support of an organization in their home country, and with the intent of a temporary stay which lasts more than one year (Suutari & Brewster, 2000).

Hidden Expatriate: A specific subset of the SIE population relocating independently for work but frequently excluded from traditional expatriate management research. Rather than lacking professional skills, these individuals may often be characterized by a severe mismatch between their acquired qualifications and their current labour market position influenced by the contextual factors in their host country (e.g. legislative barriers, protection of workers' rights), which structurally push them into low-status, entry-level, or physically demanding roles, in contrast to the domestic workers (Haak-Saheem & Brewster, 2017).

Brain Waste: Brain waste refers to the systemic underutilisation of an expatriate's skills, education, and qualifications in the host-country labour market. In this thesis, person-job fit, measured through demands-abilities fit, is used as an individual-level indicator

that captures one aspect of this broader phenomenon. However, brain waste itself is understood as a wider structural issue that also includes institutional, legal, and labour market barriers (Pires, 2009, p. 2).

Quantitative Workload: In a general sense, workload represents the "*sheer volume of work required of an employee*" (Spector & Jex, 1998, p. 358). In this thesis, quantitative workload is specifically defined as the employee's perceived amount of work in terms of both volume and pace. Within the theoretical framework of this study, it acts as a primary job demand which should be negatively associated with the career sustainability of hidden expatriates.

Person-Job Fit: In organizational research, person-job fit refers to the "*judgments of congruence between an employee's skills and the demands of a job*" (Cable & DeRue, 2002, p. 875). In this thesis, it is measured specifically through demands-abilities fit. Within the context of hidden expatriates, it measures the possible match or mismatch between a worker's advanced personal abilities, education, and training and the actual requirements of their current employment role. This antecedent arguably allows us to partially evaluate the brain waste phenomenon and its possible impact on long-term career sustainability (Cable & DeRue, 2002).

1.5 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is organized into five main chapters: Chapter 1 introduces the research topic, theoretical background and the specific research questions. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive literature review, spanning from the changing landscape of global mobility to the specific context of Ukrainian hidden expatriates. Chapter 3 focuses on the methodological approach, including the research design, sampling strategy and data analysis methods used to survey the target population. In chapter 4, empirical findings of the quantitative analysis shall be presented. Finally, chapter 5 concerns itself with the discussion of these findings in relation to the previous literature, offers theoretical and managerial implications and acknowledges the limitations of this thesis.

1.6 Delimitations of the thesis

To ensure the methodological feasibility and analytical focus of this research, several strict delimitations have been established.

Firstly, the empirical research is strictly limited to the Ukrainian workers in Czechia. Consequently, the findings may not be broadly generalizable to Ukrainian workers in other host countries, as varying socio-economic environments, national integration policies, and institutional support systems might significantly differentiate the expatriate experience.

Secondly, the target population is demographically narrowed to Ukrainian hidden expatriates currently employed in manual, service, or entry-level roles (e.g., manufacturing, cleaning, laundry, or hospitality). This focus is strictly enforced through a three-stage, logic-based screening process at the beginning of the survey, ensuring that individuals in professional office or corporate positions are excluded. Crucially, while a lack of person-job fit serves as a central explanatory variable, experiencing a mismatch is not a requirement for inclusion. The study aims to capture varying degrees of fit within this specific workforce to statistically test its association with the outcomes. Individuals outside this demographic, such as traditional corporate assignees, unemployed refugees, or expatriates from other nations, are excluded.

Lastly, this thesis limits its conceptual scope by measuring career sustainability strictly through the three established outcome indicators: health (job exhaustion), happiness (subjective career success), and productivity (perceived internal and external marketability). The investigation of antecedents is deliberately restricted to quantitative workload and person-job fit. By adopting a strictly quantitative research design, this thesis aims exclusively to measure statistical relationships and test theoretical pathways, rather than exploring the deeper, subjective qualitative narratives of the expatriate experience.

1.7 Author's declaration on the use of AI

In accordance with the guidelines regarding academic integrity and the transparent use of digital tools, the author acknowledges the use of artificial intelligence (AI) during the preparation of this thesis. Specifically, the large language model Gemini was utilised as an assistive tool strictly for language translation and for proofreading, as well as the use of appropriate academic language. AI was employed to accurately translate the survey instrument from English into Ukrainian to ensure cultural nuance and comprehensibility for the target sample. Furthermore, AI was used during the final drafting phases for grammatical proofreading and structural refinement of the English text. All core research design, data collection, statistical analysis in SPSS, theoretical interpretation, and intellectual conclusions remain as the original work of the author.

2 Literature review

Given that both the dynamics of international work and the literature describing it have undergone a rather significant paradigm shift over the past years (Mello, Erro-Garcés, et al., 2025), it shall be highly beneficial to examine this evolution through a modern theoretical lens.

Firstly, the primary theoretical anchor of the thesis is established, namely the sustainable career framework. Section 2.1 introduces the core dimensions of this model (person, context, and time) and its three key outcomes (health, happiness, and productivity). Following this, Section 2.2 examines the main work-related antecedents utilised in this study, specifically focusing on quantitative workload (explained through the job demands-resources (JD-R) theory) and person-job fit (measured through demands-abilities fit), which aims to evaluate the potential brain waste reality of the target demographic.

After the theoretical mechanism is established, Section 2.3 explores why the specific population of hidden expatriates is theoretically critical to study, tracing the changing landscape of expatriation from traditional corporate assignees to self-initiated and highly vulnerable workers (i.e. hidden expatriates). Section 2.4 then grounds these concepts in the specific empirical context of Ukrainian workers in Czechia, detailing how pre-war trends, the acceleration caused by the war, and systemic labour market barriers intensify the risks to their career sustainability and why this specific demographic may be included in the category of hidden expatriates. The section also provides arguments as to why this specific demographic's career sustainability may be crucial for the host economy. Finally, Section 2.5 utilises this literature to construct the conceptual research model and formulate the specific hypotheses that will be empirically tested in this thesis.

2.1 The theoretical framework of sustainable careers

In this chapter, the sustainable careers model is introduced as the primary theoretical framework of the thesis. Establishing this lens first shall provide the necessary foundation for measuring the associations with the specific challenges that Ukrainian hidden expatriates might face in their host country.

2.1.1 The sustainable careers framework

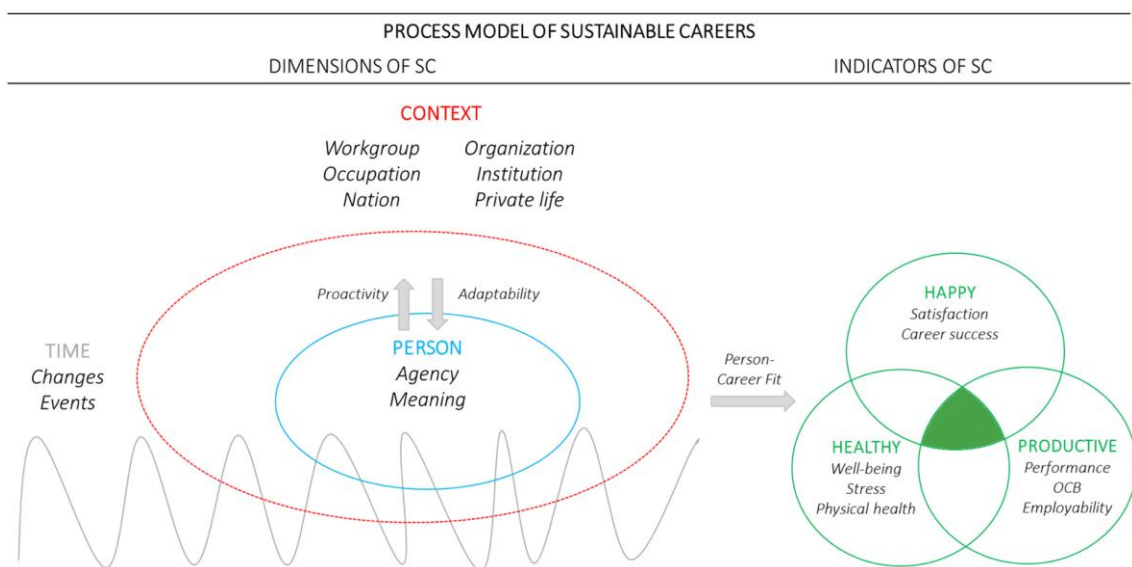


Figure 1. Conceptual model of sustainable careers (De Vos et al., 2020)

De Vos et al. (2020), who introduced the model of sustainable careers, define a sustainable career as a sequence of career experiences that offer ongoing growth, renewal and meaning over an individual's lifespan. Unlike the traditional metrics of career success, such as salary and promotions, career sustainability focuses on the preservation of human capital. The foundational argument behind the suggested paradigm shift from traditional career success metrics to the career sustainability, the authors argue, lies in the fact that in the long term, unsustainable careers (even if remunerated enough financially) may lead to employee burnout, skill degradation and, consequently, to structural issues such as staff shortages.

As can be seen in figure 1, the authors of the model conceptualize career sustainability not as a static achievement, but rather as a dynamic, ongoing process. The visual model shows that the three ultimate indicators of career sustainability (health, happiness and productivity) are continuously shaped by the constant interaction of three main dimensions, namely the person, their environment (context) and the progression of the individual lifespan (time).

2.1.2 The three main indicators of sustainable careers: Health, happiness and productivity

In order to measure the interaction between the dimensions of sustainable careers described above, De Vos et al. (2020), use three core interconnected indicators:

Health refers to both physical and mental well-being of the worker. Within demanding environments, such as those where hidden expatriates are most frequently employed, health might often be one of the first resources to be depleted. For instance, performing a high volume of demanding tasks within a very short period of time would without any doubt negatively predict the health indicator, leading to physical deterioration and emotional exhaustion (Mäkelä et al., 2022).

Happiness represents the subjective psychological satisfaction that an individual derives from their career. While in general populations, career happiness could be negatively associated with arguably predictable factors such as low financial remuneration or the lack of career advancement opportunities, the Ukrainian hidden expatriates may find themselves being influenced by a much broader group of factors. These may include job fit (Edwards, 1991) in regard to their possible overqualification, language barriers, lack of organizational support, inability to bond with colleagues, or other contextual factors outside of their employment, such as the safety of their families and relatives, legal obstructions, cultural barriers or a lack of social acceptance and integration support from the local community.

Productivity, in the authors' model, extends far beyond the traditional economic sense of the word as in measuring workers' output. Rather, it contains both current performance and the future potential of employability (Makkonen, 2015). A sustainable career ensures the worker remains employable, relevant and willing to work in the long term, rather than developing an intention of abandoning their career. For an average Ukrainian expatriate in Czechia, the upward mobility or future employability may be severely limited due to them fulfilling roles requiring less, if any, formal education and offering very limited promises of promotion or professional skill development. This may often provide little gain in professional knowledge or human capital to the worker. For those facing overqualification in their jobs, even a more significant risk may be posed by the erosion and decay of their original skills and the prolonged gaps in their careers, further limiting their likelihood of finding suitable professional jobs in the future. Therefore, this thesis uses health, happiness, and productivity as the outcome indicators through which career sustainability is assessed.

2.1.3 The core dimensions: Person, context, and time

The whole model of career sustainability seems to be driven by the following three core dimensions: person, context and time. In order to understand how the career sustainability of the Ukrainian expatriates is shaped by these dimensions, we may need to explore them in more depth.

