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TRANSFORMATION OF UKRAINE'S YOUTH LABOUR MARKET UNDER THE CONDITIONS OF FULL-SCALE WAR: TRENDS IN 2021–2025

Summary. *Introduction.* The article analyses the features and patterns of the transformation of Ukraine's youth labour market under the conditions of the full-scale war in 2021–2025. Russia's military aggression, combined with the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, has caused profound demographic, migration and macro-economic changes that have significantly transformed the conditions shaping labour supply and demand, particularly for young people. Under these conditions, the youth labour market is emerging as a highly vulnerable segment, which requires comprehensive analysis for the development of effective public employment policy.

Purpose. The purpose of the study is to identify the features and key patterns of the transformation of Ukraine's youth labour market under the impact of the full-scale war and to substantiate the main challenges of its development in the current conditions.

Materials and Methods. The methodological basis of the study includes statistical, comparative, structural and dynamic analysis based on official statistical data from Ukrainian and international organisations. The study analyses changes in the size of the youth population, employment, unemployment, economic inactivity, informal employment and the share of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET). The applied methods made it possible to assess the impact of demographic losses, forced displacement, reduced economic activity and structural shifts in labour demand on the position of young people in the labour market.

Results. The study identifies regional and sectoral imbalances in employment and labour demand. It is established that the war has significantly worsened entry conditions for young people in the labour market: employment has declined, competition for vacancies has intensified, and the greatest losses are observed in regions affected by hostilities and in sectors that traditionally absorb young workers. The article shows that labour demand has shifted towards blue-collar, technical and service occupations, while a considerable share of young people remains oriented towards office-based, creative and remote employment, which leads to deepening structural imbalances. It is proven that the decline in registered unemployment does not reflect a real improvement in the situation, as it is accompanied by a reduction in the labour force, intensified migration processes, mobilisation and the expansion of informal employment. The study substantiates the need to implement post-war policies aimed at restoring labour market statistics, supporting NEET youth, developing vocational and dual education, promoting formal employment and aligning the education system with labour market needs.

Discussion. Prospects for further research include an in-depth study of mechanisms for overcoming structural imbalances in the youth labour market, the development of instruments for integrating young people into formal employment, and the formation of effective post-war employment policy taking into account regional and sectoral specificities.

Key words: youth labour market, youth employment, youth unemployment, NEET, labour market transformation, impact of war, post-war recovery.



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Problem statement. The full-scale war in Ukraine has become a systemic factor in the transformation of socio-economic processes, with the youth labour market being one of the most vulnerable segments. The war shock, compounded by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, has led to a sharp decline in the population, large-scale migration, reduced economic activity, and profound structural changes in labour supply and demand. Under these conditions, young people have faced increased risks due to job losses in the sectors of “first entry” into the labour market, deteriorating initial employment opportunities, rising unemployment, expanding informal employment, and the growth of the NEET group. At the same time, the limited and fragmented nature of current statistical observations during the wartime period makes it difficult to adequately assess the scale and direction of these changes. This creates both a scientific and a practical need for a comprehensive analysis of the transformation of the youth labour market under wartime conditions, which is a necessary prerequisite for the development of effective public employment policy, human capital preservation programs, and the post-war recovery of Ukraine’s economy.

Review of the last research and publications. The functioning of the youth labour market under wartime conditions has been examined in a number of studies by both Ukrainian and international scholars. In particular, Kutjuk V. [1], Brik T. [1], Pishulina O. [2], and Yatsenko L. [3] analyse key wartime labour market challenges in Ukraine. Kuzenkova E. [4] regularly publishes analytical materials on youth employment based on data from the Work.ua platform. Reports by the National Bank of Ukraine identify general trends in employment, unemployment, and macroeconomic changes in the labour market [5]. Analytical reports by the World Bank [6] and the International Organization for Migration [7; 8] focus on the demographic and socio-economic consequences of the war, including population decline, rising poverty, and growing inequality. Research conducted by the European Training Foundation makes it possible to assess the structural problems of youth employment and the dynamics of the NEET rate [9]. At the same time, the available sources mainly address particular aspects of labour market functioning or examine broader economic trends without sufficient attention to the youth segment under conditions of full-scale war. The complex interrelations between demographic losses, migration processes, macroeconomic dynamics, and structural shifts in labour demand that shape the transformation of the youth labour market remain insufficiently explored. This highlights the need for a systematic analysis of these processes, which constitutes the focus of this study.

