

POLAND

UKRAINIAN NATIONALS CROSSING BACK TO UKRAINE

JULY-NOVEMBER 2024



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Cover photo: Refugees from Ukraine crossing the border in Medyka, Poland. © IOM 2022

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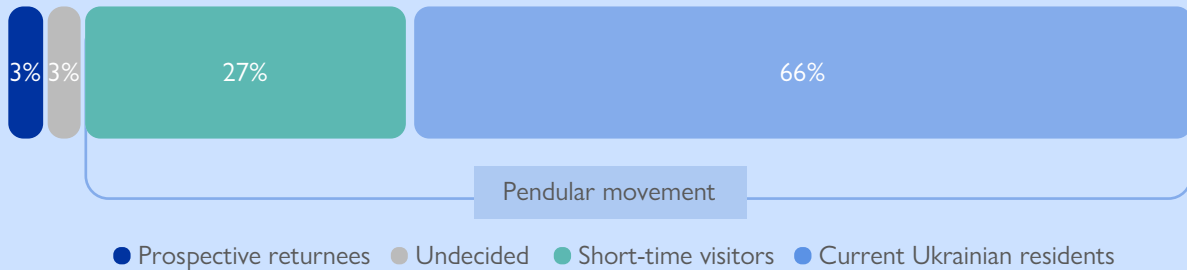
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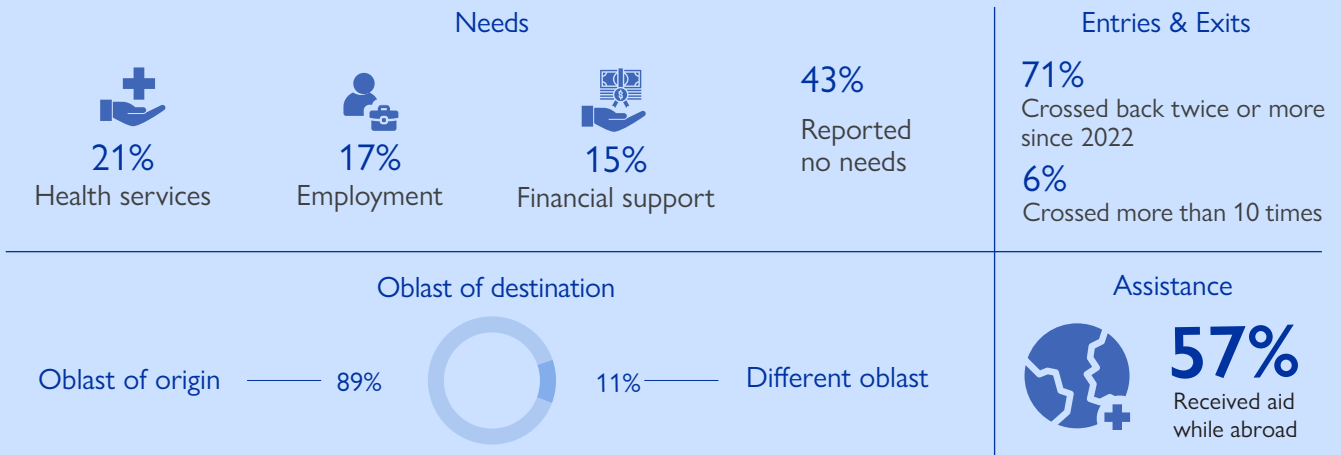
KEY FINDINGS

Intentions and mobility history



UKRAINIANS ABROAD

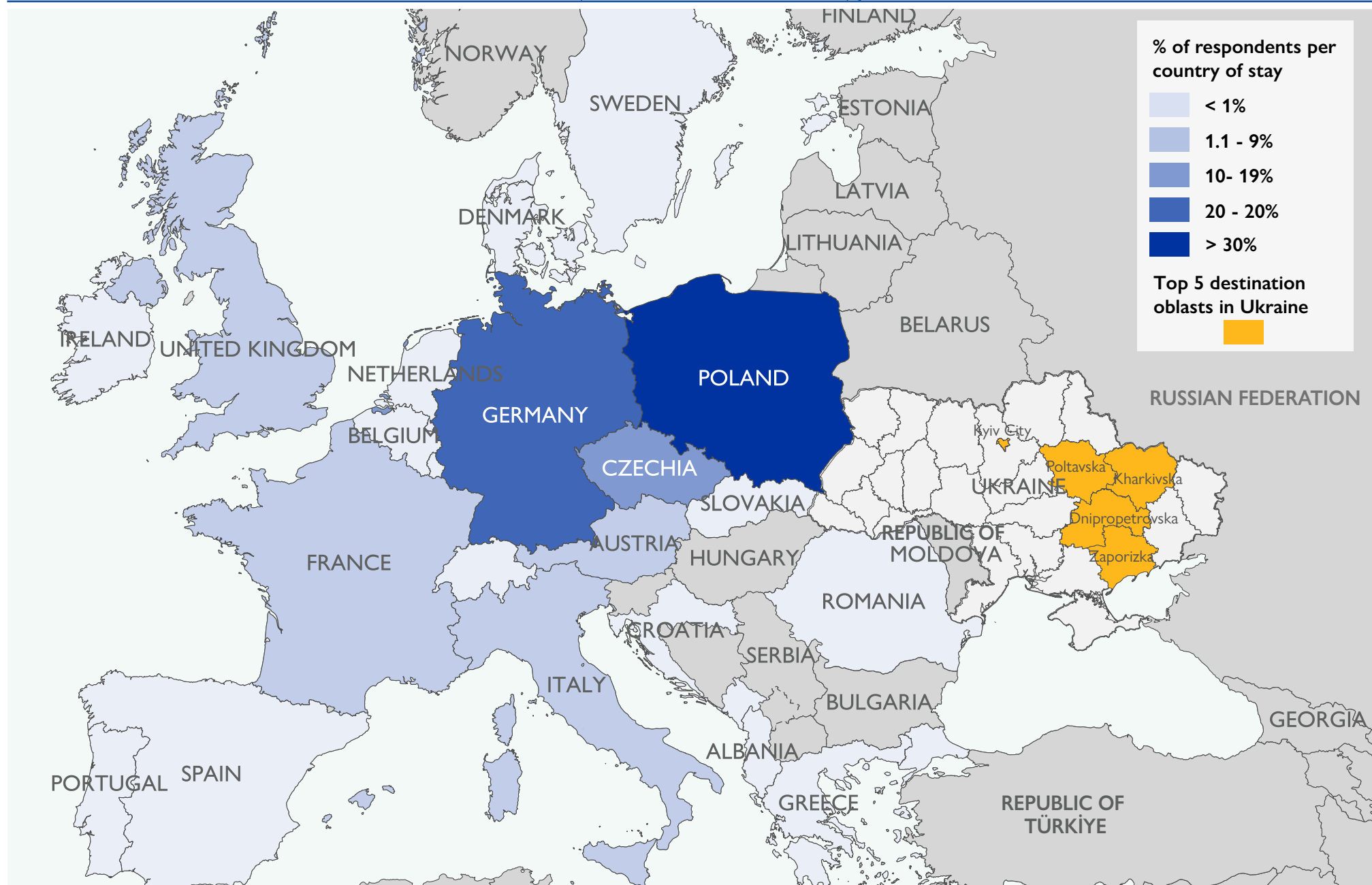
(Resided abroad 50% or more of the three months leading to crossing back)



