UKRAINIAN MIGRATION BRIEF SERIES

BRIEF #2

The Lives of the First Wave of Ukrainians Fleeing the War

A FOLLOW-UP SURVEY OF UKRAINIANS

Mariellen Jewers, Ph.D.
Technical Advisor

Pablo Maldonado
Executive Vice President & Chief Innovation Officer

Center for Migration and Economic Stabilization

Creative Associates International | July 2022

About the Series

Through the generation of primary data and strategic analysis, **Creative's Ukrainian Migration Brief Series** looks to frame challenges and opportunities confronting Ukrainian refugees as well as gauge the sentiments and appetite of Ukrainian residents towards potential migration in the future. In April 2022, Creative fielded a digital survey and published a brief that touched on the characteristics of the first wave of Ukrainians forcibly displaced by the war, the conditions under which they migrated, their destinations well beyond border countries, and their sentiments and preoccupations in their new places of residence. In June 2022, Creative followed up with these refugees to understand the extent to which their circumstances had changed in their host countries as well as their intentions and actions taken to return to Ukraine. A third brief based on ongoing research of Ukrainians in Ukraine seeks to understand issues of social cohesion in the wake of widespread internal displacement of Ukrainians within Ukraine as well as the propensity of Ukrainians to migrate given the economic pressures of the war and the burden for rebuilding sets in.

Introduction

Several months after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, people who fled are beginning to return to Ukraine as well as to relocate to countries across the globe. Since the war, over 8 million people have been registered as crossing borders out of Ukraine and 2.8 million have crossed into Ukraine.[1] Recent returns notwithstanding, approximately 3.5 million Ukrainians have applied for some form of temporary protected status across 43 countries across Europe.[2] The United States—which historically has been the second-largest destination country for Ukrainians—anticipates accepting over 150,000 Ukrainians fleeing the war.[3]

While Ukrainians' pattern of movement in recent months aligns with historic Ukrainian migration patterns, the sheer number of Ukrainians that are relocating means that host countries who have traditionally hosted Ukrainian migrants are witnessing swells in local populations. Ukrainians recorded in Germany as of July represent a 70 percent increase in nation's displaced population.[4] Population growth is particularly significant for Ukraine's neighboring countries. Poland's population has tipped above 41 million for the first time in the nation's history, due in part to the arrival of Ukrainian fleeing the war.[5] Poland's capital of Warsaw and Rzeszów, a city close to the Polish-Ukrainian border, grew by 15 and 53 percent respectively within 30 days of the war.[6]

Years before the current mass international displacement of Ukrainians, the World Bank, the United Nations and others called for a more cohesive approach to forced displacement that integrates humanitarian and development strategies.[7] With this in mind, Creative's surveys of Ukrainians fleeing the war brings attention toward supporting refugees in pursuing a livelihood and rebuilding their lives abroad. Creative's first survey brought to light important aspects of refugees' perspectives on their financial resilience and adjustment to their residences abroad as well as their intentions to return to Ukraine. The Center's first brief details the demographic composition and initial border crossings of April respondents.[8] In our second survey, Creative revisited families to provide a picture of how Ukrainian families are navigating their lives and pursuing livelihoods despite the uncertainty of the war.[9] The cohort interviewed in April and again in June reflect Ukrainians who had fled at the beginning of the war more broadly in terms of gender and family composition, though they are likely relatively younger than the overall Ukrainian refugee population.[10] Most respondents had fled Ukraine within 30 days of Russia's invasion on February 24th, 2022. The time between each survey was approximately two months, with most families having been outside of Ukraine for over three months when they were interviewed in June for the second time.

Families remain highly mobile but remain determined to return to Ukraine.

When Creative first interviewed families in April, 41 percent were living in 26 countries that did not border Ukraine and 97 percent of families had plans to move from their current location. In June, 42 percent had moved from the country where they were living in April to a different country (See Figure 1). These families remain highly mobile; 63 percent intended to stay in their current location for less than a year. Compared to April, more families had concrete plans for their next move in June. Whereas 30 percent didn't know how long they would be in their current locations in April, only 19 percent of respondents didn't know how long they would be in their current location in June.

Strong intentions to return to Ukraine have borne out in respondents' movements from April to June. By June, 10 percent had returned to Ukraine (Figure 1). Fourteen percent of June respondents still living outside Ukraine had at least one family member who had fled with them in April return to Ukraine at the time of the second survey.

