

Upskilling Equips Ukrainian Professionals for the Country's Reconstruction



KPMG Editorial Team in conversation with Olaf Buske, KPMG Partner and Head of the German International Development Advisory Services (IDAS) unit, and Nicolai Kiskalt, KPMG Partner and International Private Sector Lead of the new KPMG Ukraine Gateway. The discussion focuses on which upskilling initiatives are supporting Ukraine's transformation and how Germany can contribute.

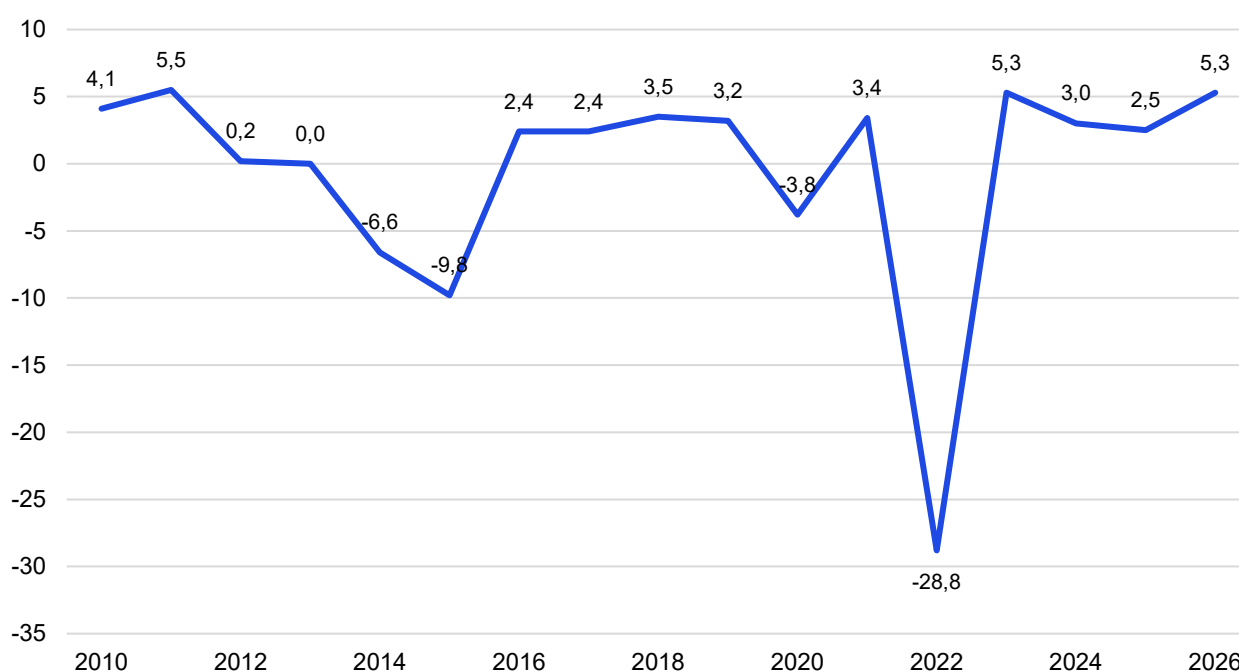
KPMG Editorial Team:

Given the immense strain caused by the war, what is the current state of the Ukrainian economy?

Nicolai Kiskalt:

The war has caused significant destruction. Nevertheless, the Ukrainian economy has proven remarkably resilient. Although there was a sharp contraction at the beginning of the war, by 2023 economic output had already begun to recover steadily, and this trend continued in 2024. Despite ongoing Russian attacks, the economy remains on a growth trajectory. Real GDP grew by around 3 percent in 2024 compared to 2023. Particularly the construction sector, transportation, and manufacturing have shown solid performance.

Real GDP Growth of Ukraine (2010–2026; in %)



Source: IWF (Okt. 2024)

KPMG Editorial Team:

What are the forecasts for the near future?