The person dimension includes the individual agency, motivations, human capital, skills or personal values of the worker. For the majority of our researched demographic, this dimension may consist of possessing a strong work ethic and the urgent agency to support their families. For approximately half of our targeted demographic, which seems to be impacted by overqualification, these factors might also define highly educated individuals whose professional identities are currently being ignored or suppressed by the Czech labour market.

The context dimension represents the environment surrounding the worker, ranging from the workplace (micro-context) to more distant surrounding factors such as the legal and institutional realities of the host country (macro-context). For the entirety of the Ukrainian workforce, regardless of their educational background, this dimension could be defined by demanding environments (both physically and psychologically), language barriers, low organizational support and the legal barriers, which, as will be explored in later chapters, have been mitigated to a certain point by the temporary protection status as a result of the war in Ukraine.

Lastly, the dimension of time acknowledges that individual career evolves through one's lifespan. Once again, this dimension seems important in the context of the Ukrainian workers, given that they tend to remain in very demanding jobs continuously and possibly without outlooks for their situation to improve over any time soon. This could eventually take away opportunities for future development or upward mobility that the workers may find, even if their careers shall be otherwise sustainable. Regarding the workers experiencing the brain waste phenomenon, these could be especially vulnerable to the factor of time because their professional skillsets and human capital may start to deteriorate over time. Although sustainable careers are theoretically understood as developing over time, this thesis focuses on current indicators of career sustainability, as the empirical data were collected at one point in time.

Overall, the sustainable careers framework provides a vital, overarching, central tool for measuring and evaluating how the careers of Ukrainian hidden expatriates are impacted after their integration into the Czech labour market. This framework seems to be especially relevant and suitable for such an evaluation, given that the mentioned workers seem to be impacted by unsustainable working conditions and factors surrounding their stay in the host country. To fully understand the mechanisms potentially degrading these three indicators, it shall be necessary to uncover and examine the specific antecedents present in their work environments.

2.2 Main antecedents and indicators of sustainable careers evaluated in the thesis

To further analyse the psychological and physical toll of the expatriate experience, this thesis applies specific theoretical concepts to the observed population. This section introduces the primary possible antecedents that could threaten the sustainable career indicators of the Ukrainian hidden expatriates in Czechia, specifically focusing on the context and person dimensions of the sustainable career model (De Vos et al., 2020).

2.2.1 Quantitative workload

As was already formerly mentioned, in their paper, De Vos et al. (2020) identify the context dimension as one of those which allows us to analyse the sustainability of careers. Within this dimension, the authors argue, the job demands and resources model as described by Bakker & Demerouti (2017) allows us to observe a broad spectrum of antecedents which either positively (job resources) or negatively (job demands) influence the employees' career sustainability.

Therefore, to precisely identify the first suitable antecedent that may be influencing the career sustainability of the Ukrainian hidden expatriates in Czechia, this thesis uses the job demands and resources (JD-R) model, namely in its form as described by Bakker & Demerouti (2007). According to the JD-R model, the specific risk factors associated with job stress in any work environment may be categorized into two main groups: job demands and job resources.

Job demands refer to the physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects of the work which require sustained effort and could therefore be associated with physical and psychological costs. For the demographic of the hidden expatriates whom this thesis follows, the compounding effects of their job demands may be very significant. As was already described, most of the jobs of the Ukrainian workers may include lifting heavy objects, long shifts or extreme environments (e.g. too cold or hot). From the

psychological perspective then, similar demands may apply to them as to any regular expatriate, such as different language, laws, surrounding environments, the possible perceived overqualification, missing one's family or the necessity to sustain it in the new environment.

The term job resources then describes aspects of the job which support the employee in achieving their goals and reduce the job demands, or the pressure caused by them. While standard supportive tools may be beneficial in normal expatriate populations (e.g. cross-cultural training), the Ukrainian hidden expatriates may actually benefit from more context-specific resources, such as language proficiency, organizational support frameworks or established social capital in the host country. Without these, they may very well be limited in their ability to face their job demands.

The JD-R model explains that once the job demands chronically exceed the job resources, the resulting situation may become highly unsustainable for the workers. As Mäkelä et al. (2022) note in the context of global mobility, this significant imbalance may lead towards severe burnout, exhaustion and a rapid decline in career sustainability.

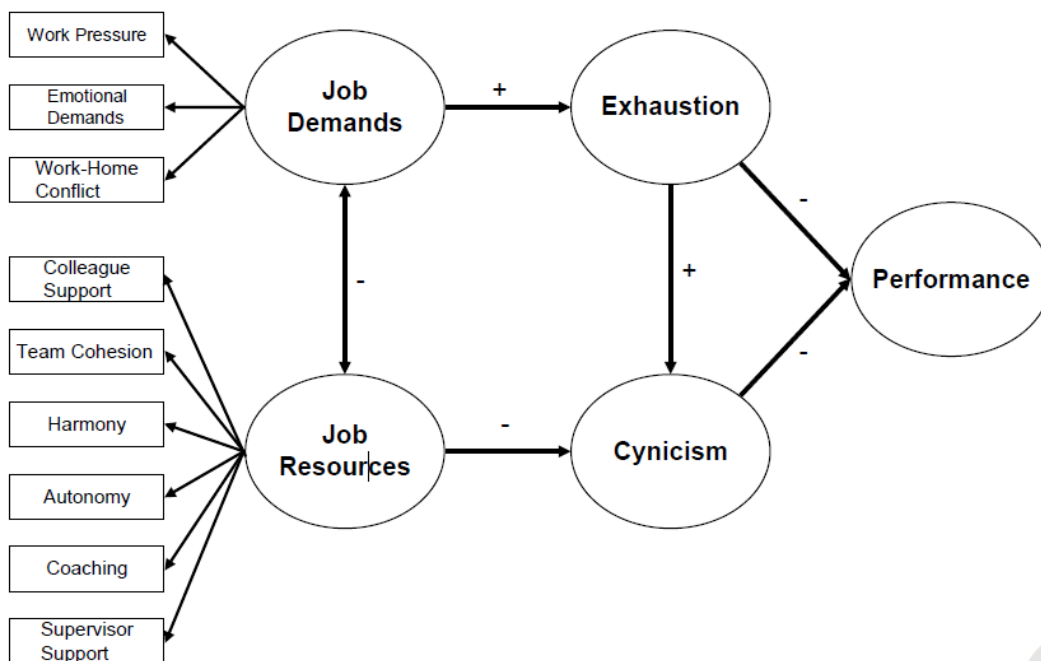


Figure 2. Work resources model (Bakker et al., 2008)

As illustrated in figure 2, the JD-R model operates through two separate but interconnected pathways, namely the health impairment process and the motivational process. As can be seen in the upper part of the model, the health impairment pathway shows negative chronic job demands, in this case given by factors such as work pressure, emotional demands or work-home conflict. Such negative factors positively predict severe physical and emotional exhaustion, while simultaneously positively predicting cynicism, which both together negatively impact performance. On the contrary, the lower motivational pathway shows supportive job resources such as colleague support, team cohesion or supervisor support. These factors act as a positive buffer, negatively predicting cynicism and disengagement.

Ultimately, this model may reveal quite a critical vulnerability for our demographic group. Because of being constantly pressured by an increased number of demands and supported by a low number of resources due to the mentioned contextual barriers in Czechia, the Ukrainian hidden expatriates may be significantly prone to cynicism and exhaustion. This, as the model shows, negatively affects their overall performance, practically guaranteeing low career sustainability and high burnout rate if no HRM policies shall be implemented.

In order to identify arguably one of the most likely antecedents which may predict these negative consequences, we may try to follow the paper by Bakker et al. (2004). In their work, which focuses on the implications of the JD-R model, the authors demonstrate that specific work demands, namely work pressure and quantitative workload, act as essential predictors of the exhaustion component of burnout, which could be seen as a direct antagonist to sustainable careers.

To further understand why quantitative workload may be especially severe for the demographic observed by this thesis, the specific nature of their employment should be explained. If there shall be at least one attribute which the majority of Ukrainian hidden expatriates in Czechia share, it would be the frequent necessity to work in demanding,

low-paying employment roles. These environments are described as those containing high volume of work, predominantly manual labour in physically demanding industries. Quantitative workload, then, might serve as a vital antecedent allowing us to understand the demands of this work, as Spector & Jex (1998, p. 358) define it as "*sheer volume of work required of an employee*". To further support this argument, the concept of high-density work, as introduced by Tesluk & Jacobs (1998), who relate it to environments characterized by high intensity of tasks, complex demands and rapid execution, may be introduced.

Mello et al. (2023b) adapt and extend this model for the context of international expatriates. They note that global work itself undoubtedly contains high-density demands due to multiple compounding pressures, such as learning a new language, navigating a new culture, and managing the loss of family support. While Mello et al. (2023b) connect the high-density work concept primarily to a traditional managerial view of self-initiated expatriates, emphasizing cognitive challenges, this thesis argues that the concept may be equally applicable to hidden expatriates fulfilling manual or blue collar employment roles.

Finally, besides facing the majority of the described cognitive challenges, the work of the Ukrainians in Czechia often consists of difficult manual labour, making them face immense physical demands as well. Therefore, by supporting the career sustainability framework with the JD-R framework and high-density theory of global mobility, we may see that the compounding physical and cognitive pace of their work could create a significant quantitative workload. This workload may act as a chronic job demand, pushing the workers down the health impairment pathway towards job exhaustion, potential burnout and, ultimately, degraded career sustainability. Furthermore, high quantitative workload may also be relevant for subjective career success and perceived marketability because it can reduce the time, energy, and psychological resources workers have available for career planning, skill development, language learning, and job search activities. For hidden expatriates, these resource losses may be especially consequential

because career recovery in the host country often requires active efforts to rebuild employability. Therefore, quantitative workload is examined as a job demand that may be negatively associated with sustainable career indicators.

2.2.2 Person-job fit

While quantitative workload may act as a severe environmental demand within the context dimension of sustainable careers, another specific psychological challenge may also uniquely influence the person dimension of the target population. According to De Vos et al. (2020), the person dimension includes an individual's human capital, skills, and professional identity, with the authors specifically highlighting person-career fit as a key antecedent regarding career sustainability. This antecedent may hopefully allow us to describe a certain component of the brain waste phenomenon within the target population. However, to accurately capture the reality of hidden expatriation, this thesis argues that a slight conceptual adaptation of the antecedent may be necessary. While Paruraman et al. (2000, p. 11), define person-career fit as “... *the extent to which an individual's career experiences are compatible with his or her needs, values, interests, and talents*”, it may be argued that this definition is rather broad and focused on long-term career orientation of traditional workers. While the demographic group, whom this thesis focuses on, certainly strives towards long-term career experiences, it is argued that their current position should be assessed in short-term view, given that their employment is oftentimes temporary and not compatible with the workers' original education or profession.

To possibly find a more precise antecedent which may help us to capture the brain waste phenomenon or perceived overqualification within the short-term career experience of our target population, this thesis draws on the person-environment fit theory as described by Mello (2023), which encompasses various sub-theories related to person-career fit. These include the person-job fit, as defined by Cable & DeRue (2002, p. 875) who describe it as “*judgments of congruence between an employee's skills and the demands of a job.*” Because the target sample is engaged in temporary, displaced

employment rather than structured long-term career trajectories, evaluating their immediate person-job fit may arguably be more suitable and empirically measurable than assessing their overarching person-career fit. Specifically, this thesis utilises the demands-abilities fit sub-tree of this concept, relying on the validated foundational work of (Cable & DeRue, 2002), who built upon the earlier operationalizations by Cable & Judge (1996).