Our results suggest that as people make decisions for their next move, if returning to Ukraine is a possibility, they will return to Ukraine as opposed to moving to another country or moving to another place within a host country. When examining factors associated with having moved back to Ukraine in June, expecting to make a move within the year in April was most strongly associated with having had returned to Ukraine. Among those living in Ukraine in June, only 34 percent had expected to move to Ukraine when first surveyed in April. In contrast, those who had intentions in April to stay for shorter periods of time in their current location, regardless of where they intended to move to next, had a higher probability of being in Ukraine as of June. **Our findings corroborate anecdotal accounts that Ukrainians' primary goal is to return to Ukraine as soon as it is feasible for them to do so**.

While many refugees were taking actions to adjust to their host countries, these do not seem to be steps toward permanently living outside Ukraine. Eighty-seven percent of Ukrainians have taken some actions to better adjust to life in their host country—such as getting a job, finding housing, or learning the local language. Nevertheless, actions to adjust to host countries did not seem to dampen

Figure 1

International Moves from April to June, Share of Respondents

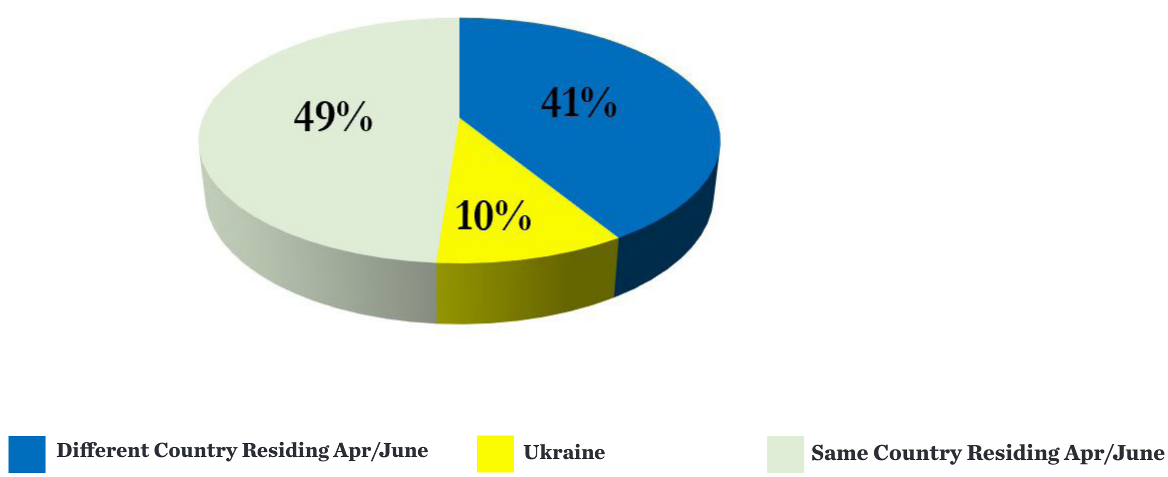
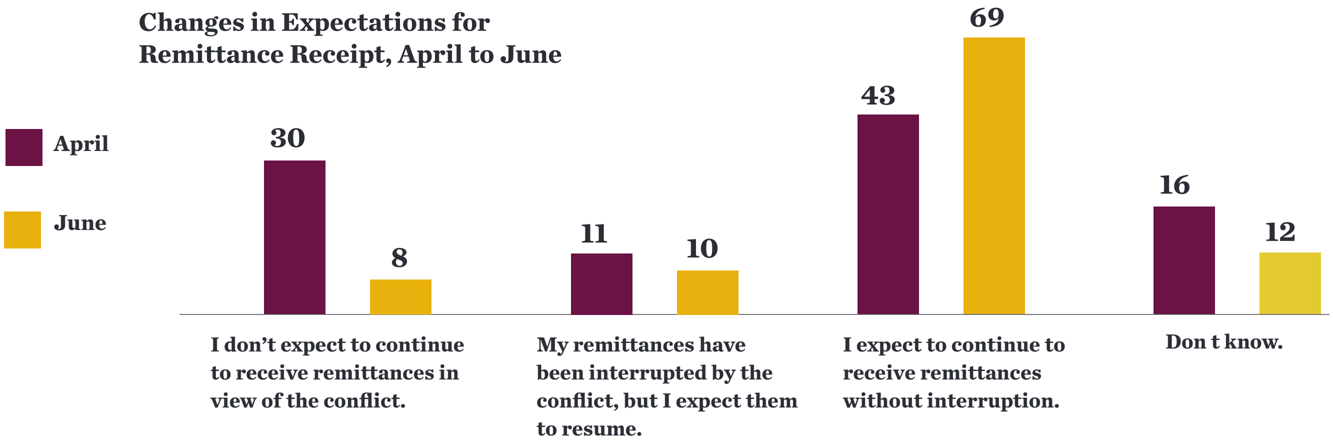


