



UKRAINIAN MIGRATION BRIEF SERIES

BRIEF #3

# The views of Ukrainians at home

THIRD SURVEY OF A SERIES ON  
UKRAINIANS MIGRATION

Mariellen Jewers, Ph.D.  
Technical Advisor

Pablo Maldonado  
Executive Vice President & Chief Innovation Officer

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Center for Migration and Economic Stabilization

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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 disposition of Ukrainian residents towards potential migration in the future. Creative's first study, published in April 2022, touched on the characteristics of the first wave of Ukrainians forcibly displaced by the war, the conditions under which they fled, 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. In July 2022, Creative delved into the sentiments and experiences of Ukrainians residing in Ukraine to understand issues of social cohesion in the wake of widespread internal displacement within Ukraine as well as gauge disposition towards migration as economic pressures of the war and the burden for rebuilding set in.

## Introduction

Nearly a year into the war, Russia has employed the worst of strategies in Ukraine. Human Rights Watch has documented Russian forces committed crimes against civilians<sup>1</sup>. There is mounting evidenced of Russia's attacks on schools, hospitals and other civilian infrastructure. Nearly a year into the war, an estimated 6.9 million people are internally displaced within the country<sup>2</sup>. Yet, Ukrainians remain steadfast in their defense of their sovereignty and committed to rebuilding their communities. For every two border crossings out of Ukraine since the beginning of the war there has now been one crossing back into the country. As of September 1st, UNHCR recorded over 5 million crossings into Ukraine<sup>3</sup>.

Creative's first survey of the first wave of Ukrainians fleeing the war, administered shortly after the invasion, brought to light important perspectives regarding their high levels of education, their financial resilience and their reliance on relatives living abroad before the war. Amid and despite the uncertainties of a breaking war, these families unequivocally intended to return to Ukraine, though few had clear timelines for returning at that moment they were consulted. Creative's follow-up survey of these same individuals revealed an important number had returned to Ukraine. Safety—not economics—prevented families from returning. Given the marked desire and intent of refugee Ukrainians to return to Ukraine, Creative sought to understand people's circumstances in their communities and gauge their dispositions towards relocation and/or hosting displaced Ukrainians. Relying on a nationally representative panel of Ukrainian online users assembled before the war, 1,500 Ukrainians living within Ukraine's borders were surveyed in July 2022<sup>4</sup>.

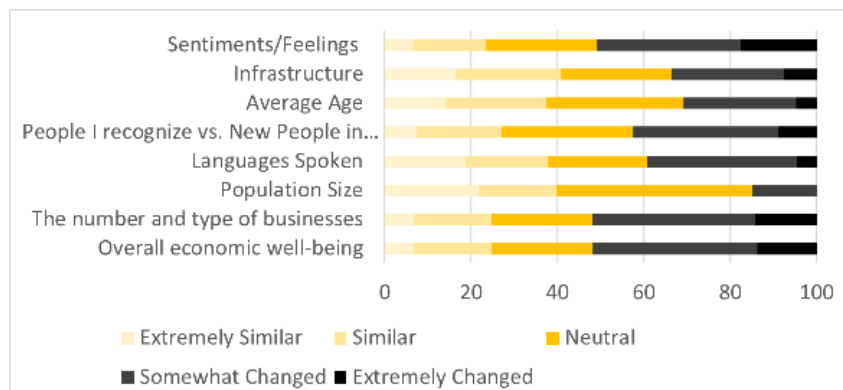
Creative's experience in migration has taught us that feelings of hope and sentiments of belonging are crucial in people's decisions to remain in their communities of origin or to leave. Within this context, when people are no longer living in their community of origin—either through voluntary migration or forced displacement—their sense of belonging is categorically altered, increasing their potential for international migration. Creative's third survey delves into social cohesion within communities in Ukraine as well as identifies the stressors in people's lives that could foment new waves of migration. Our focus on sentiments and social cohesion is a unique complement to current available data from humanitarian sources on internal displacement in Ukraine.

## Public services and local economies are adequate, but communities are very different than before the war

Most respondents felt that the sentiment/feelings in their community, the businesses operating, and overall economic wellbeing have changed compared to before the war (Figure 1). Despite these differences, over a third felt that their communities' economies would recover to pre-war levels within five years. An additional fifth (17%) expected the economy to recover but expected it would take longer than 5 years to do so.