CURRENT RESIDENTS OF UKRAINE

(Resided in Ukraine 50% or more of the three months leading to crossing back)





This map is for illustration purposes only. Names and boundaries on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM

1. INTRODUCTION

IOM’s Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) surveyed Ukrainian nationals crossing back into Ukraine from Poland, capturing their return intentions, displacement duration, destinations, access to assistance, experiences of unequal treatment, and expectations.

Between 17 July and 22 November, 2024, a total of 634 surveys were conducted in Medyka, Poland—286 (45%) in the third quarter and 348 (55%) in the fourth. The analysis is based solely on responses from Ukrainian nationals. Results are rounded, and some questions allowed multiple responses, leading to totals that may not sum to 100 per cent.

Findings indicate that 93 per cent of crossings were pendular, involving short-term or temporary returns. Only three per cent (21 individuals) were returning from displacement, while four per cent remained undecided. This suggests that most border crossings are not for permanent return but part of cyclical mobility.

To provide a clear understanding of the profiles and mobility patterns of those crossing the border into Ukraine, the analysis distinguishes between three main groups:

- Short-term visitors: Ukrainians who have spent less than half of the three months prior to the time of survey in Ukraine and who are going for a short visit lasting 30 days or less;
- Prospective returnees: Ukrainians who have spent less than half of the three months prior to the time of survey in Ukraine and who aim to remain in Ukraine for more than 30 days;
- Undecided: Ukrainians who spent half or more of their time abroad in the last three months prior to the survey and are undecided on how long they will spend in Ukraine upon crossing back
- Current Ukrainian residents: Ukrainians who have spent more than half of the three months prior to the time of survey in Ukraine and are returning after a brief trip abroad.

BORDER CROSSINGS

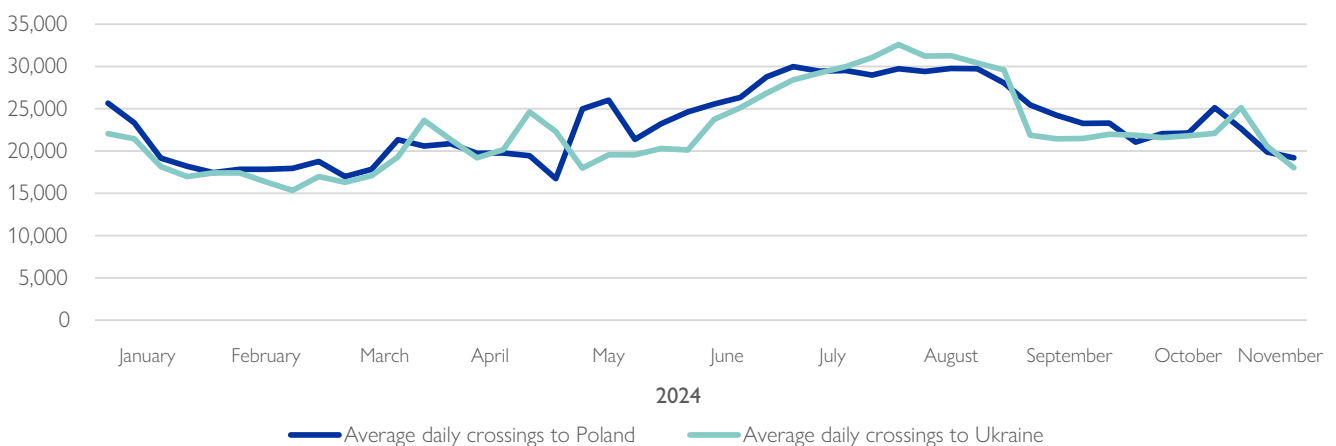
In 2024, the total number of border crossings from Poland to Ukraine was 7,216,000, compared to 7,441,000 from Ukraine to Poland, resulting in a net negative balance of 225,000 crossings. This trend was particularly notable during the first quarter, when 1,669,000 individuals crossed to Ukraine and 1,770,000 to Poland, creating a net negative of 101,000 crossings. During the second and third quarters, the figures grew and began to equalize. For instance, in the third quarter, 2,545,000 individuals crossed to Ukraine, while 2,546,000 crossed to Poland.