Figure 2



refugees' ambitions to return to Ukraine. In fact, in June, respondents were even more optimistic about their return to Ukraine than they were in April. Roughly a third of families intended to return to Ukraine within less than a year. It would indicate that proactive measures to assist Ukrainians in building a normal life in host countries would not inhibit their desire or actual return to Ukraine in the long-term. A pending question is how the international community can support Ukrainians' sustained livelihoods and financial resilience abroad in ways that would support recovering their pre-war standard of living when they are able to return to their home communities.

The opportunity for return to Ukraine depended on home communities' stability and housing.

For those we surveyed in June who were living in Ukraine, housing and family reunification were extremely important in refugees' decisions to return to Ukraine. Respondents who had returned to Ukraine as of June were concentrated in Kyiv and the West. Given that **safety and security were primary impediments for return in April and June**, Russia's retraction from the North and Central part of Ukraine may have facilitated respondents' returning if they were living in these regions of Ukraine before the war.[11]

Very few people in our study returned to a different community from the one they lived in before the war. Before the war, 86 percent of our respondents had lived in an apartment or house that they owned. Unsurprisingly, a similar share (82%) of families now returned to Ukraine were living in homes that they owned. **It is reasonable to assume that Ukrainians are more eager to return if they can return to their hometowns.**

Families living abroad are struggling with finding work and more are relying on outside income sources to pay for basic expenses.

Cash transfers and remittances featured more prominently as income sources in June compared to April. The share of families relying on cash transfers increased by 67 percent from June to April, while the share of families receiving remittances increased by 20 percent. Increased reliance on cash transfers poses challenges as the sustainability of these supports is uncertain. In contrast, people's optimism in relying on remittances for the foreseeable future improved a good deal (Figure 2). The optimism around remittance receipt reflects existing evidence that remittances are sustained or even increase during crises.

Among respondents still living outside of Ukraine, the share employed dropped from 10 percent in April to 4 percent in June. It is unclear what would account for the loss of employment from April to June, although it is possible that Ukrainian-based businesses that were employing Ukrainians remotely may have shut down or refugees might have struggled to maintain remote jobs amidst massive upheaval from April to June. Importantly, a higher percentage of refugees were actively looking for work in June compared to April. This suggests that finding work was crucial for families living abroad, despite increased access to cash assistance programs. For those looking for work, **respondents reiterated concerns voiced in April over credentialing and recognition of their education to finding employment in occupations for which they are trained**. Not knowing the local language continued to be the most common obstacle to finding employment, followed by concerns over migrants getting employment in a tight labor market and family responsibilities. The persistence of language as an obstacle to employment suggests that programs to facilitate applicable language obtainment might be especially helpful for refugees with profiles similar to those in our study.

The results from our survey bring to the fore the importance of development programming to assist Ukrainian refugees for finding jobs in their host countries. Per the European Central Bank the influx of working-age refugees might be a welcome addition to predominantly aging workforces in Europe.[12] However, there is no indication that labor market integration will be rapid for Ukrainians, despite their right to work in host countries along with their educational backgrounds. Assessments from labor market integration of Ukrainians forcibly displaced in 2014-2016 revealed that the majority of working age Ukrainians in the Euro area remained unemployed after two years of relocation.[13] There have been efforts to recruit and employ Ukrainians in the wake of the war, but spontaneous private sector initiatives may wane as European economies strain with inflation and slowing growth. Innovation will be needed to understand how to support Ukrainians living abroad in the short- and medium-term amidst lackluster economic conditions worldwide.

Looking Ahead

Our study unequivocally suggests Ukrainians left their country for safety—not economic—reasons and that the vast majority are determined to return home. Most families in our study returned to their hometowns where they lived in before the war. These findings indicate that Ukrainians are well-disposed—and may very well be induced—to return to their hometowns if conditions of safety and stability can be demonstrated. As hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians venture back home; a pending question is whether most are deciding to return to their hometowns under relatively safe conditions.

Vast parts of the country, namely the East Corridor, remain under active attack or are occupied; much of the infrastructure has been intentionally destroyed in order to, among other things, prevent populations from returning. Here, safety conditions cannot prevail and minimal conditions for subsistence cannot be assumed—pushing any remnant populations out and preventing the return of those who fled earlier. The accommodation of displaced Ukrainians—both internally displaced as well as migrants who have no place to go back to—remains a complex challenge ahead. To this end it's imperative to consider the full human dimensions of social reintegration and the needs and aspirations—and limitations--of hosting communities.