**Figure 1**

### Feelings of Similarity or Differences in Community Pre-War to Present



Research in migration suggests that stressors, such as prospects for livelihoods, sufficiency of public services, and safety, create fertile ground for people to ultimately decide to migrate from their communities and countries. Unsurprisingly, nearly all of Ukrainians reported having at least one stressor in their life. The majority cited safety and security as a topic of ongoing conversations with friends and neighbors, the second most common concern was the oncoming winter (See Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

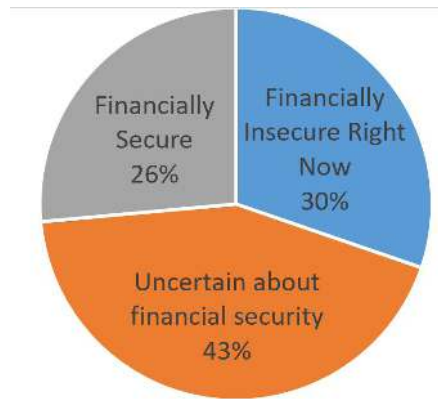
### Stressors Talked about with Neighbors/Friends

Topic of Conversation	Percent
Safety or security due to war	73
Concerns about oncoming winter	52
Tight labor market/poor job opportunities	33
Disruption of education for children	29
Food insecurity	17
Housing issues	13
Difficulties in transportation	13
Finding basic health and/or hygiene supplies	9
Air pollution, trash/waste disposal or other environmental concerns	8
Disruption of education for myself or other adults	7
None of the above	6

These stressors compound economic fragility among respondents (Figure 3). A quarter of respondents had insufficient income for living expenses and 52% faced uncertainty regarding how long these income sources will pay for living expenses. Very few families reported being able to rely on outside support to make ends meet. While 35 percent were currently working, those seeking jobs were not very optimistic about finding work in their localities.

**Figure 3**

**Financial Security measured as Ability to Pay for Living Expenses, Share of Respondents**

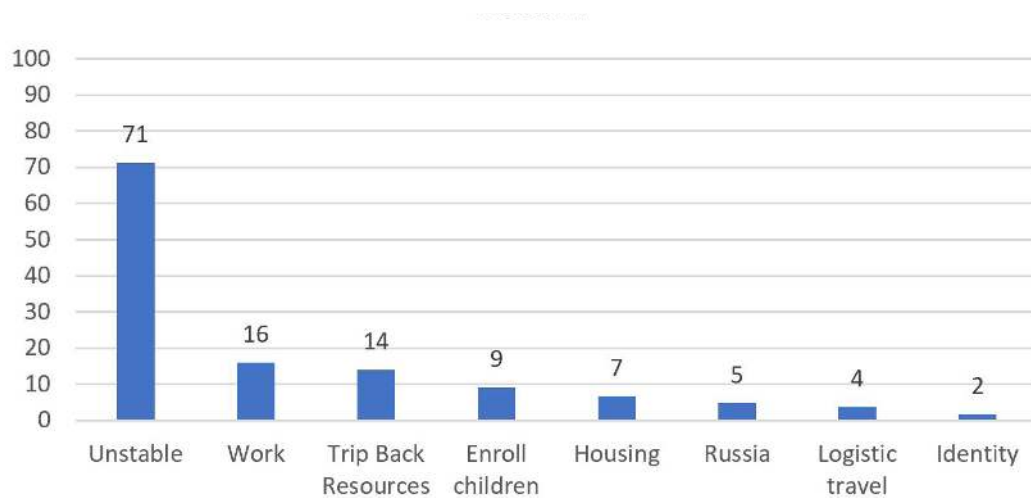


## ■ A significant number of respondents were internally displaced, but determined to return to their hometowns within Ukraine

Nearly one-fifth (17%) of respondents were internally displaced, with a majority being from East and South. Most (72%) of internally displaced had strong intentions to return to their hometowns eventually. Families cited continued conflict and instability as the main impediments to returning to their hometowns (Figure 4). Notably, very few people cited housing, work or resources/logistics for travel as an impediment to return.