In this thesis, person-job fit is not treated as identical to brain waste or perceived over-qualification. Rather, it is used to capture the individual-level experience of fit or misfit between respondents' abilities and the demands of their current job. This allows the study to examine how the broader problem of skill underutilisation may be reflected in workers' perceived fit with their employment role.

Person-job (demands-abilities) fit evaluates the congruence between an employee's personal skills, education, and training, and the actual requirements of their employment role. For traditional self-initiated expatriates, a high person-job fit should be a fundamental resource that could drive motivation and career satisfaction. For the Ukrainian hidden expatriates in Czechia, however, this dynamic may frequently be inverted, resulting in a profound lack of fit driven by the phenomenon of "brain waste" (Pires, 2009).

Currently, approximately half of the incoming Ukrainian expatriates possess a degree of higher education. However, because these degrees were obtained outside of the European Union, they are frequently not legally recognized by the Czech government. This systemic barrier may place many highly educated professionals, such as teachers, doctors, nurses, managers, or engineers, into situations where they might be left with no choice but to apply for secondary-market jobs that require no formal higher education or specific professional skillsets. A representative of one of the companies where the data for this study was gathered, for instance, recalled employing a former bank manager and a paediatrician, both of whom were forced by circumstances to work as laundry workers.

While a counterargument could be made that these workers might redeem their higher education through the legal recognition process (nostrification) of their Ukrainian degrees in the Czech Republic, such process may pose practical requirements that could hardly be achievable for temporary or hidden expatriates. For white-collar workers such as medical doctors, for example, achieving B2-level proficiency in the Czech language is mandatory, alongside completing their postgraduate certifications entirely in Czech. Consequently, although theoretically possible, the systemic hurdles of nostrification effectively discourage the vast majority of those impacted by them.

In the observed population, these increased external demands might create a brain waste reality, where the Czech labour market could be unable to fully redeem the potential of its workers. Within the JD-R framework, this systemic mismatch represents a profound deficit in job resources (the inability to utilise one's advanced skills). This severe discrepancy between the workers' human capital and their actual careers may result in a high sense of perceived overqualification. Consequently, this persistent lack of demands-abilities fit could act as a psychological stressor that is associated with their overall health, happiness, and productivity, largely degrading their career sustainability over time. Therefore, person-job fit is examined as a person-work alignment factor that may be positively associated with sustainable career indicators.

2.2.3 Job exhaustion (health)

After the antecedents, which this thesis focuses on, were introduced, it may now be necessary to introduce the chosen indicators which shall be used to evaluate the outcomes of sustainable careers that are influenced by the chosen antecedents within the population of Ukrainian hidden expatriates in Czechia. Firstly, a specific indicator from the "health" outcome needs to be chosen. Within the JD-R framework, the depletion of an employee's health seems to be very frequently operationalized through "job exhaustion" (Demerouti et al., 2001). Given the highly physical and demanding nature of the target demographic's jobs, generalized health surveys could fail to capture the specific occupational strain that these workers need to endure. Mäkelä et al. (2022b)

demonstrate that for expatriates navigating the intense, compounding demands of global mobility, job exhaustion serves as the primary and most acute indicator of depleted well-being. By measuring emotional and physical exhaustion (Halbesleben & Demerouti, 2005), it is believed that this thesis captures an important factor negatively associated with the health dimension of the sustainable careers model within the Ukrainian hidden expatriates in Czechia.

2.2.4 Subjective career success (happiness)

Secondly, the indicator of happiness needs to be established. Objective metrics of career happiness, such as hierarchical progression, formal promotions, or high financial remuneration, may largely be absent for hidden expatriates who are structurally pushed into low-status roles (Haak-Saheem & Brewster, 2017). Consequently, evaluating their happiness may require an internal, psychological approach. In this thesis, happiness is established to be operationalized through subjective career success, defined as an individual's internal evaluation of their career progress across various personal dimensions (Greenhaus et al., 1990). As noted by Mello et al. (2023a), assessing subjective career success allows researchers to capture what expatriates personally value and perceive as meaningful, providing a highly accurate measure of career happiness despite disadvantageous external circumstances.

2.2.5 Perceived internal and external marketability (productivity)

According to the sustainable careers framework, employees' productivity goes beyond immediate task performance or daily output and rather fundamentally encompasses an individual's ongoing relevance to employers and long-term employability (De Vos et al., 2020; Makkonen, 2015). For Ukrainian hidden expatriates, the greatest threat to productivity may very well be the "brain waste" phenomenon and the subsequent degradation of their human capital (Pires, 2009). Therefore, this thesis measures productivity through perceived marketability, specifically divided into internal and external dimensions (Eby et al., 2003). Evaluating internal marketability determines whether these workers feel

valued as a resource by their current employers, while external marketability assesses their confidence in securing comparable employment elsewhere in the host country. Together, it is believed, these metrics reliably capture the productivity and employability of this displaced workforce.

2.3 The changing landscape of expatriation

Having established the theoretical framework of sustainable careers and the primary work-related antecedents of this study, namely quantitative workload and person-job fit, it is now necessary to examine the specific demographic group experiencing these conditions, while tracing the evolution of how expatriates are viewed in modern literature.

2.3.1 From corporate assignees to self-initiated expatriates

Historically, we may say that international human resource management (IHRM) has been primarily focusing on research regarding assigned expatriates (AEs) (Black & Gregersen, 1990; Tung, 1998). This group has typically included highly skilled individuals, such as managers or specialized workers, sent by their employer (usually multinational corporations) to foreign subsidiaries for a defined period of time (Collings et al., 2007). These workers generally benefited from broad support provided by their parent company, such as organizational sponsorship, lucrative financial packages or relocation assistance (McNulty & De Cieri, 2011).

Throughout time, however, the rise of globalisation, ease of global mobility and an increasing number of workers deciding to seek work experience abroad have made researchers focus on a new type of workers, namely the self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) (Brewster et al., 2021; Selmer & Luring, 2010). Unlike their corporate counterparts, these workers decide to relocate abroad to seek temporary employment without any organizational support in their home country (Andresen et al., 2014). Contemporary research suggests that the SIEs operate under very different circumstances than traditionally viewed assignees, such as different career motives, higher personal risk and

significantly lower levels of perceived organizational support upon arrival in the host country (Doherty et al., 2011; McDonnell & Scullion, 2013, p. 15). Overall, it is rather apparent that the burden of career management shifts entirely from the employing organization to the individual, namely the SIE in this case (Yussuf, 2024, p. 13). Consequently, we need to understand that any type of a SIE may be facing much vaster and more diverse challenges during and after their relocation than other groups of global workers. These include global domestics, global virtual team members, short-term assignees, international business travellers, flexpatriates or corporate expatriates (Shaffer et al., 2012).

To fully understand the implications of this shift, the SIE experience, we may argue, could be viewed through the lens of career sustainability. As demonstrated by Wu et al. (2026), an employee's career sustainability is not a static achievement but rather a highly dynamic process characterized by latent transitions over time. Maintaining a balance between health, happiness, and productivity requires continuous proactivity and the constant renegotiation of person-environment fit. This dynamic may be particularly significant in the context of global mobility. Zong et al. (2026) explore these dynamics among SIEs, identifying distinct career sustainability profiles: sustainable, unsustainable, and transitional. Because SIEs lack formal organizational support, their ability to navigate into sustainable profiles relies heavily on individual person-related factors such as agency, resilience, and an entrepreneurial mindset. Given these findings, we may believe that SIEs seem to be facing much vaster and more diverse challenges during their relocation than other groups of global workers, such as short-term assignees, international business travellers, or corporate expatriates (Shaffer et al., 2012).

2.3.2 The concept of hidden expatriates

While the recognition of SIEs as a separate group of expatriates has, without a doubt, broadened the scope of international human resource management, we may still say that much remains to be researched further. One of the research gaps of the current HRM literature lies in the fact that it seems to be leaning towards a “managerial” bias,

where the researchers tend to work with samples of highly skilled or trained expatriates, such as managers, executives or highly specialized workers (Haak-Saheem et al., 2019). This is understandable given that Suutari & Brewster (2000), along with other authors, define expatriates as workers, who are, besides other criteria, highly skilled or specialized.

In their paper, however, Haak-Saheem & Brewster (2017) challenge this criterion, pointing towards the fact that the majority of expatriate workers worldwide actually consists of workers employed in low-paying and often physically demanding occupations, especially in developed economies as their host countries. It might be important to emphasize the fact that the authors address these workers as “low status” not necessarily because of their actual qualifications, but rather because of their structural position in the host country’s labour market and oftentimes an unfair treatment, in opposition to the home population. Hidden expatriates, quite interestingly, often possess rather high degrees of education from their home country, which they are unable to redeem in their host country due to many reasons, such as legal barriers or finding any available work hastily due to their displacement. This, as a result, forces such workers to accept roles which may be below their competency levels (Al Ariss, 2010).

Building upon the sustainability profiles identified by Zong et al. (2026), it can be argued that hidden expatriates are structurally pushed towards the “unsustainable” career profile. While standard SIEs can leverage their individual agency and career adaptability to regain person-environment fit and transition to a sustainable career (Wu et al., 2026), hidden expatriates face significant contextual barriers that may severely restrict their agency. In order to contextualize the emergence of the newly identified expatriate group and better understand why they may be treated differently by their organizations, as opposed to traditional expatriates, Haak-Saheem & Brewster (2017, p. 13) propose a conceptual model, as shown in figure 3.

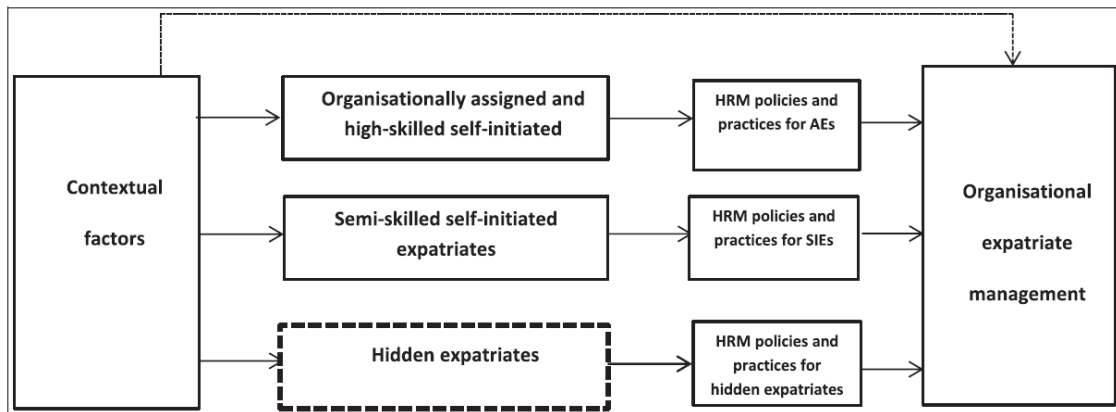


Figure 3. Conceptual framework of hidden expatriates (Haak-Saheem & Brewster, 2017)

As illustrated above, the authors' conceptual model demonstrates a clear relationship between contextual factors (e.g. host country's labour or immigration laws) and organisational expatriate management, where an organization may use various HRM policies and practices to treat different kinds of expatriates in different ways. It is also worth noting that the contextual factors themselves influence the types of expatriates who enter the particular foreign labour market. Three distinct expatriate categories are regarded in the model, namely the "Organisationally assigned and high-skilled self-initiated", "Semi-skilled self-initiated" and "Hidden" expatriates. As was already foreshadowed, the authors argue that companies use a broad variety of HRM policies and practices to treat the various incoming expatriate types differently. Furthermore, it is argued that such policies which are focused on the group of hidden expatriates are less supportive and more restrictive than those offered to their highly-skilled counterparts working in better employment roles. By mapping the relationships between the mentioned groups and surrounding factors, the model confirms that the hidden expatriates are not only a large group of globally mobile employees who have not been largely addressed by the IHRM literature, but also a group which arguably suffers from receiving much less organizational and contextual support in comparison to traditional expatriate groups. Therefore, Ukrainian hidden expatriates provide a theoretically relevant group for examining how underemployment and demanding work conditions relate to career sustainability.