Even though most Ukrainians displaced internationally by the war are intending to return Ukraine, millions of people are still unable or unwilling to do so. Evidence suggests the well-being improves for host communities overall as displaced populations seek livelihoods.[14] Nevertheless, the sheer number of Ukrainian refugees living and working in host countries is liable to stir feelings of concern among local populations. Without proactive efforts to address narratives of economic competition and resource scarcity, the potential for Russia's weaponizing the Ukrainian refugee crisis to destabilize host countries' societies is substantial. Host countries would be well-served to consider intentional efforts to promote social cohesion and formulate positive narratives around migration.

Finally, as the toll of the war and its social and economic consequences are better understood by Ukrainians, it stands to reason that, regardless of safety considerations or nationalistic sentiments, many will at the very minimum contemplate migrating. Based on ongoing research, our Third Brief will focus on successfully integrating internally displaced populations and preventing possible new waves of migration in the future.

Endnotes

1,2 United National Human Rights Commission. (2022, Jul 10). Retrieved from Ukraine - Refugee Situation: https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine

3. Rodriguez, J., & Batalova, J. (2022). Ukrainian Immigrants in the United States. Washington DC: Migration Policy Institute.

4. Authors' calculations based on numbers from 2021 in United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Global Trends Forced Displacement in 2021 that 1,255,700 displaced persons were in Germany. As of July 14, 2022 there were 893,000 Ukrainians recorded in Germany per UNHCR Ukraine - Refugee Situation online portal.

5, 6 Wojdat, M., & Cywinski, P. (2022). Urban Hospitality: Unprecedented Growth, Challenges and Opportunities. Warsaw, Poland: Union of Polish Metropolises.

7. World Bank. (2017). Forcibly Displaced: Toward a Development Approach Supporting Refugees, the Internally Displaced, and Their Hosts. Washington DC: World Bank.

8. Jewers, M., & Maldonado, P. (2022, June). A Glance at the First Wave of Ukrainians Fleeing the War. Chevy Chase, MD: Creative Associates International. Retrieved from http://www.creativeassociatesinternational.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Ukraine_Migration_Brief_1.pdf

9. From June 10th to 20th, Creative reached out to the 520 Ukrainians who had participated in our survey in April 2022; 77 percent of those that participated in April also participated in June. Creative conducted analyses of the differences in ages, gender, region of residence before the war and other demographic variables between respondents and non-respondents to the June 2022 survey. We are not conducting any statistical estimations that would be biased by these differences between respondents and non-respondents. 28% lived in the East and 23% lived in Kyiv before the war broke out. The rest of the June respondents were more or less evenly distributed across the Centre, South and Western regions of the country.

10. There is no definitive population source for Ukrainians who fled the war. Because our survey was based on a representative online panel, the cohort who participated are younger than the overall Ukrainian population.

11. Bior, A., Shapiro, A., & Ozug, M. (2022, May 20). Millions rushed to leave Ukraine. Now the queue to return home stretches for miles. NPR. Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/2022/05/20/1099876370/ukraine-russia-poland-border-return

12. European Central Bank. (2022). Economic, financial and monetary developments. Online: European Central Bank. Retrieved from https://www.ecb.europa.eu/pub/economic-bulletin/html/eb202204.en.html

13. Botelho, V. (2022). The impact of the influx of Ukrainian refugees on the euro area labour force. Online: European Central Bank. Retrieved from https://www.ecb.europa.eu/pub/economic-bulletin/focus/2022/html/ecb.ebbox202204_03-c9ddc08308.en.html

14. Verme, P., & Schuettler, K. (2021, May). The impact of forced displacement on host communities: A review of the empirical literature in economics. Journal of Development Economics, 150.

Creative Associates International

4445 Willard Avenue
Suite 400
Chevy Chase, Maryland 20815

+ 202.966.5804

About Creative

Creative Associates International works with underserved communities by sharing expertise and experience in education, elections, economic growth, citizen security, governance and transitions from conflict to peace.

Based in Chevy Chase, Creative has active projects in nearly 30 countries. Since 1977, it has worked in nearly 90 countries and on almost every continent. Recognized for its ability to work rapidly, flexibly and effectively in conflict-affected environments, Creative is committed to generating long-term sustainable solutions to complex development problems.

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Communications@CreativeDC.com
CreativeAssociatesInternational.com