Task of the research. The purpose of this article is to identify the specific features and key patterns of the transformation of Ukraine’s youth labour market under the impact of the full-scale war and to substantiate the main challenges facing its development under current conditions.

The basic material of research. In 2022, Ukraine’s youth labour market was only beginning to recover from the shock caused by the COVID-19 pandemic when it was hit by a new and far more severe shock resulting from Russia’s full-scale invasion. For a comprehensive analysis of the war’s impact, it is important to distinguish the pre-war trajectory of 2021 from the wartime period of 2022–2025 and to take into account the key determinants of these changes, including demographic losses, migration flows, and structural shifts in the economy.

This article assesses how the war has transformed the demographic basis of youth labour supply, the macroeconomic environment, key indicators of the youth labour market (employment, unemployment, NEET, and informal employment), as well as the regional and sectoral structure of employment. The analysis is based on official data from the State Statistics Service of Ukraine [10; 11], the National Bank of Ukraine [5; 12], the World Bank [6; 13], the United Nations [14], administrative statistics of the State Employment Service [15], and job market data from Work.ua [4; 16].

Demographic and migration conditions are important factors shaping labour supply in the youth labour market. In 2021–2024, Ukraine’s total population declined from 44.3 million to 37.9 million, that is, by more than 6.4 million people, while the population aged 15–24 decreased from 4.1 million to 3.8 million. At the same time, the share of young people aged 15–24 in the total population remained relatively stable at around 9–10% (Table 1). However, the absolute size of the youth labour force decreased significant.

Table 1

Demographic indicators of Ukraine in 2021–2024

Year	Population, thousand people	Population 15–24 years old, thousand people	Share of 15–24 years old, %	Population growth rate, %	Net migration, thousand people
2021	44298.6	4056.8	9.16	-0.86	-1.1
2022	41048.8	3812.1	9.29	-7.62	-5699.4
2023	37732.8	3601.6	9.55	-8.42	-300.0
2024	37860.2	3804.7	10.1	0.34	1146.0

Source: compiled by the author based on data from the World Bank and the UN [13; 14]

The annual population decline observed since 1993 entered a phase of demographic crisis with the onset of the full-scale war: in 2022 and 2023, the population growth rate amounted to -7.6% and -8.4% , respectively. The war triggered unprecedented levels of both external and internal migration. Net migration in 2022 amounted to -5.7 million people, while the total population declined by 3.3 million in 2022 alone (Table 1). This poses a threat of narrowing the “demographic reserve” of the youth labour market in the medium term.

For young people, this implies a higher likelihood of long-term departure, as well as educational and labour migration. It has also led to a concentration of internally displaced youth in relatively safe regions, particularly Kyiv and the western regions of Ukraine, which has altered the spatial structure of labour supply, intensified competition for jobs in host regions, and aggravated labour shortages in frontline and de-occupied territories.

The *macroeconomic environment* shapes the conditions for the development of the youth labour market. The war compounded the already existing pandemic-related shocks, causing a sharp decline in GDP in 2022 (-28.8%) after moderate growth in 2021. Although GDP partially recovered in 2023–2024, the economy remains vulnerable (Table 2).

Table 2

Main macroeconomic indicators of Ukraine in 2021–2024

Year	GDP, million USD	GDP growth, %	GDP per capita, US dollars	Gini index	Poverty level, %
2021	199766	3.4	4776
2022	161990	-28.8	4200
2023	181222	5.5	5140	0.41	...
2024	190741	2.9	5389	0.44	37.0

Source: compiled by the author based on World Bank data [6; 13]

Note: the poverty rate is estimated by the World Bank on the basis of microsimulations using the Actual Subsistence Minimum (ASM) poverty line

The Gini index of 0.44 in 2024 points to a high degree of income inequality in Ukraine. According to World Bank estimates, the poverty rate reached approximately 37% in 2024 (Table 2). For young people, this translates into reduced opportunities for self-financing education, maintaining mobility, and launching their own businesses.