2.4 The context of Ukrainian expatriates in Czechia

Having established the theoretical frameworks and the defining characteristics of hidden expatriates, it is now necessary to present the specific empirical situation of Ukrainian workers in Czechia. Without clearly understanding their motives, background, and the recent challenges they might be facing, the application of supportive HRM frameworks to their specific life situation could only be suggested with great difficulties.

2.4.1 The pre-war trends

Even before the events of 2022, Czechia has been establishing an increasing reliance on the foreign labour supply to sustain its economic growth. Within this demographic group, Ukrainians have formed one of the largest sub-groups, providing vast number of workers for sectors defined by high degrees of manual labour. Industries such defined included construction, manufacturing, automotive, warehouses, and perhaps most importantly service-related jobs, such as cleaning, cooking or laundry (Vollmer et al., 2010). The pre-war migration, however, may be defined as one purely relying on economic motives. The Ukrainian workers were voluntarily relocating to Czechia, in order to fill the labour shortages in the mentioned industries (Černík, 2006, p. 25).

This stream of Ukrainian expatriates has been rather steadily increasing throughout the pre-war years, creating a significant Ukrainian community in Czechia and also promoting the creation of a large number of various organizations streamlining these processes. These include, for instance, work agencies, often owned by the Ukrainians themselves, which offer to take full responsibility of the paperwork surrounding the incoming Ukrainian worker, including taxes and social security contributions, in exchange for a percentage of the worker's hourly wage. This so called "client system" (Černík, 2006) has gradually increased the ease of work and reduced the time required to find a job for many of the incoming expatriates, while often putting them in vulnerable and exploitable positions in relation to their employers. In comparison to the current Ukrainian population

in Czechia, however, this migration was generally planned, voluntary and aligned with the traditional models and views of self-initiated expatriation (Fedyuk & Kindler, 2016).

To better illustrate the scale and structure of the Ukrainian expatriation to Czechia and the already-present dependency of the Czech economy on this trend before the events of 2022, we may have a look at pre-war data provided by the Czech institutions. According to the (Czech Statistical Office, 2022a), the number of legally residing Ukrainians in Czechia had reached 196 875 citizens by 31.12.2021, making them the largest foreign minority in the country. For reference, the annual census by the (Czech Statistical Office, 2022b) has recorded that the Czech population reached 10 524 167 individuals by the end of 2021, making the Ukrainians approximately 1,9% of the whole population. This statistic alone, we may argue, already points towards the ongoing trend of voluntary Ukrainian expatriation before the start of the war.

The article by Ruschka (2022), released just after the start of the war in Ukraine, comments on further interesting trends observable among the pre-war Ukrainian expatriate group. Besides providing vital statistics surrounding this demographic, the author comments on three main observations. Firstly, the author acknowledges that besides the Ukrainians accounting for 32% of all job seekers registered at the Czech labour offices, the Ukrainian workers were mostly concentrated in physically demanding and low-skilled occupations, such as machine operators, assemblers or drivers. Secondly, the hidden expatriate status of the workers could be observable not only through their careers themselves, but also through the legal entry they have used to access Czechia. The author specifically points out that the number of Ukrainians who entered Czechia thanks to the European blue card (a tool specifically aimed at skilled workers with higher education or skillset) was negligible in comparison to those who have used work permits and other tools. Lastly, the author notices that on average, the Ukrainians earned significantly less on average than Czechs or other foreigners. He then acknowledges, however, that there were practically no differences in wages between Ukrainians and Czechs once they were working on the same position. This final observation, we might argue, further supports

the argument that the issue of Ukrainian hidden expatriates lies in the fact that they are contextually pushed into low-earning careers, rather than being treated unfairly as a minority group.

Finally, we may explore different ways and channels through which the Ukrainians were entering Czechia before the war, in order to access better wage conditions than they might receive in their country of origin. This description seems rather vital, as it allows us to understand the shift in Ukrainian expatriation which we may observe in the next chapter regarding the acceleration of the Ukrainian relocation trends. Before the crisis caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the academic research and institutional reports differentiated three channels through which the Ukrainian workers were entering the Czech labour market (Fedyuk & Kindler, 2016).

Firstly, as was already mentioned, highly skilled or trained workers with higher education were able to enter Czechia with either the EU blue card or the intra-corporate transferee card (Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, n.d.-b, n.d.-a). While both of the permits have different definitions which may be too detailed to describe in this chapter, we may simply say that the intra-corporate transferee card aims to help assigned expatriates (i.e. those sent by their parent companies to subsidiaries abroad), while the EU blue cards strives to support SIEs who have a university degree and are offered a high-paying job in a country within the European Union. Both of these permits apply to workers from countries outside of the EU.

Secondly, we may mention the legal routes used by the hidden expatriates, by which we mean simply those who might have looked for any kind of work not requiring any professional skills. These workers were legally traditionally relying on two channels, namely the short-term visas and the employee card (Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, n.d.-c, n.d.-d). While the short-term visas allowed the workers to legally work in Czechia for up to 90 days (originally meant for seasonal work such as summer agriculture), the employee card allowed the workers to stay in the host country for up to two

years, before the need to renew the card. According to the available literature, however, these channels had several drawbacks, which led to the creation of widely used illegal channels that shall be mentioned shortly. While the employee card offered its holder a legal worker status, the high degree of bureaucracy, waiting times, the requirement to return to Ukraine and apply at the Czech embassies there, the government quotas for card holders and the refusal of a large part of Czech employers to engage in this lengthy process led many of the Ukrainian workers to the decision of not using the legal channels (Satra, 2002). Furthermore, many of them were only interested in short-term and immediately accessible work which was practically unviable due to the legal obstructions of applying for the employee card.

Thirdly, mostly due to the mentioned factors, illegal channels of hidden expatriation were opened. As of June 2017, the EU granted Ukraine visa-free travel. Owners of a biometric passport could legally enter Czechia for up to 90 days for the purposes of tourism and visiting relatives and friends (KPMG, 2022). As we may expect, this visa-free time period was only intended for purposes unrelated to employment, which would be illegal. Many workers and Czech companies, however, saw a possibility of easily accessible employment without the need of potential “costs” such as social security contributions or health insurance, even despite the risk of such illegal act being uncovered by the authorities. Furthermore, some Ukrainian citizens were able to become owners of multiple passports to their name, which allowed them to prolong the 90-day period to much longer spans of time. The last widely used illegal channel consisted of entering Poland, one of the EU states, which offered more worker visas processed rather promptly. The workers who wished for Czechia to become their final destination were then able to cross the Polish-Czech border for the sake of working in Czechia, although illegally (Fedyuk & Kindler, 2016).

2.4.2 The acceleration caused by the war in Ukraine

In February 2022, the Russian invasion to Ukraine has changed the situation of many Ukrainians fundamentally. Those living in the impacted areas were forced to relocate

overnight, either to the western part of Ukraine or abroad to countries such as Poland, Czechia, Slovakia or Germany. Given these circumstances, the motives regarding the Ukrainian migration shifted rapidly from purely economic ones to those regarding personal safety and survival. Furthermore, the amount of new incoming Ukrainians has been unprecedented for Czechia, strongly accelerating its already ongoing labour market trends (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2026).

Reflecting upon the previous section, we have seen that before the war, Ukrainians were facing significant contextual obstacles when trying to enter the Czech labour market. This situation has changed profoundly, given that the Czech authorities, just as those of other western states, granted the incoming refugees a status of temporary protection. This meant that Ukrainians in Czechia were now able to access jobs practically instantly, without unnecessary bureaucracy and while receiving refugee support from the Czech government, if eligible (Postepska & Voloshyna, 2025). Much help in other areas such as housing, integration support or schooling has been provided both by the governmental and private Czech institutions, as well as by the citizens themselves (International Organization for Migration, 2024).

It is here where the argument is proposed as to why this thesis refers to the Ukrainians in Czechia as hidden expatriates, rather than simply war refugees or migrants. While it is indisputable that the war in Ukraine has been the main catalyst responsible for the relocation of the majority of Ukrainians currently living in Czechia, there are several reasons for this specific categorization as hidden expatriates, given that the behaviour of this demographic group is very much aligned with the researched demographics of expatriate literature in IHRM. Firstly, we may say that the activation of the temporary protection status for all citizens of Ukraine has enabled legal regularization of all Ukrainians who had been participating within the Czech labour market before the war. Consequently, those workers who had for instance been using the 90 day permits and were returning to Ukraine or those who were struggling to receive the employee card were immediately able to work in Czechia without legal obstructions. Secondly, by choosing to emigrate,

rather than remain as internally displaced individuals within other regions of Ukraine, this demographic group had demonstrated a certain degree of mobility agency which traditionally defines SIEs. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, we may say that the deliberate decision of this demographic to integrate into the host country's labour market has changed their functional status. By transitioning from passive recipients of humanitarian aid to active participants filling the host country's structural labour shortages, they technically act as foreign workers. However, because their human capital is most frequently misaligned with their actual employment roles and because they remain outside of traditional corporate frameworks, the label of hidden expatriates serves as the most accurate lens through which we may analyse their position in the Czech economy.

Coming back to the events which unfolded after the start of the war, another important observable trend was the feminization of the Ukrainian expatriation to Czechia (Ruschka, 2022). While the pre-war incoming groups of Ukrainians largely consisted of, among others, male construction workers, who usually had the intent of working abroad for very short periods of time and sending remittances home to their families, the new wave caused by the war in Ukraine brought whole families to participate in the Czech economy. Besides imposing many new challenges upon the families themselves, the Czech government and private organizations (e.g. inclusion of the Ukrainian children in the Czech schooling system), the Czech labour market has been supplied by an unprecedented number of workers participating in much broader group of industries, ranging from construction to hospitality. This rapid integration into broader industries, often requiring lesser formal education or specialization had possibly, however, resulted into a severe human capital mismatch, which would follow approximately about half of this demographic (PAQ Research, 2023).