A significant shift occurred during the fourth week of April and the first week of May, with a noticeable predominance of crossings to Ukraine (172,000 and 156,000, respectively) compared to crossings to Poland (136,000 and 117,000). This coincided with Orthodox Easter on 5 May. In subsequent

weeks, the trend reversed, with 175,000 and 182,000 crossings to Poland compared to 126,000 and 137,000 crossings to Ukraine.

The average daily border crossings from Poland to Ukraine stood at 22,410, while crossings from Ukraine to Poland averaged 23,110. Both directions followed similar seasonal patterns. February recorded the lowest average daily crossings, with 16,000 to Ukraine and 18,000 to Poland, and the fourth week of February saw a particularly low average of 15,000 crossings to Ukraine. Conversely, August was the busiest month, averaging 31,000 daily crossings to Ukraine and 30,000 to Poland, with the first week of August reaching a peak average of 33,000 daily crossings to Ukraine.

Figure 1: Average daily crossings to Poland and Ukraine, calculated as weekly averages, January – November 2024



2. UKRAINIANS ABROAD

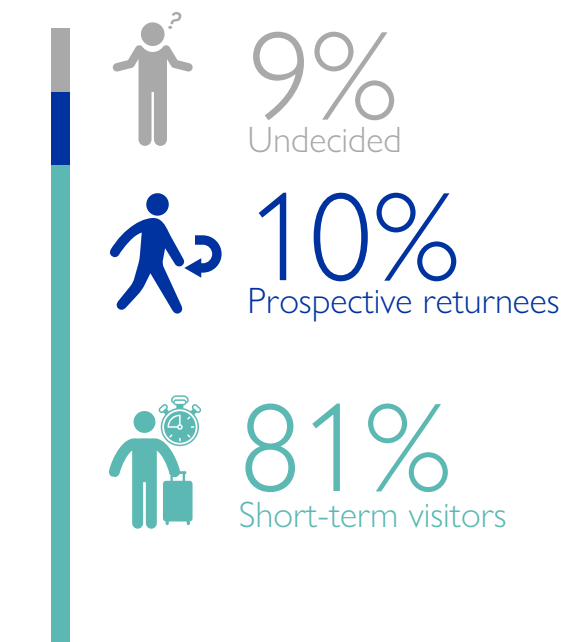
SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

The figures presented in this section exclude respondents residing in Ukraine who were crossing back from visits abroad. The data is limited to short-term visitors to Ukraine (n=173), prospective returnees (n=21), and undecided respondents (n=20), for a total of n=214. Due to the small sample sizes for the latter groups, the findings should be interpreted with caution.

Among respondents, women constituted 98 per cent, while men accounted for only 2 per cent. The average age of all respondents was 42 years, with women (n=210) averaging 42 years and men (n=4) averaging 39 years. The largest proportion of prospective returnees were in the 60+ age group (33%), whereas this group was the least represented among short-term visitors (9%). In contrast, the 30–39 (26%) and 40–49 (25%) age groups were the most represented among short-term visitors.

The highest proportions of female “prospective returnees” were in the age groups of 30 – 39 (23%), followed by the 50 – 59 age category (21%). Conversely, a significant majority of men planning to return were aged over 60 (67%). Among the subset of respondents intending to remain in Ukraine (n=106), the prevailing demographic consisted of women aged 30 – 39, comprising 22 per cent.

Figure 2: Movement intentions among Ukrainian who spent most of their time abroad in the three months prior to the survey (%), n=361



INTENTIONS AND REASONS TO CROSS TO UKRAINE

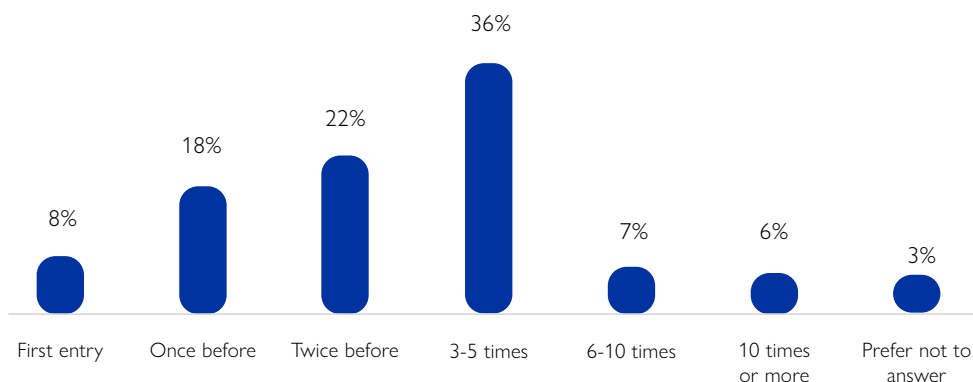
Throughout the reporting period, 81 per cent of respondents planned to make a short visit (short-term visitors), while 10 per cent expressed their intention to remain in Ukraine (prospective returnees), and 9 per cent were undecided. Of the 21 prospective returnees surveyed, 19 (90%) indicated their desire to remain in Ukraine indefinitely.