Therefore, the macroeconomic environment in 2022–2024 has generated structurally less favourable conditions for young people’s entry into the labour market than those observed in the pre-war period.

According to the State Statistics Service of Ukraine (LFS, 2021), even before the full-scale war, young people aged 15–34 exhibited a more vulnerable employment profile than the population aged 15 and over. The unemployment rate in this age group stood at 11.0%, compared with 9.8% among the population aged 15 and over. At the same time, the employment rate among young people aged 25–34 remained relatively high, ranging from 70.4% to 74.0%. The 15–24 age group was the most vulnerable: in 2021, a high unemployment rate (19.1%) coincided with a low employment rate (24.8%) and a high level of economic inactivity (69.4%) (Table 3).

Table 3

Main indicators of the youth labour market of Ukraine in 2021

Age group	Unemployment rate, %	Employment rate, %	Level of economic inactivity, %
15–24 years old	19.1	24.8	69.4
25–29 years old	9.4	70.4	22.3
30–34 years old	8.4	74.0	19.2
15–34 years old	11.0	53.1	40.3
15+	9.8	49.3	45.4

Source: compiled by the author based on data from the State Statistics Service, LFS 2021 [10]

Thus, even before the outbreak of the full-scale war, the youth labour market exhibited structural inequality across age groups.

According to estimates by the National Bank of Ukraine, the overall unemployment rate rose to 20.6% in 2022 and is projected to decline gradually to 9.2% by 2027 [5]. Given pre-war patterns, it may be assumed that the wartime peak in unemployment among young people aged 15–24 exceeded that observed for the population as a whole.

Administrative statistics from the State Employment Service of Ukraine indicate a substantial decline in the number of officially registered unemployed persons. However, the reduction in the share of young people under

the age of 35 among registered unemployed persons (from 30.7% to 21.5%) is more likely to reflect avoidance of official registration and a shift into informal employment than a genuine improvement in the position of young people in the labour market (Table 4).

Table 4

Registered unemployment in 2021–2025.

Registered unemployed	12.2021	12.2022	12.2023	12.2024	12.2025
Total, thousand people	295.0	186.5	96.1	94.2	88.3
Youth 15–35 years old, thousand people	78.3	43.3	21.9	20.4	19.0
Youth 15–35 years old, %	26.5	23.2	22.7	21.7	21.5

Source: compiled by the author based on data from the NBU and the State Statistics Service of Ukraine [5; 12; 15]

The decline in registered unemployment from 295.0 thousand persons in 2021 to 88.3 thousand in 2025 was accompanied by a substantial contraction of the labour force itself due to migration, mortality, and mobilisation. The increasing share of women among the registered unemployed (from 56% to more than 80%) indicates that a significant proportion of working-age men have moved out of the official labour market framework (Table 4).

The NEET rate — the share of young people who are not in employment, education, or training — is a key indicator of the risk of a “lost generation”. According to the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, in 2021 the NEET rate in Ukraine was 14.3% among those aged 15–24 and 19.8% among those aged 15–29 [9]. This indicator shows a pronounced gender gap: in the 15–29 age group, the rate was 26.3% for women and 13.6% for men. The main reason for NEET status is the performance of family responsibilities, including childcare and care for adult family members [9].

Informal employment serves as an important “buffer” during crises, but at the same time it is associated with low social protection and unstable incomes. In 2021, the share of informally employed persons in the population aged 15 and over was 19.5%. It was significantly higher among young people aged 15–24 (27.0%) and 25–29 (20.1%), and slightly lower among those aged 30–34 (19.0%) [10].