Ultimately, the unique combination of these historical labour market structures and the sudden, forced acceleration caused by the war seems to have created a highly unstable environment for the Ukrainian hidden expatriates in Czechia. By being contextually pushed into high-density, low-status roles despite their actual qualifications, these

workers tend to be facing intensified risks to their career sustainability. The severe physical demands and psychological displacement may actively threaten their health, while the legal barriers and perceived overqualification degrade their subjective happiness and the lack of upward mobility seems to severely limit their long-term productivity and employability. Overall, this thesis argues that the specific situation of the Ukrainian hidden expatriates in Czechia may provide us with a demographic group, which may benefit from the use of the lens of sustainable career framework, in order to investigate the challenges possibly threatening the career sustainability of this group, upon which the Czech economy seems to be increasingly relying. This specific empirical context may provide us with enough information to conduct a quantitative test of these mentioned relationships, formulating research model and hypotheses development in the following chapter.

2.5 Research model and hypotheses development

This section formulates and proposes the specific hypotheses based on the theoretical frameworks presented above. By following the concepts of sustainable careers, the JD-R model, high-density work, and perceived overqualification within the context of Ukrainian hidden expatriates, a cohesive research model is hereby established.

2.5.1 The association between quantitative workload and career sustainability

According to the health impairment pathway of the JD-R model, chronic job demands that are not sufficiently offset by resources lead to the depletion of employees' energy and wellbeing (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). For hidden expatriates, demanding work environments characterized by severe quantitative workload may act as significant job demands. Prolonged exposure to this antecedent is theoretically expected to deplete personal resources, threatening the sustainable career indicators of happiness, productivity, and health (De Vos et al., 2020).

Therefore, the following general hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Quantitative workload is negatively associated with sustainable career indicators.

Specifically, it is expected that quantitative workload shall have varying negative associations with the specific indicators. Firstly, the volume and pace of physical labour is expected to act as a depleting demand, being positively associated with job exhaustion (health impairment) (Demerouti et al., 2001; Spector & Jex, 1998). Secondly, high quantitative workload is relevant for subjective career success (happiness) because constant exhaustion is expected to be negatively associated with the psychological satisfaction and meaning derived from work (Spurk et al., 2019). Thirdly, regarding productivity, excessive workload should limit an individual's capacity to demonstrate value beyond basic task execution, being negatively related to internal marketability (Eby et al., 2003). Crucially, regarding external marketability, high workload reduces the time, energy, and psychological resources workers have available for career planning, skill development, language learning, and job search activities. For hidden expatriates, these resource losses should be especially consequential because career recovery in the host country often requires active efforts to rebuild employability (Cerdin & Selmer, 2014). Consequently, the following specific hypotheses are proposed:

- **H1a:** Quantitative workload is negatively associated with the happiness (subjective career success) of Ukrainian hidden expatriates.
- **H1b:** Quantitative workload is negatively associated with the productivity (perceived internal marketability) of Ukrainian hidden expatriates.
- **H1c:** Quantitative workload is negatively associated with the productivity (perceived external marketability) of Ukrainian hidden expatriates.
- **H1d:** Quantitative workload is positively associated with health impairment (job exhaustion) among Ukrainian hidden expatriates.

2.5.2 The association between person-job fit and career sustainability

In contrast to job demands, person-job fit should act as a vital resource for workers navigating complex career transitions (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). When individuals perceive that their abilities match the demands of their new environment, they should be better equipped to sustain their well-being and productivity (Cable & DeRue, 2002).

Therefore, the following general hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Person-job fit is positively associated with sustainable career indicators.

Specifically, finding a suitable match in the host country is expected to positively influence the specific career outcomes of this vulnerable population. Because person-job fit provides a cognitive and psychological alignment between an individual's human capital and their employment reality, it should be positively associated with greater subjective career success (happiness), as it allows workers to feel competent and valued (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Regarding productivity, this alignment means workers can effectively utilise their skills, directly increasing their perceived internal marketability (Eby et al., 2003). Furthermore, maintaining and applying their abilities prevents the degradation of their human capital, keeping them relevant and confident in their external marketability (Forrier et al., 2015). Finally, this alignment acts as a crucial resource provider that, to a certain degree, mitigates stress, negatively associating with job exhaustion (health impairment). Consequently, the following specific hypotheses are proposed:

- **H2a:** Person-job fit is positively associated with the happiness (subjective career success) of Ukrainian hidden expatriates.
- **H2b:** Person-job fit is positively associated with the productivity (perceived internal marketability) of Ukrainian hidden expatriates.
- **H2c:** Person-job fit is positively associated with the productivity (perceived external marketability) of Ukrainian hidden expatriates.

- **H2d:** Person-job fit is negatively associated with health impairment (job exhaustion) among Ukrainian hidden expatriates.

3 Methodology

This chapter describes the research methodology of the study. The applied research approach, design, and methods, as well as the data collection, sampling strategy, and data analysis process. Moreover, it discusses the quality of the research through the lenses of reliability and validity.

3.1 Research philosophy and approach

This thesis adopts a positivist research philosophy, which assumes that social reality can be observed and measured objectively through quantifiable data (Saunders et al., 2023). By relying on established theoretical frameworks, mainly the career sustainability framework introduced by (De Vos et al., 2020), this research follows a deductive approach (Saunders et al., 2023). Hypotheses were formulated based on existing literature regarding career sustainability framework and its supporting theories, such as the JD-R model, and were later tested using empirical data collected from a specific target population.

3.2 Research design

To effectively examine the relationships between quantitative workload, person-job fit, and the career sustainability outcomes of the Ukrainian hidden expatriates, this study uses a quantitative, cross-sectional research design. A cross-sectional survey methodology was selected as it should allow for efficient data collection from a large pool of respondents at a single point in time, providing a clear picture of the current reality which this specific demographic in the Czech labour market may be facing. The study measures current indicators of career sustainability rather than career sustainability as a longitudinal process. Because data were collected at a single point in time, the thesis cannot examine how health, happiness, and productivity evolve over the career trajectory. Longitudinal research would be needed to assess whether quantitative workload and person-job fit influence changes in career sustainability over time.

3.3 Data collection

This section explains the sampling strategy, as well as the ways used to obtain the data from the target population.

3.3.1 Sampling strategy

Given the hardly accessible nature of hidden expatriates, who tend to operate in low-status and manually intensive industries, oftentimes forming social clusters which stand beside the host country's native population, obtaining a randomized probability sample was not feasible for the goals of this thesis. Therefore, this paper utilised a non-probability sampling strategy combining convenience and snowball sampling as described by Saunders et al., (2023). Initial contacts were established through specific Czech employers in the manufacturing, laundry, and service sectors who employ a high volume of Ukrainian workers. Participants were asked and encouraged to forward the survey link to other Ukrainian workers in similar employment situations, allowing the research to penetrate deeper into this specific demographic network.

3.3.2 Sample

The target population consisted of Ukrainian nationals currently residing in Czechia and participating in the Czech labour market. To accurately capture the phenomenon of hidden expatriation and the possible brain waste phenomenon, the sample was restricted to individuals currently employed in manual, entry-level, or physically demanding jobs, including blue collar jobs. Traditional corporate assignees or SIEs operating in white-collar environments, office workers and unemployed refugees were deliberately excluded from the study through initial screening questions.

3.4 Questionnaire design and measures

The survey was administered digitally via Google Forms, with the responses being collected between 20.04.2026 and 29.04.2026. To reduce cognitive demands and survey

fatigue for an arguably vulnerable demographic operating in demanding environments, the questionnaire was translated into Ukrainian and optimized for mobile devices. The translation was done with the assistance of the AI model Gemini. Before the survey was administered, however, the translation was discussed with Ukrainian native speakers to ensure absolute adherence to the original survey design. Furthermore, all previously validated 7-point Likert scales were adapted into 5-point Likert scales, given that methodological literature demonstrates that 5-point and 7-point scales produce statistically comparable data characteristics and means when rescaled, making this adaptation appropriate for ensuring higher completion rates among this specific population (Dawes, 2008).

3.4.1 Dependent variables

Career sustainability was measured through its three core indicators:

- 1) In order to measure the **happiness** outcome, as defined by De Vos et al. (2020), it was decided to use “Subjective career success”, as the authors of the sustainable career framework themselves refer to it as a valuable tool for measuring happiness in career sustainability. The outcome was measured while using a 5-item validated scale adapted from Greenhaus et al. (1990), assessing satisfaction with career progress and goals. The statistical viability of the scales was proven by its Cronbach’s alpha being .88 in the case of Greenhaus et al. (1990) or .901 in the case of Mello (2023).
- 2) To measure the outcome of **productivity**, the validated scales of “Perceived marketability” were chosen, as these arguably fulfil the role of “employability”, as described by De Vos et al. (2020) and were traditionally used by researchers to measure such outcomes (Mello et al., 2023a). To provide a complete understanding of employability, this scale was split into two dimensions based on Eby et al. (2003): “Perceived internal marketability” (3 items), assessing value to the current employer, and “Perceived external marketability” (3 items), assessing the

ability to find comparable work elsewhere. To ensure that the scales were statistically viable, it was found that the Cronbach's alpha for the internal marketability was 0.73 and 0.74 for the external perceived marketability (Eby et al., 2003).

- 3) Lastly, to evaluate the **health** within the career sustainability of the sample, "Job exhaustion" was chosen as a validated scale. To support this decision, it may be stated that De Vos et al. (2020) describe both physical and mental health as the outcome of sustainable careers. Other authors, such as Mäkelä et al. (2022b) or Demerouti et al. (2001) have identified job exhaustion as a valuable scale to measure this specific outcome. In order to measure job exhaustion, this thesis used an 8-item subscale from the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI) (Halbesleben & Demerouti, 2005), evaluating physical and emotional depletion. Four of these items were positively worded and required reverse-coding prior to the data analysis to ensure mathematical consistency. According to Halbesleben & Demerouti (2005), these validated scales provided Cronbach's alpha of .82.

3.4.2 Independent variables

- 1) **Quantitative workload:** Firstly, in order to evaluate the context dimension of sustainable careers, quantitative workload was selected as a key antecedent, aligning with the JD-R model discussed in the theoretical framework. This variable was measured using the 5-item Quantitative Workload Inventory (QWI) developed by Spector & Jex (1998). A 5-point specific frequency scale was utilised (ranging from 1 = Less than once per month or never, to 5 = Several times per day) to accurately assess the intensity, pace, and volume of job demands experienced by the respondents. The statistical viability and internal consistency of this measure are well established, with Spector & Jex (1998) reporting a Cronbach's alpha of .82 for the scale.

2) **Person-Job Fit:** Secondly, to evaluate the person dimension of the sustainable careers framework, this study focuses on person-job fit. While De Vos et al. (2020) explicitly highlight the broader concept of “person-career fit”, this thesis argues that evaluating immediate person-job fit is a more accurate and measurable conceptualization for hidden expatriates who are navigating temporary, displacement-driven employment rather than long-term career trajectories. Drawing on person-environment fit theory within the expatriate context (Mello, 2023), this variable was operationalized specifically through the “Demands-abilities fit” subtree. The measurement was conducted using a 3-item validated scale developed by Cable & DeRue (2002), based on earlier uses by Cable & Judge (1996), which assesses the perceived congruence between the worker's advanced personal skills and the actual requirements of their current job on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all, 5 = Completely). This validated scale is seen in the context of this thesis as vital for capturing the possible brain-waste phenomenon. The internal consistency of this scale was proven to be highly reliable, with Cable & DeRue (2002) reporting a Cronbach's alpha of .89 in a single-firm sample and .84 in a multiple-firm sample.