**Figure 4**

**Share Reporting Each Item as an Impediment to Return**



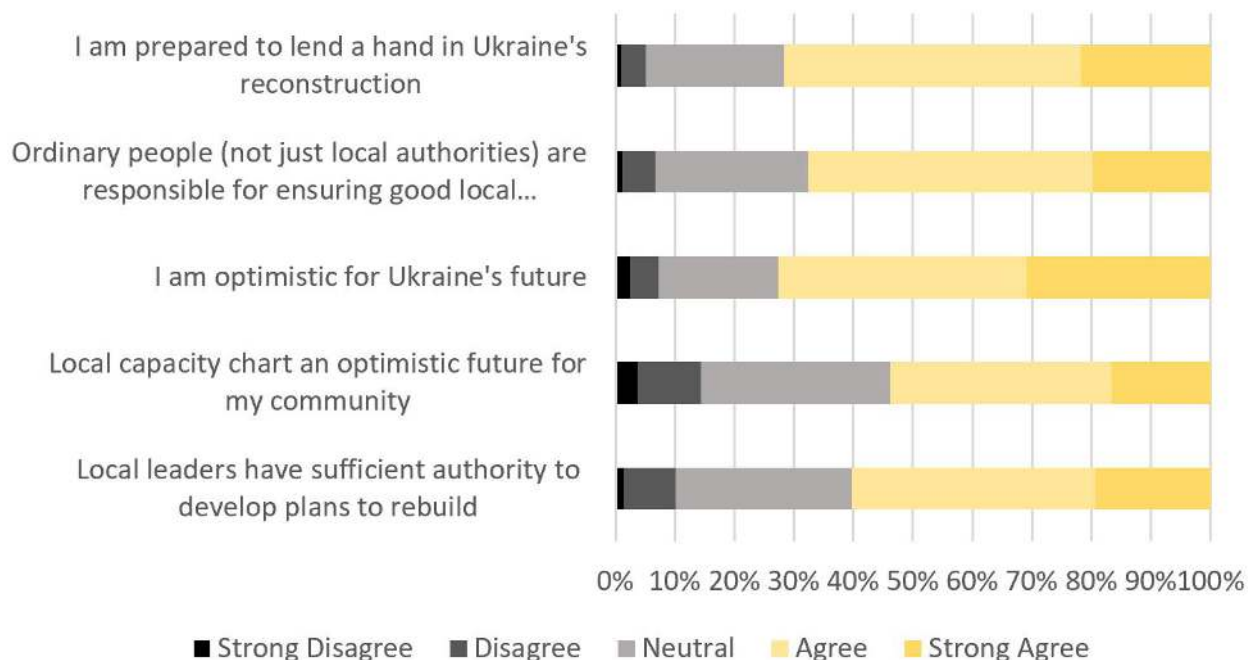
**Friction at the community level appears to be minimal for now; respondents share their commitment to the tasks ahead and optimism. Some anticipate problems in the future.**

Overall, there seemed to be a sense of social cohesion within communities across all respondents. Most of all respondents, both long-term residents and internally displaced individuals, felt that everyone did their share to keep their communities safe and clean. Most respondents felt that public services were both adequate and equitably accessible to everyone in their communities. Two-thirds felt a shared responsibility for sustaining their communities' public services and safety. A majority (56%) of internally displaced respondents indicated feeling comfortable in their host communities. Forty percent reported having made new friends in their new residences.

Moreover, there was widespread commitment to actively contribute to local communities' reconstruction (Figure 5). Most (72%) expressed being personally prepared to lend a hand in their community's reconstruction. Most respondents felt that their local government representatives both had the authority to enact the policies and programs needed to rebuild and had confidence in their local representatives' ability to do so.

**Figure 5**

**Sentiments and Agency for the Future of Ukraine and Local Communities**



While respondents indicated a shared sense of responsibility and high levels of social cohesion, other questions indicate that issues may arise. For those who were permanent residents in their homes, most (66%) reported having a significant internally displaced population in their communities. Among respondents reporting a significant internally displaced population in their communities, a small portion (12%) anticipated significant problems in the long-term if internally displaced populations permanently relocated to their communities. A somewhat larger share (31%) anticipated some problems if internally displaced populations permanently relocated to their communities. As uncertainty continues regarding how long internally displaced populations may stay within host communities, Ukrainians would be well-served to consider ways to facilitate social cohesion within communities with large internally displaced populations now.

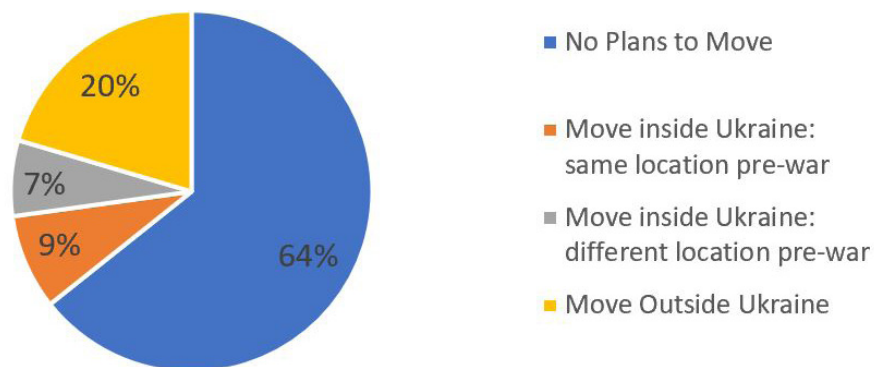
### ■ While most intend to stay in Ukraine for the foreseeable future, a significant minority reports disposition to migrate

Eighty percent of respondents expected to remain inside Ukraine in the foreseeable future (Figure 6). Safety was the main concern for potential relocation among respondents, with 31 percent having jobs factoring into their relocation decisions. Our survey also gauged respondents' overall optimism about their futures, the future of Ukraine and their capacity to support rebuilding. Those who were more optimistic were less likely to intending to move from their current location, suggesting that people's perception of hope and optimism is important in mitigating outward migration from Ukraine. Beyond material improvements, development work would be well served to attune to people's psychological needs and perceptions of optimism.