The majority of respondents (64% overall) indicated their intention to stay in their own homes upon returning. This percentage was even higher among prospective returnees, with

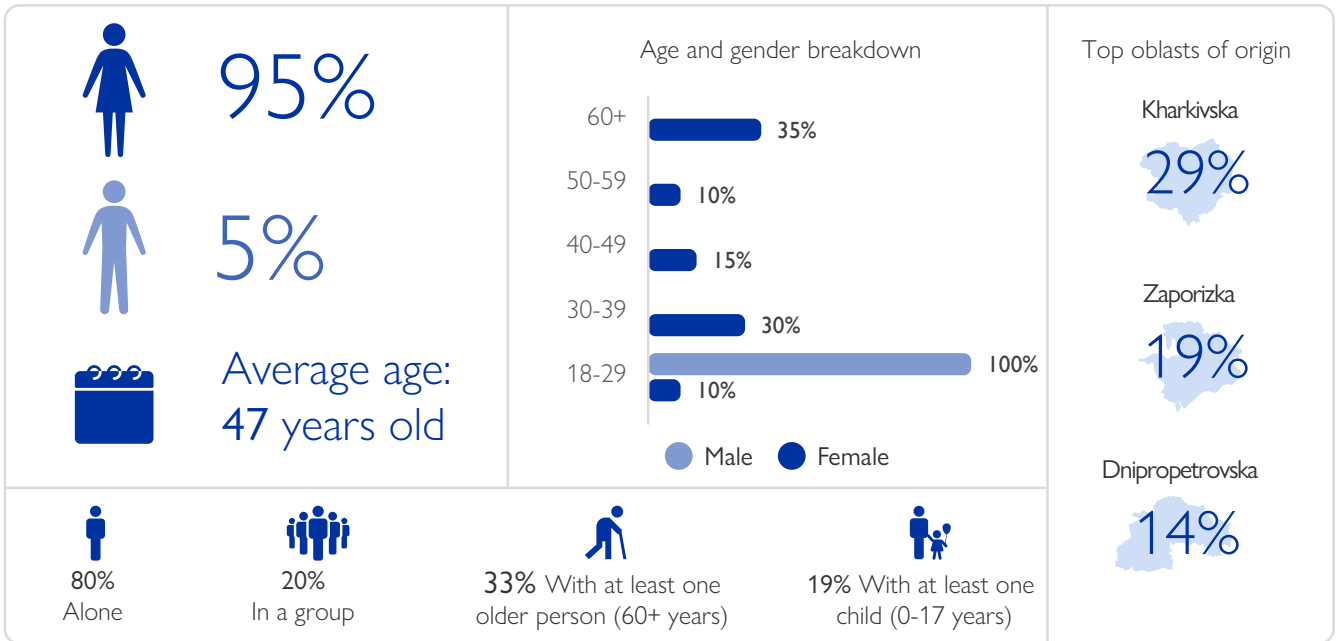
95 per cent planning to stay in their own homes. Additionally, 26 per cent of respondents reported plans to stay with relatives, while 4 per cent intended to stay with friends.

Many Ukrainian nationals cross the border regularly. Most respondents reported having crossed the Ukrainian border three to five times (36%) since their initial displacement, while only 8 per cent indicated that this was their first experience crossing from Ukraine and back.

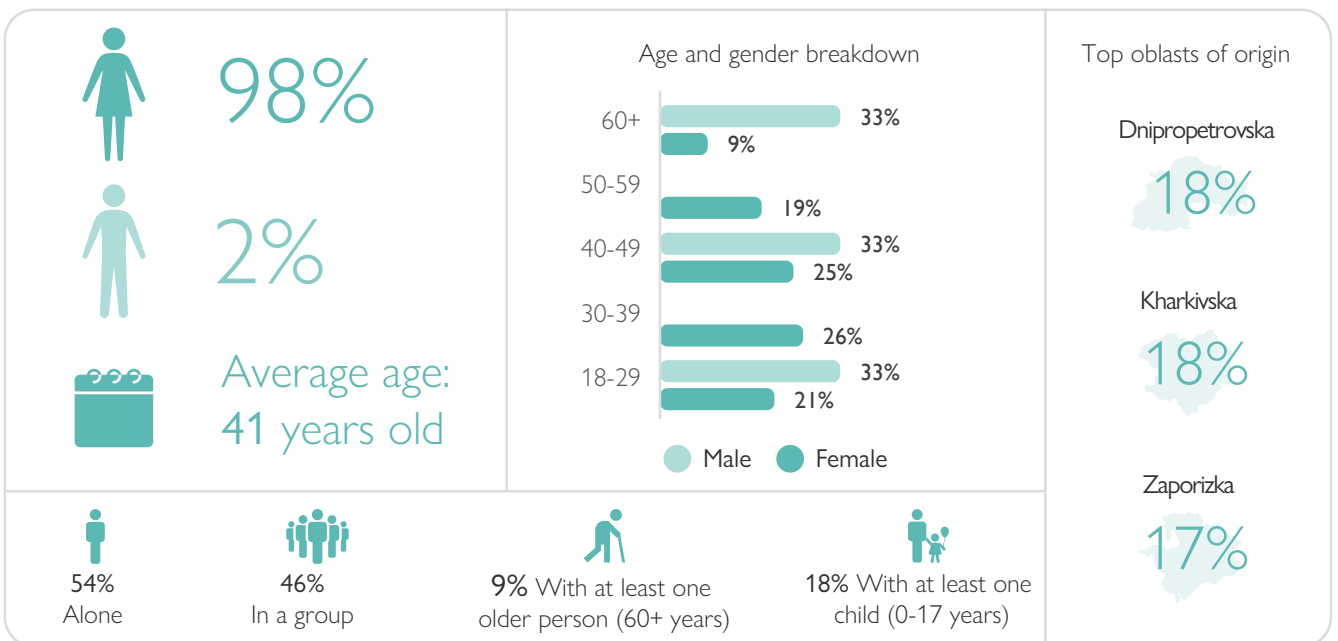
Figure 3: Number of exits from and entries to Ukraine since 24 February 2022 (%), n=214



PROSPECTIVE RETURNEES

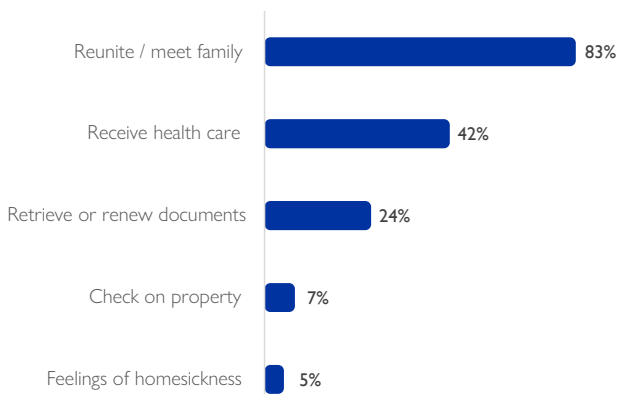


SHORT-TERM VISITORS



Among respondents returning for a short visit, reunification with family was the most frequently reported reason for crossing back, cited by 83 per cent. Other commonly selected reasons among this group included accessing health care (42%) and retrieving documents (24%). Interestingly, feelings of homesickness was one of the less frequently reported motivations among short-term visitors (5%) but was the top reason for prospective returnees.