3.4.3 Demographic variables

To provide overview of the sample, several demographic and contextual factors were included. These included age (measured continuously), gender, respondent's time of arrival (pre-war vs. post-war), workers' highest level of education, past profession in Ukraine, and current job industry.

Demographic and occupational variables were used to describe the sample and contextualize the findings. They were not included as control variables in the regression models due to the modest sample size and the risk of overfitting the models with too many categorical predictors.

3.5 Data analysis strategy

The collected data was exported from Google Forms into Microsoft Excel for initial cleaning, which included transforming textual Likert responses into numeric values (1 to 5). Out of the total of 136 responses, 103 have passed the screening questions and were deemed to be suitable for the analysis. The cleaned dataset was then imported into IBM SPSS Statistics software for statistical analysis. Negatively worded items (within the “job exhaustion” scale) were reverse-coded.

Firstly, Cronbach’s alphas for each variable were established. Due to two of the variables possessing a lower Cronbach’s alpha than would be statistically optimal (less than 0.7), an item-total statistics analysis was conducted to identify problematic items. Specifically, for the quantitative workload scale (initial $\alpha = 0.507$), the second item (“How often does your job require you to work very hard?”) was removed, which improved the alpha to .648. Conceptually, this item may have been interpreted differently by respondents working in manual or physically demanding jobs. In this context, “working hard” may be seen as a general feature of the job rather than as a distinct indicator of quantitative workload, which may explain its weaker fit with the remaining workload items.

Similarly, for the job exhaustion scale (initial $\alpha = 0.558$), the second item (“After work, I tend to need more time than in the past in order to relax and feel better.”) was removed, improving the alpha to .610. This item may have been difficult for respondents to answer consistently because it requires comparison to an unspecified prior period. For displaced Ukrainian workers, “the past” may refer to the period before migration, before the war, before the current job, or before entering Czechia. This ambiguity likely explains its weaker contribution to the scale.

By removing these two items, the scales’ internal consistency was improved to more acceptable levels for the context of this study. The final composite scores for the two modified variables were then calculated using the remaining items. Individual items for each variable were aggregated into composite mean scores, and the analysis proceeded

sequentially. Firstly, descriptive statistics were calculated, secondly, a Pearson correlation matrix was generated to check for multicollinearity. Finally, separate multiple linear regression analyses were conducted for each dependent variable: job exhaustion, subjective career success, perceived internal marketability, and perceived external marketability. In each model, quantitative workload and person-job fit were entered simultaneously as independent variables. Although the models were estimated separately, they are reported together in a single regression table to enable clearer comparison across the four sustainable career indicators. This approach allowed the study to examine the unique statistical association of each antecedent with each outcome.

3.6 Validity and reliability

To ensure construct validity, the survey exclusively used scales previously validated in established HRM and career literature, as described in the literature review section of the thesis. Furthermore, to prove the internal consistency of the adapted 5-point scales within this specific translated context, Cronbach's alpha tests were conducted for all variables.

The reliability analysis showed that two scales had internal consistency values below the conventional $\alpha > 0.70$ threshold. After item-total inspection, one item was removed from the quantitative workload scale and one from the job exhaustion scale, improving Cronbach's alpha to .648 and .610, respectively. Although these values remain modest, they were considered acceptable given the exploratory nature of this Master's thesis, the translated survey context, and the difficulty of accessing the target population. Nevertheless, findings involving these two constructs should be interpreted with caution.

Because the study relied on self-reported survey data collected at a single point in time, common method bias was assessed using Harman's single-factor test. All measurement items were entered into an unrotated exploratory factor analysis with one fixed factor. The single factor explained 30.04% of the total variance, which is below the commonly

used 50% threshold. This suggests that common method bias is unlikely to account for the observed relationships fully.

Overall, several additional procedures were conducted to strengthen the methodological quality of the analysis. Firstly, internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, and item-total statistics were inspected for scales with low reliability. Secondly, regression diagnostics were conducted to assess multicollinearity, linearity, homoscedasticity, normality of residuals, and the presence of influential cases. Thirdly, because the data were collected through a single self-report survey, Harman's single-factor test was conducted as a basic diagnostic for common method bias. These procedures were used to ensure that the regression results could be interpreted with appropriate caution.

4 Findings

This chapter presents the results of the quantitative data analysis conducted to evaluate the study's theoretical model and test the formulated hypotheses. Primary data was collected from a final sample of 103 Ukrainian hidden expatriates currently residing and working in the host country. All statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics.

The chapter proceeds in four main stages. Firstly, it outlines the demographic and occupational characteristics of the sample. Secondly, it presents the descriptive statistics for all measured variables. Thirdly, it examines the initial relationships between variables using Pearson bivariate correlation analysis. Finally, it details the results of multiple linear regression analyses used to test the associations between quantitative workload and person-job fit on the outcomes of job exhaustion, subjective career success, and internal, as well as external perceived marketability.

4.1 Description of the sample

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of participants

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Female	83	80.5
Male	20	19.5
Arrival to Czechia		
Before 24.02.2022 (start of the war in Ukraine)	50	48.5
After 24.02.2022	53	51.5
Completed education		
Elementary school	5	4.8
High school	52	50.5
Vocational training	26	25.25

University degree	20	19.4
Past profession		
Professional / Corporate / Management	8	7.8
Healthcare / Medicine	6	5.8
Education / Academia	33	32
Manual Labor / Trade / Service	47	45.6
Other	9	8.7
Current job		
Factory/Manufacturing / Warehouse	12	11.6
Cleaning / Housekeeping / Laundry	50	48.5
Food Service / Kitchen / Hospitality	13	12.6
Retail / Customer Service	10	9.7
Construction	8	7.8
Delivery	8	7.8
Other	2	2

Note. N = 103. Participants were on average 31,34 years old ($SD = 8,472$)

Table 1 details the demographic and occupational characteristics of the 103 research participants. The data reveals a highly specific demographic profile, characterized by a significant majority of female respondents (80.5%).

Furthermore, the occupational data indicates a discrepancy between the participants' education and their current employment. Despite nearly 20% of respondents possessing a university degree, all participants currently fulfil manual labour, service, or entry-level roles.

4.2 Descriptive statistics

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlations for study variables

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Quantitative workload	103	3.72	0.74	—					
2. Person-job fit	103	3.31	1.09	-.306**	—				
3. Subjective career success	103	2.73	0.84	-.410**	.744**	—			
4. Internal marketability	103	2.30	0.77	-.444**	.468**	.491**	—		
5. External marketability	103	3.64	0.73	-.085	.589**	.551**	.179	—	
6. Job exhaustion	103	3.49	0.52	.440**	-.383**	-.398**	-.497**	-.150	—

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, as well as the bivariate correlations for all study variables. As shown above, the participants reported moderately high levels of quantitative workload ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 0.74$) and job exhaustion ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 0.52$), reflecting the demanding nature of their current employment. Conversely, subjective career success among the sample was relatively low ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 0.84$).

When evaluating their career sustainability, participants reported low internal marketability within their current roles ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 0.77$). However, they reported a moderately high perception of their external marketability to other employers ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.73$). Finally, person-job fit scores were moderate on average ($M = 3.31$), though this

variable exhibited the highest standard deviation in the study ($SD = 1.09$), indicating a wide variance in perceived fit among the respondents.

4.3 Correlation analysis

Prior to formal hypotheses testing, a Pearson bivariate correlation analysis was conducted to evaluate the initial relationships among the study variables. The results, displayed in Table 2, align with the expected directions of the study's framework.

Quantitative workload, functioning as a severe job demand, was significantly and negatively correlated with both subjective career success ($r = -.410, p < .01$) and internal marketability ($r = -.444, p < .01$). Furthermore, it showed a strong positive correlation with job exhaustion ($r = .440, p < .01$). In contrast, person-job fit acted as a powerful job resource and demonstrated robust relationships with all favourable outcomes. Most notably, person-job fit exhibited a strong positive correlation with subjective career success ($r = .744, p < .01$), representing the strongest relationship in the study. It also correlated positively with both internal ($r = .468, p < .01$) and external marketability ($r = .589, p < .01$), while being significantly negatively correlated with job exhaustion ($r = -.383, p < .01$). Finally, it is worth noting that the relationship between quantitative workload and external marketability was not statistically significant ($r = -.085, p > .05$).

4.4 Regression analysis

To test the main hypotheses of the study, a series of multiple linear regression analyses were conducted. Quantitative workload and person-job fit were entered as the independent variables (antecedents) to determine their associations with the dependent variables of health (job exhaustion), happiness (subjective career success), and productivity (internal and external perceived marketability).

Prior to interpreting the models, regression diagnostics were conducted. Multicollinearity was assessed using tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) values. Residual plots

were inspected to assess linearity and homoscedasticity, while histograms and normal probability plots were used to evaluate the normality of residuals. Cook's distance was inspected to identify influential cases. The diagnostics did not indicate serious violations of regression assumptions.

Table 3. Results of multiple linear regression analyses for career sustainability indicators

Variables	Job exhaustion	Subjective career success	Perceived internal marketability	Perceived external marketability
	β (t)	β (t)	β (t)	β (t)
Independent variables				
1. Quantitative workload	.356*** (3.940)	-.201** (-2.995)	-.332*** (-3.830)	.105 (1.245)
2. Person-job fit	-.274** (-3.035)	.682*** (10.148)	.366*** (4.223)	.621*** (7.377)
Adjusted R²	.247	.582	.305	.344
F-statistic	17.686***	72.034***	23.395***	27.780***

Note: N = 103. Standardized beta coefficients (β) are presented alongside their corresponding t-values in parentheses. Demographic variables were not included as control variables due to sample size constraints.

** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

4.4.1 Associations with health (job exhaustion)

The first regression model, shown in Table 3, explains 24.7% of the variability of the dependent variable (job exhaustion). Quantitative workload is positively associated with job exhaustion (Beta = .356, $p < .001$). Person-job fit is negatively associated with job exhaustion (Beta = -.274, $p = .003$). Therefore, Hypotheses 1d and 2d are supported.

4.4.2 Associations with happiness (subjective career success)

The second regression model explains 58.2% of the variability of the dependent variable (subjective career success). Quantitative workload is negatively associated with subjective career success (Beta = $-.201$, $p = .003$). Person-job fit is positively associated with subjective career success (Beta = $.682$, $p < .001$). Therefore, Hypotheses 1a and 2a are supported.

4.4.3 Associations with productivity (internal and external perceived marketability)

The third regression model explains 30.5% of the variability of the dependent variable (internal marketability). Quantitative workload is negatively associated with internal marketability (Beta = $-.332$, $p < .001$). Person-job fit is positively associated with internal marketability (Beta = $.366$, $p < .001$). Therefore, Hypotheses 1b and 2b are supported.

Finally, the fourth regression model explains 34.4% of the variability of the dependent variable (external marketability). Quantitative workload does not have a significant association with external marketability (Beta = $.105$, $p = .216$). Person-job fit is positively associated with external marketability (Beta = $.621$, $p < .001$). Therefore, Hypothesis 1c is not supported, while Hypothesis 2c is supported.

4.5 Summary of hypotheses testing

Table 4 provides a final overview of the study's theoretical propositions and the results of the statistical testing. Overall, seven of the eight proposed hypotheses were supported by the collected data, while one hypothesis (H1c) was not supported.

