



UKRAINIAN MIGRATION BRIEF SERIES

BRIEF #1

A Glance at the First Wave of Ukrainians Fleeing the War

FINDINGS FROM A SURVEY OF
UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

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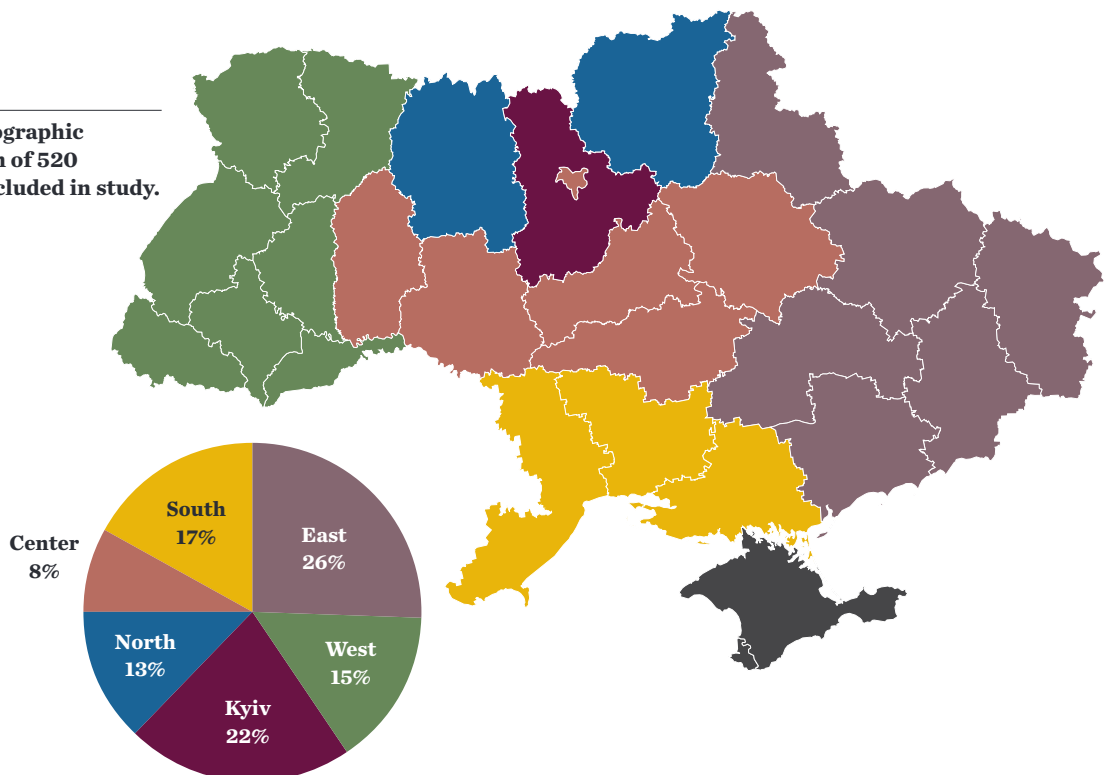
■ About the Series

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. Based on a digital survey conducted by Creative in April 2022, this first brief touches on the characteristics of Ukrainians forcibly displaced by the war, the conditions under which they have migrated, their destinations well beyond border countries, and their sentiments and preoccupations as they negotiate their new places of residence. A planned follow-on brief based on an ongoing longitudinal study will focus on the changing attitudes of refugees relative to the progress of the war, focusing primarily on impediments to their well-being, and intentions and actions taken to relocate. A planned third brief based on ongoing research of Ukrainians in Ukraine will define migration push and pull factors, seeking to reveal the propensity of Ukrainians to migrate once the reality of destruction and economic devastation sets in. Planned studies focus on the realities and capacities of the Ukrainian society and economy to meet the expectations of young and educated Ukrainians, depicting demographic challenges to the stabilization and reconstruction of Ukraine.