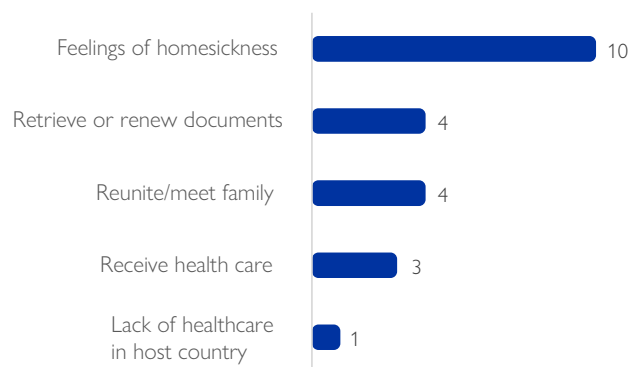
Figure 4: Top 5 reasons to make a short visit, short-term visitors (%), n=173



Multiple answers possible

In contrast, while reuniting with family was less commonly chosen by prospective returnees compared to short-term visitors, it remained a significant motivation (19%). Notably, this group frequently selected 'Other' (29%), citing motivations not included in the standard answer options, such as returning from work trips. Finally, the undecided group reported a mix of motivations similar to both visitors and returnees, including reunification with family (75%) and missing home (30%).

Figure 5: Top 5 reasons to stay in Ukraine, prospective returnees (Number of respondents), n=21



Multiple answers possible

DISPLACEMENT ABROAD & GROUP COMPOSITION

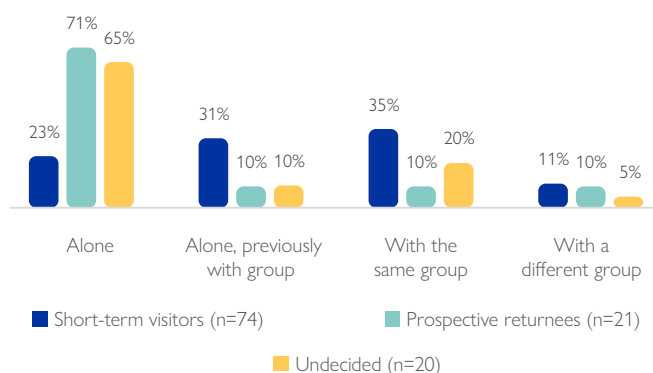
Among short-term visitors, 42 per cent were returning to Ukraine after being displaced in Poland. The remaining returnees had stayed in other European countries, particularly Germany (23%) and Czechia (13%). The findings for the undecided group were similar, with 50 per cent returning from Poland, 15 per cent from Germany, and slightly fewer (5%) from Czechia, and 10 per cent from Ireland. Among prospective returnees, the primary countries of displacement were Poland and Czechia, each accounting for 24 per cent. Overall, 41 per cent were returning from Poland, 20 per cent from Germany, 14 per cent from Czechia, and nearly all respondents were returning from European countries.

At the time of the interview, respondents had been displaced outside of Ukraine for an average of 854 days (approximately 2 years and 4 months). Short-term visitors, on average, experienced longer periods of displacement (882 days) compared to those who returned for a permanent stay (787 days) or were undecided (695 days). Overall, 39 per cent of respondents (n=115) were returning alone, the same way they were displaced, while 28 per cent were traveling with the same group they had been displaced with. The majority of prospective returnees (n=21) and undecided respondents (n=20) were traveling alone, whereas only 23 per cent of those returning alone for a short visit (n=74) were originally alone. Most of this group had initially left Ukraine as part of a larger group, and now either crossed for a temporary visit with the same group (35%) or alone (31%). Respondents rarely crossed back as part of a group different from the original one (overall 10%). The groups respondents

travelled with were generally small, with 51 per cent traveling with one other person and 47 per cent with two other people (n=43).

Those traveling with a group were, in most cases (95%), traveling with children under 18 years old. Overall, 19 per cent of respondents were traveling with children, including 18 per cent of short-term visitors, 19 per cent of prospective returnees, and 25 per cent of undecided respondents. Seventeen per cent travelled with children between 5 and 17 years old, and only three per cent were with younger children. Short-term visitors were less likely to be over 60 years old or traveling with someone in this age group (9%) compared to prospective returnees (33%) and undecided respondents (20%). Overall, 13 per cent of respondents were traveling with someone over 60 years old.