Informal employment is considerably more widespread among young men (reaching up to 30.7% in the 15–24 age group), which is associated with their greater willingness to engage in riskier forms of work and to prioritise income over official employment status. Under wartime conditions, this may indicate a further expansion of informal youth employment, including due to fears of mobilisation and the growing share of young people not covered by the social insurance system, thereby increasing the risks of poverty and vulnerability in the post-war period.

An analysis of *employment by region* in 2020–2023 points to a profound spatial transformation of the labour market. Overall employment in the country declined by approximately 20.6%. The largest relative losses in employment were recorded in Donetsk (–72.6%), Luhansk (–94.1%), Kherson (–76.1%), Kharkiv (–32.2%), and Zaporizhzhia (–43.0%) regions. By contrast, the relative share of employment increased in the city of Kyiv (from 27.8% to 30.3% of total employment), as well as in Lviv, Vinnytsia, Poltava, and a number of western regions, where internally displaced persons and economic activity were relocated [11].

In terms of the *sectoral structure of employment by type of economic activity (NACE)*, the largest reductions in jobs in 2020–2024 occurred in agriculture, forestry and fishing (–35.6%), industry (–18.5%), construction (–33.6%), accommodation and food service activities (–43.9%), and information and telecommunications (–47.3%). The only sector to demonstrate positive dynamics was real estate activities (+39.3%); however, its share in total employment remains limited and does not offset the overall decline in labour demand (Fig. 1).

These sectors have traditionally employed a substantial share of young workers, particularly those with secondary and vocational education. As a result, young people have been disproportionately affected by job losses in the sectors that were hit first by the war.

According to administrative statistics from the State Employment Service of Ukraine, *the number of vacancies* fell sharply in 2022, from 706 thousand in 2021 to 396 thousand, reflecting an unprecedented contraction in labour demand following the outbreak of full-scale hostilities. The most severe shortage of vacancies was observed in 2021–2022, when the gap between the number of unemployed persons and available jobs reached its maximum (Fig. 2). In 2023–2024, labour demand showed signs of partial recovery; however, this was not accompanied by a proportional increase in formal youth employment. This can be explained, first, by the substantial reduction in the size of the labour force due to migration and mobilisation and, second, by changes in young people’s behavioural strategies, in particular the avoidance of official unemployment registration.

Analysis of *data from the Work.ua employment platform* also shows that competition for jobs increased sharply in 2022–2023: during some periods, the number of CVs submitted per vacancy reached approximately 100 [16]. The highest concentration of young jobseekers was observed in the 18–24 age group, while more than half of all candidates were young people aged 16–34 (Fig. 3).