■ Introduction

As the war drags on, the forced displacement of millions of Ukrainians poses unprecedented challenges to the international community. The Temporary Protected Order issued by the European Commission in March eased pressures on countries’ asylum systems, but addressing immediate humanitarian needs of refugees, made up predominantly of women and children, remains a herculean task.¹ An estimated 2.1 million of the 6.9 million people who fled Ukraine have already crossed back into Ukraine.² Nevertheless, Russia’s purposeful devastation of Ukraine’s infrastructure and economy create substantial uncertainty regarding when, or whether, many Ukrainians will be able to return. As many brave and resilient families navigate immense uncertainty and challenges, Creative aims to draw attention toward supporting refugees in pursuing a livelihood and rebuilding their lives abroad—and prospects of rebuilding back in Ukraine. For this, Creative sought to understand the underlying decision-making for families’ movements, their capacity for financial resilience and sustaining their livelihoods while abroad, as well as their longer-term intentions to return to Ukraine.

Pre-war geographic distribution of 520 refugees included in study.



■ About the first wave of Ukrainian Refugees: *What our study tells us*

Relying on a nationally representative panel of Ukrainian online users assembled before the war, 520 refugees who crossed out of Ukraine’s borders were surveyed in April 2022.³ Overall, survey participants reflected descriptions of Ukrainians fleeing more broadly.⁴ Eighty percent of respondents were female. Very few respondents fled alone; a majority had one or two school-aged children with them. Seventy-one percent of respondents had a university degree or higher, which aligns with national statistics for Ukrainian women’s educational attainment (See Figure 1).⁵

Most respondents were well into adulthood, with a majority between the ages of 30 to 39. However, the distribution of respondents skewed younger than the national Ukrainian population, owing to a substantial share of the national population being over the age of 65.⁶ The survey suggests that the elderly, for the most part, were not part of the first wave of Ukrainians fleeing the country.

Some differences exist between respondents in our study and the displaced population overall. A very small share of respondents in our study reported living in a refugee center. Most had access to online financial products, such as savings accounts and credit cards. Only eight percent of respondents were unemployed before the war, which is slightly lower than 2020 unemployment rates for women in Ukraine.⁷ These discrepancies notwithstanding, we believe that our findings represent a useful contribution to overall understanding of this transitory population.

Building on Creative’s extensive experience of forced migration, irregular migration and migration integration in the Western Hemisphere, the Center for Migration & Economic Stabilization’s survey delved into transnational engagement, financial assets, and livelihood questions as well as short and long-term plans. Below we highlight key aspects of the individuals interviewed and make critical connections for ways to support these refugees and others that have similar characteristics and needs across the European Union and in the United States.