Figure 6: Group composition by return intention (%)



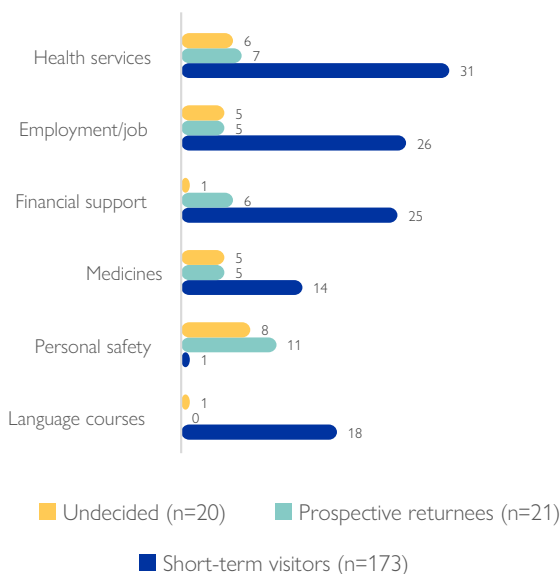
NEEDS AND ASSISTANCE

Health services emerged as the primary immediate need among those crossing back, reported by 21 per cent of respondents, followed by the need for employment (17%), financial support (15%), and medicines (11%). No needs were reported by 43 per cent. While personal safety (9% overall) was frequently mentioned by prospective returnees (52%) and undecided respondents (40%), it was rarely cited by short-term visitors (1%). Overall, short-term visitors more often reported having no immediate needs (47%) compared to other groups (43% overall). Additionally, their top reported needs were less frequent than those of other groups (see Figure 7), except for language courses, which were understandably an immediate need for 10 per cent of short-term visitors but not for those returning to stay. On average, respondents crossing back for a visit reported one immediate need, whereas the other groups reported two.

Although the most commonly reported categories of needs were consistent, the frequency of these needs varied slightly by country. For example, respondents traveling from Poland (n=88) more frequently identified health services as their primary need (24%). Those from Germany more often reported the need for employment (30%), while respondents from Czechia (n=29) were more likely to mention language courses (21%). Respondents from Germany were also less likely to report having no needs (33%).

More than half of Ukrainian respondents (57%) received humanitarian assistance while abroad. Prospective returnees accessed this assistance slightly more often (62%) compared to visitors (57%) and the undecided (45%). Overall, only seven per cent of respondents encountered difficulties when seeking support, such as language barriers and documentation issues.

Figure 7: Frequencies of top immediate needs upon return, by return intention



Multiple answers possible

UNEQUAL TREATMENT

Overall, 13 per cent of respondents reported experiencing unfair or unequal treatment based on nationality, ethnicity, or gender since leaving their place of residence in Ukraine, while 86 per cent reported no such experiences, and the remaining respondents preferred not to answer. Prospective returnees were less likely to report such treatment (5%), whereas the undecided group appeared to experience it more frequently (25%). Common forms of discrimination included bullying of children at school, economic exploitation, and negative attitudes or biases from the native population. Examining different countries of residency, respondents who resided in Poland reported experiencing unequal treatment more frequently (22%, n=88) compared to those from Germany or Czechia (7% each, n=43 and n=29, respectively).

“ We were forced to pay a fine on the train even though we had electronic tickets. Additionally, while checking tickets, the conductor tossed my phone across the carriage. The police did nothing to assist. ”

Thirty-nine-year-old woman, originally from Chernihivska oblast, crossing back from Poland

OBLASTS OF ORIGIN & DESTINATION

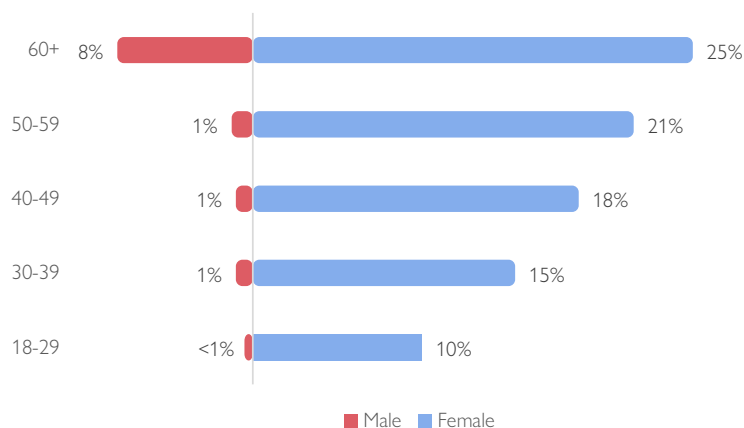
Over half of the respondents resided in one of three regions before being displaced outside Ukraine: Kharkivska (19%), Dnipropetrovska (18%), and Zaporizka (17%). Overall, 59 per cent of respondents originated from oblasts in the eastern part of the country, 13 per cent from the central region, and between 5 and 8 per cent from the western, southern, or northern regions. No significant intergroup differences were observed regarding intentions to cross back. Eighty-nine per cent of respondents reported plans to return to their region of origin, while a significant portion of those intending to relocate to a different region planned to travel to Kyiv (8 out of 23). Overall, the destination of 19 per cent of respondents was Dnipropetrovska, another 18 per cent were planning to cross back to Kharkivska, 17 per cent to Zaporizka, and 11 per cent to the city of Kyiv.

3. CURRENT UKRAINIAN RESIDENTS

Overall, current Ukrainian residents accounted for 66 per cent of the survey respondents (n=634). The majority were women, accounting for 89 per cent, compared to only 11 per cent who were men. Older age groups had higher representation among

the respondents, with those over 60 years old accounting for 32 per cent of respondents. This was true for women (n=373), but it was particularly noticeable among men (n=47), most of whom were in the 60+ age group.