Olaf Buske:

For 2025, Ukraine's economic growth is projected at approximately 2.5 percent. In 2026, stronger growth impulses could emerge, leading to a substantial economic recovery. However, returning to pre-war levels remains a distant goal.

The pace and stability of economic recovery will depend heavily on the course of the war. A negotiated ceasefire could prove decisive for the speed and sustainability of the rebound.

KPMG Editorial Team:

Given these figures and forecasts, what are the key labor market challenges facing the country?

Nicolai Kiskalt:

Millions of people have been displaced or forced to flee, resulting in a significant shortage of skilled labor and a pronounced brain drain. Critical sectors such as transport, logistics, construction, IT, and agriculture are particularly affected. Currently, around 100,000 job positions remain unfilled, posing a major obstacle to economic recovery.

KPMG Editorial Team:

Is there likely to be any short- or medium-term relief in the labor market?

Nicolai Kiskalt:

Not in the short or medium term – quite the opposite. The demand for skilled workers continues to rise. By 2033, the Ukrainian economy is expected to require up to 4.5 million additional specialists. Another factor intensifying this challenge is that many key jobs now require digital skills, which many workers currently lack due to outdated education and training.

KPMG Editorial Team:

So, without improvements in the Ukrainian education system, reconstruction will not be possible. Would you agree?

Nicolai Kiskalt:

Absolutely. Upskilling the Ukrainian workforce is critical. Only then can they contribute effectively to rebuilding the country and strengthening the economy. We are seeing growing interest from German companies in investing in Ukraine. This finding is not only confirmed by our German-Ukrainian Business Outlook 2024 but also by our recent German-CEE Business Outlook 2025 study.

KPMG Editorial Team:

What programs exist in Ukraine to support upskilling?

Nicolai Kiskalt:

The Ukrainian government is highly committed to reskilling and professional training. A good example

is the Reskill UA initiative, which offers around 30,000 scholarships. It's a free retraining and training program designed to prepare Ukrainians for the labor market. Target employers include large corporations such as Vodafone and Genesis, as well as SMEs.

Training is delivered remotely via the online platform Coursera and covers eleven key qualification areas including logistics, cybersecurity, construction, and sales. Even beginners are welcome to participate. The program supports career changers but also focuses on developing expertise in fields such as artificial intelligence.

KPMG Editorial Team:

Are there initiatives focused specifically on implementing European standards?

Olaf Buske:

Yes. For instance, there is a noteworthy collaboration between Ukrainian government bodies and Skills4Recovery. Supported by the German government, this initiative trains 1,200 highly qualified professionals to help drive Ukraine's economic recovery. The training programs focus on logistics, IT, construction, and agriculture which are all aligned with European standards.

KPMG Editorial Team:

Are there further programs involving the German government?

Olaf Buske:

Yes. In the summer of 2024, the German and Ukrainian Ministries of Economic Affairs jointly launched the Skills Alliance for Ukraine initiative. This comprehensive program aims to support and train around 180,000 workers by 2028. Germany is not acting alone. More than 50 countries, alongside numerous business leaders and international organizations, endorsed this ambitious effort at the Ukraine Recovery Conference 2024. The initiative primarily targets internally displaced persons, veterans, and young people. In my view, this is a crucial step toward Ukraine's reconstruction, with the European Union playing a leading role.

KPMG Editorial Team:

Which professional groups in Ukraine need upskilling most urgently to strengthen the bridge between Germany and Ukraine and support long-term integration?

Nicolai Kiskalt:

Upskilling is particularly important for Ukrainian lawyers, auditors, and management consultants — key professions for successful reconstruction. Multidisciplinary teams are also essential. However, a challenge remains: while Ukraine has many university graduates in these fields, most lack experience with German projects, and language barriers persist. This makes collaboration with German companies and investors more difficult.

KPMG Editorial Team:

How large is this gap, and what is the current baseline of qualified professionals?