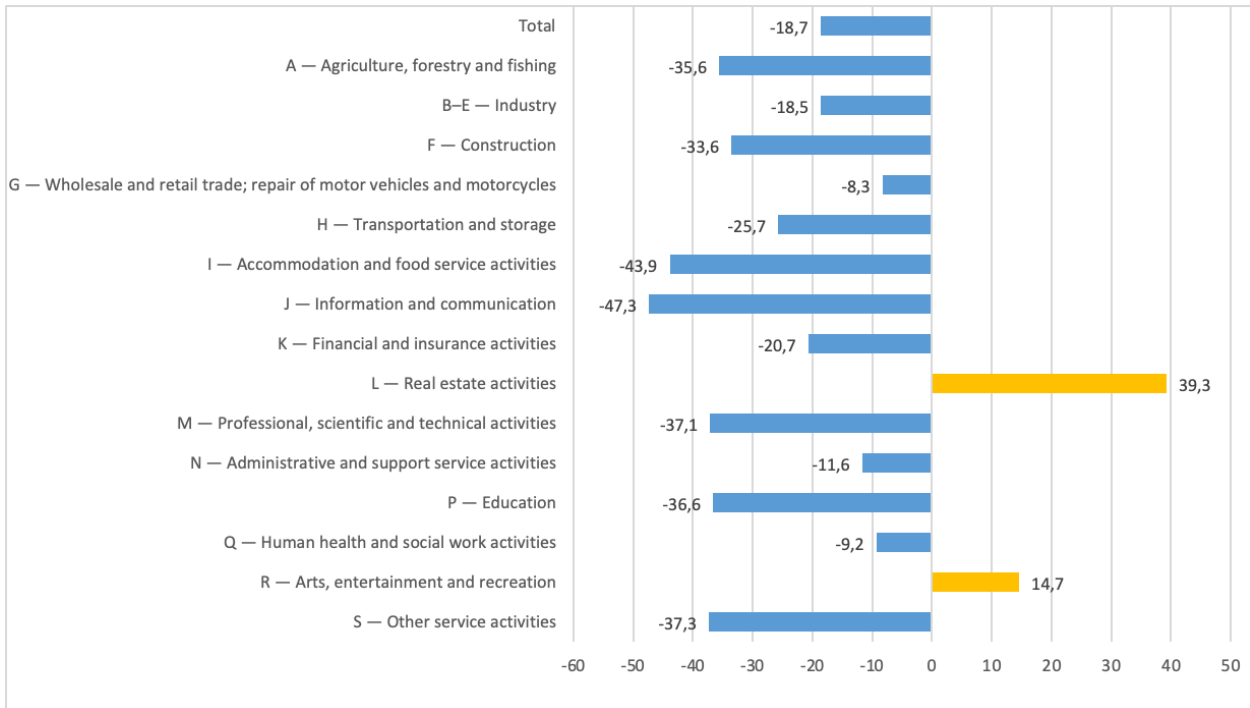


Fig. 1. Growth rate of employed by economic activity in 2020–2024, %
 Source: calculated by the author based on data from the State Statistics Service [11]

At the same time, employer demand is concentrated primarily in trade, logistics, transport, catering, and blue-collar occupations [1], whereas young people tend to orient themselves towards office-based, creative, and remote forms of employment [17]. This creates a persistent skills and occupational mismatch between labour demand and labour supply in the youth labour market, which has only intensified under wartime conditions.

Thus, the war has transformed labour demand in Ukraine’s youth labour market through a combination of a quantitative decline in vacancies and profound structural shifts. Reduced demand in “first-entry” sectors,