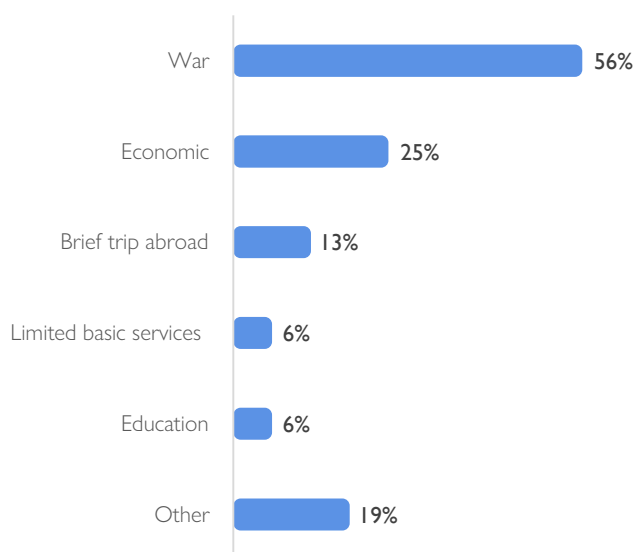
Figure 8: Gender and age breakdown of current Ukrainian residents (%), n=420



REASONS FOR TRAVEL

The most frequently reported primary reason for travelling abroad (n=416) was a brief trip, selected by 82 per cent of respondents. Other, far less common primary reasons for travelling abroad included the war in Ukraine (11%) and economic factors (4%). When asked about secondary reasons for travelling abroad (n=160), the majority cited the war (56%), followed by economic reasons (25%) and brief trip (13%). It is important to note that respondents could select more than one secondary reason. A considerable group crossed the border between Ukraine and other countries three to five times (35%), while one in four (24%) reported crossing only once before.

Figure 9: Secondary reasons for going abroad (%), n=160

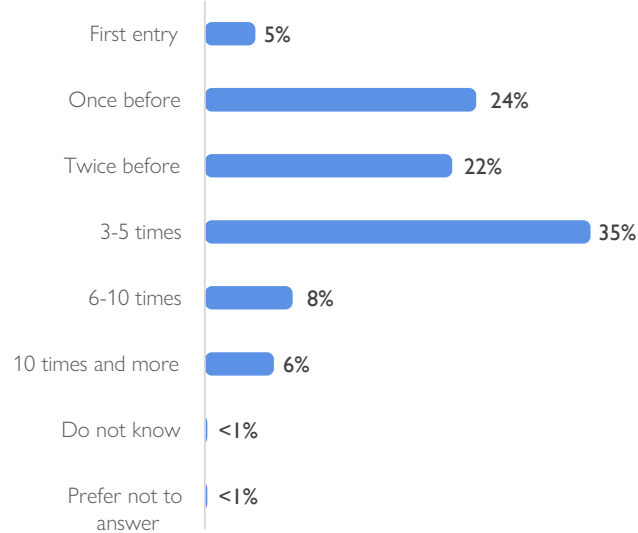


Multiple answers possible

OBLASTS OF ORIGIN & DESTINATION

Half of those travelling abroad visited Poland. Smaller percentages were returning from trips to Czechia (12%), Germany (9%), and Spain (5%). While there was greater variability in the oblasts of origin, approximately one in five respondents were from Kharkivska (21%) and Dnipropetrovska (19%). Other common oblasts of origin included Zaporizka (10%), Lvivska (9%), and the city of Kyiv (8%). Only three per cent of those travelling abroad returned to a different oblast than their place of origin. Among these, a few respondents, primarily from Donetsk, Kharkivska, and Luhanska, travelled to the city of Kyiv, Poltavska oblast, or other locations.

Figure 10: Number of times entered/exited Ukraine since February 2022 (%), n=420

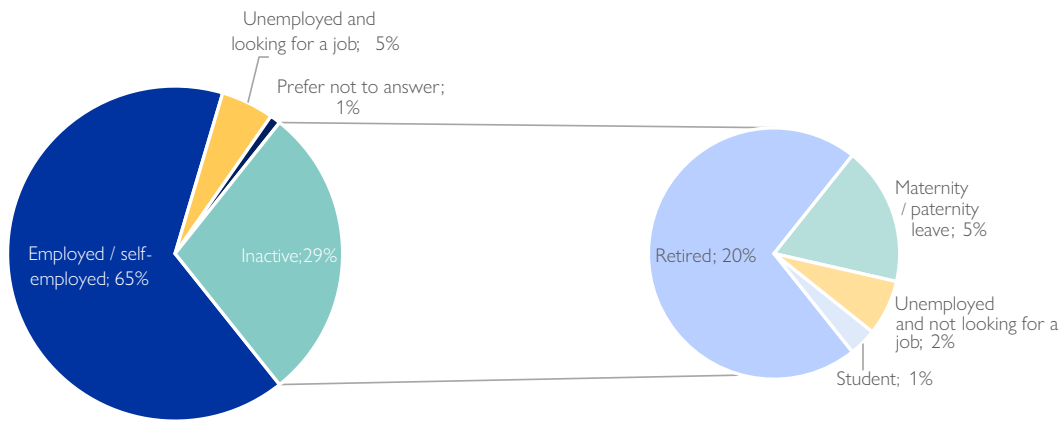


EMPLOYMENT

Over half (57%) of current Ukrainian residents were employed, with an additional 8 per cent self-employed. Only 5 per cent were unemployed and actively seeking work, while one in five

were retired. In total, 65 per cent were engaged in employment or self-employment, 5 per cent were unemployed and job-seeking, and 29 per cent were economically inactive.

Figure 11: Employment status (%), n=420



4. EXPECTATIONS UPON RETURN

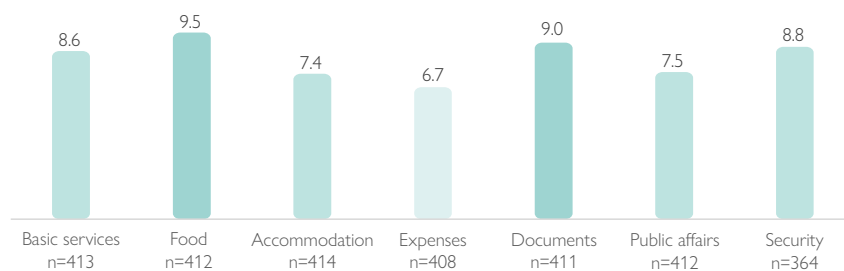
Current Ukrainian residents were asked about their perceptions of the accessibility of certain services and resources upon their arrival at their destination. Specifically, they were questioned about their expectations regarding the ease of accessing basic services, food, and adequate accommodation, as well as their ability to cover basic expenses, retrieve documents, and participate in public affairs. Additionally, they were asked how often they expected to experience serious security incidents as a result of the war. To assess these perceptions, a 10-point scale was used, with 0 indicating the most difficult access to services or absolute certainty of experiencing security incidents, and 10 representing the easiest access to services or no likelihood of encountering security incidents. Finally, respondents were asked whether they expected their household to be reunited after arrival.