Table 4. Summary of research hypotheses

H	1. Hypotheses on quantitative workload	Status
H1	Quantitative workload is negatively associated with sustainable career indicators.	Partially supported
H1a	Quantitative workload is negatively associated with the happiness (subjective career success) of Ukrainian hidden expatriates.	Supported
H1b	Quantitative workload is negatively associated with the productivity (perceived internal marketability) of Ukrainian hidden expatriates.	Supported
H1c	Quantitative workload is negatively associated with the productivity (perceived external marketability) of Ukrainian hidden expatriates.	Not Supported
H1d	Quantitative workload is positively associated with health impairment (job exhaustion) among Ukrainian hidden expatriates.	Supported
H	2. Hypotheses on person-job fit	Status
H2	Person-job fit is positively associated with sustainable career indicators.	Supported
H2a	Person-job fit is positively associated with the happiness (subjective career success) of Ukrainian hidden expatriates.	Supported
H2b	Person-job fit is positively associated with the productivity (perceived internal marketability) of Ukrainian hidden expatriates.	Supported
H2c	Person-job fit is positively associated with the productivity (perceived external marketability) of Ukrainian hidden expatriates.	Supported
H2d	Person-job fit is negatively associated with health impairment (job exhaustion) among Ukrainian hidden expatriates.	Supported

5 Discussion and conclusion

This final chapter describes the empirical findings of the study, interpreting the statistical results in the context of the sustainable careers framework, supported by the JD-R model. It outlines the theoretical contributions of the research, offers practical recommendations for management and HR professionals, acknowledges methodological limitations, and suggests areas for future research.

5.1 Discussion of key findings

The primary objective of this thesis was to empirically verify the career sustainability of Ukrainian hidden expatriates in Czechia by examining how quantitative workload and person-job fit are associated with their health, happiness, and productivity. The regression analyses largely validated the proposed theoretical model, with seven of the eight hypotheses receiving statistical support.

To explicitly answer the main research question (MRQ), namely how work-related antecedents are associated with the career sustainability of Ukrainian hidden expatriates in Czechia, the findings suggest a dual mechanism. A severe contextual demand (quantitative workload) is associated with resource depletion and lower career sustainability, whereas cognitive and professional alignment (person-job fit) seems to be positively associated with well-being and employability. These findings are analysed in depth below.

5.1.1 Quantitative workload in the context of hidden expatriates

Regarding the first sub-question (SQ1), the findings indicate that quantitative workload may act as a severely depleting antecedent within the researched group. As hypothesized, high quantitative workload was positively associated with job exhaustion (H1d) and negatively associated with both subjective career success (H1a) and internal marketability (H1b).

These results align with the health impairment pathway of the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Because the vast majority of the sample is currently employed in physically demanding sectors, this intense workload appears to act as a chronic job demand. The data suggests that heavy workloads and fast-paced environments may be associated with rapid energy drainage, leaving workers exhausted. This aligns with the findings of Mäkelä et al. (2022), suggesting that for international workers, the compounding physical demands and the stress of displacement create a severe "resource tax" that accelerates exhaustion.

Furthermore, the negative association with subjective career success may require a deeper psychological explanation. Rather than offering opportunities for ongoing growth and renewal, which De Vos et al. (2020) define as essential for career sustainability, the physically demanding roles appear to impact the workers' psychological reserves. Within the JD-R framework, chronic physical exhaustion is closely linked to increased cynicism and psychological detachment from one's work. Because hidden expatriates may often view their current employment role as a temporary necessity rather than a chosen vocation, this constant physical and emotional depletion likely strips away their capacity to find personal meaning, autonomy, or satisfaction in their roles.

Finally, regarding the negative association with internal marketability, the findings indicate that the workers' capacity for upward mobility or other career prospects within their current employing organization appears to be limited. Within the JD-R framework, when quantitative job demands are excessively high, individuals may have to allocate their available personal resources to simply meeting baseline performance expectations. Consequently, they may be left with limited surplus time or physical energy to invest in proactive behaviours that would enhance their internal value, such as skill development, language acquisition, or professional networking. Furthermore, because hidden expatriates are structurally pushed into low-status roles that frequently lack overarching organizational support or formal career paths (Haak-Saheem & Brewster, 2017), this intense workload may effectively contribute to these workers remaining in their current entry-

level positions. Therefore, the host-country work environment appears to not only exhaust these workers but also restrict their perceived internal value, negatively associating with their long-term career sustainability.

5.1.2 Person-job fit in the context of hidden expatriates

Addressing the second sub-question (SQ2), the results indicate that person-job fit seems to be consistently positively associated with stronger sustainable career indicators across all measured dimensions (H2a–H2d). Rather than simply acting as a standard job resource, these findings suggest that for hidden expatriates, cognitive and professional alignment may serve a more important function.

Specifically, for workers experiencing severe occupational downgrading, the sudden loss of professional status could represent a significant psychological and resource deficit. The strong positive association between person-job fit and subjective career success (H2a), which presents the most significant statistical relationship in the study, could possibly be theoretically interpreted through this lens. When displaced workers find roles that actually utilise their past education and training, they are likely able to reclaim a portion of their original professional identity. This perceived alignment appears to perhaps act as a certain psychological safeguard, allowing them to feel competent and valued despite the broader context of their displacement.

Furthermore, the data indicates that person-job fit relates positively to both internal and external marketability (H2b, H2c) and negatively to job exhaustion (H2d). Theoretically, this could suggest that the opportunity to apply one's actual skills may actively prevent the degradation of human capital. By maintaining their abilities in practice, workers may experience reduced occupational strain and retain higher confidence in their ongoing employability. Consequently, minimizing the gap between a worker's abilities and their job demands appears to have a positive impact on keeping career trajectories sustainable, even within host-country labour markets, which may sometimes be rather restrictive.

5.1.3 The role of external marketability in the context of hidden expatriates

Unlike the other sustainable career indicators, external marketability was not significantly associated with quantitative workload. One explanation for the non-significant relationship between quantitative workload and external marketability is that respondents may perceive physically demanding work as specific to their current job rather than as a factor that limits their broader employability. In manual and service labour markets, workers may still believe that similar employment opportunities are available elsewhere, even when their current workload is high. Because these roles frequently require less formal education or specialized training, the sheer volume of work does not necessarily alter the workers' confidence in their ability to secure comparable, alternative employment in the host country.

Furthermore, we may try to interpret this finding through the lens of the specific legal context surrounding Ukrainian workers in Czechia. As established by Postepska & Voloshyna (2025), the temporary protection status grants these individuals unrestricted access to the host country's labour market. Unlike traditional assigned expatriates or standard migrant workers, whose legal residency is often strictly tied to a single employer through the so-called "employment card", hidden expatriates under temporary protection possess the structural freedom to change employers at will. Consequently, their objective, legal capability to enter the external job market may not be diminished. It shall be said that this applies both to the workers who came to Czechia before and after the start of the war in Ukraine.

Finally, from a psychological perspective, another explanation of this result may lie within the career agency characteristic of self-initiated and displaced expatriates. As Zong et al. (2026) demonstrate, navigating the highly volatile environment of global mobility requires a high degree of individual agency and adaptability. Having already successfully relocated and secured initial employment under crisis conditions, these workers could very likely maintain a baseline confidence in their basic employability. Therefore, while quantitative workload is negatively associated with their happiness and

internal prospects, it appears to be insufficient to impact their belief that they could potentially secure basic employment elsewhere, if necessary.

5.2 Theoretical contributions

The thesis contributes to sustainable career research by applying the health, happiness, and productivity framework to a vulnerable and underexplored group of international workers: Ukrainian hidden expatriates in Czechia. It also contributes to expatriation research by showing how hidden expatriation can be examined not only as a labour market or migration issue, but also as a career sustainability issue. Finally, the thesis suggests that person-job fit may be a useful individual-level lens for understanding how the broader phenomenon of brain waste is experienced by displaced workers.

5.3 Managerial implications

The findings of this study offer actionable insights for Czech employers, HR departments, and policymakers who seem to be increasingly reliant on the Ukrainian expatriate workforce. To sustainably integrate this demographic and prevent human capital degradation, the practical implications of this study are divided into two primary areas of action.

5.3.1 Implications for employers

Employers should not treat Ukrainian workers only as a solution to labour shortages in low-status roles. A practical first step would be to map employees' previous education, professional experience, and career aspirations during onboarding. This would allow organisations to identify workers whose skills are currently underutilised and to create internal mobility or training pathways. To directly address this challenge of career mismatch, companies can proactively create micro-promotion pathways (Usanova et al., 2023). Transitioning overqualified workers into team-lead, administrative, or internal training roles based on their actual home-country expertise could preserve their human capital for the direct economic benefit of the employer.

Furthermore, employers might see it beneficial to actively monitor workloads and physical demands placed on their employees. While significantly reducing physical labour demands in certain sectors may be difficult, organisations could implement specific job redesign interventions and improve supervisor support. As demonstrated by established applications of the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), allowing greater employee participation in shift planning, facilitating adequate recovery periods, and providing clear performance feedback may serve as powerful job resources. Finally, drawing on established best practices for refugee integration, employers should offer supportive frameworks focusing on training and skill recognition, such as offering internal language training during paid working hours (Adamovic & Cooney-O'Donoghue, 2025).

5.3.2 Implications for policymakers and support organisations

If the host economy is to sustainably integrate this demographic at a macro-economic level, it would be advisable for systemic changes to be implemented by policymakers.

Firstly, improving qualification recognition pathways is vital. The formal legal recognition of Ukrainian degrees (nostrification) remains a slow and restrictive process, streamlining this bureaucracy should be essential to allow hidden expatriates to re-enter their actual professional fields. Secondly, rather than relying solely on general language courses, state support should fund targeted language training directly connected to specific occupational fields and professional vocabularies.

Additionally, support organisations should develop specialized career counselling tailored for displaced skilled workers, helping them navigate the host country's corporate landscape, rather than just placing them in highly demanding working environments.

Finally, policymakers should actively create institutional partnerships between integration agencies and employers to facilitate the mapping of migrant skills and ensure a smoother transition from secondary labour markets into primary, skill-matched employment.

5.4 Limitations and future research

While this study provides certain empirical insights, several methodological limitations must be acknowledged.

Firstly, due to the use of non-probability convenience and snowball sampling, the findings should not be interpreted as statistically representative of all Ukrainian workers in Czechia. Rather, they provide analytically useful evidence about a specific group of Ukrainian hidden expatriates working in manual, service, and entry-level occupations. Furthermore, the sample inherently skews toward the specific social and professional networks of the initial respondents.

Secondly, given the cross-sectional design of this thesis, the findings should be interpreted as evidence of statistical associations rather than causal effects. Although regression analysis identifies significant relationships between quantitative workload, person-job fit, and sustainable career indicators, the study does not establish temporal or causal direction.

Thirdly, although the survey was translated into Ukrainian and checked with native speakers, a formal back-translation procedure was not conducted. This may have introduced some measurement error, particularly because the meaning of scale items may vary across linguistic and cultural contexts. In addition, adapting some validated scales from a 7-point to a 5-point response format may affect comparability with previous studies. These decisions were made to reduce respondent burden and increase the completion rate among a vulnerable population, but they should be taken into account when interpreting the findings.