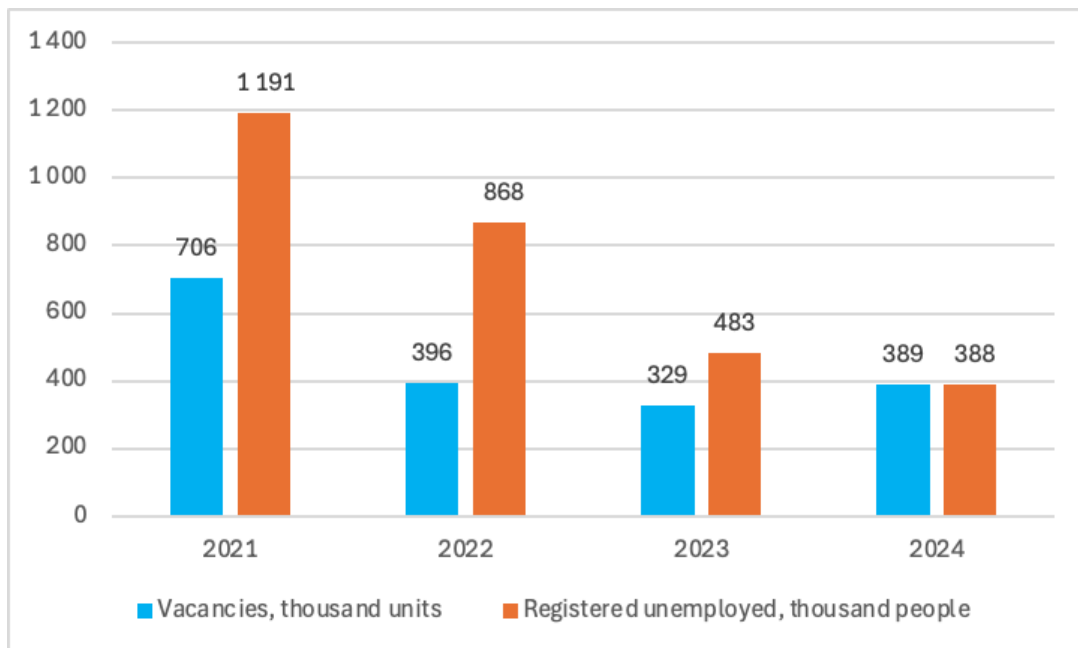


Fig. 2. Annual number of vacancies and unemployed, State Employment Service of Ukraine, 2019–2024
 Source: compiled by the author based on data from the State Employment Service of Ukraine [15]
 Note: cumulative data over the year

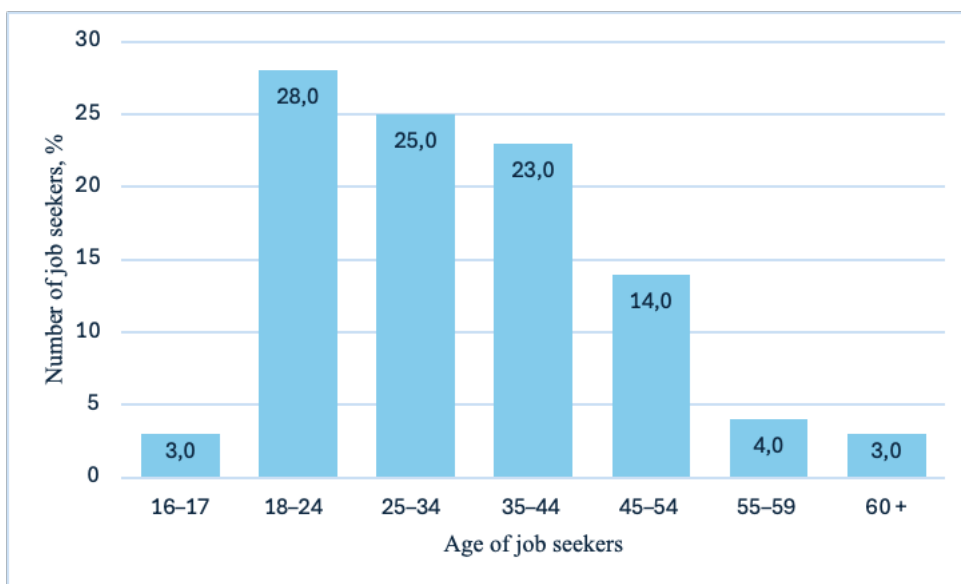


Fig. 3. Distribution of jobseekers by age on the Work.ua in December 2024
Source: compiled by the author based on data from the Work.ua employment platform [4]

widening regional disparities, and intensified competition for a limited number of jobs have significantly worsened the initial conditions for youth employment.

Conclusions and prospects for further research. The analysis has shown that the war has not been a temporary shock, but a systemic factor in the profound transformation of Ukraine's youth labour market.

The decline in demand for youth labour has been uneven and has been accompanied by growing regional and sectoral disparities. Frontline and temporarily occupied territories have effectively lost a substantial part of their economic base for youth employment, while in relatively safe regions the concentration of economic activity has increased, together with excessive competition for a limited number of jobs.

The war has also exacerbated structural imbalances between labour demand and labour supply in terms of qualifications and occupations. The orientation of a significant proportion of young people towards remote, office-based, and creative forms of employment conflicts with the predominance of demand for blue-collar, technical, and service occupations, thereby limiting the possibilities for the effective integration of young people into the labour market even under conditions of partial economic recovery.

Thus, Ukraine's youth labour market under wartime conditions is emerging as a segment characterised by heightened structural instability, where the key challenges concern not only the restoration of the number of jobs, but also the quality of labour demand, its alignment with the educational and professional characteristics of young people, and spatial as well as sectoral balance.