When analysing the average scores, the lowest-rated service was the ability to cover basic expenses (6.7), highlighting concerns about financial sustainability. Categorizing the responses descriptively (see Table 1), 19 per cent of respondents indicated that covering basic expenses was at least somewhat difficult, while another 20 per cent described it as neither difficult nor easy. In contrast, obtaining food received the highest rating, with an average score of 9.5 and 90 per cent of respondents reporting it as very easy. Perceptions of security were moderately positive, with an average score of 8.8 and 77 per cent of respondents anticipating minimal security risks. Responses regarding participation in public affairs varied significantly, with 19 per cent reporting very difficult access and 67 per cent describing it as very easy. Lastly, 66 per cent of Ukrainian residents visiting abroad expected to reunite with their families after arrival.

Table 1: Numerical scale representing level of difficulty in accessing services and resources

0,1	2,3	4	5	6	7,8	9,10
Very difficult	Difficult	Somewhat difficult	Neutral	Somewhat Easy	Easy	Very easy
difficult						

Figure 12: Average perceptions of access to durable solutions in respondents' areas of origin among Ukrainian residents



5. METHODOLOGY

IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) is a system to track and monitor displacement and population mobility. It is designed to regularly and systematically capture, process and disseminate information to provide a better understanding of the movements and evolving needs of displaced populations, whether on site or en route.

Since March 2022, IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) has been regularly surveying individuals who are crossing back to Ukraine from neighbouring countries. The aim of the survey is to improve the understanding of their profiles, displacement patterns, intentions and needs. The survey is deployed in 5 countries neighbouring Ukraine – Hungary, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, and Slovakia.

In Poland, surveys were conducted in Ukrainian, Russian, and English by IOM's DTM trained teams of enumerators on a mobile application. The interviews are anonymous and carried out one-on-one with respondents, provided they consent to be interviewed after a brief introduction. Enumerators trained on ethics of data collection, information provision and protection principles, approached people crossing back to Ukraine, to verify their willingness to conduct the survey, which was only addressed to adults (18+).

Since July 2023, the survey section on intentions was updated to better capture the dynamics of movements to and from Ukraine. A new question on the "length of stay in Ukraine," measured in days, was introduced, with "forever" and "does not know" as additional response options. For the purpose of this report, short-term visitors are defined as those intending to remain in Ukraine for 30 days or less. Prospective returnees are individuals planning to stay in Ukraine for more than 30 days or "forever" while having spent less than 50% of the past three months in Ukraine. Ukrainian residents visiting abroad are those intending to stay in Ukraine for more than 30 days and who spent over 50% of the past three months in the country.

From 01 January to 20 September 2024, prospective returnees were defined as those who will stay in Ukraine for more than 30 days, excluding individuals travelling for visiting or accompanying someone abroad, shopping, or tourism. From 21 September to 22 November 2024, prospective returnees were defined as those who will stay in Ukraine for more than 30 days and spent less than 50% of the past 3 months in Ukraine. Additionally, a new category "current resident of Ukraine" was introduced to account for respondents residing in Ukraine who are returning

after a visit abroad. These classifications have been applied throughout the data collection and analysis process to better capture diverse border crossing intentions.

About the survey

The aim of the study is to improve the understanding of the profiles of refugees from Ukraine crossing back into the country, including their displacement patterns, intentions, and needs. To achieve this, face-to-face surveys are conducted by eight trained enumerators stationed at selected locations. These surveys are administered in Ukrainian and Russian with the help of a mobile application. The target population consists of Ukrainians who are crossing back into Ukraine. Regional data collection and analysis are carried out in five countries neighbouring Ukraine: Hungary, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, and Slovakia.

Limitations

In order to maximize the number of interviews, and reach out to different profiles of individuals, various locations for data collection were identified.

While in border crossing/transit points, such as train stations, the flow of people was higher and interviewees were randomly surveyed (having the same likelihood compared to others to be selected), in other locations, such as collective accommodations and humanitarian aid centres, respondents were intentionally identified.

Among the limitations encountered during data collection were the reduced time to carry out surveys at transit points and limited number of enumerators to cover the desired locations/regions.

To address the aforesaid shortcomings, and cover different viewpoints, a mixed sampling strategy guided the data collection exercise.

Consequently, this analysis does not proportionally represent the whole population and results cannot be deemed representative of all refugees from Ukraine in Poland, and the results should be considered indicative.

Given the border flow statistics collected by governments do not include reasons for movement, the analysis presented is unweighted.



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DISPLACEMENT
TRACKING MATRIX

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DTM

Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) is a system to track and monitor displacement and population mobility. The survey form was designed to capture the main displacement patterns – origin country and region – for refugees of any nationality fleeing from Ukraine because of the war. It captures the demographic profiles of respondents and of the group they are travelling with, if any; it asks about intentions relative to the intended destinations and prospects of permanence abroad or return; it gathers information regarding a set of main needs that the respondents expressed as more pressing at the moment of the interview.

Since the onset of the war in Ukraine, several IOM's DTM tools were deployed in countries neighbouring Ukraine and in other countries particularly impacted by the new arrivals of migrants and refugees from Ukraine.

For more information, please consult: <https://dtm.iom.int/responses/ukraine-response>

DTM is part of IOM's Global Data Institute.