Figure 1

Highest Level of Education Completed Before The War, Percent

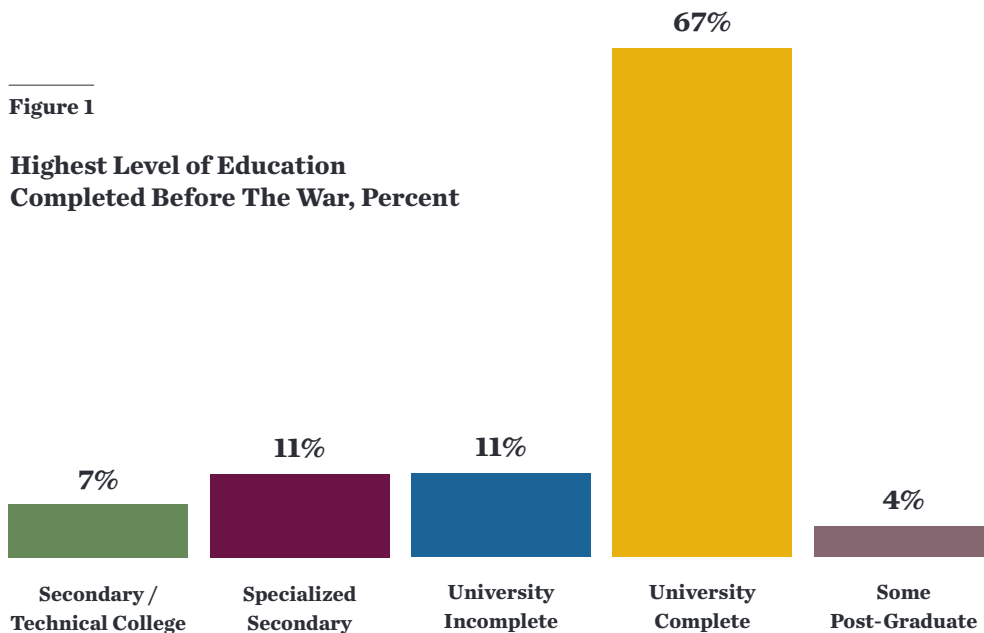
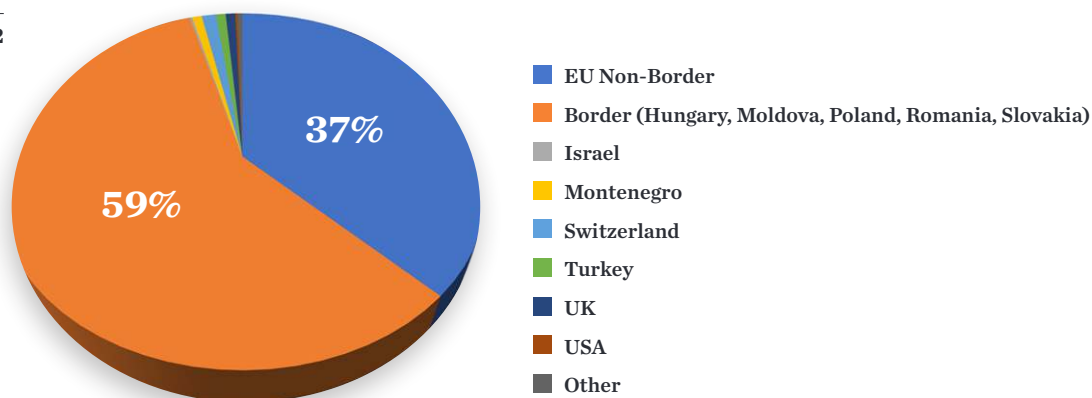


Figure 2



■ Many families had transnational connections with Ukrainians living abroad before the war

Before the war, Ukraine was among the top ten migrant sending countries in the world.⁸ According to the Migration Policy Institute, in 2020 6.4 million Ukrainians lived and worked outside the country.⁹ Of these, 3.3 million resided in Russia.¹⁰ Although reliable information remains scarce, there is some evidence that these Ukrainians are facing increasing amounts of pressure and discrimination within Russia.¹¹ Due to security and sanctions, we were unable to interview Ukrainians in Russia within our study. However, more attention is needed to understand this population's needs and aspirations moving forward. Without doubt, the current war categorically changed the dynamics of Russian-Ukrainian migration and remittances for the foreseeable future. Excluding Russia, 1.4 million Ukrainians resided in countries across the European Union (EU), and 370,000 resided in the United States before the war.¹² Ukrainians interviewed reflected these international connections; 63 percent had a relative who was living outside of Ukraine before the war. Nearly one-fifth of interviewees were receiving remittances from relatives living outside Ukraine before the war. It's implicit that the existence of transnational connections plays a significant enabling role in migration patterns.

■ Ukrainians interviewed were highly unsettled but determined to return to Ukraine eventually

Tragically, the Ukrainian population has experienced forced displacement before the current war. Armed conflict between 2013 and 2015 displaced over a million Ukrainians internally and outside of Ukraine.¹³ Among Ukrainians who were forcibly displaced and left Ukraine, their migration was characterized by short stays in Poland and Romania, with longer-stays for economic reasons in Germany and Italy.¹⁴ Study participants seem to be following similar patterns of these earlier forcibly displaced Ukrainians who emigrated outside Ukraine. Just over half, 59 percent, of respondents were still in major border crossing countries at the time of the survey (See Figure 2). The rest of respondents were spread across 26 countries around the world. Thirty-seven percent were in countries within the EU but that do not share a border with Ukraine.

■ Human Capital Assets and Livelihoods

Eighty percent of respondents had been employed before the war. Notably, 11 percent reported being actively employed at the time of the survey. Given that all respondents were connected online, these families were working remotely despite having to flee their country.