Given this, post-war youth labour market policy should focus on the resumption of systematic labour force surveys; targeted programmes for NEET youth, especially women and internally displaced persons; the development of dual and vocational education in reconstruction-related sectors such as construction, energy, transport, and logistics; the promotion of formal employment; and a regionally differentiated policy that takes into account the differences between host regions and territories most affected by military action.

Such approaches would not only minimise the long-term loss of human capital among young people, but also turn the youth segment into a key resource for the reconstruction of Ukraine's economy in the post-war period.

ДОДАТКОВА ІНФОРМАЦІЯ

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ЗАЯВА ПРО ДОСТУПНІСТЬ ДАНИХ: Не застосовується.

КОНФЛІКТ ІНТЕРЕСІВ: Автори заявляють про відсутність конфлікту інтересів.

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ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЯ МОЛОДІЖНОГО РИНКУ ПРАЦІ УКРАЇНИ В УМОВАХ ПОВНОМАСШТАБНОЇ ВІЙНИ: ТЕНДЕНЦІЇ 2021–2025 РР.

Анотація. Вступ. У статті проаналізовано особливості та закономірності трансформації молодіжного ринку праці України в умовах повномасштабної війни у 2021–2025 рр. Військова агресія Росії у поєднанні з довготривалими наслідками пандемії COVID-19 зумовила глибокі демографічні, міграційні та макроекономічні зміни, що суттєво трансформували умови формування попиту і пропозиції праці, зокрема для молоді. За цих умов молодіжний ринок праці формується як сегмент підвищеної вразливості, що потребує комплексного аналізу для формування ефективної державної політики зайнятості.

Мета. Метою дослідження є виявлення особливостей і закономірностей трансформації молодіжного ринку праці України під впливом повномасштабної війни та обґрунтування основних викликів його розвитку в сучасних умовах.

Матеріали та методи. Методичну основу дослідження становлять статистичний, порівняльний, структурний і динамічний аналіз на основі офіційних статистичних даних українських та міжнародних організацій. У процесі дослідження проаналізовано зміни чисельності молоді, рівнів зайнятості, безробіття, економічної неактивності, неформальної зайнятості та частки молоді, яка не працює, не навчається і не підвищує кваліфікацію (NEET). Застосовані методи дозволили оцінити вплив демографічних втрат, вимушеної міграції, скорочення економічної активності та структурних змін попиту на працю на становище молоді на ринку праці.

Результати. У статті виявлено регіональні та галузеві дисбаланси у сфері зайнятості та попиту на робочу силу. Встановлено, що війна суттєво погіршила умови входження молоді на ринок праці: скоротилася зайнятість, посилилася конкуренція за вакансії, а найбільші втрати спостерігаються в регіонах, що зазнали бойових дій, та у галузях, які традиційно забезпечують зайнятість молоді. Показано, що попит на працю змістився у бік робітничих, технічних і сервісних професій, тоді як значна частка молоді орієнтована на офісну, креативну та дистанційну зайнятість, що зумовлює поглиблення структурних дисбалансів. Доведено, що зниження рівня зареєстрованого безробіття не відображає реального покращення ситуації, оскільки супроводжується скороченням робочої сили, посиленням міграційних процесів, мобілізацією та зростанням неформальної зайнятості. У дослідженні обґрунтовано необхідність реалізації післявоєнної політики, спрямованої на відновлення статистичного забезпечення ринку праці, підтримку молоді категорії NEET, розвиток професійної та дуальної освіти, стимулювання формальної зайнятості та узгодження системи освіти з потребами ринку праці.

Перспективи. Перспективи подальших досліджень полягають у поглибленому вивченні механізмів подолання структурних дисбалансів молодіжного ринку праці, розробленні інструментів інтеграції молоді у формальний сектор зайнятості, а також у формуванні ефективної післявоєнної політики зайнятості з урахуванням регіональних та галузевих особливостей.

Ключові слова: молодіжний ринок праці, молодіжна зайнятість, молодіжне безробіття, NEET, трансформація ринку праці, вплив війни, післявоєнне відновлення.