Furthermore, although Harman's single-factor test did not indicate severe common method bias within this research, this procedure is only a basic diagnostic. Future studies should reduce common method concerns through longitudinal designs, multi-source

data, or temporal separation of predictor and outcome measures. Given that this thesis measures current indicators of career sustainability, rather than career sustainability as a longitudinal process, as the data were collected at a single point in time, the thesis cannot examine how health, happiness, and productivity evolve over the career trajectory. Longitudinal research would be needed to assess whether quantitative workload and person-job fit influence changes in career sustainability over time.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that this study focuses exclusively on two specific antecedents: quantitative workload and person-job fit. While these were selected based on their theoretical relevance, career sustainability is highly complex and certainly influenced by numerous other unexplored antecedents. Moreover, the hidden expatriate category itself may require further conceptual refinement, particularly when applied to crisis-driven migration contexts rather than traditional, voluntary global mobility.

Future research could examine Ukrainian hidden expatriates longitudinally to understand how their health, happiness, and productivity change over time in the host labour market. Qualitative research could also explore how workers themselves interpret occupational downgrading, brain waste, and career recovery after displacement. Finally, comparative studies across different host countries would help assess whether the Czech context produces unique challenges or whether similar patterns are visible among Ukrainian workers elsewhere in Europe.

5.5 Conclusion

This thesis examined how quantitative workload and person-job fit are associated with the career sustainability of Ukrainian hidden expatriates in Czechia. The findings suggest that workload is linked to weaker sustainable career indicators, especially higher job exhaustion and lower subjective career success and internal marketability. Person-job fit appears to be especially important, as it is positively associated with subjective career success and perceived marketability, and negatively associated with exhaustion. Overall,

the thesis shows that the sustainability of hidden expatriates' careers depends not only on their access to employment, but also on the quality and fit of that employment.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Survey questionnaire (English)

Dear participant,

I am a Master's student at the University of Vaasa in Finland. As part of my Master's thesis, I am conducting research on the career sustainability of Ukrainians currently living in the Czech Republic.

The survey takes approximately **5 minutes** to complete.

The survey is completely **anonymous**. No names or personal IDs are collected or shared with anyone.

Participation is **voluntary**, and you can stop at any time.

Thank you in advance for your time and for sharing your experience with me.

Kind Regards,

Dominik Nicolas Soudil

(If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at: x0044825@student.uwasa.fi)

1. Screening questions

1) Are you originally from Ukraine?

- Yes
- No

2) Are you currently living and employed in the Czech Republic?

- Yes
- No

3) Which category best describes your current job in Czechia?

- Manual labour / service / entry-level (e.g., factory, cleaning, laundry, kitchen, warehouse, retail, construction)
- Corporate / professional / management (e.g., office job, IT, finance)

2. Quantitative workload

Measurement: 5-point specific frequency scale.

(Scoring: 1 = Less than once per month or never, 2 = Once or twice per month, 3 = Once or twice per week, 4 = Once or twice per day, 5 = Several times per day)

4) How often does your job require you to work very fast?

5) How often does your job require you to work very hard?

6) How often does your job leave you with little time to get things done?

7) How often is there a great deal to be done?

8) How often do you have to do more work than you can do well?

3. Person-job fit

Measurement: 5-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all, 5 = Completely).

- 9) The match is very good between the demands of my job and my personal skills.
- 10) My abilities and training are a good fit with the requirements of my job.
- 11) My personal abilities and education provide a good match with the demands that my job places on me.

4. Subjective career success (Happiness)

Measurement: 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

- 12) I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career.
- 13) I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my overall career goals.
- 14) I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for income.
- 15) I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for advancement.
- 16) I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for the development of new skills.

5. Perceived marketability (Productivity)

Measurement: 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

Perceived **internal** marketability (3 items):

- 17) My company views me as an asset to the organization.
- 18) Given my skills and experience, the company that I work for views me as a value-added resource.
- 19) There are many opportunities available for me in my company.

Perceived **external** marketability (3 items):

- 20) I could easily obtain a comparable job with another employer.
- 21) There are many jobs available for me given my skills and experience.
- 22) Given my skills and experience, other organizations view me as a value-added resource.

6. Job exhaustion (Health)

Measurement: 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

- 23) There are days when I feel tired before I arrive at work.
- 24) After work, I tend to need more time than in the past in order to relax and feel better.
- 25) I can tolerate the pressure of my work very well. (R)
- 26) During my work, I often feel emotionally drained.
- 27) After working, I have enough energy for my leisure activities. (R)
- 28) After my work, I usually feel worn out and weary.
- 29) Usually, I can manage the amount of my work well. (R)
- 30) When I work, I usually feel energized. (R)

7. Demographics

31) What is your age?

- (Insert your age)

32) What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

33) When did you come to the Czech Republic?

- Before 24.02. 2022 (start of the war in Ukraine)
- After 24.02. 2022

34) What is your highest completed level of education?

- Elementary school
- High School / secondary School
- Vocational training / trade school
- University degree

35) What was your primary profession or industry in Ukraine before relocating?

- Professional / corporate / management
- Healthcare / medicine
- Education / academia
- Engineering / IT / technical
- Manual Labor / trade / service
- Other (please specify)

36) What best describes your current job in the Czech Republic?

- Factory / manufacturing / warehouse
- Cleaning / housekeeping / laundry
- Food Service / kitchen / hospitality
- Retail / customer Service
- Construction
- Delivery
- Other

Appendix 2. Survey questionnaire (Ukrainian)

Опитування щодо стабільності кар'єри

Шановний учаснику / Шановна учаснице!

Я студент магістратури Університету Вааса (Фінляндія). У межах своєї магістерської роботи я проводжу дослідження стабільності кар'єри українців, які зараз проживають у Чеській Республіці.

Заповнення опитування триватиме приблизно **5 хвилин**.

Опитування є повністю **анонімним**. Жодних імен або персональних ідентифікаційних даних не збирається і нікому не передається.

Участь є **добровільною**, і ви можете припинити заповнення в будь-який момент.

Заздалегідь дякую за ваш час та за те, що поділилися зі мною своїм досвідом.

З повагою,

Домінік Ніколас Соуділ

(Якщо у вас виникнуть запитання, звертайтеся за адресою:
x0044825@student.uwasa.fi)

Блок 1: Відбір (Screening questions)

1) Ви родом з України?

- Так
- Ні

2) Чи проживаєте та чи працюєте ви зараз у Чеській Республіці?

- Так
- Ні

3) Яка категорія найкраще описує вашу поточну роботу в Чехії?

- Ручна праця / сфера послуг / початковий рівень (наприклад, завод, прибирання, пральня, кухня, склад, роздрібна торгівля, будівництво)
- Корпоративна сфера / професійна діяльність / менеджмент (наприклад, офісна робота, ІТ, фінанси)

Блок 2: Кількісне робоче навантаження (Quantitative workload)

Будь ласка, вкажіть, як часто ваша робота вимагає наступного. Оцініть за шкалою:

(1 = Рідше ніж раз на місяць або ніколи, 2 = Один або два рази на місяць, 3 = Один або два рази на тиждень, 4 = Один або два рази на день, 5 = Кілька разів на день)

4) Як часто ваша робота вимагає від вас працювати дуже швидко?

5) Як часто ваша робота вимагає від вас працювати дуже інтенсивно?

6) Як часто ваша робота залишає вам замало часу для виконання завдань?

7) Як часто у вас накопичується великий обсяг роботи, яку потрібно виконати?

8) Як часто вам доводиться виконувати більше роботи, ніж ви здатні зробити якісно?

Блок 3: Відповідність людини та роботи (Person-job fit)

Будь ласка, оцініть ступінь вашої згоди з наступними твердженнями за шкалою від

1 до 5:

(1 = Зовсім ні, 5 = Цілком)

- 9) Вимоги моєї роботи дуже добре відповідають моїм особистим навичкам.
- 10) Мої здібності та підготовка добре відповідають вимогам моєї роботи.
- 11) Мої особисті здібності та освіта добре відповідають вимогам, які висуває до мене моя робота.

Блок 4: Суб'єктивний успіх у кар'єрі (Subjective career success)

Оцініть за шкалою від 1 до 5:

(1 = Категорично не згоден/-на, 5 = Цілком згоден/-на)

- 12) Я задоволений/-а успіхом, якого я досяг/-ла у своїй кар'єрі.
- 13) Я задоволений/-а прогресом у досягненні моїх загальних кар'єрних цілей.
- 14) Я задоволений/-а прогресом у досягненні моїх цілей щодо рівня доходу.
- 15) Я задоволений/-а прогресом у досягненні моїх цілей щодо кар'єрного просування.
- 16) Я задоволений/-а прогресом у досягненні моїх цілей щодо розвитку нових навичок.

Блок 5: Затребуваність на ринку праці (Perceived marketability)

Оцініть за шкалою від 1 до 5:

(1 = Категорично не згоден/-на, 5 = Цілком згоден/-на)

Сприйнята **внутрішня** затребуваність (3 пункти)

(Perceived **internal** marketability (3 items)):

- 17) Моя компанія вважає мене цінним працівником для організації.

18) З огляду на мої навички та досвід, компанія, в якій я працюю, вважає мене важливим ресурсом.

19) У моїй компанії для мене є багато можливостей.

Сприйнята **зовнішня** затребуваність (3 пункти)

(Perceived **external** marketability (3 items)):

20) Я міг би / могла б легко знайти аналогічну роботу в іншого роботодавця.

21) На ринку праці є багато вакансій для мене, враховуючи мої навички та досвід.

22) З огляду на мої навички та досвід, інші організації вважають мене цінним ресурсом.

Блок 6: Робоче виснаження (Job exhaustion)

Оцініть за шкалою від 1 до 5:

(1 = Категорично не згоден/-на, 5 = Цілком згоден/-на)

23) Бувають дні, коли я відчуваю втому ще до приходу на роботу.

24) Після роботи мені зазвичай потрібно більше часу, ніж раніше, щоб розслабитися та відчути себе краще.

25) Я дуже добре витримую робочий тиск. (R)

26) Під час роботи я часто відчуваю себе емоційно виснаженим/-ою.

27) Після роботи у мене залишається достатньо енергії для дозвілля. (R)

28) Після роботи я зазвичай почуваюся знесиленим/-ою та втомленим/-ою.

29) Зазвичай я добре справляюся з обсягом своєї роботи. (R)

30) Коли я працюю, я зазвичай відчуваю приплив енергії. (R)

Блок 7: Демографічна інформація (Demographics)

31) Ваш вік?

- (Вкажіть ваш вік)

32) Ваша стать?

- Чоловіча
- Жіноча
- Не бажаю вказувати

33) Коли ви приїхали до Чеської Республіки?

- До 24.02.2022 (початок війни в Україні)
- Після 24.02.2022

34) Який ваш найвищий завершений рівень освіти?

- Початкова освіта
- Середня освіта
- Професійно-технічна освіта
- Вища освіта

35) Якою була ваша основна професія або галузь діяльності в Україні до переїзду?

- Спеціаліст / корпоративний сектор / менеджмент
- Охорона здоров'я / медицина
- Освіта / наукова діяльність
- Інженерія / ІТ / технічна сфера
- Фізична праця / робочі спеціальності/ сфера послуг
- Інше

36) Що найкраще описує вашу теперішню роботу в Чеській Республіці?

- Завод / виробництво / склад
- Прибирання / хатнє господарство/ пральня
- Громадське харчування / кухня / готельний бізнес

- Роздрібна торгівля / обслуговування клієнтів
- Будівництво
- Доставка
- Інше