Nicolai Kiskalt:

The gap is substantial. It has been exacerbated by the brain drain over the past three years. Many professionals, particularly academics, left Ukraine following Russia's invasion. Currently, there are only limited numbers of Ukrainian auditors, lawyers, and consultants who speak English, German, or French fluently and possess extensive experience in international advisory and transformation projects.

KPMG Editorial Team:

Ukrainian state universities have recognized this gap and approached KPMG in Germany. How exactly does this cooperation look?

Olaf Buske:

KPMG in Germany intends to support Ukrainian universities in this critical area. Together, we developed the concept for a German-Ukrainian Business Skill Camp, which was further refined during a workshop in Lviv. In collaboration with the universities, we aim to involve the German federal government in this initiative. The goal is to establish a scholarship and training program to help graduates of leading Ukrainian faculties enhance their qualifications, particularly in auditing, legal advisory, and management consulting.

KPMG Editorial Team:

How will this support program be implemented in practice?

Nicolai Kiskalt:

The plan is to launch a dedicated hybrid upskilling program for Ukrainian academics that runs alongside employment and is designed to be flexible with the support of local employers. The training will take place mainly online, supplemented by in-person sessions every two months at various Ukrainian universities and educational institutions. In addition, two study trips to Germany are planned, each lasting between one and two weeks.

KPMG Editorial Team:

What will the curriculum include?

Nicolai Kiskalt:

Together with the universities, we discussed developing tailored curricula for each profession, delivered by qualified lecturers. Around 50 auditors could complete a 12-month program tailored to German frameworks such as the Handelsgesetzbuch (HGB - Commercial Code). Another 50 lawyers could receive training focused on European and German law. The largest group would be consultants participating in a 12-month Consulting Skills Camp. Additionally, language courses in German and English would be offered to all participants.

KPMG Editorial Team:

Where will the lecturers for this upskilling initiative come from?

Olaf Buske:

Trainers could be drawn from both Ukraine and Germany. The German expertise would primarily come from experienced practitioners at KPMG in Germany. Their know-how would prepare Ukrainian professionals for real-world consulting engagements. They could also benefit from modules of the German KPMG Academy. Professors from German universities may also participate.

KPMG Editorial Team:

How can German investors and companies benefit from this training initiative?

Nicolai Kiskalt:

The planned Business Skill Camp offers numerous advantages for German companies and investors. It enables them to build their Ukrainian operations on German standards from the outset.

This is only feasible if Ukrainian lawyers, auditors, and consultants are familiar with relevant legal and economic frameworks, including EU procurement law, the Handelsgesetzbuch (HGB), tax law, financial accounting, and SAP. German language skills will also be of crucial importance.

KPMG Editorial Team:

Is KPMG in Germany bringing specific expertise to this project?

Olaf Buske:

Yes, absolutely. KPMG in Germany brings unique expertise to this initiative. We currently employ more than one hundred Ukrainian professionals and have appointed the first partner of Ukrainian origin to our partnership. This gives us a strong network and excellent positioning for effective knowledge transfer.

KPMG Editorial Team:

Finally, let's turn to the public sector. Are there upskilling initiatives to support reconstruction within Ukraine's public administration?

Olaf Buske:

Yes, there are already promising qualification programs in the public sector aimed at supporting post-war reconstruction. One notable example is the Education for Victory program, developed in cooperation with the think tank LSE IDEAS at the London School of Economics and Political Science. It targets Ukrainian civil servants with managerial responsibilities and provides them with a four-week internship to enhance their leadership and management capabilities.

The program aims to accelerate and improve the efficiency of reconstruction efforts. Lecturers include leading academics and Nobel Prize laureates from around the world.

Participants also benefit from valuable connections with international business and government representatives, financial institutions, and NGOs supporting Ukraine. I consider this program highly positive and forward-looking.

KPMG Editorial Team:

Thank you for the interview.

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