As seen in the media,¹⁵ 65 percent of the Ukrainian refugees interviewed are seeking to work abroad in order to sustain their livelihoods until they are able to return to their communities in Ukraine. A majority of those interviewed without jobs at present intended to look for work in their current locations. However, many had concerns about language barriers and their education and professional credentials being recognized in their current locations (See Figure 3).

Figure 3

Obstacles to finding employment in trained occupational field in current location	Percent
I have trouble speaking the local language	57
I am concerned that migrants will have trouble getting employment in a tight job market	23
Proving my education qualifications for a job	21

■ Pursuing High Skill Occupations for which Ukrainians are Trained

Brain waste—the underemployment or misemployment of migrants with professional or specialized skillsets—is already a well-documented phenomena in immigration/migration literature.¹⁶ For those Ukrainians that have educational credentials—such as a university or technical degrees as well as occupational experience—a pending question is whether their degrees will be recognized for jobs abroad. Among those interviewed with university degrees, 45 percent were unsure as to whether their degrees would be accepted in the EU. It is unclear how well the EU countries will be able to match demands for workers with the skills of the current Ukrainian displaced population seeking work. The EU is looking toward automatic international credentialing so that workers with educational and skills backgrounds can work in their fields.¹⁷ However, automatic credentialing remains an aspiration for 2025 in the EU.¹⁸ Until then, Ukrainians will need to pursue national processes in order to have their degrees recognized. Unsurprisingly, a substantial number of refugees interviewed were unsure of whether their degrees would be recognized in their current locations. This is among the most salient preoccupations among this first wave of refugees interviewed.

The EU temporary protected status (TPS) implies that housing and income support are not considered “resettlement”. By definition, Ukrainians with TPS have no certainty of their long-term immigration status for residence in their host countries past their TPS authorization. Based on previous experience, the European Commission expects a quarter of the entire still in flux displaced population to remain in the EU to live and work permanently.¹ It is unclear how many forcibly displaced Ukrainians will be approved for asylum and refugee status in the EU after temporary protection ends. Given that this is the EU’s first experience with TPS, the U.S.’ experience with TPS may be informative. The U.S.’ issuance of TPS was not accompanied with any long-term plan for circumstances or assistance for when it would be humane for TPS holders to return to their countries of origin. Ongoing economic instability and civil unrest generally left TPS holders with little optimism for rebuilding their lives in their countries of origin. As a result, the U.S. government plan in 2017 to cancel TPS for selected countries amounted to a humanitarian disaster.¹⁹ The EU would be well-served to learn from the U.S.’s TPS experience and consider the needed economic and safety conditions in Ukraine that would permit currently displaced Ukrainians to return to a prosperous and safe life in their communities of origin to deem the termination of TPS reasonable. Depending on the war’s impact, this may be past the current three-year extended validity period.

■ Looking Ahead

As many brave and resilient migrant families manage in times of immense uncertainty and challenge, attention toward supporting refugees’ self-efficacy in pursuing livelihood, learning the local language, and negotiating migration fatigue on the part of host communities are critical. While we attend to immediate humanitarian concerns, the international community would be well-served to not lose sight of ways to support skilled Ukrainians rebuild their professional lives. Perhaps more importantly, if not strategically, is to turn our attention to Ukraine proper, in hopes of preventing potential new waves of massive migration and anchor the young and the educated in Ukraine through a vision for reconstruction and a future that meets aspirations.

■ Endnotes

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3. Creative contracted with a premier polling agency in Poland, which had offices and operations in Ukraine before the war. Ukrainians colleagues utilized proprietary online interviewing method surveying an existing proprietary panel of 40,000 Ukrainians residing in Ukraine before the war. The pilot used a non-probabilistic quota method to create a distribution of refugees that crossed the various border countries that reflected the distribution of border crossing published by the United Nations in April 2022.
4. See citation 2. United Nations' estimates for April 22, 2022 were: 59% Poland; 16% Romania; 10% Hungary; 9% Moldova; 7% Slovakia. Creative's study distribution was: 58% Poland; 12% Romania; 10% Hungary; 12% Moldova; 7% Slovakia.
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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 Washington, D.C., 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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