Notably, internally displaced populations may be at higher risk for leaving Ukraine if they are unable to return to their hometowns. A very small share of displaced respondents intended to live in their host communities permanently. Just a fifth (20%) reported having found a job. Just 30 percent were optimistic about having a prosperous future in their host communities. Fortifying local economies of host communities might be crucial to prevent these populations from relocating outside Ukraine in search of work.

**Figure 6**

**Moving Plans, Share of Respondents, Within Ukraine and Abroad**



## Looking Ahead: addressing immediate preoccupations and laying critical foundations

Brave families throughout Ukraine are forging ahead with their lives despite ongoing instability and active conflict. While the vast majority of respondents do not intend to leave Ukraine, a significant minority—representing a considerable number of individuals—in our study considered migrating. Understandably, safety and security by far remain the principal concerns of those consulted, provoking at-risk populations to relocate—and preventing refugees abroad from returning Ukraine. There are clear signs of financial struggle among individuals who participated in our study, with many reporting marked financial insecurity at present and financial uncertainty looking forward. Unemployment reported by respondents is significant if not alarming, and job seekers feel relatively pessimistic about finding work. Notably, the oncoming winter is a new development of considerable concern among respondents, perhaps reflecting extensive media coverage of the issue and the hands-on recognition of the levels of destruction;<sup>5</sup> among other things, Ukrainians are openly concerned that Russian forces may attempt to destabilize major cities by attacking centralized heating systems. If this were to happen, a second wave of migration of Ukrainians escaping frigid temperatures may be inevitable if unmitigated.

Millions of Ukrainians who fled the country have found their way back home, mostly to their hometowns demonstrating relative safety. In contrast, within our sample of Ukrainians in Ukraine, the volume of internally displaced populations was very significant. The makeup of communities is reported to have changed in several dimensions. The generalized sentiment, however, is that, owing to remarkable empathy towards fellow Ukrainians in need, internally displaced populations consulted are satisfactorily meeting immediate needs in host communities. Importantly, however, families who are internally displaced don't see themselves as permanent residents and visibly prioritize their return to communities of origin. In this respect, expectations must be managed for both—long-term residents and internally displaced populations—and vision, viability, and incentives for more permanent arrangements must be framed. In the meantime, intentional efforts to sustain and enrich existing community cohesion ought to be considered within plans for recovery.

Ukrainians' commitment to rebuilding and sense of shared responsibility are invaluable and unassailable assets in meeting the nation's immense development challenges. While security concerns remain determinant, Ukrainians seem ready for what's to come. Ukrainians consulted feel the economy will jump back to pre-war levels, albeit with varying timelines. By and large and importantly, survey respondents also endorsed the capacity of local authorities to chart a way forward. Despite the devastation, the war may develop in unexpectedly positive directions and new opportunities may emerge. Ukrainians need a comforting vision and an optimistic narrative to remain in place and return in high numbers when security permits. It is increasingly evident that Ukrainians will return in high numbers when security permits and Ukrainians are eager and able to rebuild their nation. More than operational capacity support, international actors would be well advised to support Ukrainians' shared vision, their sense of optimism and their agency in rebuilding their local economies and communities.

## Endnotes

1. "Ukraine: Apparent War Crimes in Russia-Controlled Areas." Human Rights Watch, October 11, 2022. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/03/ukraine-apparent-war-crimes-russia-controlled-areas>.
2. "Ukraine Situation Flash Update #28." UNHCR Operational Data Portal (ODP), n.d. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/95314>.
3. Ibid
4. The survey was a random sample. After stratifying for regions, invitations were sent randomly to 19,788 with 1,504 responses between July 15 to 20th, for an 8% response rate.
5. Mak, Tim. "Ukrainians Prep for Winter. If Russia Hits Heating Systems, Cities Will Freeze." NPR. NPR, September 6, 2022. <https://www.npr.org/2022/09/06/1121201345/ukrainians-prep-for-winter-if-russia-hits-heating-systems-cities-will-freeze>.

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