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Skills pipelines amid war-driven internal displacement and cross-border migration: university–industry capability partnerships for value-added apparel manufacturing

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 triggered mass population displacement; at its peak, an estimated 6.7 million citizens were recorded abroad (UNHCR, 2024), with approximately 5.9 million remaining as of February 2026. Of those displaced, roughly 1.7 million had been economically active prior to departure, representing over 10% of the pre-war labour force (Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, cited in VoxUkraine, 2024). The textile, clothing, leather, and footwear (TCLF) sector has experienced acute workforce depletion driven by cross-border emigration, internal displacement, and military mobilisation (Fama Research Agency & Ukrlegprom, 2023). Concurrently, the state enterprise relocation programme relocated over 840 firms from combat zones to western regions between March 2022 and October 2023 (Ministry of Economy of Ukraine, 2023), redistributing labour demand without proportional skills transfer. At the national level, 74% of employers report staffing shortages concurrent with structural unemployment (European Business Association, 2024), indicating a systemic spatial mismatch between available and required competencies. This presentation employs a single embedded case study design to analyse how university–industry capability partnerships sustain skills formation in labour-intensive manufacturing under these conditions. The empirical basis is the Softorg–KNUTD training initiative, delivered within a UNIDO programme supported by the Government of Japan (2024–2025): five intensive cohorts enrolled 51 apparel production technologists, with enterprise-level productivity gains reaching 30% at selected sites. In February 2026, a trilateral memorandum between KNUTD, Vinnytsia National Technical University, and Softorg institutionalised this model within university curricula (KNUTD, 2026). The analysis identifies the role of an industry ecosystem orchestrator (Adner, 2017) as a necessary condition for translating sectoral labour demand into structured educational provision within conflict-affected economies.

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